

THE IRON FOUNDRIES OF SAN FRANCISCO.

There was a time in the history of this city—and it requires no tenacious memory to call it to mind—when the iron foundry business occupied a prominent place among its leading industries. The many establishments located here were all flourishing, and even more, crowded with work and constantly increasing the facilities for performing it. The business was excellent in 1855, and improved steadily until 1863, when the Washington excitement raged. Then came the rush like a thunderbolt; fabulous riches were nestling in the ledges of Nevada, and the machinery to wrest them from well defined leads must be built immediately, immediately, sir! Quartz mills were ordered by the wholesale, the demand for mining machinery was unprecedented, and the local requirements increased to a great extent. The foundries were running night and day in many instances, and the brilliant glow of the furnace fires had by no means contemptible rivals in the immediate countenances of happy employers and contented employees. The fictitious mining excitement was not of long duration, but as there were many valuable ledges discovered—the working of which necessitated the erection of mills, etc.—the bursting of the bubble had no immediate deleterious effect upon the foundry business. In fact, from 1863 to 1867, the business, taking all branches into consideration, increased. The building and manufacturing interests of the city created a large demand for work, as well as the numerous orders for mining machinery received from the interior.

Our reporter has investigated the foundry business thoroughly, and with the sole idea of presenting it to the public in its true light, without fear of prejudice. To this end he has conferred with both employers and employees, and the facts given are based on their assertions. As regards the condition of the business a year ago, a pretty correct estimate may be formed from a statement of the number of men employed and the wages paid at that time. The following list of persons employed includes the apprentices in the various branches of the business, and is collated from the pay-rolls and statements of employers: Pattern-makers, 45; machinists, 305; blacksmiths, 217; moulders, 142; boiler-makers, 200; helpers, 60; laborers, 100. Total, 1,162. The average pay of the skilled mechanic was \$4 per day, the cases where larger amounts were paid, being exceptional. Let it be remembered that this was the state of affairs a year ago. Now then for the present time.

The business commenced to decline early in 1869, and before the year closed four large establishments failed, involving a loss of not less than \$200,000. The other foundries lingered along—although, under the circumstances, it would have been good policy for some of them to have discontinued business—and still find work to do. We visited some of the foundries a few days ago to glean information as to their condition, and were surprised to see the changes of a year. The large shops still remained, but the number of workmen had materially decreased, and swarms no longer to be used in speaking of them. The proprietors, in many instances, had a dejected air; and our query as to the condition of their business caused a sickly smile to overspread the countenance, indicating that they regarded our interrogation as a grim joke. Upon assuring them that we were seriously in earnest, however, courteous treatment was uniformly received and information tendered.

To illustrate the condition of affairs, a description of a foundry which has, until within the past three weeks, given employment to twenty men, may be of use. Looking into the building from the street, it had a dark, desolate look, but a feeling of curiosity prompted us to enter and explore.

The only occupant was a boy—a small boy—who was pretending to work on some castings at the father and of the building. When first discovered, he was not exerting himself much, but upon hearing our approach he tried to work very hard.

Reporter: "How many men are employed in this establishment?"
Boy (straightening himself): "I'm the only man here now; there were twenty three weeks ago, but they ain't here now," leaving there ain't no work for them to do."

Of the foundries visited, few proprietors claimed to be employing more than half their regular number of men, and others candidly stated that they had no work on hand and would see no prospect for any. These establishments which had work in the machinery line were compelled to figure very close—or else the work would go to Chicago—and the profits were consequently small. As regards home castings, there is so little building going on at present that the demand is limited. To our repeated inquiries as to the condition of the business, the answer was given: "We are doing little at present, and that is of a general jobbing character." The true state of the business may be shown again by the number of persons employed—600; the skilled mechanics being paid at the rate of three dollars per day of ten hours—all mechanics in foundries are now paid by the hour. From the present outlook, both employers and employees regard the business as fast going to decay, but neither advance any argument to save it.

With the view of ascertaining the cause of this remarkable decline in the foundry business, we questioned proprietors and practical men of the various establishments, and found that different theories were held relative to the matter. A number attributed the depression of the business to the decay of the mining business, some to the stagnation of business generally, others to direct competition with Chicago and the cities further east, price, condition, and position of laborers, brought about by trades' unions and those who seek to use the men for individual promotion; and still more to a combination of all these causes, which latter are probably about right.

Few of our citizens are aware of the amount of work that is sent East, and for the enlightenment of the masses the items given below have been collated. In August last the Chicago Milling Company, located at White Pine, pur-

chased a quartz mill in Chicago, after obtaining estimates of all leading foundries here, and the cost compared with San Francisco is as follows:

Cost of mill in Chicago	\$ 9,500.00
Freight from Chicago to Elko	3,225.00
Total (in currency at 71 cents)	\$ 12,725.00
Or in coin	9,035.88
Cost in San Francisco	\$ 12,500.00
Freight from San Francisco to Elko	1,241.00
Total cost	\$ 12,741.00

In favor of Chicago and against San Francisco, \$1,705.

The freight tariffs between Chicago and Elko and San Francisco and Elko stood:

	Per ton.	Miles.
From Chicago to Omaha by car loads	\$70	400
From Omaha to Promontory	45	1,000
From Promontory to Elko	30	223
From San Francisco to Elko	45	595

The following item also needs little comment by way of illustration, and its drift can easily be perceived. In April last Messrs. Pierson & Starr, of Vallejo, decided to build a flouring mill at that city, and, with this idea in view, called upon two of the leading establishments, and requested estimates of its cost here. After close figuring, the bids were put in—one offering to do the work for \$21,500, the other for \$22,000. The parties sent East, and purchased this mill at a cost of \$14,000 delivered here—a difference, it will be seen, of over \$7,000 in their favor.

Again, the San Lorenzo Lumber Company desired to purchase a rough locomotive for hauling lumber, and wishing to patronize a local establishment which had always done their work, requested a leading firm in this city to estimate upon its cost. The lowest amount the locomotive could be built for here was \$5,000 in coin. The company sent East, and had the locomotive built at Philadelphia, its total cost upon reaching the wharf here being \$3,200 in currency.

The San Jose Woollen Mills Company wanted a number of delicate pulleys and shafts built for their establishment. Parties came to this city and inquired what they could be purchased for here. Dissatisfied with the price asked, they sent East and had them built at the rate of 9 cents per pound in gold. These pulleys and shafts could not have been touched here for less than 14 cents per pound.—San Francisco Bulletin.

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