

In 1879, young Frank Gimlett moved with his family from Illinois and settled in Garfield. In his youth, Frank worked with his dad around the Monarch mining district and through the years both his father and Frank became successful miners; among other interests, they had part ownership in the famous Columbus Mine, a successful mine that through the years produced millions in ore profits.

With money and a dream, Frank married Gertrude in 1897 and moved down to Salida. By 1903, he was setting up his business enterprise, the Salida Wood & Lumber Supply Company, situated between 2nd & 3rd next to the Denver & Rio Grande railroad tracks. Frank's business was successful, building over ten homes in Salida, including the Terraces on the corner of 4th and D, and he had a hand in building the Red Cross Hospital on the corner of 3rd & G, now the VFW.

But, as they sometimes do, things took a turn. By the 1930s, Frank was fighting off debtors and struggling with the aftermath of a fire at his business. Bad luck and bad business practices may have played a role in his situation. The Great Depression may have played a part. And Frank certainly began to miss the old days back at Garfield.

Frank soon abandoned his wife and business in Salida and set up a homestead at Arbor Villa, located about a mile below Garfield. He rebranded himself as 'The Hermit'.

The Hermit began to live the prospecting life once again. When he wasn't panning for gold in the mountain streams, the Hermit set himself up as a roadside attraction up at the top of Monarch Pass where he sold postcards depicting the good old days.

He wrote about his new life up in the mountains and published his entertaining 9 volume epic 'Over the Trails of Yesterday', which were reminiscences of days gone by, most notably those of the Monarch mining industry and the pioneers who made an impact on the area. There was some Salida history thrown in for good measure.

This, from the Hermit:

'Sixty-five years have passed, the scene has changed and now I find myself a Hermit, and not a kindred soul remains to converse in the language of the old sourdough, alone in the solitude of the Rockies where the footprints of the prospector is seen no more ... Methinks I hear the creak, chuck and rattle of the heavy iron-tired wheel of the overloaded freight wagon as the 6-span of steel shod mules, slowly inch by inch move up the grade urged on by the cuss words and oaths that only a mule skinner, ox drover, or horse wrangler can utter.'

During this time, the Hermit often made trips to D.C., advocating congress to return the country back to the gold standard. He viewed the future with 'great alarm' and proposed 'we deflate gold to it old value and remove the billions of inert useless gold bullion in the vaults of the Nations, stamp into coin at our old weights, size and fineness, and for those Pagans of the East who do not care for the motto 'In God We Trust' stamped on their money, let them have the gemy, microby, dog-eared and flimsy paper, but see to it that it

be backed by 100% gold and silver, so in case we Christians get a hold of it, we can redeem it in honest dollars.'

The Hermit died in 1952 at the age of 77, well-loved by Salida, and today well-remembered for his poignant and humorous writing:

'Now I have reached the end of the trail, and while I do not see the pot of gold at the rainbow's end, I do see where the clouds are fringed with silver and the sunsets turn to gold atop the great Divide. I see through the dusk of the evening the mines high up on the mountains and the prospectors claims they are impregnated with silver and gold ... Here lies the land of the whiskered prospector, and before I close eulogizing he and his ilk, I want to pay tribute to those old pioneer women who kept romance alive. How love survived and they ever succeeded in planting a kiss on the lips of those gnarled, tobacco-matted, booze-flavored, soup-stained, whiskered and long-spreading 12-inch mustachioed prospectors has always been a mystery to me, and here and now I favor a statue be erected in the halls of fame, honoring these savers of romance under such terrific handicaps.'

More photos and postcards from the Hermit of Arbor Villa Collection are available online at salidaarchive.info. The Hermit's epic 'Over the Trails of Yesterday' is available for checkout at the library.