

[R. W. Isaacs]

Interview

Genevieve Chapin.

About 1800 words. R.W ISAACS.

Among our prominent and efficient “Oldtimers” we now introduce Robert Wolfe Isaacs, a dealer in Hardware and Implements at Clayton, Union County, New Mexico.

Mr. Isaacs, or “Bob Isaacs”, as he is familiarly and affectionately known here in the West, is a public-spirited man, whose idea is that whatever benefits the community also, more or less directly, benefits him individually, and acts accordingly.

He is the proprietor of a thriving business which, as he says, “you could hardly kill with an axe.” It came into his sole ownership in 1902—with a floor space of about 800 square feet, which by 1929 had increased to 1800 square feet.

Mr. Isaacs caused much shaking of older and more experienced business heads by buying his building and lots, which are on the corner of Main and First, and by a great many other progressive ideas introduced into his business. His slogan is—“The House of Good Service,” and he has conscientiously and consistently lived up to it thru’ a long period of years.

When the Isaacs Hardware and Implement Store began its career in Clayton, the only farm tools used here were the “breaker” and the seven-inch plow, and a great excitement pervaded the little community when he introduced into it the first modern plow.

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At, that time, Mr. Isaacs states, Clayton was just a wide place in the road with a population of three or four hundred. As he says “there was no parking problem then—“by dropping the traces you could 2 park parallel, angling, horizontally or vertically.” [??]

In tho'se days, trade reached-out toward Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma and into New Mexico something like 135 miles—the “good old days of the wide open spaces,” with drinks at fifteen cents each and no nickel cigars.

By 1929, the business had expanded until it employed eight full time men, and two High School boys, who were working their way thru' school. At present, the active work of the store is in charge of Mr. Isaacs' son, “Young Bob,” altho" Mr. Isaacs himself is far from being the typical retired business man.

So much for the growth of the business itself. But the man at the head of it is much more interesting himself than the business he founded.

Robert Wolfe Isaacs was born in 1859, in Australia, his parents having come there some time previously, from London. Here he lived during his earlier boyhood, returning in 1870 with his parents to London, the trip consuming sixteen weeks.

In 1871 the family again crossed the waters, this time to the United States, where they settled in Cincinnati. Here, as Mr. Isaacs says, “engaged in the important retail branch of the newspaper trade,” also selling some books at the same time.

In 1892, Mr. Isaacs came West; locating at Trinidad, Colorado, where the family owned the old Phoenix Hotel. Mr. Issacs states that he landed in Trinidad with a capital of \$35.00.

Just about this time, in company with two older and more 3 experienced Westerners, Mr. Isaacs set out with team and wagon to prospect for “gold in them thar hills.” Their search lead them first to a lode prospect, where one of the oldtimers was sure there was

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a true fissure vein, that was located on or near the Richardson Ranche about fifty miles Southwest of Dorsey Station on the Santa Fe.

But on arriving there, they found they had forgotten to bring caps and fuses for blasting, so our hero was dispatched to Trinidad to get them, one of the men taking him to the nearest Railroad Station, some 11 miles away, promising to meet him there on his return.

After securing the necessary caps and fuses, Mr. Isaacs also remembered the very abbreviated state of the camp menu, to which he was not accustomed. So he worked on the sympathies of his sister till she contributed several pounds of dried fruit of different varieties, a whole cheese, and some bananas. These were disposed over his person, front and back, like a peddler's pack, and he set forth on his return journey.

Having traveled by train as far as possible, and seeing no evidence of anyone there with a conveyance to meet him, there was nothing for it but to start out afoot to cover the remaining distance. So off he went.

A kindly disposed rancher picked him up and carried him by wagon a few miles, and, as night had already fallen, urged him to tarry at the ranch till morning before finishing his journey. But knowing his partners were anxious for the re-inforcements for their blasting operations, he plodded on, mile after weary mile, afoot and alone thru' the dark. The newly acquired boots, to which his tender feet were unaccustomed, made walking extremely difficult, not to say painful. And when the pangs of hunger assailed him, so nobly did he respond to their intimations that when he reached his destination, the cheese alone remained to embellish the too-meager menu of the mining camp.

Arriving at last at camp, footsore, worn and weary, but having taken almost a beeline from the railroad, what was his chagrin to find that one of the partners had left camp, as per promise, to meet him, but, it developed later, looking our modern conveniences of guide marks and highways, he had traveled miles in an exactly opposite direction from that he

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had intended to go, finally rounding up to spend the night with the same rancher with whom Mr. Isaacs had earlier refused shelter. Such is life.

Failing to get results from lode mining, they moved their base of operation to Big Nigger Gulch, opposite Elizabethtown, in the hopes—vein hopes!—of getting results from placer mining.

But, as Mr. Isaacs whimsically adds, all the “gold in them thar hills” remains there to this day, so far as that expedition is concerned, as they took none of it out.

In his earlier life, Mr. Isaacs was greatly interested in athletics, being an instructor- (amateur) in boxing and calisthenics. Nor did his advancing years take any great toll of that interest. In later years, he “made his hand” on the golf course, with no mean results.

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In 1905 “Bob Isaacs” married Miss Mary Alice Stubbs, daughter of B.C. Stubbs, of Clayton, formerly of Georgia. And, as he expresses it, he's got the same wife yet!” To them were born two children—a daughter, who became Mrs. Finis Roberts, of Clayton, and a son —“Young Bob,” who is with his father in the Hardware business, carrying on the active management of it.

Besides his hardware business, Mr. Isaacs has always found time for any service of community interest that came his way.

He is a writer of no mean ability—is healthfully interested in politics, serving for a time on the City Council—and is a pioneer in the field of reforestation and water conservation ideas. He also agitated the question of establishing warehouses of Federal, State or Community ownership, for the benefit of the farmers.

During the war, Mr. Isaacs was a very active agent for the sale of Thrift Stamps, and a staunch member of the Council of Defense for his community.

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Asked a few years ago for the secret of his business success he used Mark Twain's twisted version of the old adage—"Don't put all your eggs in one basket"—which runs —“Put all your eggs in one basket, but watch that basket!”

His business investments are all in Union County and Clayton; he believes that if a community has helped you to develop, you, in turn, should do your share to help the community to develop.

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Mr[?] Isaacs has been a very considerable factor in the growth and development of Union County and its County seat, and now, in his later years, numbers his friends by the scores. Such men are the bone and brawn of any community.

Sources of Information.

Interview; R.W. Isaacs, Clayton, New Mexico.

R.W. Isaacs dies

CLAYTON: Funeral services were held here today for R.W. Isaacs, prominent Clayton merchant and resident of Union County since 1898.

A stroke caused Mr. Isaacs death Saturday night. He was 77.

Prominent in funeral services were members of the Masonic, Odd Fellows and Woodman lodges of which he was a member.

Mr. Isaacs was a delegate to one National Democratic convention and this year was an alternate.