

Bill Nye and His Boomerangs

By Dennis Payton Knight

Edgar Wilson Nye was born in Maine in 1850, was educated in Wisconsin, then moved to Laramie City, Wyoming Territory where he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1876. We do not know how much law he ever practiced, but he soon began to send funny sketches to the newspapers under the pen name of Bill Nye.

Along about that time he got himself appointed as the postmaster of Laramie City and founded a newspaper, the *Laramie Boomerang*, which is in daily production to this day. He claimed to have named the *Boomerang* after his mule, who got the name because Nye could not get rid of him. Nye became internationally famous as a humorist through stories he wrote and printed in the *Boomerang*.

Because he gained his fame in my home town, and I fancy myself a humorist, I have become fascinated by Bill Nye. There are two humorists of that era whose works translate to our own century. Mark Twain and Bill Nye both wrote in plain English without the incomprehensible dialog that marred most of their contemporaries. In fact, Mark Twain thought so highly of Nye that he quoted him in his autobiography with the line, "I have been told that Wagner's music is better than it sounds."

My favorite Bill Nye writing is contained in his book, *Remarks*. It is a letter resigning his post as postmaster of Laramie City. With due respect for the office he was vacating and the one he was addressing, he opened,

Oct. 1, 1883, To the President of the United States: Sir. —

I beg leave at this time to officially tender my resignation as postmaster at this place, and in due form to deliver the great seal and the key to the front door of the office. The safe combination is set on the numbers 33, 66 and 99, though I do not remember at this moment which comes first, or how many times you revolve the knob, or which direction you should turn it at first in order to make it operate.

Nye continued on and then conscientiously informed his boss,

If the stove draws too hard, close the damper in the pipe and shut the general delivery window.

There followed more in the way of instruction, and Nye wrote,

You will find the key under the door-mat, and you had better turn the cat out at night when you close the office. If she does not go readily, you can make it clearer to her mind by throwing the cancelling stamp at her.

After more such detail, he brought his letter to a respectful conclusion,

Mr. President, as an official of this Government I now retire... It will be best, perhaps, to keep the heart-breaking news from the ears of European powers until the dangers of a financial panic are fully past. Then hurl it broadcast with a sickening thud.

Signed, Bill Nye, Postmaster, Laramie City