

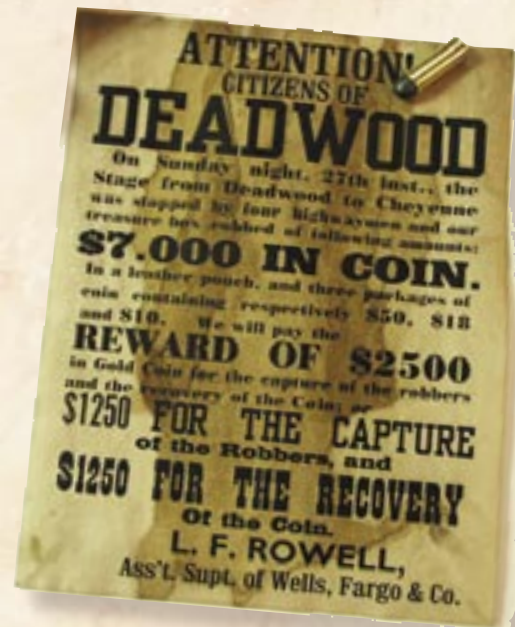
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DAYS LATE IN DEADWOOD SOUTH DAKOTA



by Johnny Duckworth



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Chasing old coin operated machines really gets the heart pumping and I can never get enough. Just to get a little excitement, I will even sift through the old coin operated magazines from time to time. I have chased several leads from the pages of the old Coin Slot and Loose Change magazines but never had much luck. However, about seven years ago while reading an article out of a 1990 Coin Slot magazine there was an interesting photo of a very nice Musical Victor. The machine was pictured in the old town hall of Deadwood, South Dakota and incorrectly named a Caille Victor. My mind began to race, wondering if the machine could still be there years later. Unfortunately, Deadwood was 750 miles away and in the middle of no where, so there was not a whole lot I could do with this information.

Now fast forward to 2007, as my wife and I decided that we would go to bike week, better known as 'Sturgis' with my cousin and his wife up in South Dakota. However, I didn't think nearly as much about riding bikes in South Dakota that week as I did about trying to find this old floor machine. Deadwood is located only fifteen miles from Sturgis, so I dug the article back up to try and find any clues that might help me track this elusive machine down.

We rode our Harleys into Deadwood on a sunny August day, and it was like going back in time. Main street has

changed very little over the years; The old red brick street remains with beautiful Victorian buildings standing tall on each side. Large hotels from the turn of the century are still in use with much of the same décor. Saloons and casinos line the street filled with customers just like in the days of the gold rush. You may recall that Wild Bill Hickok was shot there in 1876 at the No. 10 saloon.

We started the search off for the machine at the old train station which was now a history and information center. After about the third person giving me a strange look when trying to describe what I was looking for, we made a breakthrough. I began talking to this elderly man who couldn't quite remember the machine, but he did remember the old town hall which had been sold years ago along with all its contents. He was able to give me the buyer's first name as "Blake", and said some of the contents had been moved to other locations in town which Blake owned.

After making several unsuccessful stops searching for this machine my time was starting to run short as everyone with me would rather catch butterflies than look for some silly old slot machine. Sensing their impatience, I decided to make our final stop at a little old casino at the bottom of Main Street. I walked through the double doors and into this very quaint one room casino. I was headed towards the

cage to ask if they might know where I could find a guy named Blake, when my heart began to speed up.

I didn't make it very far into the casino, for off to my right I spotted a little Seeburg L. I quickly walked over to check out this little musical wonder. When I finished looking it over, it was time to find out whom it belonged to and if it was for sale. I turned back to walk across the casino floor and on the other side of the room I saw pay dirt... The Musical Victor was standing proud and tall between the two picture windows of the building. I couldn't believe I was lucky enough to stumble upon this machine which I had been chasing but my luck was about to change.

I talked with the lady at the cage and she was able to get me on the phone with Blake's son. I found out that they also owned two other casinos and a hotel in town. He said they would have no interest in selling the machine and I could tell that the money would mean very little to them. They enjoyed placing these old items from town in their establishments. I ended up going to another one of their casinos in town to meet him in person where I gave him my card. I guess this was my closure on the find, as I knew I would never be able to pry this old machine away from them. Although it ended with the wrong conclusion, I was very happy to have found what I was looking for still in the town of Deadwood.

Two years later in 2009, we decided to head back to South Dakota and ride bikes in the black hills again. We went into Deadwood twice that week, but I never checked on the machine to ask if he had changed his mind. My cousin even joked with me about chasing down the machine again but I felt it would be a total waste of time. We rode bikes all over South Dakota and Wyoming that week, traveling through several old towns such as Deadwood, Custer, Hill City, Keystone, Lead, and many others.

It was a long ride home, taking us just over twelve hours to get back to Kansas City. We made it home late Wednesday night, and by the next day my mind was finally off the old Wild West towns of South Dakota. Then, only five days after returning home I received an unexpected phone call. Blake was on the phone, the owner of the Musical Victor, asking if I was still interested in buying his machine. He was looking to buy another hotel in town, and thought he might sell off a few items to help with the finances. I couldn't believe it! We had parked our bikes across the street from him only five days ago, and walked right past his casino. I was so frustrated at myself for not stopping in and checking up on the machine, for if I would have merely followed up with Blake once more, the machine would already be at home and in my collection.

That was my biggest mistake on this hunt, but I quickly came to my senses and made an agreement with Blake on the machine. I was thankful that he had saved my card, but in the same breath, I couldn't believe I had given up on this machine so easily. It is amazing how things can change over time, making what once seemed impossible, finally able to come true. Great machines are still out there hidden among the world; so don't give up when you feel that the trail has run cold, for as long as your persistence does not falter, there is always a chance.

