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Dramatic Publishing



Gold Fever

From
Yellow Brick Road Shows

By
Rita Grauer and John Urquhart



Gold Fever

**This production is a hallmark of the
Yellow Brick Road Shows of these talented collaborators.**

***Comedy. By Rita Grauer and John Urquhart. From Yellow Brick Road Shows. Cast: 4 either gender. Gold Fever** is a popular participatory play of the highest quality for children of kindergarten to third grade. The characters, story and plotting attract all ages. Old West history and legend are humorously and imaginatively blended in this comedy to make a powerful statement about the conflict between personal greed and compassion for others. Set in the historic California Gold Rush, Gold Fever brings together Ben Halladay, "King of the Stage Lines," and a notorious highwayman known as Black Bart, a "forty-niner" who failed to find riches in the gold fields. Now Black Bart turns to robbing Halladay's stagecoaches. Their ensuing misadventures reveal to both that "Gold fever can make a man mad!" *Designed to tour with simple sets and suggested costumes. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Music in book. Code: G96.**

Cover art by Rita Grauer.

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YELLOW BRICK ROAD SHOWS

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Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

GOLD FEVER was developed in 1979 by the Yellow Brick Road Shows company as part of an extensive educational theatre tour. The original production received over one hundred performances in Elementary schools throughout the Southwestern United States.

Each of the company members played multiple roles. Their major characters are noted below.

C. E. Boles. Bill Yate

Ben Halladay John Rosochacki

Jeremiah Boles, Reason McConnell. Pamella O'Connor

James Clemens, Mr. Hume. Rita Grossberg (Grauer)

GOLD FEVER was directed and edited by Rita Grauer and John Urquhart with special thanks to Peter Southcott and Paul Picus.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

THE HISTORY

To develop GOLD FEVER, we spent many weeks sitting through the annals of Gold Rush history, discovering a wealth of fact and legend. Our research turned up many gray areas where contradictory reporting of events left us with unanswered questions about what really happened. For instance, in the case of C.E. (alias Black Bart) Boles, if one discards the legends that grew up around his exploits, there remains little hard, cold documentation of the man and his life.

It is within this gray area that we have constructed our play. We have tried to be true to the basic facts of the era, weaving within these facts our own speculations about the feelings and motivations of our characters. The only area in which we have taken major dramatic license with known fact is in the juxtaposition of Ben Halladay and "Black Bart". In truth, these two characters never had any association, but we chose to bring Halladay into the Bart legend because his life epitomized the kind of individual whose drive and passion were

responsible for the development of the West as we know it today.

SETS AND PROPERTIES

This script was originally developed for an extensive elementary school tour, utilizing a company of four actors. Minimal set pieces and properties are required. When produced in arena style it can be effectively performed in any school cafeteria, library, or multi-purpose room. A flat floor area of approximately 40' x 40' will accommodate both the actors and the audience.

The original production utilized five playing areas- - one small circular area was the hub of four "aisles" that extended to the perimeter of the audience seating area. (see appendices) The children were seated within the four wedges created by ropes which were taped to the floor to define these "aisles". At the rear of each "aisle" were elevated screens which partially concealed the actors when they stepped behind them. Painted on the screens were scenes depicting the Gold Rush and the Old West. Props and costumes could be draped upon, placed at the base of, or hung on hooks behind these screens. Two large rectangular boxes which carried the props and most of the set pieces, were placed at two ends of the stage in front of the screens to provide a means of elevating the actors when necessary.

This production concept is not integral to the success of the play. Should economy not be a concern for your production, the play contains many opportunities for creative design and technical embellishment.

CASTING

If GOLD FEVER is produced with a company of four, careful consideration of the casting is imperative. Two men and two women must be used, and the women will each have to play several male roles. Specific assignments will depend upon the individual skills of your performers and the production concept you develop.

COSTUMES

If only four actors are used to produce GOLD FEVER, simplicity in

costuming is a necessity. Each actor, male or female, should wear pants and a shirt. Wrap-around skirts, bonnets, and shawls can then be donned for the female characters while hats, handkerchiefs, vests, and jackets may be interchanged for the male characters. Should you choose to use a large cast, greater detail and authenticity can be used in the costuming.

Certain required costume parts have been noted specifically in the script.

MUSIC

In the original production, the “Singer” played both the guitar and harmonica while available actors supported him with various rhythm instruments and kazoos. This was a matter of necessity and not choice. Scenes where we employed music are noted in the script, and sheet music is provided for the original GOLD FEVER theme song. The show can be greatly enhanced, however, by a broader use of music to assist in the transformations, the pace, and the mood.

GOLD FEVER

A single musician is discovered on stage as the audience enters the performance area. He is playing the guitar and perhaps singing songs suggestive of the old West. His repertoire might even include some of the material from the coming show.

As he plays, other company members conduct the audience to their seats on the floor. Each actor handles a classroom sized group of children, discussing with them the topic of the play and the style of the production they are about to see.

Once the audience is in place and the actors have ascertained that everyone is comfortable, the stage manager signals the actor playing the jailer to begin the play. As the jailer enters, the musician slowly fades out the pre-show music, taking his place for the start of the show.

OLD JAILER: *(offstage)* This way, Mr. Halladay! Right this way. *(entering with Ben)* Here's your friend, Mr. Boles- - on time, as usual. *(he opens an imaginary cell door to let Ben enter the cell)* Now you two try to keep the peace in here today. My ol' ears can't take much more o' your arguin'. *(he locks the door and exits)*

OLD BEN: Moved ya to a new cell, did they?

OLD C. E.: *(unconcerned)* More light. You bring the checkers?

OLD BEN: O' course. *(he grabs a nearby stool to sit on, they set up the checkerboard, and begin to play)* How come they moved ya again?

OLD C. E.: Haven't the foggiest. . . maybe they was bored.

OLD BEN: I don't know why people gotta change things all the time.

- OLD C. E.: Whadayou talkin' about? When I met you, you was pushin' people an' things around all the time, tryin' to prove how important you were.
- OLD BEN: *(avoiding an argument)* Oh now . . . don't lets get started C. E. - I'm jest tryin' to make some interestin' conversation here, that's all.
- OLD C. E.: *(continuing)* It's true. You never cared about nothin' but yourself and ya never thought about nothin' 'cept gettin' rich, so's you could say that you was somebody!
- OLD BEN: *(defensively)* Now hold on a minute. That was a long time ago. Things are different these days. 'Sides, back then I thought that everything I was doin' was helpin' this here country grow. Why when people think about the Gold Rush, they think of me as a hero.
- OLD C. E.: *(with disdain)* Hero!
- OLD BEN: *(righteously)* Least I never broke the law doin' what I done! You warn't nothin' but a common criminal.
- OLD C. E.: *(voice rising)* Well it's your fault! I never would o' done what I done if it weren't for what you done.
- OLD BEN: *(sarcastically)* Oh sure, blame it on me! You were born to break the law- - yer a bad seed! *(taunting him)* Black Bart! Black Bart!
- OLD C. E.: *(loosing control)* Liar! You consarned liar!
- OLD JAILER: *(from offstage)* Hush it up in there!
- OLD C. E.: *(clenching his teeth to keep from shouting)* You don't remember nothin' right. You always get things screwed around in your head!

OLD BEN: I remember things perfectly well!

OLD C. E.: Perfectly well accordin' to Ben Halladay.

OLD BEN: I got my way o' seein' things!

OLD C. E.: And I got my way o' seein' things, too. (*facing each other nose to nose by now*)

OLD BEN: (*backing down a bit for the sake of friendship*) Well, I know ya do, C. E. S'pose it wouldn't hurt none if we was to remember the old times together.

OLD C. E.: (*pleased*) Why no sir, it sure wouldn't. You tell it yer way, an' I'll tell it mine.

OLD BEN: Alright. (*thinking back*) The way I see it, it all started back in 1848, when they found that gold nugget at Sutter's Mill- - changed a lot o' lives. . .

OLD C. E.: Why yessir . . . I agree with you on that. That's when me and Jeremiah caught a stage goin' West. I can almost see it now, it's so clear in my mind . . . just as clear as it were yesterday . . .

(The Gold Fever Theme music plays as the actors playing C. E. and Ben change the scenery for the beginning of the Black Bart story. When they finish, Ben exits and C. E. dons a bowler hat and a black suit jacket that are preset on stage. He picks up a carpet bag and heads center stage. He is now a young man.)

SINGER: (*singing*) Gold fever that's what they had. Gold fever can make a man mad!

(The music fades as the new scene begins.)

C. E.: (*looking at his watch*) Where is he?

(Jeremiah scurries onstage, clumsily carrying an awkward wooden box. Like C.E., he is dressed smartly and wears a bowler hat.)

JEREMIAH: Oh. Hi, C.E.

C. E. : Where have you been?

JEREMIAH: Oh. *(embarrassed)* Sorry, C.E., but they had a goin' away party for me at the bank. I had to be there. Lucy even baked me a cake. Am I late?

C. E.: No. *(he looks into the distance)* But the stage should be here any minute.

JEREMIAH: *(hesitating)* C.E., I don't know about all this. You know Mr. Perkins, my boss? He says we're gonna' get all the way out West and not find any gold at all and we'll be worse off than we are already.

C. E.: *(sternly)* Jeremiah! What does ol' Perkins know? *(softening)* Now listen . . . *(pause)* . . . You trust me, don't ya? *(Jeremiah nods uncertainly and C.E. continues, trying to console him)* We're goin' out West, and we're gonna find so much gold that you can come back and buy that bank from Perkins and have him workin' for you! You'll be the boss!

JEREMIAH: *(brightening)* The boss!!

C. E.: *(seeing the stage coach in the distance)* The stage coach, Jeremiah! The stage is coming!

(The "stage" is a single actor with a Wells Fargo strong box slung over his shoulders by means of straps which suggest reins. All of the other aspects of the stagecoach are pantomimed by the actors. The melody for "Gold Fever" begins to play in the background as the stage appears.)

DRIVER: *(bringing the stage to a halt)* Whoa . . . whoa! Howdy fellas!

C. E.: Hello.

JEREMIAH: *(enthusiastically)* Howdy there!

DRIVER: *(chuckling)* Howdy little fella. You headed out West to the gold fields?

JEREMIAH: Yes sir!

DRIVER: Well you better get on board. This is the only way to get there ya know. We'll be goin' nineteen days, non-stop, Kansas City to San Francisco.

JEREMIAH: *(stunned, as he boards the stage)* Nineteen days?

DRIVER: You betcha boy!

C. E.: Jeremiah! Don't forget the box!

JEREMIAH: *(remembering)* Oh. I got it. *(he hops on board)* Nineteen days . . .

DRIVER: Hang on tight!

(As the stage pulls out, the music becomes louder. The singer sings while the stage coach travels within and around the playing area; behind or through the audience or along whatever path the performance space allows. The driver and passengers interact with the audience by recognizing them as station masters, fellow travelers, bystanders, etc.)

SINGER: *(singing)* Nineteen days and nights they rode,
Tryin' to find that mother lode,
Over the mountains, across the plains,
Long before the days of trains.
That westward trail was hard and long,
Gold Fever drove them on.

Gold Fever, that's what they had.
Gold fever can make a man mad.

(The stage pulls into the center playing area.)

The stage pulled up in a cloud of dust.

DRIVER: Whoah! Whoah! *(the stage stops)*

SINGER: *(singing)* They looked around. Who could they trust?

(Jeremiah and C. E. disembark.)

To C. E. Boles everything seemed fine,
And Jeremiah was a-itchin' to mine.
Gold Fever can make a man blind.
Gold Fever can make a man blind. *(music fades)*

DRIVER: Now, listen. If I was you fellas, I'd head on up the
north fork o' that stream. *(he points)* Up into the
mountains. I hear they're pickin' up a little paydirt that
way. Good luck to ya now! Hee-yah!

*(The stage pulls away and C. E. and Jeremiah wave
good-bye.)*

JEREMIAH: Good-bye!

*(For a moment they gaze after the driver, then they
both turn to survey their surroundings.)*

We're out West, C. E.!

*(Jeremiah gets right down to business and begins to
look for gold on the floor and beneath the audience
members seated nearby.)*

C. E.: *(without noticing Jeremiah)* Look at those mountains!
(he turns and sees Jeremiah) Jeremiah? Jeremiah!
(Jeremiah stops what he is doing and looks up) What
are you doing?

JEREMIAH: *(seriously)* Looking for gold, C. E. I don't want to waste any time!

C. E.: You're not gonna find any gold around here! Didn't you hear what the man said? *(deliberately)* We have to go up to the north fork of that stream. Now, that's in the mountains.

JEREMIAH: *(embarrassed)* Aw, I knew that.

C. E.: *(shaking his head)* Get the box, Jeremiah.

(Jeremiah picks up the box as C. E. starts off down the trail. Jeremiah follows him.)

JEREMIAH: *(excited)* We gonna find some gold up there, C. E.?

C. E.: *(stopping to assure him)* You know it, Jeremiah!

JEREMIAH: I sure hope so! *(he eagerly heads for the mountains)*

(Jeremiah exits ahead of C. E. as Old Ben enters from the opposite side of the stage.)

OLD BEN: *(calling out to C. E.)* Maybe you shoulda stopped your brother right then and there C. E. Things was bound to take a bad turn the way he was runnin' after gold so crazy-like!

(C. E. stops, then turns, transforming into Old C. E.)

OLD C. E.: Maybe? Maybe? Isn't it a little late to be talkin' about maybes, Ben? I feel bad enough about what happened to Jeremiah without you chidin' me! Sides, it was just as much your fault, what happened, as it was mine.

OLD BEN: *(defensively)* Now, I done the right thing with the boy, C. E. If he hadn't o' broke the law, I wouldn't o' done what I done. What I done was right!

OLD C. E.: *(exiting)* Sure, sure. Ol' Halladay never did nothin' wrong. Always done everything right. A true gentleman!

(As Old C. E. completes his exit, Old Ben turns, transforming into a much younger Ben. We are now "up the north fork" of the river, in the heart of the gold fields. Ben begins to examine some "claims" along the riverbed, when a miner enters from the other side of the stage.)

(The miner positions himself along an imaginary bank of the river, which flows through the audience. He starts to pan for gold while singing "loo-dee-doo-dee" to the tune of "Clementine". The singing attracts Ben, who is busily scribbling his "claim" on a piece of paper. He posts it before speaking to the miner.)

BEN: *(calling out)* Hey! You there! *(the miner looks up)* I heard these miners done cleared out and left these claims abandoned.

CLEMENS: Oh, yeah. They cleared out a couple o' weeks back. Ran out o' money afore they hit paydirt.

BEN: Good. I aim to make these claims my own and send some o' my men up here to work 'em.

CLEMENS: *(scratching his head)* Excuse me, sir. But, ain't you Ben Halladay?

BEN: That's my name.

CLEMENS: Well, I'll be . . .

BEN: *(continuing to scribble and post claims)* Who's askin'?

CLEMENS: I'm James Clemens. *(with pride)* This here's my claim!

BEN: Looks like we're gonna be neighbors.

CLEMENS: *(tickled)* Yessir! An' it's mighty fine to meet a fella like you! You got all them stage lines, doncha?

BEN: Yup. Twelve hundred miles o' stage lines. "Halladay's Overland Mail and Express Company".

CLEMENS: Whooooee! If I had your money, I sure wouldn't be up here in the gold fields. No, sir.

BEN: I never knowed a man that had too much money.

CLEMENS: *(chuckling)* I reckon not, sir. But you gotta watch yerself up here. Men'd just as soon stab ya in the back as look at ya. They say it's the land o' plenty, But I tell you, there's days when I think it's just the land o' hard luck.

BEN: This here's the land o' opportunity, mister. I wouldn't have any stage lines if I didn't take advantage o' opportunity when it came knockin', now would I?

CLEMENS: Well . . . I reckon not, sir.

BEN; Man's gotta take what he can get in this life, Clemens!

CLEMENS: I s'pose so.

(Ben posts his claims then surveys his work.)

BEN: Whelp, Clemens, I'm gonna go into town to register these claims at the assay office. I'll be back up later this afternoon and we can talk.

CLEMENS: Yessir. I'll be lookin' for ya then.

BEN: Good day to ya.

(Ben exits as C. E. and Jeremiah enter from the opposite side of the stage. They are both winded and have been obviously climbing for some time. Jeremiah is now struggling with the box. He finally drops it on his foot.)

JEREMIAH: *(holding his toe as he does a little dance)* Oh, owwww!!! *(dances a little more)* My toe! *(he gains his composure and sighs)* Golly . . . ya know C. E., we better rest some. We must've come five miles today already. *(he prepares to sit on the box)*

C. E.: Not now, Jeremiah. Come on. I'll carry the box.

JEREMIAH: I'm starving!

(C. E. picks up the box slipping it unintentionally from beneath Jeremiah just as he is about to sit on it. Jeremiah tumbles to the ground.)

Oh, owwww !

(C. E. is oblivious to Jeremiah's howls. He has noticed Clemens, who has been working his claim with hardly a glance at the newcomers.)

C.E.: *(in a hushed voice, pointing)* Jeremiah! Look!

(Jeremiah scrambles to his feet and they both gawk at Clemens. Jeremiah can make no sense of what the miner is doing. C. E. begins to frantically thumb through a small book.)

This is it, Jeremiah. We're gonna be rich! That man is panning for gold! *(he finds what he has been looking for in the book)* Ah, yes. Precisely as prescribed in "Periwinkle's Guide to Mining".

JEREMIAH: *(intrigued)* It is?