

Letter from Cornelius Hedges to "Parents," September 13, 1865

*Helena City
Sept. 13, 1865*

Dear Parents—

I presume you have not forgotten your boy in the Rocky Mountains & would like to hear from him & know of his welfare. I am comfortably situated in this city where I have been since last winter. I am still practicing law though business has been rather dull of late—I have held my own & been steadily advancing since I have been here. I have a third interest in three lots on Main St. on two of which we have houses. One we rent for \$30 a month & we rent part of our office where we are to the county for \$75.00 a month. We rent the other lot without improvements for \$30.00 a month—I have two cabins of my own besides that rent for \$10. a month, one—the other is not finished.

I have 300 feet of gulch claims to which we have been running a Drain that has cost me already \$400. in gold & it is not finished yet. I dont know as the claims will be worth anything but hope & think so—I have about 10,000 feet of Lode claims that may prove rich but nothing is known yet—In fact nothing is sure here but what one has in his hands. Perhaps I couldn't sell all I have here for \$1,000. but I know I wouldn't take \$5,000. for it.

I am going to stay here one year more & see what I can do in that time. If I cant make anything in that time I shall come home anyway—I have seen about as much of the mountains as I desire without I get some good pay for it. It is a hard life at best, full of self denial & hardship. Living is very high without any luxuries—We hardly ever see any fruit—vegetables are scarce—potatoes are pretty cheap now, only 10 cts a pound, milk is 25 cts a quart & butter \$1.75 a pound—Flour is \$24.00 a hundred—So we live—Yet there is some constant excitement. Everyone expects to make a fortune any minute. . . .

It is a pretty hard country to get a start in, but after being once started it is pretty easy to make headway, if one is careful—I am satisfied with what I have done since I came up here—I lost all I made last season entire—But I learned by it & will try to keep clean in the future—

Life is full of danger here—We have lots of men who are ready to murder for a few dollars. Only yesterday a man was shot not half a mile from a town in open day & robbed of all his money—He started on foot a few minutes ahead of the stage & was to get aboard when it overtook him—They found him lying in the road—Twenty men were out hunting the murderer yesterday but have not found him yet if found he wont see sunrise again—Civil law is but little guarded—Men protect themselves & hanging or shooting is the general remedy. . . .

I wish I could have some apples & cider once in a while—I dreamed the other night of eating apples. It is the nearest I have come to having any for a long time—This is the season of the year that I always loved at home, I would like to help father through his fall work, gathering corn & potatoes & apples—How strange it all seems—I never see a fruit tree of any kind—There is nothing but pine here—I am one of the county commissioners here now—I was candidate for District Attorney on the Union ticket—I expect I am defeated as the secesh are much the strongest in this section—I would like to hear from you very much & all the neighbors & relatives. . . .

*With Much Love Yours Truly
Cornelius Hedges*

Source: *Cornelius Hedges Papers, 1831–1907. Manuscript Collection 33* [box 1 folder 33]. Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 49.