

THE RIVER PRESS.

Wednesday, October 27, 1880.

We present to our readers this week a paper which in typographical execution and general appearance is the equal of any in the West, and we have endeavored to make its columns interesting by presenting a class of matter so diversified and original as will please all tastes. Our local record is full and complete, while in our editorial comments we have been fair and impartial. As a whole we feel that we can safely rest on what we believe will be public approval and appreciation of our efforts, and we will leave with it the criticism of our acts, with the knowledge that it will be at the same time just and lenient. We deem it necessary, in this initial number, to define ourselves personally, and the special part each of us will take in conducting this paper: Mr. H. C. Williams will act as editor, and will be responsible for all its utterances and its general editorial make up. He has been in the Territory but little over a year, and is a comparative stranger to the people of Choteau county. Mr. Thos. D. Wright is well known to the people of Benton; he will act as general business man, keeping the accounts, making collections, etc. Mr. Jas. E. Stevens, although somewhat a stranger to the people of Benton, has been a resident of the Territory for several years; he has control of the mechanical department, and the typographic excellence of this paper renders further comment unnecessary; he will also principally edit the local department. We are all practical printers and journalists, two of us with many years' experience, and we are confident in our collective ability to make this in all respects a good newspaper.

OUR PLATFORM.

It is a time-honored custom of newspapers to herald with their first issue the causes which brought them forth, and to excuse their own existence by a series of remarks entirely foreign to the subject. We will dispense with a discussion of the causes, and will make no excuses, but will state a platform of the principles which will guide us in the future.

We are not come to create strife, nor to sow seeds of discord among the people of this county. Our mission is one of peace and good will. Our coming is due to an abiding faith in the rapid development of this great Northwest, and in the belief that this town of Benton has a future before it commensurate with the magnitude and richness of the country of which it the natural center. Our efforts, to the utmost limit of our ability, will be directed toward the furtherance of the material development of this section, and of this town, and we will advocate such measures as will best conduce to the public interests.

This paper is not, nor will it become, the mouthpiece or creature of any part or section of this town or county, and it will not advocate measures of private interest when the cause of variance is detrimental to the interest of the community.

Benton has not yet grown so great that whatever is of benefit to a part is not of benefit to the whole; nor has competition become so intense that there is not room for further enterprise.

We are opposed to the discussion of political questions which do not, from their nature, affect our material welfare, but which tend to create division and rancor among our people, and to divert attention from our commercial development. But whenever it shall be necessary to discuss such questions, they will be treated with a spirit of fairness, and with a view only to the interests of the public, irrespective of party influence.

The paper will observe absolute independence in politics, believing that correct journalism is impossible if affected by the exigencies of party or clique, which bias judgment and render expression thereon unreliable. The public has lost its old time reverence of oracles, whether newspaper or other, and is doing its own thinking; and we believe it to be the mission of the newspaper to furnish news and material untinted with partisan opinion.

We have faith in the future of this great Northwest, faith in the future of this splendid county, faith in the future of this town of Benton, and faith in the energy, enterprise, and foresight of our business men to overcome the obstacles presented in the opening of our vast resources, and to make Benton in fact, what it is in point of geographical position—the commercial center of this new region. On this faith we have planted this enterprise, and we will stay with it until it is justified by the certain event of successful development of the whole.

DANIEL SEARLES has taken editorial control of the *Butte Miner*.

We call the attention of voters to a summary of Montana election laws, which we publish on this page.

As ECONOMY in the administration of county affairs appears to be the platform, pure and simple, of the people of Choteau county, the incoming officers must prepare themselves to perform their duties upon a strict business scale. Patriotism is a very good thing, but when the tax-payers have to pay too heavily for such pleasure, it becomes monotonous. The people desire that law and order shall be enforced and that every

proper effort shall be made to place this county in its true commercial standing, but it is due to them that the duties arising therefrom shall be performed upon purely business principles.

The present condition of Choteau county is such that if economic management reigns supreme the balance can very soon be transferred to the other side of the account. If, however, unnecessary expense and extravagance is permitted in the management of county affairs a ruinous result will follow.

It is the duty of every voter of this county to cast his ballot at the ensuing election. We should poll seven hundred votes this year, and will do it if each person takes the interest in the matter that devolves upon him as a citizen. There is more at stake—a great deal more—than merely voting to put this or that person into office. Let every voter go to the polls on election day and—vote.

POLITICS, as well as other matters, sometimes work at cross purposes. The Republicans of this Territory are clamoring for a "change" of Delegate, which the Democrats say would be impolitic, while the Democrats are crying for a "change" of Federal officials, which by no means suits our Republican friends. And thus it goes, the main question, apparently, being: which side of the bread should be (politically) buttered.

The majority of Major Maginnis in Choteau county is variously estimated from fifty to four hundred, the weight of opinion being that it will be in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty. It is useless to attempt to disguise the fact that Maginnis has worked faithfully for the interests of Choteau county, although, of course, he has been aided by the merchants of Benton. The drift of sentiment here is undoubtedly in favor of his reelection.

The nomination of Mr. J. D. Weatherwax for county commissioner is another instance that the good old rule, that the office should seek the man, is not obsolete. Besides the shrewd business habits for which Mr. Weatherwax is noted, the interests which he has in this county, as the owner of real estate of very large proportions in Benton, and an extensive stockgrower, make his selection for the office of county commissioner the very best that could have been made.

The organization of the Fort Benton Board of Trade is the primary step towards revealing to the country at large the resources of this section and Choteau county in particular. But it must be borne in mind that while the Board of Trade is an important factor towards that end, its usefulness will be impaired if the people themselves do not assist its progress. Let every person, regardless of business interests, and irrespective of rival industries, assist the organization by giving such information as may be in their possession for the compilation of statistics requisite to the purposes of the Board.

The rapid growth of Benton calls for the passage of some law for its local government. We believe that a measure can be agreed upon which will have a municipal character, and not attended with the expenses of incorporation. A board of trustees could be appointed or elected, clothed with all the authority required to form within themselves a compact and inexpensive city government. That a measure of this nature would be acceptable to the people of Benton we do not doubt, and we hope that such a law will be presented for the next Legislature.

WM. ROWE, one of the candidates for sheriff, has always shown the highest business qualifications—strict integrity, careful management, and excellent executive ability, and we have no doubt that if elected he will display those same qualities which are as useful in a public as in private business. He is a man of nerve and is free from the rashness which sometimes disqualifies men for such a position as sheriff. His previous record in this office has been all that could be desired, and the citizens of Choteau county cannot do better for its interests than by electing him.

The commercial interests of this county make road improvements an independent and special feature of its expenditures. The interests of Meagher county are in that respect almost identical with those of Choteau. The representatives of both counties should unite upon a measure that would separate the road fund from the county fund proper, and strive to have a law to that effect passed at the next Legislative Assembly. As a special provision, there might be inserted in such a measure authority for the county commissioners of both counties—Meagher and Choteau—to consolidate such portions of the road fund as in their judgment should be expended upon the improvement of roads in which the two counties are directly interested. This expenditure could be apportioned by the commissioners, and the improvements made under the supervision of a resident of either county to be selected by the two boards of commissioners.

A LITTLE more than two years ago, the assessable property of Choteau county was, in round numbers, \$350,000, and its indebtedness about \$3,200. To-day the assessable property of the county is \$1,350,000 and its debt \$43,000, being an increase in the assessable property of less than five times and an increase in indebtedness of thirteen

times. Why should there be such an increase of our debt over that warranted by the increase in our property valuation. Taxpayers should remember that they must pay all debts that have been or may be contracted, and that however easy may be the terms upon which the debt is created, a day of redemption will certainly come, and unless the expenses are kept down to a close margin, and not allowed to accumulate beyond our income, that day will find us totally bankrupt. The history of many Western States is filled with wrecked municipalities which went down on this very rock. We want men in office who are pledged to keep down expenses to their very lowest level.

CORMORANT RULE.

We intended to present the first number of the RIVER PRESS free from anything of a controversial nature, but through a proper sense of what is right, with due appreciation of justice to all, an intelligent conception of independence, and an utter abhorrence of hoodwinking and unfair criticism, we are compelled to deviate from the course intended. Taking for its text the late sale of county warrants, and the above heading for its caption, the *Record* of last week shows itself in the newest and strangest garb of independent journalism ever witnessed in this Territory. The article to which we refer was evidently written as an electioneering card for Mr. Healy, and was meant to be complimentary to the retiring county officers. In both objects it has failed. When the endeavor is made to laud any particular person or persons at the expense of the community in which they live; to praise their usefulness by directly insulting the intelligence of their neighbors; to place them on a standing of honesty and purity (which never had been in question except by themselves), by dragging down others to the level of "curs," the result of such endeavor must be flat failure. Over the shoulders of an unknown correspondent the people of this county who do not believe what the *Record* desires they should in regard to the county indebtedness, or who object to extravagant expenditure of their money, and demand a strictly economic administration of county affairs, are designated "skulking, dirty, cowardly, miserable curs." Is that right? Is that justice? Is that respectable and independent journalism? If such were the sentiments entertained by that paper towards a very large and influential portion of the citizens of this county, decency alone should have prompted silence. And right here, by way of digression, we ask: Why should the people of Choteau county place confidence in the statements of the *Record* in regard to the financial condition of the county? Has it faithfully and truly represented the condition of the finances when it infrequently referred to the subject?

It is easy to perceive that the article in question was written, not in haste, but after due and mature reflection; and its language, plain and intelligible, must be accepted in its full meaning as the free expression of the paper. Now let us see what this language is: It says that an anonymous correspondent of the *Helena Herald* compared Mr. Healy to Boss Tweed, of New York City fame. This comparison the *Record* does not think proper—and very possibly it is not—and it intimates that the correspondent might be some over zealous Republican who desired in that manner to forward the canvass of Mr. Rowe, the other candidate for the sheriff's office. That was the first thought of our cotem. But upon reflection and deliberation, however, it was considered, to use their own words, "too favorable." Why? Because,—and we quote from the article itself,—"taken in connection with the second resolution of the last Republican convention of Choteau county, a result of personal enmity and spite * * * we are forced to conclude that the same skulking, dirty, cowardly miserable cur, with an individual grudge, who has figured in these other nice little pieces of business, has loomed up again in the *Herald* as a Benton correspondent." Very plain language, indeed. No chance for the charitable opinion that there may be a mistake; the wording is too plain for the meaning to be construed in any other light than that in which it presents itself—a direct insult to the citizens of this county who condemn the abnormal increase of their county's indebtedness.

After reading the above quoted passage, our first duty was to search for a copy of the resolution. We found it—where? Embodied in an anonymous communication to the *Record*—which leads us to say that that paper, which seemingly despises the association of anonymous correspondents—and very properly—is, at times, found enjoying the society of these "cowards and curs," even to the extent of publishing their vulgar and unmanly attacks upon a body of citizens of Benton, who, under the provisions of free speech, free expression of thought, under the laws of the Territory of Montana, and the provisions of the constitution of the United States, assembled in convention under the name and authority of the Republican party. Out upon such journalism, when its independence is shackled and bound by the question: whose ox was gored?

The resolution above referred to reads as follows:

Resolved, That the extravagance of certain county officers in increasing the county debt in one year sixteen thousand dollars, making it at the present time equal to nearly forty thousand dollars, meets the condemnation of every citizen, and in order to prevent

the removal of capital to more favorable locations, and the saddling of enormous debt on our shoulders, we demand the closest scrutiny of official fees and the strictest economy in county expenses.

The resolution states a fact, and the harsh term used is "extravagance." Yet the *Record* says that those who believe this fact, (which is not contradicted by any person), are cowards; that those who do not glory in the indebtedness of the county, and who wish to see the incoming officers practice economy and endeavor by a practical business administration to retain the present movable property of the county, are "dirty, miserable, curs." Some of the honestest men in the world are theorists, and it is well known that theorists are universally extravagant. And yet if you call that man extravagant the *Record* says you distrust his honesty. The question of dishonesty does not appear in the resolution at all. Was the debt increased sixteen thousand dollars in one year, and was this increase brought about by extravagant expenditures? That is the question. The citizens who endorsed that resolution represented, as a political party, one-third of the population of the county. They say that if the expenditures of the county were made in a business like manner the increase would not have been as large. There would be no disgrace or dishonor attached to the officials if every man in the county endorsed that resolution, and we venture to say that nine-tenths of the people do indorse it. It would merely show that though able and accomplished these officials may be in other walks of life, and able and accomplished they are undoubtedly, they had failed in that particular direction. They are not the first good business men and intelligent citizens who have made indifferent county officials, and in the course of events it will be proven that they are not the last. Others may fail to improve by the change from occupation in which they are familiar with every detail to duties with which they are comparatively ignorant. But because their fellow citizens have the candor and independence to say that, in their opinion, they might have done better, is no reason, nor can it afford the slightest excuse for such reckless abuse as that which is heaped upon them by the *Record*, in which they are classed as "skulking, dirty, cowardly, miserable curs."

Whatever may be the motive which inspired this uncalled for insult to the citizens of Choteau county, its effect will militate against those whom, in a misguided way, it was intended to assist. There is no such feeling of hostility entertained against the outgoing officials as the *Record* would fain have it appear. And a paper that would countenance or endorse any attempt to engender an unfriendly feeling among the few who form the population of this county, by comparing some of them to the most perfect handiwork of the Creator, and by comparing others, because they differ in opinion upon a purely business question, to the miserable cur, had better haul down the independent flag under which it sails and unfurl its true colors of officious busy-bodism and indecent and offensive personalism.

BRILLIANT FINANCIERING.

In an article which appeared in the *Record* of last week, to which we have briefly referred in another column, some very amusing, perhaps instructive, lessons on finance are given to the citizens of Choteau county. The article itself was evidently built in an electioneering dockyard and launched upon the political waters with a view of affecting the election of Sheriff. As far as the RIVER PRESS is concerned, we fail to perceive what the sheriff's office has to do with the finances of the county, that is, directly. He cannot get a dollar from the treasury, save his legal fees, without the connivance of other officials, and if any sheriff has received fees to which he was not entitled by law, then his accounts have not been strictly audited or scrutinized by those whose duties required it should be done. As we have not seen nor heard of any charge of this nature, it is to be presumed that no reason for the same exists, or, if it does exist, it is not generally known. Be that as it may, the only question in regard to the candidates for the office of sheriff is, as we understand, which will prove the most economical and efficient in the fulfillment of the duties of his office? Mr. Rowe and Mr. Healy have each filled the office, and we have heard the statement made by a gentleman who served in a position directly connected with the sheriff's office during the incumbency of both the candidates, that Mr. Rowe made as good a sheriff as Choteau county ever had. The same claim is made, we believe, by some persons in behalf of Mr. Healy, but the *Record* goes further and attempts to show by its electioneering card that Mr. Healy's efficiency as sheriff is the standard of value of the warrants of Choteau county. It says: "If it be cormorant rule [meaning Healy's rule] in Choteau county to have county warrants advance twenty-five per cent. or more within a period of two or three years, then, in heaven's name, let us prefer the cormorant rule to all other kinds of rules! for in a year or two the value of warrants increasing proportionately, the county will grow rich."

Now, as we have already said, we cannot see how the sheriff figures in the make up of the financial exhibit of the county, save on the list of expenditures alone, a tax consumer, and we are not willing to believe that Mr. Healy is responsible for the value of county warrants. The *Record*, however, is determined that he shall be held responsible. Let us follow its lessons and see where they

will land us. One year ago, when Choteau county was known to have an indebtedness of only about eight thousand dollars, and when the assessed valuation was one million dollars and the taxes sixteen mills, county warrants were sold for ninety cents on the dollar. Now, when the indebtedness of the county is known to be over forty thousand dollars, with a comparatively small increase in the assessed valuation, county warrants can be sold at public auction for one and one-tenth per cent. above their par value. It is very strenuously claimed that these warrants are purchased by shrewd men, who are undoubtedly cognizant of their real value; we know that those who purchased the warrants one year ago, at ten per cent. discount, are men of shrewd business qualities, money lenders of experience. Their warrants are now being bought at prices away beyond their real worth, or they were sold one year ago at figures ridiculously below their marketable value. It may not make much difference just now which is the case, but when the fact is especially referred to that the purchasers of our warrants to-day are shrewd and practical business men, who are well posted as to the value of county indebtedness of every description, it may lead people to infer that those who purchased our warrants one year ago were preferred purchasers, or that those who had the selling of the warrants were incompetent to judge the proper value of the paper they were issuing. And as the *Record* wants us to believe that the standard of value of warrants is governed by the efficiency of the Sheriff, we must acknowledge that it proves Mr. Healy to be lacking in efficiency as financial gauger of the county. But, ignoring altogether all questions relative to the disposal of warrants one year ago, why were the warrants, sold a few days ago, disposed of in that manner? Is it not about time to cut down the interest account? Evidence of public indebtedness in other parts of the Territory are freely purchased at their face value, and even at a premium, at a rate of interest nearly one-half of that carried by the warrants of this county. Has not the efficiency of the sheriff arrived at that point where a saving of money to the tax-payers of the county would be the result? Certainly not, nor never will; the efficiency of the Sheriff has about as much to do in indicating the financial prosperity of Choteau county, or in directing the manner of disposing of its warrants, as the vane on the military flag staff has in controlling the direction of a gale of wind.

But it is to the second lesson on finance that we wish to call attention. Casting aside the well tried but safe rule of "pay as you go," ignoring the propriety of the creation of indebtedness for the purpose of fostering the industries of the county and enhancing its revenue by a more judicious investment of borrowed capital than of paying interest, it announces the startling theory that the more we are in debt the richer we are, and that so long as we can sell one dollar warrants for one dollar and one and one-tenth of a cent, the fact of carrying such a thing as a burdensome debt upon our shoulders is a matter of complete indifference. And that as the indebtedness of the county is nearly forty thousand dollars more than it was one year or so ago it is that much richer, and has gained the sum of four hundred and ten dollars by the increase, by the way of commission. Why, any unsophisticated youth would jump at such a scheme as this, where he would make four thousand dollars by an investment of four hundred dollars. How very astute the editors of the *Record* are to make this discovery in political economy for the benefit of the public, and how grateful the Sheriff must feel for the credit given him of being the fact and factor of the execution of this balloon financial theory. One illustration will suffice: We sell a warrant of one hundred dollars, for which we get one hundred and one dollars cash; this is a gain of one dollar, but the interest upon this same warrant is ten dollars, so that the actual increase of indebtedness upon that one hundred dollars in a year would be nine dollars, the second year it would be nineteen dollars, third year twenty-nine dollars, and so on until it was redeemed, which, according to the rule laid down for us by these political economists, would be—never.

It behooves every citizen of this town and county to distinctly recollect that they are saddled with a pretty stiff indebtedness, and that it is their duty to demand of the incoming officials, whoever they may be, a strict account of the manner in which they intend to act in regard to this debt, whether they will endeavor to reduce it, by economical habits, or plunge Choteau county into an abyss of irretrievable ruin.

Montana Election Laws.

The following is a summary of the laws of Montana now in force touching the qualification of voters:

1st. They must be citizens of the United States, or have declared their intentions to become such.

2nd. They must have resided in the Territory three months, and the county where they offer to vote thirty days prior to the election.

3rd. They can vote for Delegate to Congress, or a district officer, (as District Attorney,) anywhere they may be in the district if they have the above qualifications if on voting day they should happen to be out of the county of their residence, but not for county officers of any county other than their own.—*Herald*.