

The Ronan Pioneer

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Ronan, Mont., Aug. 30, 1912.

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The Ronan Spirit.

The spirit which has been exemplified during the past two years in the growth of Ronan still prevails. Our business men and citizens, one and all during the time referred to, have had the interests of the town and welfare of the surrounding country at heart so much that they have at no time exhibited that spirit of jealousy which many towns complain of. We have all labored hard and earnestly for the upbuilding of the beautiful city, and have succeeded so well that on Saturday last, August 24, 1912, a town of approximately 800 people, with well built stores and residences were to be found where a short two years ago barren prairies and uncultivated fields were the rule. They came here from all sections of the country determined to build for themselves new homes, new businesses and to form new friendships. In each of these particulars they succeeded well.

On Saturday last, the hopes and ambitions of many were, for the time being, overwhelmed by the catastrophe which overtook them when the accumulations of the past two years and labor expended, were in one short hour, completely destroyed. The fire raged and the wind swept the flames so rapidly that in many instances one scarcely saw the destruction it wrought.

Scarcely had the fire ceased burning when the spirit which has prevailed during all this time we have labored here together, again exhibited itself. Preparations were under way to rebuild and at the present time, many of those who were burned out are again to be found busily engaged in merchandising in the various vocations they followed before the fire. Confidence came with the full realization of the worth of the country, in the fertility of the soil, in the character of the men and women, who by their exertions have made it possible for a town of the size of Ronan was on Saturday last, to be built. This confidence will increase and grow, and it is confidently expected at this time that before another issue of this paper is published, each and every one of those who were burned out will be preparing to again build and follow the plans and preparations which were made before their loss.

The spirit which has been shown in the past will not only rebuild the town, but it will rebuild it in more substantial form and in a manner to be safe and secure from a repetition of the fires of last Saturday. Where wooden structures once stood will be erected brick and cement business houses of permanency, and the town will be finely established. Already it may be said that plans are made by several of those who were burned out to build bigger and better, and others have announced their desire to do so at the very earliest possible date.

While many of our merchants have lost heavily in dollars and cents, they have been encouraged to further efforts by the sympathetic messages they have received from the wholesale houses and have been assured their credit was not impaired, but to order the goods they needed and they would be shipped at once. An expression of this kind at this time means more than mere type can express. Many of those who received such assurances, shed tears for the first time and were more affected by this expression of confidence than in the loss of their property.

It is a matter of much congratulation to know that at no time has any single one lost heart or confidence; it is also a matter of much rejoicing to know that each of the business men who were so nearly ruined by the fire sympathized with his competitor and urged him to renewed efforts. They consulted together as to the best means of again building quickly and substantially and from these conferences came the determination to again forge ahead and rebuild the town.

It would not be fair to give all this credit to the men alone, as their wives were as brave and steadfast as the husbands who had lost so much. Not a tear did they shed, not a wavering was to be seen, but only words of sympathy and encouragement. They urged them on to greater efforts for the future and manifested as great an interest in the fortunes of the town and in their future as it is possible to imagine or conceive.

Commendable Action.

The action of the town council, at the Monday meeting in establishing a fire limit in the town is one of the most commendable acts of that body. It would have been the height of folly for the town council to have allowed the rebuilding of all kinds of shacks scattered here and there in the business district of the town. This was the menace we faced for thirty months and was the real cause of the fire of Saturday last. Garages and other hazardous risks were scattered here and there close to large business houses and the close proximity made it impossible to once extinguish a fire when started. The action of the council will prevent such rebuilding in the future.

The object of this ordinance was greatly misunderstood by many of those who suffered the loss of their buildings. Some of those seem to have thought that it would prevent them rebuilding their buildings and re-establishing their business. When in truth, it was the best and most precautionary measure which could possibly have been made. When a merchant now rebuilds his place of business he can do so with a feeling of assurance that some dangerous risk will not be built alongside of him, and the reduced rate in insurance alone, in the course of a very short time, will have helped to pay the additional cost of better and safer construction. While brick and cement seem to many an impossibility at this time, the future will demonstrate that it is the wisest and most prudent course to pursue.

In this connection it may be said that another matter that the council should have attended to at once is that of allowing stovepipes to extend through the roofs of many buildings as at present. Every building which has a stovepipe instead of a chimney, is a menace to all other building surrounding it, as well as to the building itself, and the council should pass an ordinance at once requiring that chimneys replace stovepipes within a reasonable time.

Water System Needed.

Just at this time when Ronan is commencing to rebuild, it seems that the most important thing which should be attended to is to protect against a repetition of such a catastrophe as overtook the town in Saturday's fire. One of the greatest needs is a water system, and this we must have. During the past two years this has been the one drawback to a more rapid growth, and it is the one thing which we most need now. A water system to guard and protect in case of fire and for domestic purposes would long since have been a reality had it been possible to secure from the United States the privilege of taking water from the mountain stream which furnishes such an abundance of pure water which flows past our homes.

In the early part of 1910 an effort was made by Stanley Searce and others to secure from the Government the right and privilege of taking water from Crow Creek for municipal purposes. The reclamation service, it seems, has filed upon all the water on the entire reservation and a permit must be secured from the Interior Department before the town can be granted the privilege of installing a water system.

At the time Mr. Searce made his application, Secretary Ballinger indicated by letter that this privilege would be readily granted just as soon as the town was incorporated and officers elected to whom the privilege would run. Just as soon as this latter was consummated, another request was made to the Interior Department for permission to divert the water of Crow Creek for municipal purposes. The present Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Fisher, replied that it would be necessary to file with the department duplicate maps or profiles showing the source of the proposed water system, indicating thereon the fall and the pressure and much other data which would require considerable expense and much time to furnish. In the meantime, a great number

of people desire to again rebuild and again engage in business. Some hesitate to again invest their capital where a repetition of Saturday's fire is liable to come at any moment, and it does seem that through some channel, or through some persuasion, the slow process of departmental machinery might be accelerated and this privilege granted without waiting the unwinding of all the red tape that is usual.

A municipal water system is probably more preferable to the great majority of our citizens than a system built, owned and managed by private capital. This is a question which must be thrashed out and which undoubtedly will be determined in a very short time. Should the condition permit, and it is decided that the town build its own system, this would entail an issuing of bonds for the purpose of raising the money necessary for its construction. Should it be determined that private capital is preferable, or that it is the only ready method by which the system could be constructed, the Pioneer is prepared to state that parties are now ready and anxious to furnish the money and go to work just as soon as the privilege to build is granted. This is an encouraging sign. It shows that those who have the money (and they are not among our own citizens, but represent foreign capital) have every confidence in the future of Ronan and believe that their investment will be a paying one. This fact should also be encouraging to those who have felt that it might be better to await the building of a railroad before again building permanently and establishing themselves in business. No later than Wednesday of this week a gentleman who represents sufficient capital to build Ronan an adequate water system, which would also furnish light and power, told the writer that he stood ready to engage in this enterprise. This gentleman indicated that in his opinion this was the wrong time to hesitate about rebuilding the town, or the construction of a water, light and power system for Ronan.

With such a country as surrounds the town, with so many acres of valuable land under cultivation, with the reclamation system covering more farms than surround any other town in the work, there can be nothing to prevent the building of some good town and the building of some railroad directly to it. Notwithstanding the fact that this same bugaboo, to-wit: "Will the railroad miss us?" has been constantly discussed, the town has grown and did grow until it was the best town on the reserve and had it not been for the calamity which destroyed all that two years' labor have done, it would still be pointed to as an example of what the thrift, energy and the Ronan spirit has done. It should not be allowed to deter one person and it is not believed that it will.

President Elliott Sympathizes

President Howard Elliott of the Northern Pacific, heard of the burning of Ronan on the train in Washington, and sends the following letter to the Pioneer:
Messrs. C. F. and E. H. Rathbone, Ronan, Montana.

My Dear Sirs: I have received a copy of the Ronan Pioneer of August 16 and have read with interest your article about our most pleasant trip through the Flathead Indian reservation.

Since reading it I see by a dispatch from Missoula, that your beautiful little city was very badly burned. I regret this exceedingly and I hope the damage is not as great as stated in the press dispatch.

I have been on the road since leaving you and I can truthfully say that I have not enjoyed any portion of my trip more than that through the Flathead Indian reservation, and I shall make a good report of that whole situation to my associates.

I hope very much that Mr. Searce, Mr. Brower and other good citizens of Ronan were covered by insurance.

Yours very truly,
HOWARD ELLIOTT.

Card of Thanks.

We desire to express our sincere thanks to the many kind friends who so generously donated their time and labor to us during the sickness and death of our beloved son, King. Each one will be kindly remembered, and our hopes are that none of you will be similarly afflicted.

Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Stansbury.

RONAN BUSINESS SECTION ALMOST DESTROYED

(Continued from Page One.)

at once. There were nearly 20 commercial salesmen there this afternoon, taking orders for the new stocks. The business of the town will be resumed in an incredibly short time. The rebuilding will be a slower matter. But I am sure the town will be rebuilt on a proper system."

John M. Keith went to Ronan in his automobile early yesterday morning and got back last night. To the questions of a Missoulian reporter, Mr. Keith replied: "There is not much to add to The Missoulian's story of the fire; your list was correct and the fire was fully as serious as your story indicated. There is nothing to be seen, looking across from this side of the creek, except ashes and the Pioneer building and the two vaults of the banks. Everything else was wiped out. I took over a supply of cash for A. J. Brower, so he will be able to open his bank for business in the morning. It will not be safe for him to open his vault for a day or two, as it must be thoroughly cool. I think the vaults will be ready to open by Tuesday night. There are other preparations making for the resumption of business under conditions which will meet immediate needs. The loss is really serious. In some cases it is total with no insurance. It



THE BUSINESS SECTION AFTER THE FIRE WAS OUT.

—Photo by Bigelow.

covered his buildings with blankets and bedding, which were kept soaked with water from a small hose. But even then and with the long distance between the Sterling property and the rest of the town, the buildings were badly scorched and it is not likely they would have been saved had it not been that the wind changed just as it did. The other end of the bridge had begun to burn and the hot blast and

up above the water beneath which can be seen the bright woodwork. And the fire itself was a considerable distance away. The government flour-mill, 200 yards or more from the main street, caught fire at just the same time as the Searce building, which was just across the street. It must have been fierce. I heard the story from a good many people and the rapidity of the spread of the flames must have been wonderful. It seems incredible that so much destruction could be wrought in so short a time."

"The saving of the Pioneer office was another interesting incident," said Mr. Farrell. "When the fire was raging its fiercest, Editor Rathbone got some help and tore off the entire end of his shop. Four horses were then hitched to his big new press and it was hauled bodily out into the open. Then willing hands helped remove the type and other equipment, so that the whole printshop was out on the field. At this time came the change in the direction of the wind which saved the Sterling buildings. The men who had been fighting ahead of the fire looked back and saw there was a chance to save the Pioneer office. They hastened to the rescue and got around the shop in time to prevent its destruction. The building and the printing equipment were saved, but both were badly pined and it will take a good deal of hard work to get the office straightened out. But the Pioneer building stands among the ruins, a monument to the power of the press."

Stanley Searce was just completing the construction of heavy brick fire walls in his big store. In a few days they would have been done and it was



DURING THE FIRE AS VIEWED FROM THE STERLING HOTEL. THE HOTEL WAS SAVED.

—Photo by Bigelow.

will be difficult for some of the losers to get started again. But there is a brave spirit among all the people. They face the situation with courage and they are determined to make the best of the conditions. In regard to the rebuilding, I think there will be caution and conservatism. Those who rebuild will go slowly and the new Ronan, when it is built, will be a substantial place. Some of the leading business men are inclined to the opinion that assurance should be had as to where the railway is going before the town is rebuilt permanently and it is probable that there will be a consideration of this condition before any definite steps are taken. I talked with a good many of the heavy owners of real estate and I found their opinion to be that there should be no undue haste in this direction. But the people are not discouraged and that is a good sign. I believe a new town will result which will be more substantial and permanent. But I think the Ronan people are wise in proceeding cautiously."

Joe Farrell went to Ronan as early as he could yesterday morning, to see his sister, Mrs. A. M. Sterling, and to look over the situation. Interviewed last night, Mr. Farrell said to a Missoulian reporter: "It was the cleanest sweep I ever saw a fire make. It does not seem possible that a fire could so thoroughly destroy a town. Even the Sterling hotel and store, a long distance this side of the creek, would have been burned had it not been for a fortunate change in the direction of the wind at a critical moment. The heat was intense. Sterling has his own water system and had

burning embers were blown right against the Sterling house so fiercely that the fighters would have had to leave. Just at this moment the wind changed and turned the course of the heat up the stream instead of across it. This saved the day for Sterling."

"Some idea of the tremendous heat



JUST AFTER THE FIRE STARTED.

The large building shown was owned by Edward Clairmont and occupied by the Glacier Drug Company.

—Photo by Bigelow.

can be formed," continued Mr. Farrell, "when I tell you that one man ran a new wagon down into the creek in the attempt to save it, and the hot blast from the blazing buildings burned all the woodwork of the wagon that stuck out of the water. The tires of the wheels and the bolts of the body stick

the plan further to protect the large establishment by other means. Pending the completion of this work, Mr. Searce, it is said, had not been carrying a full amount of insurance on account of the high rate. This rate would have been lowered with the completion of the fire walls and the insurance would have been increased. Mr. Searce is one of the most confident of the Ronan business men, although he is the heaviest loser. His pluck and courage are infectious and the whole community is facing its disaster with remarkable fortitude.

Pablo & Potvin Rebuild.

Pablo & Potvin commenced Wednesday to clear away the debris where their former large mercantile establishment stood. This work is preparatory to rebuilding and it is stated that a handsome brick structure, larger in proportions than the burned one, will soon be erected on the same site.

It takes more than one fire to put the firm of Pablo & Potvin out of business, and the same may be said of everyone burned out.

The Ronan spirit is rampant in every breast, and the greater Ronan will surprise the many who have surmised our misfortune would be permanent.



GEHLERT'S MEAT MARKET AT SIX O'CLOCK SATURDAY EVENING AFTER THE FIRE. FIRST PLACE TO REOPEN AFTER THE FIRE.

—Photo by Bigelow.



STANLEY SCEARCE'S BIG STORE BEFORE THE FIRE.

This will be replaced by a brick and cement building 90x100 feet, at once.