

Montana Editors and the Custer Battle

Author(s): Rex C. Myers

Source: *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring, 1976), pp. 18-31

Published by: Montana Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4518062>

Accessed: 12-07-2019 13:01 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Montana Historical Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*

[FROM THE HERALD EXTRA OF JULY 4.]
A TERRIBLE FIGHT

**Gen. Custer and
his Nephew
Killed.**

**The Seventh Cavalry Cut to
Pieces.**

**The Whole Number
Killed 315.**

**From Our Special Correspondent
MR. W. H. NORTON.**

STILLWATER, M. T., July 2d, 1876.
Muggins Taylor, scout for Gen. Gibbons,
got here last night, direct from Little Horn
river with telegraph dispatches. Gen. Cus-
found the Indian camp of about 2,000
at Little Horn, and immediately
at five compa-

MONTANA

and

CUSTER

by REX C. MYERS

GENERAL JOHN GIBBON paused briefly on the bluffs overlooking the valley of the Little Big Horn late in the afternoon of Wednesday, June 28, 1876. As his men fashioned litters for the remnants of Major Marcus Reno's command and dug graves for the remains of Custer's, the General took out his personal notebook and penciled a note to inform his superiors and the world of what had transpired in the southern part of Montana Territory during the last three days.

"We will start down the river to-day for the steamboat with the wounded of Custer's command, . . ." the message began. "General Custer's command met with terrible disaster here on the 25th. Custer, with five companies, were so far as we can ascertain, completely annihilated except two of our Crow scouts. . . . Roughly stated the loss of Custer's command is about one-half, say 250 men." Between 1,800 and 2,500 warriors, according to Gibbon's estimate, had inflicted a resounding defeat upon the men of the Seventh Cavalry.

Beyond recounting the engagement's particulars, Gibbon had two more messages to convey. First, commanders at Fort Ellis, Fort Shaw, Camp Baker, and Washington, D.C., as well as his wife and friends, should know that the bulk of Gibbon's troop was "intact and in fine order." Second, Matthew Carroll, the expedition's freight master, asked that news of the

P. S. Then . . . the whole
officers killed, and the whole
died at the head of their column. The
act loss is not known, as both the Adjutant
and Sergeant Major were killed.
The Indian camp was from three to four
miles long, and was 20 miles up the Little

EDITORS the BATTLE

1876.
The One Hundredth National Anniversary.
The Grand Procession Through the City.
Col. Woolfolk's Oration.
Fireworks and Illuminations.
The one hundredth anniversary of our national independence was celebrated in Helena yesterday, and was undoubtedly the grandest affair ever witnessed in the Metropolis. The glorious day was ushered in by the firing of a national salute, the ringing of all the church bells in the city, and the playing of national airs by the Silver Cornet Band. At 9 o'clock the procession formed at the head of Main street, in accordance with the directions of the Chief Marshal, Wm. F. Wheeler, as follows:
1. The Helena Silver Cornet Band.
2. Minute Men of 1776, in Continental uniform, under command of Col. Robert C. Walker.
3. Helena Fire Department, under charge of Seth Bullock, Chief Engineer.
4.

battle be conveyed to Montana Surveyor General A. J. Smith in Helena, who would, in turn, pass it on to the Helena Independent for publication.

Finished, General Gibbon tore the pages from his notebook, summoned a scout — H. M. "Muggins" Taylor — and instructed him to carry them straight to Captain D. W. Benham at Fort Ellis, near Bozeman, M.T. It was the nearest telegraph station and here Captain Benham could send the necessary dispatches with all due haste.

From these hastily penciled beginnings, the written word on Custer's battle swelled to astronomical proportions. Professional and non-professional historians have scrutinized and ballyhooed countless facets of George Armstrong Custer, his last campaign, and the provocative legacy the two left behind. More than any other single incident, the Battle of the Little Big Horn brought, and continues to bring, attention to Montana. Yet scholars and buffs have almost universally ignored the reaction of Montana's Territorial residents to that engagement. By default, writers have assumed that word of Custer's defeat produced the same monumental reactions in Montana as it did in the eastern press.¹

1. The significance or nature of Montana's reaction has received little attention despite its proximity to events. Edgar I. Stewart's work *Custer's Luck* (Norman: 1959), includes seven Montana newspapers in the bibliography, but only three were contemporary to the actual events. Stewart omits the *Bozeman Times* and the *Helena Herald*, among others. Fred Dustin's famous Custer bibliography, originally published in 1939 (*The Custer Tragedy*, Ann Arbor), and later expanded in Col. W. A. Graham's *The Custer Myth* (New York: 1953), contains 631 separate citations, including the *Bismarck Tribune* of July 6, 1876. There is not a single Montana newspaper mentioned.

CHARGE OF DIVISION.
Marshal:
Helena Silver Cornet Band.
Minute Men of 1776, under command of
Col. Walker.

IN THE FIRST published reports, according to Robert M. Utley's observations in *Custer and the Great Controversy*, one finds the inception and perpetuation of all the "errors, myths and legends that clutter the history of the Little Big Horn."² Utley tarried only briefly with the Montana press, however, as he attempted to unravel the question of who first published word of the Custer battle. He then deserted the Territory and moved eastward to the big urban dailies where fact, fancy, and legend absorbed the attention of large reading audiences. The Custer Mystique was a phenomenon that began that first week of July, 1876, and continued, almost unbroken and unbridled, for a century.

Brian W. Dippie, in a recent article entitled "The Southern Response to Custer's Last Stand," examined the reaction of the press in the Reconstruction South. He concluded that the battle was "irrelevant." Of import were "the various uses to which it could be put" — primarily Democratic and political in nature.³

Whether the Southern press used Custer and the Battle of the Little Big Horn for its political implications, or whether the eastern papers capitalized on it for purposes of circulation and political chess, these utilizations served to perpetuate not only the memory of the battle but of Custer himself. Herein lay the genesis of a century of public attention and debate — a stark contrast to the public reaction in Montana.

Glorification of Custer and his defeat served no purpose in contemporary Montana. Concerns of Montanans were more pragmatic: the Battle of the Little Big Horn was one of a series of engagements in the Indian wars. These wars and their potentialities were utmost in importance. The Custer battle was like a "flash in the pan" — a manifestation of something that territorial settlers knew was there all along.

Montana Territorial Governor Benjamin Franklin Potts had an ominous message to convey to new Secretary of War Alphonso Taft in a letter dated May 1, 1876: "It is now evident that the Yellowstone Valley will soon be the scene of bloodshed. The Sioux Indians are numerous and determined and great apprehension is felt for the safety of our eastern

settlements. . . . I fear [General Gibbon's] force is not sufficient to meet the Sioux if they concentrate their entire strength . . . and attack his little band."⁴

Montanans had long been concerned with the "Indian Situation" and the Washington politics which produced it. Repeatedly, Governor Potts addressed letters to Commissioner of Indian Affairs J. Q. Smith suggesting that all arms and ammunition trade along the Missouri River be suspended. The material, he warned, was reaching hostile hands and would bear bitter fruit.

Early in 1876, motivated by the same desire to protect eastern Montana, Congressional Delegate Martin Maginnis had introduced legislation to authorize construction of a new military post on the Yellowstone River, and another on the Musselshell. Throughout the spring, his bill had remained in committee, its future dubious.

Meanwhile, in Montana, pragmatic Governor Potts realized action was needed soon. In the same letter of May 1, 1876, and again two weeks later, the Governor requested new, breech-loading rifles to help arm Territorial residents. He also offered to raise a 1000-man militia "to protect the Montana frontiers." Montana did not have a general militia law, so the Governor needed authorization from the War Department to call up volunteers. He got neither the rifles nor the authorization: "[T]his Department does not require the service of such a force . . . in the protection of settlements alleged to be threatened by Indians. . . ."

Rebuffed, the Governor had all available breech-loaders secured in armories at Helena or Virginia City. Attempts to alter Indian policy, to secure protective forts, and to arm and organize a militia had gone for naught. Governor Benjamin F. Potts and all Montana waited to see what transpired in the Yellowstone Valley during the summer of 1876.

2. Robert M. Utley. *Custer and the Great Controversy*. Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1962. Utley's Chapter II, "The Press," adequately covers the reaction of the major eastern newspapers.

3. Brian W. Dippie. "The Southern Response to Custer's Last Stand." *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, XXI, 2 (Spring, 1971), pp. 18-31.

4. Benjamin Franklin Potts to A. Taft, May 1, 1876. B. F. Potts Correspondence, Montana Historical Society (MHS).

CARRYING GENERAL GIBBON'S notes, which told the biggest news story of the year, "Muggins" Taylor left camp on June 28 and began a circuitous trip to Fort Ellis. On the evening of July 2, he arrived in the small community of Stillwater, now Columbus, Montana. Too exhausted to continue, he rested that night in the general store of William H. Norton and Horace Countryman. Norton was a "correspondent" for the *Helena Herald*, a rival daily of the *Independent*. As he read Gibbon's words he realized he had a "scoop." He questioned Taylor further about Custer's defeat, wrote a story for the *Herald*, and dispatched his partner to hurry it to Montana's capital city.

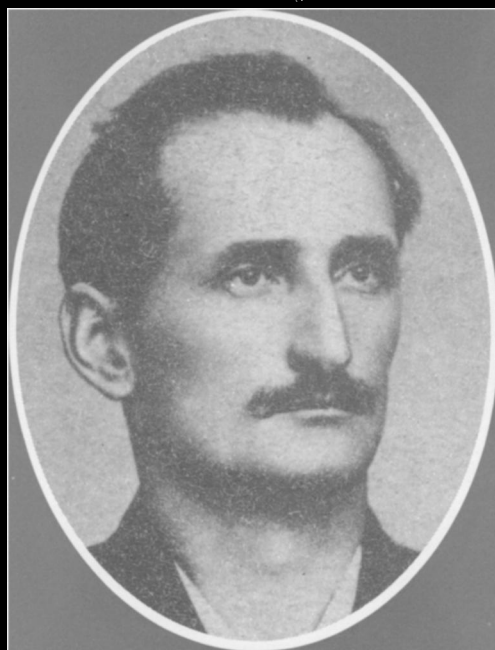
Horace Countryman and "Muggins" Taylor left Stillwater early on the morning of July 3, arriving at Fort Ellis by mid-afternoon. Taylor delivered his dispatch to Captain Benham who, in turn, took it to the telegraph office for transmission as General Gibbon had instructed. For reasons still not known, the telegraph agent delayed transmission until after the Fourth of July.

His assignment completed, Taylor sought out E. S. Wilkinson, editor of the *Bozeman Times*, and recounted his story. Hurriedly, Wilkinson assembled a work crew and published a single sheet "Extra" which was ready for distribution by 7:00 o'clock that evening.

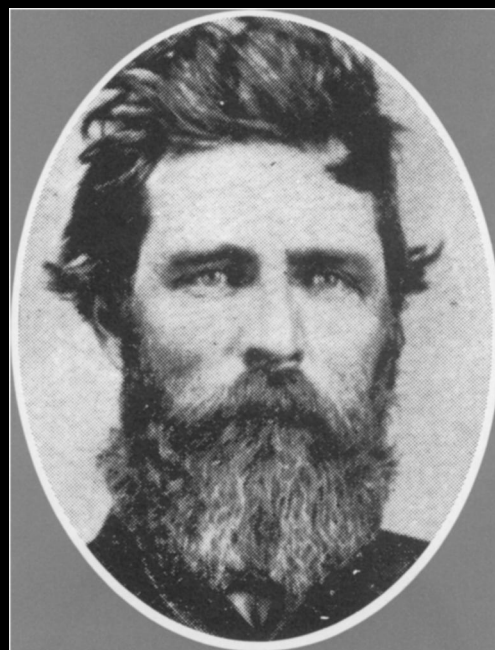
Taylor embellished the account a little, undoubtedly using some of his own observations on the battlefield. The total number killed, he said, was 315, while Indian forces included 2,500 to 4,000 warriors. The battleground looked like a "slaughter pen." The *Times* printed it all, with a concluding observation: "The situation now looks serious."⁵

Editor Wilkinson's "Extra" of July 3 became not only the first published word of the Custer battle, but the initial source of information for the rest of Montana's newspapers. By the morning of July 4, details about what had happened at the Little Big Horn began to spread throughout the Territory.

Very early on the Fourth, Horace Countryman resumed his trip to Helena. To Norton's July 2 account he added a copy of the *Times*



WILLIAM H. NORTON



HORACE COUNTRYMAN

5. No copy of the July 3, 1876, *Times* "Extra" is known to exist. The complete text of that issue appeared in the *Helena Herald* issue the next day, and in the next regular edition of the *Times*, published July 6.

"FAITHFUL AND FEARLESS."

NUMBER 99



WILKINSON

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

DESTRUCTION OF A FIVE-CHILD HOME IN FLAMES.

From the *Star* of Albany, N. Y., dated May 11, 1934.

Albany, N. Y., May 11.—A five-child home, which was the residence of a family of seven persons, was destroyed by fire this morning, and the flames consumed the bodies of the mother and her five children and also the bodies of the mother and her five children. The fire broke out at about 10:30 a. m. and was caused by a gas stove. The fire spread rapidly and the flames consumed the bodies of the mother and her five children. The fire broke out at about 10:30 a. m. and was caused by a gas stove. The fire spread rapidly and the flames consumed the bodies of the mother and her five children.

[illegible]

Like Wilkinson, Fisk wasted no time putting out a special edition which hit the streets at 6:30 P.M. Under the headline "A TERRIBLE FIGHT," Fisk informed Helena residents that Custer and 315 soldiers were dead, and the Seventh Cavalry "Cut to Pieces." The columns carried two dispatches: the first W. H. Norton's; the second, a verbatim text of the Bozeman *Times* special issue. The enterprising Fisk also got the story on the Associated Press wire service later in the evening of July 4 and brief notes about the battle appeared in Salt Lake City and San Diego papers on July 6. For many years, Clement A. Lounsberry of the Bismarck (D.T.) *Tribune* claimed his paper was the first to publish the news. While the fact that his issue of July 6 carried the most complete early account cannot be denied, Lounsberry was not the first editor to break the news, and many writers have garnered public attention with accounts — factual and otherwise — to prove the point.⁶

Governor Potts received unofficial word of the battle from the *Herald* on July 4, and official confirmation by telegram from Captain Benham the next morning. He hurried to the telegraph office and sent out his own message to Commander of the Army W. T. Sherman. For statistics he relied on Gibbon's account rather than on Taylor's or Norton's, concluding with a note that Montanans were greatly excited at the news. He restated his offer to raise 1,000 volunteers.

6. For varying accounts of who said what first, see Graham, Stewart and Utley, cited above, and Hugh McQuaid's account in the *Bozeman Advertiser-Courier*, June 6, 1902, p. 8. E. A. Brininstool, *A Trooper With Custer*, Columbus, Ohio: The Hunter-Trader-Trapper Company, 1925, pp. 158-65; Harrison Lane, "Custer Massacre: How the News First Reached the Outer World," *Montana Heritage Series*, No. 7, Helena: Historical Society Press, n.d., pp. 16-22.

BOZEMAN AVANT COURIER.

Devoted to the Development of Eastern Montana and the Encouragement of all Industrial Pursuits.

Volume 5

BOZEMAN, MONTANA TERRITORY, FRIDAY, JULY 7, 1876.

Number 30.

The Avant Courier.

WERN WRIGHT, Editor & Publisher

The Reaper.

The reapers bend their dusty backs,
The scythe strikes away;

some silver blades, which represented
as solid, subjects from the Old Testament,
and these cause figures, half as natural as
nature herself, reared from the antique—
in with great perfection. So long as the

The Philosopher

Police Court.

It is seldom that a philosopher gets

Here and There.

Does Prof. Tins still hang out at St.

Louis? No man his the weather as early

A Baby's Way.

[From the St. Louis Republican.]

It was just about sunset, the street had

Squibs.

The girl who can put a square patch on
a pair of pantaloons may not be an acrobat,
but as one who can outdo and
work green wadded legs on blue ground,
she is useful in her way.

Helena's *Herald*, in its first regular issue after word reached the city, responded to the situation in more subdued terms. Expressing "heartfelt sorrow" over the death of Custer and his troops, the paper quickly placed the incident in a more pragmatic perspective. If there was solace to be taken, the editor observed, it would be in the fact that Congress was still in session, and might yet come to grips with the "Indian problem" in Montana.

AS NEWS OF Little Big Horn spread across the Territory to find its way into the columns of its press, the pattern of reaction generally followed that of the Helena *Herald*. On July 6, the Butte *Miner*, Diamond City's *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, and the Virginia City *Madisonian* carried their first accounts. The next day the Bozeman *Avant Courier* and Fort Benton *Record* carried their initial stories, and a week later, on July 12, the Territory's westernmost paper, *The Missoulian*, completed the chain of reports. With each, the first issue or two contained emotional reactions to Custer's death and the battle. Later, while emotions remained high, the point of concentration was not on Custer, but rather on practical issues: potential Indian threats, organization of a militia, adequate arms for defense.

In the remaining months of summer, other issues received increasing news and editorial space in Montana papers. The Butte *Miner* retained its mining emphasis, as did the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* with agriculture, and the Fort Benton *Record* regarding Missouri River trade. National and local political contests, the question of railroad development for the Territory, a population exodus to the new Black Hills gold fields, and local floods all assumed places of note

during July and August. The number of column inches devoted to Custer dissipated in direct proportion to the proximity of the first news reports. By early August references to the Little Big Horn were scattered; by September, non-existent.

Of the ten newspapers published in Montana during the summer of 1876, five were Democratic in politics, four Republican, one Grange/Independent.⁹ Yet political persuasion was of little significance when it came to criticizing Indian policies. The Democratic press, led by the Bozeman *Times* and the Helena *Independent*, was more vitriolic in its criticism, accusing the Grant Administration of pursuing a "foolish" and "insane" course, skimping on frontier troops and retaining sufficient forces in the Reconstruction South to influence forthcoming national elections.

Republican stalwarts, like the Fisk Brothers and Mills and Kessler, criticized the "Quaker policy" of peace and advocated increasing troops on the frontier until the Sioux nation was "exterminated" or "extinct." Even R. N. Sutherlin of the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, who refrained from siding with either the Democrats or Republicans in the 1876 elections, was unhesitatingly critical of existing policies. Calling the course of the Indian Bureau a "total failure," Sutherlin contended that "Indians should be treated in a manner that would be creditable to our nation, not wheedled and dallied with for the sake of private speculation. . . ." No wonder there was a war on the frontier, he concluded; the Indian uprising was justified.¹⁰

9. Democratic papers included: *The Bozeman Times* (BT), *The Fort Benton Record* (FBR), *The Missoulian* (MM), *HDI*, and *VCM*. The Republican papers were *The Avant Courier* of Bozeman (AC), *BM*, *NNW*, *HDH*. Diamond City's *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* (RMH), was independent or pro-Grange.

10. *RMH*, August 3, 1876, p. 2, August 10, 1876, p. 2.

The New North-West
DEER LODGE, MONTANA.

RATES OF ADVERTISING.

CLASS	PER LINE	PER COLUMN	PER PAGE
First	10	25	100
Second	8	20	80
Third	6	15	60
Fourth	4	10	40
Fifth	3	8	30
Sixth	2	6	20
Seventh	1	4	10
Eighth	1	3	8
Ninth	1	2	6
Tenth	1	1	4

Transient advertisements payable in advance.
Regular advertisements payable quarterly.
Twenty-five per cent. added for special advertisements.

The New North-West.

VOL. 8, No. 1. DEER LODGE, MONTANA, JULY 7, 1876. WHOLE No. 366.

POETRY.

THE AMERICAN FLAG.

BRIC-A-BRAC.

Dr. Schmidt, of the Athens, Greece, Observatory, has recently completed a map of the moon, upon which he has been so industriously laboring for the last 34 years. It contains 31 craters and hills, besides 200 craters and other objects. It is hardly necessary to say that if Dr. Schmidt had not the assistance from "The Moon" in the Moon that he ought to have had, the map would have been completed many years ago.—*Graphic-Journal.*

Vol. opinion furnished by Charles W. Abrahamson, Cortland T. John C. Smith, Richard T. &c.

NEW YORK-DEER LODGE.

—Values that always come on foot—
—Glad to have 1,000,000 acres and 100 thousand factories.
—A Kentucky double-poled egg basket and two chicks.
—Robert Napier, the well known Scotch ship builder, is dead.
—Tyrone Church has found the way of death at \$20,000 annually.
—Philadelphia minister received two barrels of olives one Christmas.
—The New York Herald complains that

BEAUTIES OF THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

MAKING THE COUNTRY.

The New North-West
DEER LODGE, MONTANA.

RATES OF ADVERTISING.

CLASS	PER LINE	PER COLUMN	PER PAGE
First	10	25	100
Second	8	20	80
Third	6	15	60
Fourth	4	10	40
Fifth	3	8	30
Sixth	2	6	20
Seventh	1	4	10
Eighth	1	3	8
Ninth	1	2	6
Tenth	1	1	4

Transient advertisements payable in advance.
Regular advertisements payable quarterly.
Twenty-five per cent. added for special advertisements.

NEWSPAPER DECISIONS.

1. Any man who takes a paper regularly from the Post-Office, without paying for it, is guilty of a misdemeanor, and is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

2. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

3. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

4. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

5. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

6. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

7. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

8. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

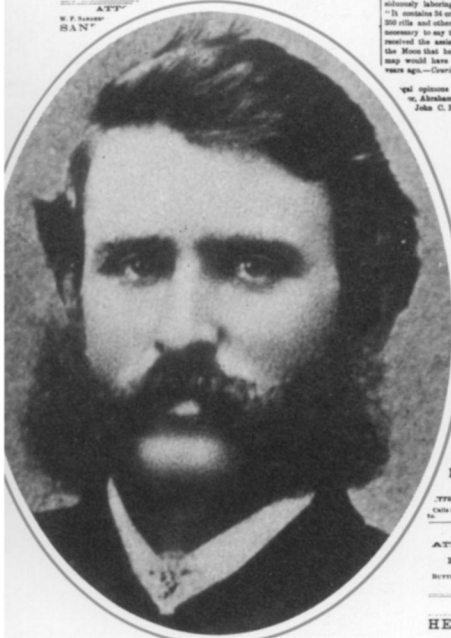
9. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

10. If a person publishes a paper, and it contains any libelous or obscene matter, he is liable to be arrested or to be imprisoned for the same.

ETHNOLOGICAL CORRESPONDENCE.

A different woman—five.
Lemon pencils are fashionable.
Crawfishes appear diagonally in front as very popular.

The very wide hat lately brought into fashion has been christened Henry V.
The progress of Germany believes that women have too little to do with politics.



JAMES MILLS

BUTTE

JUNE 1. BUTTE, MONT.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

BUTTE MINER.

The recurring question of Custer's culpability in the Little Big Horn battle surfaced briefly in mid-July, corresponding with the heated debate then taking place in the eastern press. Montana's newspapers, however, did not dwell on the issue, confining themselves to repeating a story circulating elsewhere, if they mentioned the subject at all. Where editorial comments did appear, they often tempered rumors with appeals to wait for further reports or the results of an official investigation.

THE MAJOR CONCERN of Montanans and the Montana press in the summer of 1876 was still the Indian threat. Most papers carried regular accounts of "The Indian War," or "The Indian Situation" in their pages. Although many editors counseled objectivity, apprehension was widespread. A Sun River rancher synthesized all the Territory's fears in an excited letter which the *Helena Herald* printed on July 10. The great fear, he said, was that "Gibbon's little command" would be "eaten up" before help arrived. Such a defeat, coming on the heels of the Custer battle, would spur formerly peaceful Indians to leave the reservations and join the Sioux. Then, if the Indians defeated both Gibbon and Crook, "good bye, John! and everybody else, for they are strong enough to clear the country to the Columbia River."¹¹

Hugh McQuaid of the *Helena Independent* exhibited the most editorial apprehension among Montana editors. In obvious competition with the *Herald*, which had "scooped" him on the original news of the Little Big Horn, McQuaid sought to be the first with significant Indian news — accurate or not. On July 9, the *Independent* reported a Sioux raid on Fort Lincoln, Dakota Territory. The report was false. Three days later there appeared an account of a massacre near Fort Pierre, D.T. — equally false. On July 13 and again the following day, McQuaid took up the idea that northern tribes might join the Sioux, adding speculation that the Sioux might cross over into the Gallatin Valley and raid there.

Governor Potts and the more cautious *Herald* attempted to allay citizen fears. On

July 14, Potts wrote to several agents of the northern tribes, asking them to tell Indians under their charge that the Sioux would be severely punished, and cautioning them against joining their more hostile brothers. The next day's *Herald* carried an editorial on "The Extent of our Danger" which concluded that there was no need for apprehension in established communities, and probably none in the Gallatin Valley.

ON SATURDAY NIGHT, July 15, 1876, however, Governor Potts received two disturbing dispatches. Crow Indians were camped on the upper Yellowstone and had reported to the Indian Agent that they were out of ammunition. If the government did not resupply them, they would cross the river and leave southeastern Montana — including the Gallatin Valley — exposed to Sioux raids. The same evening a telegram arrived from Bozeman reporting signal fires in the surrounding mountains — reportedly a sign the Sioux were moving in that direction.

Potts decided the best course of action was a visit to Bozeman and Fort Ellis. Arriving in the afternoon of July 17, he addressed a large crowd, counseling them to remain calm in the "seeming emergency." Then he met with Captain Benham to secure more ammunition to mollify the Crows. Unfortunately for Potts' efforts, about the time he was enjoying Bozeman's hospitality with a little food and drink, the *Helena Independent* received alarming telegrams from the Gallatin Valley.

At 8:15 P.M., J. C. Bennett telegraphed the *Independent* — more signal fires had been observed east of Bozeman the previous night. An Indian raid might be imminent. "Further particulars in a few hours," Bennett promised. Thirty-five minutes later he was back on the wire, reiterating what he had already said.

Hugh McQuaid now faced a dilemma. He had to go to press shortly if the *Independent* was to be out at its accustomed early morning hour; but there was nothing to substantiate Bennett's reports. He wired Bozeman's S. W. Langhorn at 9 P.M. to ask if the Indian raid story was true. Langhorn responded immediately. He knew of no raids, but he would check into the matter.

11. *HDH*, July 10, 1876, p. 3.

McQuaid weighed the options — probably recalling the July 4 *Herald* “Extra” — and then acted. “INDIAN RAID — SIGNAL FIRES!!! — THE SAVAGES IN THE GALLATIN VALLEY!” screamed the headlines above the accounts of Bennett’s telegrams in the July 18 issue of the *Helena Independent*. It was possible, the editor admitted elsewhere in an editorial, that the reports were “colored with an undue apprehension”; but, he assured his readers, the paper spared “no expense to get the truth . . . publishing all that we were able to learn.”¹²

Called to task by the *Herald* and the *Bozeman Avant Courier* for his unfounded alarm over what were probably charcoal or hunters’ fires, McQuaid defended his actions with the retort that the reports at least made evident the fact that “such a thing is possible.”¹³

Despite calming efforts, reports of more signal fire sightings kept the Gallatin Valley in a “state of apprehension” during the week of July 17. East Gallatin residents who felt the most threatened, met in the Grange hall on Thursday, July 20, to discuss a course of action. Those in attendance agreed the threat appeared real, and at once formed several committees. One solicited subscriptions to pay for scouts. A second enrolled volunteers for a militia, if necessary. Another committee called on Captain Benham to see if he would support their actions. All East Gallatin residents agreed to meet again on Saturday to assess the results of their efforts.

Within the space of two days, however, the alarm dissipated. Benham assured local residents there was no cause for concern. Crow Indians were between the Sioux and the Gallatin Valley, but if residents felt threatened they were welcome to seek protection at Fort Ellis. There had been no more “signal fire” reports for several days and volunteer scouts scouring the countryside found no trace of alleged war parties. Reassured, East Gallatin residents voted to adjourn their organization subject to the chairman’s recall. The group never reconvened, and with its dissolution went the height of excitement in Montana over the “Indian threat.”

12. *HDI*, July 18, 1876, pp. 2 and 3.

13. See the *HDH* of July 18, 1876, p. 1, and the *AC* of July 21, 1876, p. 2. For McQuaid’s defense, see the *HDI* of July 19, 1876, p. 2. See also the *FBR*, July 21, 1876, p. 2 in defense of McQuaid, and the *NNW* of the same date, p. 2, advocating restraint and calm.

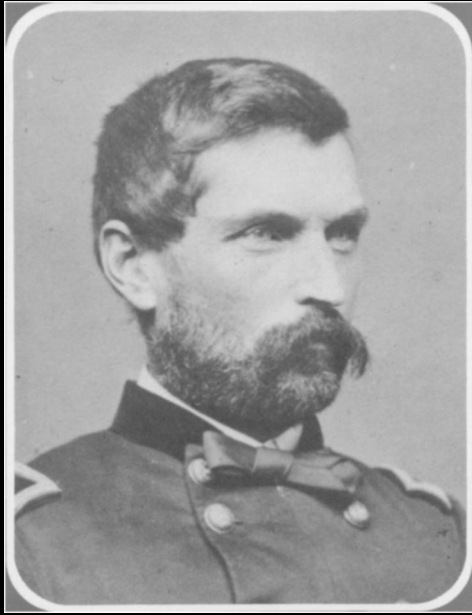
DESPITE AN occasional return to the theme of a potential northern Indian uprising, emotions in Montana quickly cooled. By the first week in August, Governor Potts could write to Martin Maginnis with the assurance that “Northern Indians are all quiet and I think will remain so.” J. V. Bogert, the *New Northwest’s* correspondent in Bozeman, reported “not even a rumor” to enliven his dispatch. At the same time, *Helena’s Herald* felt secure enough to offer mild support for the military’s apparent inaction since the Custer battle — it was not a good time to fight Indians, anyway. The *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* even braved an observation that war on her frontiers would be good for the Territory’s agriculture and livestock businesses. Perhaps it would also bring attention to Montana.

From July 5, when documentation of Custer’s defeat convinced Governor Potts that volunteers were essential for defense, until well into August, the call for militia became the most apparent manifestation of the threat on Montana’s frontier. Save the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman*, every newspaper in Montana called for the organization of either territorial or community militia.

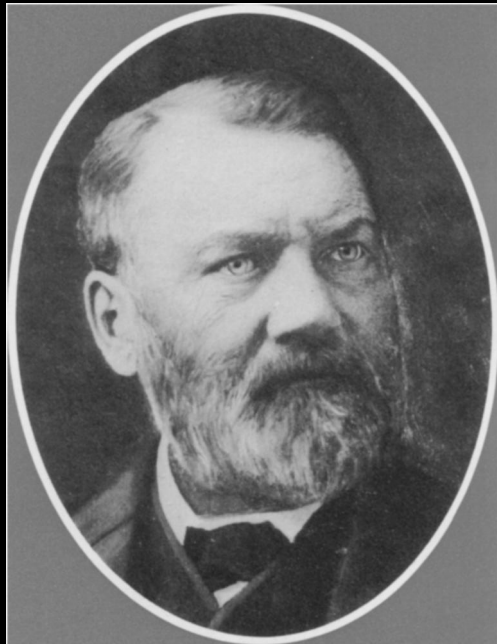
Butte was the first community to offer troops to Governor Potts on July 6, the day after the Governor made his proposal to General Sherman. Four days later, Potts wired assurances to the *Butte Miner* that should he receive authorization, Butte’s forces would be the first enrolled. That same day he notified Delegate Maginnis of his offer, and implored, “Will you please see Sherman about Montana.”¹⁴

Neither War Department or Congressional approval was, however, forthcoming. On July 12, Potts received a telegram from General Sherman, dated the 8th. The War Department did not feel the need was sufficient to justify calling up volunteers, although the General was certain Montana militiamen would handle themselves well. Unless he received authorization from Congress or the President, Sherman said that Montanans would be free to look after their own mines and ranches. He suggested that local militias might be organized, but it would be a purely territorial matter, and such

14. Potts to Martin Maginnis, July 10, 1876. Martin Maginnis Papers, MHS.



JOHN GIBBON



BENJAMIN F. POTTS

groups would probably not be mustered into federal service.

While some Montana editors questioned the wisdom of the decision, and others engaged in a debate over the superiority of cavalry vis-a-vis foot troops in fighting Indians, the issue of volunteers for federal service was all but dead. The question of local or territorial militias continued to garner editorial space, nonetheless.

Governor Potts made one more attempt to get federal authorization to raise a militia. Through Martin Maginnis he had a bill introduced on July 25, authorizing the President to accept the service of Montana volunteers. From the start, Montana's press realized the proposal had little chance of passage. It eventually succumbed to an unfavorable committee report.

IF THE JULY 5 telegram to Sherman did not bear fruit in the form of a volunteer call-up, it did produce action on Maginnis' proposal to construct forts on the Yellowstone and Musselshell Rivers. On July 8, the same day he cabled Potts to reject his offer, Sherman notified Congress that two new posts would prove beneficial. In a flurry of Congressional activity, the measure came out of committee and found its way into law by the middle of July.

When Montanans realized militias were to be a local matter, petitions went to the Governor for modern, breech-loading arms. The Territory's store of arms in July consisted of sixty muzzle-loading muskets in Helena, and another 1,200 in Virginia City. There was also a twelve pound mountain howitzer in Virginia City (but the carriage had rotted away since its last use) and an untold number of breech-loading Springfields previously issued to citizens on a consignment basis.

Potts tried to have the breech-loaders collected, or even accounted for, only to discover farmers and ranchers had traded many of them to Indians for horses. Potts' only recourse was to call in the remaining "needle guns," authorize needed repairs on the mountain howitzer, and request 2,000 new breech-loaders from the War Department. He took these actions, all the while attempting to assure

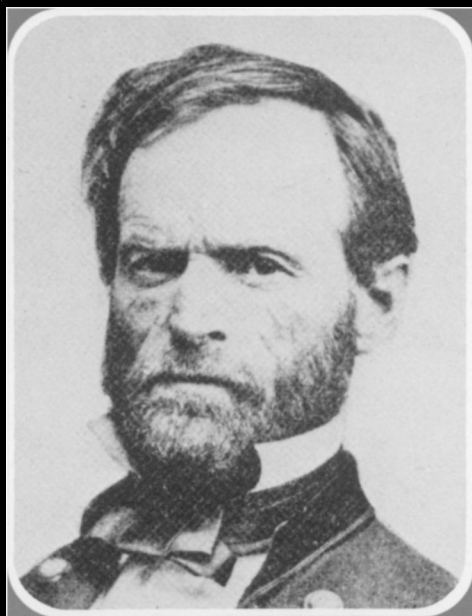
uneasy Montanans that the 1,260 muskets currently in the Territory's possession would be sufficient should a real emergency arise.

Word reached Montana in late July that the War Department would issue 500 new Springfields to Montana Territory. It was not 2,000 as Potts had requested, and even then, there were two restrictions. Potts had to sign for the weapons personally, to prevent a repeat of the traded-for-ponies debacle, and Potts had to guarantee payment of the \$1,081.51 freight bill. The Governor gave his assurances in both instances and the arms were sent on their way — anticipated arrival date, about mid-October.

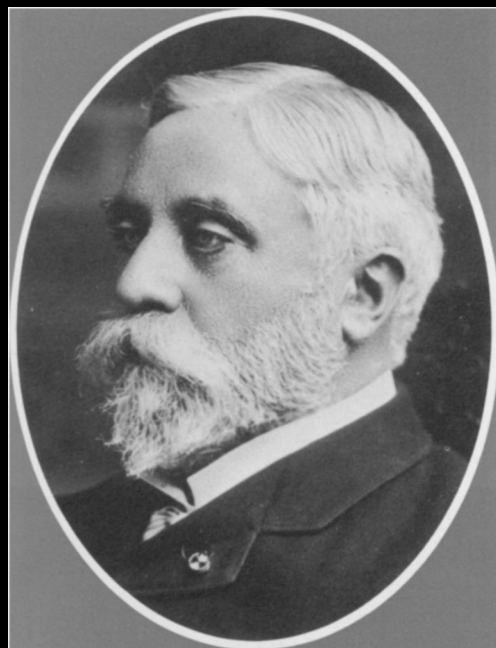
News that the arms were on their way revived only scant interest in organizing local militia groups. Indeed, the Indian threat had so subsided that only two communities expressed interest. Virginia City succeeded in organizing a "Home Guard" in early August, but only ten men participated. Efforts were even more frustrating in Butte. Despite a vigorous campaign by *Miner* editors Mills and Kessler on the benefits of militia membership — it "improves muscular development, gives . . . a free, springing walk, and renders [members] easy and graceful in all their movements" — the militia did not jell. Butte residents met on August 27 in the school house to consider the matter, then voted to form a fire department instead — "such members of this company as desire to do so, can enroll themselves in the militia company." None did.

One more facet of the Indian excitement which enveloped Montana during the summer of 1876 manifested itself in positive results. Governor Potts renewed his long-standing pleas to curb Indian traders' traffic in arms and ammunition, and with the exception of the *Fort Benton Record*, Montana's press supported him. While not justifying the arms trade in general, the *Record* did rise to the defense of T. C. Power and Company of Fort Benton, noting that not all weapons in the possession of hostile Indians came from traders — a situation demonstrably correct from the Governor's experience with earlier "needle guns" and frontier farmers.

To the relief of most Montanans, Indian Commissioner J. Q. Smith closed the arms and ammunition trade on August 22, 1876. His action affected not only Montana, but the ter-



WILLIAM T. SHERMAN



MARTIN MAGINNIS



GEORGE A. CUSTER

ritories/states of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Dakota, and Nebraska as well.

THE CENTENNIAL SUMMER closed without further battles of major significance on Montana's plains. For the Territory's residents, the excitement had ended by mid-August. Much of what they had sought earlier came to pass: Easterners were now aware of the true nature of the Indian wars; the official arms traffic had ended and a shipment of modern arms — albeit a small one — was on the way.

By the end of July, the *Madisonian* could even report the Custer debacle in mock seriousness: "Finest watering place in the country! . . . Salubrious climate, mountain prospects, pleasant sites for picnic parties in mountain dells about the forks of the far-famed Little Big Horn River. Water with medicinal properties much praised by Major Reno and party, late visitors; in short, every attraction of a first-class fashionable abode for the heated term. The closest attention paid all visitors; charges moderate, and always on horseback. . . . An elegant summer resort — Recumbent Bison proprietor."

When Benjamin F. Potts addressed the Tenth Montana Legislature on January 8, 1877, he made reference to the excitement of the previous summer only in routine matters which constituted an insignificant portion of his speech. He asked members of the Legislature to take care of financial obligations incurred, particularly the freight bill for the rifles and suggested the Territory have a general militia law to facilitate local organization, should such be necessary at a future time.

In Council Joint Resolution #1, legislators allocated money for the freight bill on the 500 breech-loaders. The warrant went to Governor Potts, who had paid the bill out of his own pocket. House Bill #24 took care of the expenses of Francis C. Deimling — \$58.75 — for rebuilding the carriage on the mountain howitzer.

On the Governor's last suggestion, however, the Assembly members were not moved. They made provision for the care and keeping of the 500 rifles in the Territory's custody to

prevent further abuses, and provided for their allocation to militia groups should any be formed. It was not a general militia law, *per se*, but it did provide a basic framework in which militias could operate.

On February 3, 1877, House Member Louis Rottwitt of Meagher County rose to introduce Joint Resolution #1 suggesting that the name of the Little Big Horn River be changed to "Custer's River," in commemoration of the "dauntless courage, the disciplined valor, and the heroic death of Col. George A. Custer, and his men. . . ." Under a suspension of the rules, the measure passed the third reading unanimously, cleared the upper chamber that same afternoon, and received the Governor's signature by nightfall.

Not to be outdone, A. H. Mitchell of Big Horn County introduced Council Bill #62 on the last day of the session, changing the name of Big Horn County to Custer County, in commemoration of the same traits and events. Like the preceding resolution, there was a suspension of the rules, unanimous consent, and the Governor's signature in less than twelve hours.¹⁵

These were perfunctory social obligations at best. Neither measure merited editorial comment in a single Territorial newspaper. This lack of concern for, or interest in, the Custer battle was representative of the position newspapers had taken the previous summer. In

their pages during the term of the 1877 Legislative Assembly were discussions of politics, railroad questions, and local issues. There were no discussions of events along the Little Big Horn or the commander of the Seventh Cavalry who died there.

GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER'S last battle has generated a greater volume of historical — and non-historical — literature than any other single United States military engagement. Placed in an historical context of United States /Indian confrontation during the Nineteenth Century, however, it is a tragic but not highly significant event. Montana and its press placed the battle in that context. At a time when it was attracting major attention elsewhere in the nation, the region most affected by the outcome relegated the actual engagement — and Custer — to a place of relative insignificance.

Of primacy to Montanans were the results of the Indian war. If the battle was significant it was so only because it made it possible for them to obtain goals they had sought before the summer of 1876. Governor Potts finally secured the close of the Indian arms trade; Martin Maginnis saw his legislation to construct forts on the Yellowstone and Musselshell get hurried passage; the Territory secured more modern arms for home defense; the legislation regulating the use of those arms became the basis for militia organization the next summer when the "Indian problem" renewed itself as the Nez Perce plunged across Montana in search of sanctuary in Canada.

Montana was the site of those events which occupied the attention of the nation a century ago. Its people and its press, however, were not the promulgators or the perpetrators of the controversy and verbiage which swirled out of the Custer Battle to flood the nation in rhetoric. These were eastern in origin.

15. Despite these legislative efforts, the Custer River designation did not survive. The Department of the Interior's General Land Office Map of Montana Territory in 1879, contains both Custer County and Custer River. George W. Cram's "Cram's Railroad and Township Map of Montana," published the same year by the Western Map Depot, has Custer County, but retains Little Big Horn River. General Land Office maps after 1879 all reverted to use of Little Big Horn River. Montana remained without a Big Horn County until 1913 when the Legislature created one out of part of what had been Custer County. Big Horn County contains the site of the Custer Battlefield. The Custer County name change went into effect immediately. When the state printer set type for the legislative proceedings, he listed Mitchell as a delegate from Custer County. Whereas the county name change was a Territorial matter, changing the name of the Little Big Horn River was something different. For many people outside Montana, it was a name made all too familiar through the columns of the nation's press in preceding months. Map makers used both Custer River and Little Big Horn River for several years, then reverted to the original.

REX C. MYERS has returned to the pages of MONTANA and to the state itself after a brief sojourn of college teaching in Southern California. It has been a happy reunion for both. Moreover, Rex brings his considerable talents as an historian to the Montana Historical Society staff, serving as Reference Librarian. Born in Ohio and raised in Colorado, he received his graduate degrees from the University of Montana under Professors K. Ross Toole and Robert L. Peterson. From his studies at the University came an interest in Montana history which has produced several publications on some wide-ranging subjects: railroad and urban transportation, the Vigilantes (we published his thesis on the mysterious numbers "3-7-77" in our Autumn issue, 1974) and now on Montana editors' reaction to the Custer Battle, a result of his growing acquaintance with the Society's extensive newspaper files.