

JUDGING POVERTY: INSTITUTIONAL POVERTY RELIEF
IN GALLATIN COUNTY DURING THE
LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

James William Jenks

A professional paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-BOZEMAN
Bozeman, Montana

December 1999

P378
J424

APPROVAL
of a professional paper submitted by
James William Jenks

This professional paper has been read by each member of the professional paper committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies

Robert W. Rydell, Ph.D.


(Signature)

1 Dec 1991
Date

Approved for the Department of History and Philosophy

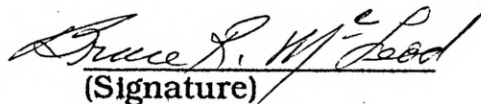
Thomas R. Wessel, Ph.D.

Thomas R. Wessel
(Signature)

11/30/99
Date

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Bruce R. McLeod, Ph.D.


(Signature)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
JUDGING POVERTY	1
THE BOARD OF HEALTH CLEANS UP BOZEMAN	9
"BOZEMAN HAS NO USE FOR WHISKEY-SOAKED BUMMERS"	16
THE FATES OF LABORING MEN IN GALLATIN COUNTY	23
"THE POOREST FARM IN THE COUNTY;" THE COLLEGE AND BEYOND	33
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	40

ABSTRACT

County or locally administrated poor farms were one of the principle means of poverty relief in the United States during the nineteenth century. How financially prepared were localities to effectively carry out poverty relief? Questions regarding the gender, class and ethnicity of local poor farm inmates also remain unanswered. Further, how did citizens respond to the influx of the wandering, able-bodied poor, created by nineteenth century economic dislocation.

Gallatin County citizens encountered the two general classes of poor which existed nationwide--the able-bodied poor and the aged and infirm. Various social histories provided the national context for nineteenth century poor relief, while identifying the local poor, the attitudes toward the able-bodied poor, and growth of the poor farm was pursued by studying local newspapers, county directories, census data, county commissioner journals, probate court documents, cemetery information, and local correspondence.

What emerged from these documents was a picture of county citizens cognizant of their responsibility to care for the local aged and infirm, yet engaged in coordinated efforts to drive the able-bodied poor out of Bozeman. The poor farm became the final destination for the county's elderly and infirm, who were overwhelmingly composed of single, laboring class immigrant males. That the poor farm was only able to aid the elderly and infirm indicates the inability of localities to deal effectively with the immense costs of poor relief. Only with the New Deal were policies initiated at the federal level to finance poor relief created by unemployment and age.

JUDGING POVERTY

In many ways, Patrick Clark was representative of the class of poor sheltered by the Gallatin County Poor Farm. At age 105, Clark was reported by the *Bozeman Avant-Courier* as the "Oldest Man in the Mountains."¹ An immigrant, Clark came to the United States in 1849 with his sixteen year old bride. Though his wife died in 1851, she bore him a son, who at the time of the newspaper article was an inmate in Warm Springs State Hospital. With his wife deceased and his son institutionalized, late nineteenth century Bozeman offered Clark few options for survival. Clark's wage earning years had long passed, with no family to support him, he turned to Gallatin County for sanctuary and support. No national or statewide welfare system existed during this time. Thus, it was left to localities to shelter their elderly and infirm in the most humane and affordable way possible. Poor farms were the most popular form of local institutional care for most of the United States during the nineteenth century.

Poor relief in the Western United States was based on the experience and practice of eastern states, which as English colonies had adopted the major features of English Elizabethan poor law. This statute defined three major categories of dependents--children, the able-bodied and the elderly or infirm. The almshouse, or poorhouse, was a major element of that tradition and was intended to relieve the suffering of that last class of poor, the elderly and infirm. The remedy for children was apprenticeship, while work was seen as the antidote for the able-bodied poor.

¹ "Oldest Man in the Mountains," *Bozeman Avant-Courier*, 18 June 1885, p. 3.

Immigrants like Patrick Clark provided the labor that helped fuel the massive American economic expansion which took place throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but the human wave which crashed over the East coast increased the problem of poverty.

Immigrants arrived with the enthusiasm to create a new life, but this fervor did nothing to alleviate the penniless state of many new arrivals. Countless observers began to view private charity and outdoor relief as encouraging idleness and incapable of dealing with the breadth of poverty. These observers viewed traditional poor relief policies as creating conditions which made it possible for many to live modestly without hard labor. By 1851, and with pauperism rising at an astounding rate, poorhouses, the auctioning of the poor, the contract system and outdoor relief became the four methods of poor relief practiced by many states.

The dilemma most localities faced began with defining who the poor were, and how to prevent the genuinely desperate from starving without creating a class of people who chose to live off local aid rather than work. In Gallatin County, two classes of paupers were assumed to exist. The first group, as one nineteenth century report related, "was the impotent poor, who are wholly incapable of work though old age, infancy, sickness or corporeal debility." Apprenticeship still existed and orphaned children were certainly poor, but children began to be associated with the "impotent" poor of the era rather than as a separate class. The second class was made up of "the able poor, who are capable of work of some nature or another."² Most localities agreed that the elderly and impotent deserved help--ordinary human compassion dictated this--

² Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare In America*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 18.

though the form of such aid was not clear. The able-bodied poor, it was assumed, could fend for themselves.

During the nineteenth century, most places, Gallatin County among them, chose poorhouses (or poor farms) and attempted to create a work requirement for all inmates while ending outdoor relief for the able-bodied poor. The poorhouse filled the requirements that the definitions of the able-bodied poor had created--a sanctuary for the infirm and elderly as well as a place where the able-bodied could earn a living. As Social historian Michael B. Katz related, "Within the almshouses, work--especially farm labor--would be mandatory for all inmates neither too sick nor too feeble."³

These dual definitions of the poor shaped the thinking of late nineteenth century Gallatin County residents. Understanding who the impoverished were is one key to understanding the poor farm experience. Did the local poor farm live up to institutional expectations set for it? Who were the impoverished elderly and what sort of social and economic conditions forced them into the Poor Farm? Did the able-bodied poor share the same poverty relief experiences as the elderly and infirm, who had a God-given right to aid? Did their standing as "able-bodied"--those who could and should work--create a different perception among local citizens? Finally, the U.S. economy was subject to massive fluctuations in the late nineteenth century. Given the severity of the era's economic dislocations, how well were local governments, like Gallatin County's, equipped to deal with the growing numbers of poor and immense costs of poverty relief?

As historian Gary Nash has observed, "Poverty has not been a

³ Katz, p. 19.

popular word in this country. It is offensive to the notion of a people of plenty, an insult to the bounteous natural resources of North America, a puzzlement to those who believe in the untrammelled equality of opportunity that provided a chance for everyone to succeed, and an embarrassment to those who trumpet American classlessness and exceptionalism."⁴

Many of those who built the American West subscribed to the myth of the "rugged individualist." Bozeman was not built by itinerate trappers but by a new class of men, who "carried a rifle in one hand," and as Peter Koch, one of Bozeman's early builders, explained, "in the other bore the spade and the school book."⁵ These were the type of men who built Bozeman and created a sense of security and permanence. Koch, as a successful banker and immigrant from Denmark, was in many ways the polar opposite of Patrick Clark. Koch summed up the feelings of accomplishment and self-congratulation which many early Gallatin Valley residents echoed when he wrote "I hear the tread of pioneers, of nations yet to be; the first low wash of waves where soon shall roll a human sea. They crossed the prairie as of old the Pilgrims crossed the sea. To make the West as they the East, the homestead of the free."⁶ The idea of the West, built by the hard labor of free white men became the stuff of American myths.

Sentiments such as Peter Koch's mask with myth and poetry the tremendous amount of economic dislocation which occurred throughout much of the nineteenth century. Early in the century, independent

⁴ Gary Nash, "Poverty and Politics In Early American History," in Billy G. Smith, ed., *Down and Out in Early America*, forthcoming.

⁵ Peter Koch, "Historical Sketch of Bozeman, Gallatin Valley and Bozeman Pass," *R.L. Polk and Co.'s Bozeman City Directory, 1892-93*, p. 71.

⁶ Koch, p. 72.

artisans and their crafts coexisted with manufactured goods. Some "factories" were simply collections of craftsmen in large workplaces. However, as industrialization and standardization grew, especially by the middle of the nineteenth century, the position of the artisan eroded to where most became wage laborers. Of greater consequence was the loss of their skill monopoly--and ownership of what they produced--as production techniques divided labor into smaller components which required less skill and less time to learn. The growth of wage labor broke the more familiar, non-economic ties between employees and employers. This exchange of money for work became the only bond. Consequently, more men entering trades found a glutted labor market which in turn led to lower wages, as both older artisans and younger, unskilled laborers were thrown into unemployment.

Social historian Michael B. Katz has sketched two main problems facing these unemployed when he observes "One [problem] was the absence of any cushion against unemployment. Very few workers could save enough to tide them over a long period of unemployment...their alternatives were to seek relief or travel in search of work. Here the ecology of the workplace--the second factor--came into play. Most working people had to live within walking distance of their jobs, and, as a consequence losing a job often meant traveling to find new work. People on the road usually had no money. Often hungry and desperate, they sometimes sought relief in poorhouses or from public officials. In this way, transiency helped swell the roles of public relief."⁷

Further, wages were often reduced, leaving large numbers of people unable to support themselves or their families. In a young, capitalistic

⁷ Katz, p. 6-7.

economy governed by a laissez-faire philosophy, work varied by demand as few manufactures employed a consistent number of workers throughout the year, and very few people enjoyed steady employment. As much as low wages, this irregular employment often dropped both families and individuals into poverty. As one nineteenth century observer pointed out, "These last, after no very long time, must become dependent on foreign aid. They are made paupers."⁸

Mechanization and industrialization also intensified rural poverty. Threshing machines replaced flailing, a common type of winter farm employment depended upon by agricultural laborers. Seasonality itself menaced the rural and urban working class. A great deal of unskilled labor took place outdoors, such as digging canals or building roads or railroads. All this employment ended in winter, as did most construction work.

Immigration had a paradoxical effect on the American economy during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Between 1820 and 1860 more than five million immigrants entered the United States, and the problems of poverty and poor relief in America were often exacerbated by foreign upheavals such as the human exodus from Ireland in the wake of famine in the 1840s and 1850s. While immigration numbers exploded and intensified the social morass of poverty, it is vital to realize that without massive immigration America would have lacked the necessary labor to build its infrastructure of roads, railroads, bridges and canals, while American factories would have lacked the essential workers needed for production.

What was, and is, a universal human experience, was that

8. Quoted in Katz, p. 19-20.

everyone would age. Whether a recent immigrant, unemployed artisan or seasonal farm laborer, everyday problems of survival intensified in old age. Laboring people did not retire, they simply worked until they could no longer continue. Elderly people usually lived with their children. As historian William Trattner summarized, "With no savings, no pension, no social security, or if they lacked children able or willing to care for them, old people often found themselves completely destitute,"⁹ a common situation for elderly, single immigrants.

Gallatin County, like most other localities in America, saw a solution to the issues and costs of poverty relief in the creation of a poor farm. Early American experience with poor relief drew heavily on English ideas. In the early and middle nineteenth century, Eastern cities and counties aided their poor through private charity and outdoor relief, which allowed the poor to remain in their homes while receiving assistance. To many nineteenth-century observers, these methods simply fostered dependence and eroded traditional work ethics, and relief rolls continued to grow. By building poorhouses and poor farms, critics of charity and outdoor relief sought to introduce a work element to receiving aid, in hopes of reducing costs and deterring applications for support.

By the time Gallatin County built a poor farm, the institution had begun to disappear as an element of eastern poor relief. Localities in the East had discovered what Gallatin County would eventually find out--that poor farms increased financial burdens rather than reducing costs. For medium and larger sized counties and townships, the sheer numbers--and costs--of poor relief simply become too great to handle at

⁹ Walter L. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*. (New York: Free Press, 1989), 47.

the local level. By the late nineteenth and twentieth century, frequent national economic depressions and financial panics increased poverty exponentially, and illustrated the need for a national system of poverty relief to supplement local relief measures.

THE BOARD OF HEALTH CLEANS UP BOZEMAN

Gallatin County's emphasis on building a poor farm can be traced to local experience with poor relief in the 1870s. During that decade, the county based poor relief efforts on the "contract system," through which the poor, elderly, and infirm were housed in local hotels at county taxpayer expense. Many observers criticized this method as too costly and inefficient, and one which required no labor from the person receiving the aid. As the *Avant-Courier* editorialized in March of 1882, "This custom of boarding the sick and indigent of the county at first-class hotels must sooner or later be abandoned, unless money becomes becomes no object to the industrious tax-payers of the county."

More important, this article relayed a warning of the county's earlier experiences with the poor when it reminded readers that "it was this very class of persons that ran the county so deeply into debt during the first eight or ten years of its history. But for that very loose condition of things, Gallatin County today need not have been owing over 50 percent of its present indebtedness."¹⁰ The implications of this condition was two-fold: Gallatin County would be unable to support the volumes of able-bodied poor entering its borders and would react negatively to the traveling poor upon their arrival in Bozeman. Fresh memories of poverty-induced county indebtedness prepared locals to meet these newcomers with less than cordial greetings.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad through Bozeman was a reason for optimism. Prosperity alone, however, was not all the rail line would bring to Bozeman. The wandering, able-bodied

¹⁰ "The County Finances," *Avant-Courier*. 23 March 1882, p. 3.

poor used the railroad to travel the country in search of employment. Locals were quite aware of the wealth a railroad would bring. The town and county, though growing, believed a rail line which would inextricably connect Bozeman with the rest of country would guarantee economic permanency and security.

Leading Bozemanite and booster Peter Koch recounted the importance of the railroad for local prosperity in his "Historical Sketch of Bozeman, Gallatin Valley and Bozeman Pass,"¹¹ Koch recounted hopes generated and dashed in 1871 when "Northern Pacific surveying parties ran lines across Bozeman Pass...and we all believed that time had come when our front door was to be swung wide open. But again we were doomed to disappointment."¹² For many local citizens, the railroad was the difference between a thriving locality ripe for expansion, or a inevitable ghost town like so many of Bozeman's predecessors.

The Panic of 1873 had been fueled by overinvestment in railroads and faulty financing, and was the cause of the difficulties described by Peter Koch. Financier Jay Cooke went bankrupt after extending too much credit to the Northern Pacific railroad. Eighty-nine railroads, including the Northern Pacific defaulted on their bonds which triggered a general collapse of financial confidence nationwide. Banks failed, the New York Stock Exchange closed and the nation entered a five-year depression consisting of high unemployment, wage cuts, strikes, factory closures and falling agricultural prices. This crisis contributed immensely to the conditions Gallatin County's poor faced during the 1870s, as well as the county's state of indebtedness by the early 1880s.

Bozeman elites had good reason to try to inspire local confidence.

¹¹ Koch, p. 61.

¹² Koch, p. 68-69.

The late nineteenth century was a time of great mobility among middle and lower class people. Immigrants, for example, flooded westward looking for employment. Unless a sense of permanency could be established, there was nothing to stop these same groups of locals from packing up and heading elsewhere, perhaps to towns where the railroad had already reached.

By early 1882 the Northern Pacific Railroad, though recovering financially from the crisis of the 1870s, had not reached Bozeman yet discussion of the rail line's possible routes was a hot topic. The Northern Pacific was busily surveying two possible into Yellowstone National Park. The first proposed route followed the Yellowstone River south to Mammoth Hot Springs. The other option, trumpeted by Gallatin county's leading citizens and surveyed by Peter Koch for the Northern Pacific, passed from Bozeman via the West Gallatin River into the lower Geyser Basin.

Bozeman's leading newspaper, the *Avant-Courier*, confidently predicted the adoption of the Bozeman route, and not only for the huge quantities of available timber which would aid construction. As the *Avant-Courier* pointed out, "Finally, by it's adoption, the company virtually corrals the entire Clarks Fork mining district." Such monopolistic incentive would indeed prove too much for the Northern Pacific to pass up. Meanwhile, it was hoped that some of this wealth would trickle into Bozeman pockets.

Tucked into the same edition of the *Avant-Courier* and surrounded by railroad related articles was a small notice which described sanitary conditions in Bozeman. The newspaper called attention to statutes which required "owners of dead animals to remove them beyond the town

limits...and either bury or burn them." The article reminded readers of the penalties possible--fines up to \$100.00--for those violating the law.

Apparently meeting with little interest, the *Avant-Courier* devoted greater space to comment on the town's condition in the next issue. Under the title "An Unpleasant Subject," the newspaper again condemned the filthy conditions of the alleys, streets, waterways and backyards of the town. The timing of the story was interesting. Because the *Avant-Courier* was concerned that Gallatin County lacked the "government to make and enforce the requisite sanitary laws," the only goal behind the article was simply to encourage a citizen-sponsored clean-up movement. The newspaper, however, revealed the transparency of its motives when it stated "We do not refer to this matter now because the Grand Jury is in session next week, and may possibly take cognizance of any flagrant violations of the law and good order..."¹³

To the surprise of no one, the Grand Jury took up the issue of town sanitation in that session, and described the filth as "too general to be chargeable to the few--we think of it as chargeable to the many." The Grand Jury included additional specifics, such as "decomposing dead pigs...old creek beds that have become receptacles of filth from wash houses, swill barrels, stoves, cans and clothing...and low places and town lots filled with stable manure. In one instance we saw a great heap of at least twenty tons, and we also visited the slaughter house on Bozeman Creek, with a hog pen on one side from which the blood and other offal of the place was thrown to the hogs. The long standing and continued use of said premises have inoculated the premises with such a stench."¹⁴

¹³ "An Unpleasant Subject," *Avant-Courier*, 13 April, 1882, p. 3.

¹⁴ "Report of the Grand Jury," *Avant-Courier*, 4 May 1882, p. 3.

In mid May of 1882, the *Avant-Courier* reported that locals were "becoming thoroughly waked up to a sensible realization of the filthy condition of the streets," and related that a "goodly number of prominent citizens were forming a board of health."¹⁵ Most intriguing was a reference to the importance of this Board in guarding the community "against the probable spreading of any contagious disease which may be brought here by the tide of emigration new pouring into Eastern Montana."¹⁶ The language used by the *Avant-Courier* is illuminating. On one level, townspeople were warned of new sickness, but on another citizens were told who be wary of--and that local elites were working selflessly for the good of the town. Beginning with this article, and growing from it, was a hostility toward the traveling poor, first illustrated in the transparent guise of disease before evolving into an all-out assault on those deemed both undeserving and a potentially costly burden to the county.

To address the problems posed by disease and poverty, locally prominent Bozeman residents set up a Board of Health. They adopted an ad hoc governmental approach to their duties, prescribed legal remedies for citizens in non-compliance with their recommendations, and created for themselves a responsibility to inspect every home in Bozeman. Men such as bankers Nelson Story and Peter Koch sat on the Board, as did physicians George W. Monroe and Charles M. Chambliss, merchants John V. Bogert, Achilles Lamme, Lester S. Willson and Samuel W. Langhorne, as well as Gallatin County Sheriff William S. McKinzie.

They drew on the advice of local doctors and merchants. During

¹⁵ "A Move in the Right Direction," *Avant-Courier*, 11 May 1882, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3.

the 1870s the county operated poor relief on a contract system in which the county paid proprietors to board the poor in hotels. Further, these vendors supplied the poor with additional services at significant profit--and at taxpayer cost. These men had a private interest in the direction poor relief in Gallatin County took as they had supplied Gallatin County with relief services for a decade. From 1870 to 1880, various county physicians, among them Monroe and Chambliss, had collected over \$10,000 in medical fees from treating the county poor, while merchants had supplied over \$700.00 worth of goods during that same period.¹⁷ During the initial meeting of the Board of Health on May 10, 1882, the Board called on all citizens to aid in cleaning up the town to avert the spread of small pox, but the most important and far-reaching suggestion of the Board was their advice that the County "purchase 10 acres of the southwest corner of the farm of Daniel Maxey, for a Pest and Poor House location."¹⁸

Within the week, the Maxey location was abandoned by both the Board of Health and the County Commissioners in favor of 160 acres which belonged to Sheriff and Board of Health member William S. McKinzie. The County Board purchased the new Poor Farm location for \$4000.00, a sum which would have accounted for almost four years of poor relief budgets under the discarded contract system.

Many believed that the establishment of the Poor Farm would relieve the taxpayer burden in subsidizing the poor. The *Avant-Courier* declared the \$4000.00 spent to be "an excellent investment," and echoed the general belief and hope of county taxpayers by noting "that by

¹⁷ Gallatin County, Montana. *Poor Fund Warrant Register No.1* (May 4, 1871 - December 14, 1879).

¹⁸ "Board of Heath Organized and Vigorous Measures Adopted," *Avant-Courier*, 18 May 1882, p. 3.

judicious management that farm can be made a source of revenue for the county,"¹⁹ an expectation of poor farms locally and nationwide. More important, Gallatin County's poor "could be made nearly, if not wholly self-supporting. A farm would be a place where, during the summer season at least, many of them could more than earn their board and clothing. This custom of boarding the poor at first-class hotels and paying for medical attendance at usual Montana rates must sooner or later be abandoned, unless money becomes no object to the industrious taxpayers of the county."²⁰ If one of the expected goals of the poor farm was self-sufficiency, then locals must have been sorely disappointed by the results.

¹⁹ "Report of the County Commissioners," *Avant-Courier*, 22 June 1882, p. 3.

²⁰ "Financial Condition of Gallatin County," *Avant-Courier*, 23 March 1882, p. 3.

"BOZEMAN HAS NO USE FOR WHISKEY-SOAKED BUMMERS"

While leading citizens concentrated on the poor farm, local attitudes toward a large segment of poverty's population hardened. Locals acknowledged that the coming railroad would certainly increase contact with the wandering poor--that is, those who responded to economic hardship and a new set of economic and social standards by traveling the country in search of work.

By the early 1880s, the local poor had already been blamed for county indebtedness, with the railroad still over a decade away. Gallatin County's early experience with poverty was crucial in defining later attitudes and treatment of the wandering poor. Locals hoped for a self-sufficient Poor Farm, but the reality of the sheer numbers of wandering poor created by economic dislocations and exacerbated by immigration created a poverty relief crisis Gallatin County was ill-prepared to meet.

Gallatin County officials accurately predicted that the railroad would bring the able-bodied poor to Bozeman. Given that poor relief fostered county indebtedness during the 1870s, the trepidation felt by Bozemanites in the days before the railroads (and the wandering poor's) arrival easily turned into hostility and violence once the wandering poor entered the county. Ironically, while county taxpayers were gravely aware of threats to their pocketbooks, they were blind to the intimate links between low wages and poverty and the consequences the poor faced.

Not surprisingly, anti poor sentiment, especially directed toward the male, able-bodied, traveling poor, appeared in the *Avant-Courier* simultaneously with the health movement. On April 6, 1882, the paper

reported that "The town appears to be rapidly filling up with strangers--men who have neither trade nor employment. It is hoped that this is not the vanguard of an army of regular eastern tramps."²¹ With these words, the newspaper sounded the alarm as to who was unacceptable in Gallatin County.

Locals were more than prepared to defend their town from any perceived pauper invasion. In May 1882, one month before the purchase of the McKinzie farm, the *Avant-Courier* championed a vigilante movement, and stated "Tramps and roughs are getting too numerous in and around Bozeman. [We are] in favor of following the example of Butte in making the 3-7-77 an omen to be feared. We are informed that the organization in our town is fully equipped and that it includes no less than 150 brave, old-time citizens."²²

For the next several years the *Avant-Courier* described encounters between the wandering poor and locals. These articles were undoubtedly intended to condition local attitudes and responses to the perception that the wandering poor represented a worthlessness that undermined a smoothly functioning society. Further, fear of repeating and increasing the indebtedness of the 1870s played a large part in driving the able-bodied poor out of Gallatin County. The county could not afford to board all poor as attempted in earlier years. Any attempt to do so might endanger the financial security, prosperity and sense of permanence many local elites wanted to create in Bozeman.

²¹ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*, 6 April 1882, p. 3.

²² "Local matters," *Avant-Courier*, 25 May 1882, p. 3. The "3-7-77" vigilante symbol has two generally recognized, albeit differing, interpretations: 1. The three hours, seven minutes and seventy-seven seconds an individual had to leave town after receiving warning from a local vigilante committee. 2. The dimensions of a grave (three feet wide, seven feet long, and seventy-seven inches deep) in which the same person might be buried if he ignored vigilante warnings.

The local press relentlessly reported these incidents, in part to demonstrate steady employment as the mark of a valuable citizen. Another goal was glorification of the attackers of the poor who entered Gallatin County. A May 1885 article related how "about a half dozen prominent (?) [sic] citizens of Bozeman were courteously invited to take a walk," and that "there is nothing small about the bona fide citizens of Bozeman, and they have no idea of monopolizing the society of those distinguished (?) persons who have made up their minds to neither work or starve."²³ Concern with individuals who had made up their minds to neither work nor starve" demonstrated the unwillingness of local residents to had support the able-bodied poor. Support of the poor and infirm at the poor farm, especially after the overwhelming expense of purchasing suitable lands was perceived as difficult enough. To shelter the able-bodied poor was unthinkable.

Until 1885, apparently no "tramp" was prosecuted for vagrancy under municipal or county law. Gallatin County appeared to rely on groups of citizens to roust undesirables out of town. Only in 1885, and with the tenure of City Marshall John Clark, did the first prosecutions for vagrancy appear. Even these, however, did not appear on a grand scale.

On May 4, 1885 "John Doe" and "Richard Roe" were charged with "begging from house to house,"²⁴ later amended to vagrancy. The men were held on \$200.00 bail. Two days later, James Duran was arrested for the same offense, while June saw the arrest of James Broderick and William Hibbert for the same offense. All five men were found guilty, fined \$10.00 which none could pay, set to work to pay for the

²³ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*, 14 May 1885, p. 3.

²⁴ Montana. "Probate Court of Gallatin County, Case #949." 5 May, 1885.

misdeemeanors, and finally run out of town. The arrests of Doe and Roe were documented in the *Avant-Courier*, with the paper observing that "Marshall Clark, backed by the persuasive power of his battoon [sic], soon convinced the tramps the cooler was a good place to go."²⁵ The *Avant-Courier* advised the inmates "be fed on a bread and water diet," and stated "Bozeman has no earthly use for such brazen-faced, whiskey-soaked bummers."²⁶ Further, the legal complaints made against the men noted their physical conditions as "being healthy and able to work."²⁷

Prosecutions for vagrancy continued into 1886. Liberty Mounts was accused of being "a idle and dissolute person,"²⁸ and was unemployed "despite having the physical ability to work."²⁹ George Conley was arrested in June and charged with vagrancy for "unlawfully soliciting alms as a business upon the streets, despite being a healthy person."³⁰ Two weeks later, John Sullivan was prosecuted for vagrancy and shared the same label of being "idle and dissolute."³¹ Once again, these men were fined and chased from town.

What is fascinating is both the seasonality of the arrests (suggesting the link to the work/migration patterns of the able-bodied poor), and the fact that none of these men were sent to the poor farm. These were exactly the people the poor farm was intended for, if indeed the motivation behind the poor farm was economic self-sufficiency. In 1885 and 1886 most of these arrests were made in the spring and early

²⁵ "Pounced, Pummeled and Penned," *Avant-Courier*, 21 May 1885, p. 3.

²⁶ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*, 4 June 1885, p. 3.

²⁷ Probate Court, Case #949.

²⁸ Montana. "Probate Court of Gallatin County, Case #1057," 5 January, 1885.

²⁹ Probate Court, Case #1057.

³⁰ Montana. "Probate Court of Gallatin County, Case #1105," 29 June, 1886.

³¹ Montana. "Probate Court of Gallatin County, Case #1151," 25 October, 1886.

summer, just when farm employment, either on or off the poor farm would have been available. These men, strangers to Gallatin County, mirrored the typical encounters of the whole. Single, male, able-bodied and looking for work, these men were met with hostility, viewed as the class of people who brought indebtedness to Gallatin County in 1870s, and locals were more than prepared to meet threats of further indebtedness head on.

Significantly, the rousting of these traveling poor had the paradoxical effect of increasing poor farm expenditures. Whether the wandering poor were arrested for vagrancy or chased out by vigilantes, the result was the same--a poor farm with too insufficient a labor force for financial solvency and with increased dependence on taxpayer funding.

In articles about these encounters, the *Avant-Courier* expressed a lesson on who made up society's worthy and unworthy poor. A December 1885 article published under the headline "3-7-77," related the ouster of a "hard-looking, suspicious character" from Bozeman. The story remarked that the "vigilantes mean business when they start in," and menacingly stated "we [the *Avant-Courier*] infer that other hard characters are being carefully watched and may find it convenient to take a walk at almost any untimely hour."³²

While it may be tempting to assume that the behavior and attitudes of local citizens toward the traveling poor echoed other municipalities in the West, or at least in Montana, this may not have been the case. Late in 1885, the *Avant-Courier* reprinted a editorial from the *Yellowstone Journal*, which read: "The citizens of Gallatin County,

³² "3-7-77," *Avant-Courier*. 17 December 1885, p. 3.

finding time to hang heavy on their hands, have revived the vigilante scheme, and prowl about at night with six-shooters and shotguns, intimidating innocent people." The *Avant-Courier* responded to the broadside by inviting *Journal* editors to Bozeman to view the "tramp question for themselves," and made this threat: If the two men attempted to run Gallatin County as they "had Custer County for the past three or four years, then two innocent 'innocent persons' might expect to be intimidated with six-shooter and shotguns."³³

Vigilantism continued, even when locals vaguely recognized the sincerity of the traveling poor in searching for work. A May 1889 *Courier* article described "a large number of idle laboring men in and around Bozeman," but uncharacteristically noted many "men [were] induced to come here by the prospect of work...we hope that willing workers will have no difficulty in finding plenty to do."³⁴

So not all reactions to the traveling poor were violent; recognition existed that many of the traveling poor responded to dislocation created by new economy conditions the only way they could--by traveling to new lands in search of a living wage. Simply by virtue of their health, the able-bodied were able to relocate; physical ability was not only an indicator of who was undeserving. Further, the county reaction to the traveling poor may have been atypical. The antipathy the poor encountered was a localized overreaction that may have appalled neighboring counties with its longevity and violence. The relative humanity of the article which described the efforts of laborers to find employment proved an aberration. Three weeks later the *Avant-Courier* reported on a posse of law-abiding citizens who "escorted a number of

³³ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*, 17 December 1885, p. 3.

³⁴ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*, 16 May 1889, p. 3.

bums and tramps to the railroad station,"³⁵ and whose numbers might have included the "willing workers" of two weeks previous.

³⁵ "Local Matters," *Avant-Courier*. 13 June 1889, p. 3.

THE FATES OF LABORING MEN IN GALLATIN COUNTY

While locals discouraged the able-bodied poor from partaking in county largess, these wanderers were far from the only needy in Gallatin County. In 1880, men labeled as "laborers" made up a significant number of Bozeman's working class. In the 1880 census, sixty-one adult males listed their trade as laborers. Of those, 25 men gave periods of unemployment during the census year which spanned from one to ten months, with most durations of joblessness in the four to six month range.

Further, few of those men appeared to have received county aid under the contract system. Under that procedure, recipients would have been bordered in a local hotel, and twenty of those twenty-five laborers who listed periods of unemployment were also listed as "boarders" in local hotels and boarding houses.

While this is certainly inexact--the census only provides a snapshot of the immediate circumstances which existed when the census was taken--some conclusions can be drawn. According to census data, most of these laborers were single, white males in their twenties or early thirties who had immigrated from northwest European countries.³⁶ The majority were without local family and lived in rented rooms, possibly swapping menial tasks with a landlord in return for room and board in winter months when wage labor was difficult to locate, or even as a supplement to such employment. This class of laborers represent another type of poverty, impoverished tenancy, which grew out of the spread of wage labor. While these men might have been able to pay their

³⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor. *Tenth Census Report of the United States, Schedule #1 - Population. Bozeman, Montana Precinct.* Washington, D.C., 1880.

room and board, they lived just above the subsistence line, unable to save for the future. A few were future poor farm inmates.

In the 1900 census, ten borders were living at the poor farm under the care of farmer and poor farm overseer Charles Holmes. Nine were male and seven of these were over sixty years of age. The lone woman was a eighty-six year old widow named Mariah Warwood, an immigrant from England. Five of the men were immigrants, single or widowed, and from Sweden, Norway, Germany or England.

While none of these inmates listed their previous occupations in the 1900 census, August Johnson, a sixty-two year old Swedish immigrant, and Henry Ahnen, a forty-four year old from Germany, appeared in the 1892-93 Bozeman directory. Each man listed their occupations as laborers and both lived on the north side of town. Johnson rented a room on North Church Avenue while Ahnen boarded on North Wallace Avenue. Of the known poor farm inmates between 1895 and 1918, which so far number nearly one hundred persons, only these two men and Bozeman resident Jennie Boulos had an address listed in the local directories which differed from the poor farm. Boulos was a prostitute who died at age forty at the poor farm, but who earlier resided at 116 East Peach.³⁷ These three represented local impoverished tenancy which characterized many working class lives in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth centuries.

The 1910 census provides further tools to build a profile of poor farm inmates, while simultaneously fueling more questions. When the Agricultural College and Experiment Station was established in 1893, the poor farm relocated from the McKinzie farm site to a new location

³⁷ R.L. Polk and Co. *Bozeman City Directory* - 1910-11, p. 77.

one-half mile south. The new site coordinates, given at Section 13, Township 2 South Range 5 East were listed on the 1910 census report under the title "Poor House Farm." Interestingly, almost thirty separate households were listed as residing on poor farm lands--in addition to those named as poor farm inmates.³⁸ Had Gallatin County learned a expensive lesson and had begun to turn over small plots of poor farm land to needy families? Or was the census simply organized in a confusing fashion which suggests that more families and individuals were tending poor farm lands than were truly present?

In any case, a supplemental section of this census was specifically devoted to those listed as "lodgers" at the poor farm. All ten inmates were male and were overseen by Michael Stefany, a former brewer for the Lehrkind Brewery. Nine men were over fifty-five years of age, eight over sixty-five. These men duplicated earlier inmates in that each was single or widowed and was an immigrant from northwest European nations, though Daniel O'Leary was from Canada. O'Leary, Sam Fridley from Ireland and Joseph Lafayette of France could not read or write English.

Henry Lucky, or Luckie depending on which census report is believed, appeared in both the 1900 and 1910 census report, yet did not appear in any Polk directory from that era. Luckie, however, was absent from the Gallatin County death register, making it difficult to use him as a gauge in determining the length of time an individual generally resided in the poor farm--although in Luckie's case it was least a decade.³⁹

Daniel O'Leary, Thomas Burke, Joseph Lafayette, William Carter and August Kayahn were listed in the 1910 census and appear in the

³⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce And Labor. *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Schedule #1 - Population*. Bozeman, Montana Precinct. Washington, D.C. 1910.

³⁹ *Twelfth and Thirteenth Census Reports of the United States*. Washington, D.C. 1900 and 1910.

county death register. These men allow a glimpse into one element of poor farm life. The poor farm was the final destination for an aged and indigent person without family. O'Leary died in 1911, Lafayette in 1912 and Kayhan in 1913 - all at the poor farm.

R.L. Polk's Gallatin County directories provide further, important clues into those confined to the poor farm. The first directory was published in 1892-93, and was not issued again until 1900-01. Only in the 1916-17 edition were poor farm inmates included by name. This directory listed eighteen male inmates, twelve of whom appeared in the following 1918-19 edition and later died at the poor farm over the next seven to ten years, according to death certificates.⁴⁰ Though the information provided on death certificates can be somewhat fragmented, many of these men were single, laboring class immigrants.

Robert Clayton appeared as a poor farm inmate in the 1910 census as a sixty-six year old, and was still listed as a poor farm inmate in the 1916-17 through 1918-19 editions, though his exact death date is still undetermined. Charles Bradley, like Clayton, appeared as an inmate in the 1916-17 edition, as well as the next directory.⁴¹ His date of death was listed in the death register as 1925, which indicated he spent the last eleven years of his life in the poor farm. Bradley was blind, unable to support himself and without family, and his experience demonstrated that those with physical handicaps often faced the same fate as the elderly. James Ford was listed as a poor farm inmate in the 1916-17 directory. Ford appeared as an inmate in several succeeding editions until his death in 1940 at the poor farm. Ford, a logger, entered the poor

⁴⁰ Montana. *Gallatin County Death Certificates*. Gallatin County.

⁴¹ R.L. Polk and Co. *Bozeman City Directory - 1916 edition and 1918 edition*, p. 82 and p. 94.

farm at sixty-two, and spent the last twenty-four years of his life as a county ward.

The Gallatin County death register provided another important, albeit fragmented look at who occupied the poor farm. The death register was organized to include where the place of death occurred. Records are especially incomplete regarding county deaths before 1895, but over sixty deaths are recorded to have happened at the poor farm from about 1895 to 1915. Another twenty-five unidentified persons are interred in a single plot at Sunset Hills Cemetery. The final tally of those who expired at the Poor Farm will probably never be known, but indications are that sixty is too low, even during the 1895-1918 time frame.

This seemingly high death rate was partly attributable to the sheer numbers of elderly housed at the poor farm, but living conditions at the poor farm might have been a relevant factor. In May 1883 a *Avant-Courier* reporter visited the poor farm with the county physician and reported on living conditions of the poor and infirm. The writer painted a grim portrait of the setting, and related "the depressing influence of one sick patient over another, the imperfect and wholly inadequate accommodations no physician could hope to meet with such success as he desired."⁴²

Another indication of a higher fatality rate is the imprecise way poor farm deaths were recorded by the county. Some of those men who indeed died at the poor farm were listed in the death register as expiring either "in Bozeman," "near Bozeman," or in "Gallatin County."⁴³ Men such as George Brown, Joseph Hurdle and George Burrell were listed in both the Polk directories as poor farm inmates. Their place of death,

⁴² "The County Poor Farm," *Avant-Courier*, 10 May 1883, p. 3.

⁴³ Montana. *Gallatin County Death Register #3, 1895 - 1915*.

however, was specified in the death register as one of the three alternatives to the poor farm. When the death certificates of these three men was located, the place of death was verifiably the poor farm.

Sunset Hills Cemetery began in 1872, and originally had its lands split between the Masonic and Oddfellows societies. By the 1920s both organizations had turned their sections over to the city. Though many early cemetery records were destroyed in a 1920s era fire, there are two zones on surviving cemetery maps set aside for poor farm deaths. The map, revealed nearly sixty persons, who--besides Boulos and five Asians --received county-financed burials in 1920s to the 1950s, but these were not necessarily poor farm inmates. Comparing names on the cemetery maps of these blocks to death registration data revealed that sixteen of these individuals, all older males, expired at the poor farm after 1920.⁴⁴

Death register data also assists in structuring profiles of poor farm inmates. Jennie Boulos is the only female to appear in the death register (Marlah Warwood is not listed in the death register and her death certificate has disappeared). She came from Massachusetts, was a divorced caucasian prostitute who died from alcoholism or a hernia, depending on which documents are accurate.⁴⁵ Another inmate, Granbury Chopper, a boot-black who lived in Gallatin County since the end of the Civil War, died in 1906 at the reported age of 106. Andrew Metoxin was a 54-year-old Native American laborer who died of alcoholism.⁴⁶ As noted, Boulos was the only other inmate who might have died of alcoholism--important evidence in any effort to debunk the fundamental view that almshouses and poor farms were populated by

⁴⁴ "Cemetery Map of Sunset Hills Cemetery," City of Bozeman, Montana. 1962.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 206.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 211.

worthless intemperates.

These three people were exceptions to the rule. The poor farm inmates in the death register were overwhelmingly single, white males. They were laboring class immigrants whose wage-earning years had long since passed. Thirty-nine of these men were over sixty years of age and nine were at least fifty. The younger men who appear in the death register were there by virtue of acute illness such as pneumonia, consumption, cancer or typhoid fever. Apparently anyone, regardless of age, who contracted a serious sickness and was unable to afford private treatment was eligible for poor farm/county hospital care.⁴⁷

Finally, death register data demonstrated that many of these men were long-time residents of Gallatin County--perhaps an important factor in any county board decision regarding poor farm eligibility. Turning out a younger, able-bodied male stranger was one thing; to ignore a long-time neighbor was quite another. Though term-of-residence information was not given for all who died at that poor farm, several men were acknowledged to have been county residents for at least twenty-five years. Eighteen men had terms of residence which averaged fourteen years, although Granbury Chopper, a forty year resident of the county, skewed the numbers somewhat, and the number of inmates included in this list is limited. Yet enough data exists to suggest that long-term county residence, accompanied by old age and poor health, was an powerful factor in poor farm eligibility.

Newspaper stories, census statistics, local directories, cemetery and death register data, while valuable, reveal one side of local experiences with poverty and the poor farm. Personal narratives which

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 229.

dealt directly with poor farm experiences are few and difficult to locate, and quarterly reports of the poor farm superintendent to the Gallatin County commissioners have not been located. Personal stories and descriptions, however, do exist in the archives of Park County--immediately to the east of Gallatin County--and shed light on the uncertain fates the local poor faced in the 1890s.

Correspondence from the poor and from citizens acting as intermediaries to Park County commissioners illustrate the plight of the elderly destitute. In 1897, Park County commissioners received a plea from acquaintances of Jacob Engessor, who wrote "Engessor is on the starvation point, he is over eighty years old and has no income of any sort. Would you kindly grant him \$5.00 per month which will do him. He only wants a little meat and potatoes [sic] which he slops on account he has no teeth left. Please help him quick."⁴⁸ This petition was allowed and the letter illustrated the desperate straits faced by the impoverished elderly. Park County had a poor farm at this time and Engessor seemed like a prime candidate. This case might demonstrate communication limitations of the time. An old man living alone in a mountain cabin would have little contact with the outside world. However, Engessor is further evidence of the important role family played in caring for the elderly, and how lack of family adversely affected immigrant males who made up much of the era's poor.

A 1895 letter to Park County commissioners revealed another problem faced by county boards nationwide--where to draw the line on county relief. Livingston resident Charles E. Shafer petitioned "for a sum of money for medicine, for I need it as bad as some of the persons

⁴⁸ Park County Montana. "Letter From Ernst Spleth and Andrew Johnson." Park County Board of Commissioners. 20 March 1897.

you are allowing for."⁴⁹ Shafer described his need for eastern supplied medicine which cost \$20.00 per month, and further included a request for Park County to pay for two months worth of medicine followed by a supplementary \$15.00 per month, "or else stop giving to other persons for I need it as much as they do."⁵⁰ A review of 1895 Park County poor fund warrants revealed the Shafer ultimatum as unfulfilled--an indication that the wording of a petition, and not only the desperation in it, might have affected county approval.

An 1896 communique between Gallatin County and Park County commissioners demonstrated a shared concern over cost control, perhaps to the peril of a family in need. The two counties debated financial responsibility to the destitute McKee family who resided in Horr, a mining settlement north of Gardiner, Montana. Responding to a Park County query, George Ellis, Chairman of the Gallatin County commissioners, wrote that the matter had been referred to the Gallatin County attorney, who opined that the family "is not residing in this county or is a charge upon this county."⁵¹ As far as Gallatin County was concerned, "McKee has paid road tax in Park County, and we can take no action whatever in this matter."⁵² This was not precedent-setting as far as Gallatin County was concerned--in 1888 the county commissioners turned down a petition for aid from the Birrel family, and tersely stated that "the Board did not feel justified in making any allowance."⁵³ In the McKee case, while it is impossible to tell how

⁴⁹ Park County, Montana. "Letter From Charles E. Shafer." Park County Board of Commissioners. 17 December 1895.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Park County, Montana. "Letter from George Ellis to Charles Angus," County Board of Commissioners. 8 September 1896.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Proceedings of the Gallatin County Commissioners," *Avant-Courier*. 13 September 1888. p. 3.

much time expired while the counties argued over financial responsibility, it is clear a family was in need while local politicians debated. Once again the limitations of county financial resources affected the ability to provide poor relief for local residents.

"THE POOREST FARM IN THE COUNTY;" THE COLLEGE AND BEYOND

In 1893 the Gallatin County Poor Farm was again front-page news, though now discussion centered on dismantling it. Thanks to heavy lobbying by state Board of Education member and local booster Nelson Story, the state legislature awarded Bozeman an Agricultural College and Experiment Station in 1893. What followed was a frenzied debate over where to locate the school, as state funding depended on quick agreement on a location. Different suggestions flew back and forth, with some residents advocating Fort Ellis and others the poor farm area. Local merchants opposed Fort Ellis, arguing that "it might be of small benefit to the city of Bozeman to have the college located at Fort Ellis, where a separate railroad station might be established and where supplies might be obtained elsewhere than in Bozeman."⁵⁴ The poor farm site had the advantage of close proximity to town.

During a town meeting called by the merchant and banker-dominated Board of Trade, debate over a location swayed back and forth. Former Sheriff C.P. Blakely balked at the poor farm location, and urged "It is not a proper place. It is rightfully named a poor farm. It is the poorest farm in the county. It is absolutely unfair for the purpose."⁵⁵ Peter Koch, because of his role as chairman of the local Board of Education, had the final word on a site. Koch stated that the college and station must be close to each other and estimated that local income generated from the school would eventually range from \$75,000 to \$100,000 per year. Finally, Koch noted the dearth of unallocated water near the town. The poor farm held a water right and this reason,

⁵⁴ "Locating the College," *Avant-Courier*. 11 March 1893, p. 1.

⁵⁵ "The Poor Farm Site," *Avant-Courier*, 18 March 1893, p. 1.

perhaps more than any other, was behind the decision to support the poor farm location.

The Board of Trade called the Gallatin County commissioners into session that same evening. The commissioners were reluctant to donate the land and questioned their own authority for such a transaction. The Board of Trade then submitted a bond signed by fifty-four county property holders which secured the commissioners against any legal suit. The County agreed to make half the poor farm land - 80 acres - available to the state. The selling price was \$1.00 per acre, paid for by the state of Montana. The *Bozeman Chronicle* undoubtedly mirrored the feelings of many citizens when it editorialized, "The action of the commissioners in agreeing to transfer 80 acres of the poor farm as an experimental farm for the agricultural college at the nominal price of one dollar per acre, meets with, we might say, unanimous approval of the taxpayers of the county."⁵⁶ The *Avant-Courier* reported, "citizens raised sufficient money to purchase about twenty acres of ground, consisting of six blocks in the Capital Hill addition. The Board secured eighty acres of the Poor Farm adjoining, and the citizens agreed to furnish eighty acres additional and adjoining the property already secured within one year."⁵⁷

Locally, the arrival of Agricultural College was not the only significant event of 1893. The Panic of 1893 was one of the harshest economic disintegrations in American history, and the local effects of this collapse led to severe austerity measures. In 1893, the country was only beginning to feel the effects of this economic collapse. Nationally, over 600 banks closed, including the Bozeman National Bank, cashiered

⁵⁶ Untitled article, *Bozeman Chronicle*. 21 March 1893, p. 4.

⁵⁷ "State Board - Board of Education Organized and College Located," *Avant-Courier*. 28 March 1893. p. 1.

by Peter Koch, which closed for four months.⁵⁸ Three times as many business's failed as in the 1873 Panic and by 1894 3 million men were unemployed. Farmers, once again, were struck hard by falling prices. Republicans blamed free-falling silver prices on the election of Democrat Grover Cleveland to the Presidency. In August of 1893, Gallatin County commissioners, in an effort to save county funds, halted all county roadwork.⁵⁹ The *Avant-Courier* sought to shore up economic confidence, and optimistically reported that "the financial depression cannot, in the very nature of things, last very long, nor the hard times prove extremely serious in such a magnificent agricultural county as Gallatin and in a state of wonderful resources as Montana."⁶⁰ Many locals failed to share in the *Avant-Courier's* sunny outlook, with reactions varying from concern over "how many [local citizens] will be able to stand years of this" to booster-related views which insisted "Bozeman is the best town in the state, right today!"⁶¹

The Panic also fueled a change in local attitudes toward the poor. In December 1893, the *Bozeman Chronicle* reported "several ladies had canvassed the city and failed to find one family in distress. It is extremely doubtful if anyone can be found willing to except alms. Bozeman is indeed fortunate, for all around it there is dire poverty and suffering, while here charity enterprises have found their efforts unnecessary."⁶² Unnecessary, perhaps, because the poor had been driven out. More likely was that the new definition of poor that had been

58 Phyllis Smith, *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley*. (Helena: Falcon Press Publishing, 1996) 141.

59 "Synopsis of the Proceedings," *Bozeman Chronicle*, 12 December 1893, p. 2.

60 "The Business and Farming Outlook," *Avant-Courier*. 5 August 1893. p. 2.

61 "The Prevailing Panic: What a Few of our Citizens Have to say About it," *Avant-Courier*. 5 August 1893, p.3.

62 "The Needy," *Bozeman Chronicle*, 28 December 1893, p. 4.

embraced.

Halting intemperance was one goal of the eastern-born poor farm movement, when housing a alcoholic in a poor farm was a way to rehabilitate the "deviate" into a productive worker. The *Bozeman Chronicle* reported that the ladies could find no poor, but that in "all instances where they were led to believe that poverty did exist it was the result of either shiftlessness, extravagance or drunkenness; the deserving needy they were unable to find."⁶³ Perhaps the last thing local boosters wanted was a poor farm which would have reminded locals of their own precarious existences. Perhaps one strategy employed by local elites was to show that the needy no longer existed--only undeserving alcoholics.

In many ways, the 1893 Board of Trade mirrored the 1883 Board of Health, as did local attitudes toward economic security. In 1883, locals looked for legitimacy and permanence in a time when towns appeared, thrived, then dried up seemingly overnight. Thus, the able-bodied poor who wandered though Gallatin County represented impermanence. The violence against tramps, boosterism, town cleanliness and the drive to secure the Northern Pacific were rooted in a collective insecurity created and exacerbated by an unsettled society and economy. The Panic of 1893 prompted that false promise to crash, and prompted another search for security, as did the economic crisis of the 1870s.

After 1893 the poor farm had several different incarnations. From 1894 to 1895--and in the absence of a permanent location--bidders for the poor farm's Superintendent's position--were asked to supply a location to house the poor. Only in 1904 was a permanent location secured, at the current site of the Gallatin County Rest Home. That

⁶³ Ibid, p. 4.

institution, founded in 1958, was an outgrowth of poor farm functions and the belief that local government assume a social and financial responsibility in support of the local elderly and infirm.

In the 1870s county indebtedness was created by relief policies and a depressed economy, which in turn had a strong influence on poor relief policies and hostile sentiments the poor faced in the 1880s. The 1890s saw the temporary collapse of local institutional relief, born again from national economic breakdown. Despite the massive poverty and dislocation created by these crises, systematic methods of poor relief, especially in the West, even at the state level, remained nonexistent. Social progressives were making headway in eastern cities with the establishment of settlement homes, such as Hull House in Chicago and the Henry Street settlement in New York, but once again the West lagged behind the East in institutional development.

It took the economic and social trauma of the Great Depression to spur the federal government to build a national system of poor relief. During the 1930s, the financial needs of so many people--not only the aged and infirm, but also the ordinary middle class people who were now unemployed--were clearly beyond the meager means of local relief systems, both public and private.

President Herbert Hoover opposed federal aid for a variety of reasons. In his opinion, such support "would delay the natural forces at work to restore prosperity, impair credit, stifle voluntary aid, politicize bureaucracies and undermine free enterprise."⁶⁴ In reply, the *Nation* magazine asked Hoover "Must Americans perish miserably because because of your fear that their characters might be sullied by a dole?"⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Trattner, p. 252.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 252-253.

Hoover's attitude toward poor relief was perhaps best exemplified by his opinion concerning a 1930 federal appropriations bill. Hoover approved \$45 million to feed the stricken livestock of Arkansas farmers but opposed and additional \$25 million to feed the starving farmers and their families. Attitudes such as these would cost Hoover the presidency in 1932.

With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the nation entered the era of the New Deal. Roosevelt believed that public relief was not a matter of charity but and requirement of justice. Contrary to Hoover's views, Roosevelt thought that existence of democracy depended on the well-being of its citizens. As Roosevelt observed, "Modern society, acting though its government owes the definite obligation to prevent the starvation or dire waste of any of its fellow men and women who try to maintain themselves but cannot."⁶⁶

The New Deal featured many temporary measures, acts and administrations designed to relieve suffering and get people back to work. One specific act was designed to support the very poor Gallatin County had struggled with for decades. As finally adopted, the Social Security Act, an omnibus bill, supplied two main lines of defense against destitution. First, the act provided for national old-age insurance, financed by a combination of taxes on wages and employers payroll, which would be received by the individual after age 65. The act also set up a federal-state system of unemployment insurance, which functioned along the same lines as Social Security. Employers contributed a portion of their payroll and employees had income withheld and placed in a government fund for times of financial hardship.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 254.

In a sense, poor relief had undergone a revolution. What had once been viewed as a local responsibility was now a national concern, and federal dollars poured into local coffers in support of those poor who had once been run out of town. More important, however, was a change in attitude toward the poor. In a sense, the Great Depression leveled the playing field. Poverty became a more common experience, and those formally comfortable now shared many of the difficulties of an earlier era's wandering poor. If nothing else, the economic collapse of the 1930s demonstrated that one's financial circumstance had less to do with quality of character than the economic conditions over which ordinary people had little control.

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