



The evolution of a frontier town : Bozeman, Montana, and its search for economic stability, 1864-1877
by James Bruce Putnam

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Abstract:

The period 1864-1877 saw the town of Bozeman evolve from nothing to the position of a stable, prosperous community with a bright future. The evolution of this nineteenth century frontier town is the story of the struggle for economic stability.

The town was founded in 1864, by John Bozeman, D.

E. Rouse and W. J. Beall, with the intent of making some money for its founders. Bozeman noted that pioneers pouring into the Gallatin Valley from the east, would have "golden fleeces to be taken care of." Consequently, Bozeman's residents followed the example set by John Bozeman and paid close attention to financial matters.

The town's early growth depended to a large extent on government monies brought in through the supply of military posts and Indian reservations. In addition, the promise of a railroad was briefly withheld from local residents because of the national financial collapse of 1873, which halted the advance of the railroad. But, aggressive measures undertaken by local businessmen remedied this situation. Following the Indian Wars of the late 1870's and the opening up of the Yellowstone Valley, the town's future seemed secure at last.

The founding and early growth of this frontier town was primarily an economic matter. Leading the town's quest for economic stability during these early years were an aggressive group of local merchants.

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ITS SEARCH FOR ECONOMIC STABILITY, 1864-1877

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Bozeman lies cradled in the southeastern corner of the Gallatin Valley in southwestern Montana. During the first decade of its existence, Bozeman developed into the leading financial center of south-central Montana. Its importance owes in large measure to the advantageous geographical position that it occupies.

Bozeman is surrounded on three sides by mountains. The Horseshoe Hills lie to the north and the Bridger, Gallatin and Madison ranges to the south and east. The 800-square-mile-Gallatin Valley, spreading mainly north and west from Bozeman, is drained by the east and west branches of the Gallatin River. "In geological times it was a lake bed; now it is a gently sloping plain of rich soil, much of it of volcanic origin."¹ While Bozeman's climate is cool, it is not nearly as dry, with an 18.03 inches average annual rainfall, as the portion of the valley farther west. The city's mean annual temperature is 41.9 degrees, and it averages 115 frost free days yearly.² Several stream-

¹Robert G. Dunbar, "The Economic Development of the Gallatin Valley," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, XXXXVII (October, 1856), p. 117.

²Ibid.

eroded canyons allow natural passage to the world outside. The most important of these is Bozeman Pass, which provides an outlet eastward to the Yellowstone Valley. Because of its easy accessibility and good soil, the city of Bozeman quite naturally developed early into a leading agricultural and trade center.

This thesis is an attempt to describe the founding and early growth of Bozeman. The town demonstrated an atypical growth pattern compared to others in Montana. It did not owe its life to the existence of a railroad, although Bozeman residents directed a great deal of effort at securing the eventual arrival of one. In addition, the town depended only to a small degree on the mining of the territory for trade and prosperity and could never be considered a boom town. Area merchants, ranchers and farmers dominated and directed the town's early development.

Bozeman's early history must be seen through the causes and effects of events which occurred during the town's early years. For example, the Gallatin Valley Indian War of 1867, the Sioux Wars of the 1870's, and the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Several of these events held significance for the Territory of Montana and the western United States, as well as Bozeman.

Communities evolve like human beings. Like human beings, also, they can be warped by external problems that beset them, they can suffer from chronic afflictions, and they can develop distinct character from the crucibles in which they are formed.³

³K. Ross Toole, Montana: An Uncommon Land (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), p. 5.

I

John Merin Bozeman was born in Pickens County, Georgia in January, 1837, the son of William and Delila Sims Bozeman.¹ He was described as a "brave determined man, a great mountain pathfinder and Indian fighter." Bozeman stood "several inches over six feet tall" and "probably weighed two hundred and twenty-five pounds." He "carried no extra flesh; all was bone and muscle." Bozeman was reputed to be a very strong man and "quite a favorite with women."² He only used money "to bet with," and this generally took place in a saloon "with a few boon companions at a table, playing a game of draw."³

John Bozeman first experienced gold fever in 1849, when at the age of twelve he watched his father depart for the California gold rush, never to be heard from again. On January 9, 1856, John Bozeman married Lucinda C. Ingram. This union produced three daughters, Linda, Lila, and Martha C. Bozeman. But like his father before him, John

¹Merrill G. Burlingame, "John M. Bozeman, Montana Trailmaker," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVII (March, 1941), p. 541.

²Ibid., p. 558.

³Ibid., p. 559.

was struck by the gold fever of the Colorado rush in 1860. Leaving his wife and three small children to provide for themselves, he left and joined the Green-Russell crowd in Georgia gulch, Colorado.⁴

Upon arriving in Colorado he soon discovered that most of the good claims had already been taken. He soon decided, at the suggestion of the famous Stuart brothers, to move on to the Deer Lodge Valley in Montana, which he did in 1862. As he did in Colorado, Bozeman remained only a short while in the Deer Lodge Valley. In January 1863, the news of the discovery of gold on Grasshopper Creek in the nearby Beaverhead Valley caused some excitement in the other gold camps of the region. Bozeman was among those who chose to answer this latest cry of gold. His luck, however, remained true to form. Once again, he missed out on securing a paying claim at the boom town of Bannack. His enthusiasm now began to wane, and he started to look around for a more lucrative line of work.

In 1863 there were two primary routes from the east to the gold fields of Montana. The first, the Missouri River route, led to the head of navigation at Fort Benton.

⁴Ibid., p. 541.

The second followed the Oregon Trail to Fort Hall, Idaho and then led north to the gold fields. The river route was "slow and expensive," and the Oregon Trail route "a long route much of it over barren plains." Bozeman, being a perceptive man, "sensed the need for a more direct over-land route; one which was better equipped with water, grass, and wood."⁵

While in Bannack, Bozeman had made the acquaintance of John M. Jacobs. Together with Jacobs and his eight-year-old, half-breed daughter, Bozeman set out in the spring of 1863 to locate a more favorable route, over which emigrant trains could be brought to Montana. In the course of their journey, they passed through the Gallatin Valley via the pass later named in Bozeman's honor. It was probably at this time that Bozeman became impressed with the potential of the Gallatin Valley to support a thriving community. During the course of their trip they marked a trail that ran to the east of the Big Horn mountains in north central Wyoming. It considerably shortened the distance to the Montana gold fields. After completing their journey, Bozeman and Jacobs recruited immigrants

⁵Ibid., p. 542.

from the Platte River region for a trip up their new trail to Montana. This wagon train assembled and departed for Montana on July 3, 1863, led by John Bozeman. The pioneers never reached their destination because they were forced by Indians to turn back in the latter part of July, having only made it as far as the north fork of the Powder River in Wyoming. Bozeman and nine other men, however, continued on their own. And after a harrowing trip, during which they faced starvation, they arrived in Alder Gulch, the major gold camp in Montana, early in August, 1863.⁶

Although this expedition failed, members of the wagon train were impressed with the new route. Samuel Word, one member of the train, observed in his diary that not only was there a promise of good grass, but that this route could save a month or six weeks of travel time.⁷

As his earlier attempts at mining showed, Bozeman did not give up easily. Montana historian James M. Hamilton says that John Bozeman "conceived the idea of starting a colony of farmers in the Gallatin Valley to raise wheat

⁶Ibid., pp. 544-546.

⁷Samuel Word, "Diary of Colonel Samuel Word," Contributions To The Historical Society of Montana, VIII (Helena, 1917), pp. 56-57.

and potatoes to supply the mining camps."⁸ This is probably true. Speaking about a townsite in the Gallatin Valley, M. G. Burlingame says:

Here at the opening of several passes from the Eastern trails, a town could be laid out which would attract certain men who might engage in crafts or business and where a farming community could be built up, all to serve the incoming trains of emigrants whose supplies would be badly in need of stocking. Bozeman observed that such a settlement standing right in the gate of the mountains ready to swallow up all the tenderfeet that would reach the territory from the East, with their golden fleeces to be taken care of would be profitable to those in the little town as well as offering advantages to the tenderfeet.⁹

Whatever Bozeman's reasons for wishing to found a town were, it is obvious that he was, in large part, economically motivated. Bozeman arranged with W. J. Beall and D. E. Rouse, who were ranchers near the Three Forks of the Missouri, to lay out a townsite in the spring of 1864, while he returned east to gather a wagon train and pilot it to the Gallatin Valley. Beall and Rouse were to locate a

⁸James McClellan Hamilton, From Wilderness to Statehood: A History of Montana, edited by Merrill G. Burlingame (Portland, Oregon: Binford's and Mort, Publishers, 1957), p. 169.

⁹Merrill G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Company, 1942), p. 342; see also M. G. Burlingame, Gallatin Century of Progress (Bozeman: Artcraft Printers, 1964).

claim for Bozeman and all three would engage in real estate and commerce speculation upon his return.

Bozeman returned east to the Missouri area and formed another wagon train to travel to Montana. This large train arrived in Bozeman around August 1, 1864.¹⁰ The spring and summer of 1864 saw many people follow the lure of gold and silver to Montana. In addition to Virginia City, the boom towns of Helena and Diamond City attracted many people. Also in May, 1864, Montana achieved territorial status. Many people who experienced bad luck at mining elsewhere and ". . . others who were naturally disposed to other pursuits, found their way into the agricultural valleys of the territory."¹¹

The tendency of people to realize the advantages of farming, while many of their neighbors were struck by gold fever, is an interesting phenomenon. It helps to explain why many of those who passed over the rich, black, well watered soil of the Gallatin Valley chose to make the

¹⁰Burlingame, "John M. Bozeman," p. 551; see also Grace Raymond Hebard and E. A. Brininstool, The Bozeman Trail (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1922) Vol. I, p. 219.

¹¹E. Lina Houston, Early History of Gallatin County (Bozeman, Montana: Bozeman Chronicle Print, 1933), p. 17.

Bozeman area their home. Franklin Luther Kirkaldie, an early Gallatin Valley settler, showed a great deal of insight in the following statement.

Mining even in good mining countries is uncertain business. Probably not more than one in fifty of the mining population ever get rich at it. While farming in a good mining country has almost universally proved profitable. And I think I can turn my past experience in farming to better account here than to attempt to engage in a business with which I am entirely unacquainted and which is uncertain in any case.¹²

As the summer of 1864 drew to a close, several more wagon trains reached the Gallatin Valley. It was reported that as many as 1000 wagons crossed the Bozeman Trail in 1864.¹³ The success of these pioneers encouraged others to follow them. This led to the fortification of the trail with Forts Reno, Phil Kearney, and C. F. Smith in the Powder River country in 1866. These forts, according to Burlingame, "caused it to become the most popular route to the Northwest," until 1868, when they were abandoned

¹²Letter, Franklin Luther Kirkaldie to wife, January 24, 1865, Montana State University, Special Collections, Franklin Luther Kirkaldie Papers; see also Dorothy M. Johnson, "The Patience of Frank Kirkaldie," Montana the magazine of Western History, XXI (January, 1971), 16.

¹³Mark H. Brown, The Plainsman of the Yellowstone (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), p. 138; see also Dorothy M. Johnson, The Bloody Bozeman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), pp. 3-145.

because of the threat posed by Red Cloud and the Ogallala Sioux.¹⁴

W. J. Beall and D. E. Rouse constructed the first log cabin homes on the present townsite of Bozeman in July, 1864. W. W. Alderson and his brother John also arrived at this time. They built the third home on a hill one mile south of the present day Main street. By early August, 1864, there were enough settlers in the Bozeman area to warrant some kind of community organization. Consequently, the settlers "determined to locate the town officially, and accordingly, a claim association was formed, by-laws were enacted, fees for recording were fixed and other necessary business was transacted."¹⁵ The minutes of the first meeting read as follows:

East Gallatin, Montana, Aug. 9, 1864
At a meeting held by settlers of Upper East Gallatin at Jacobs Crossing on Tuesday, August 9, 1864, John M. Bozeman was elected chairman and W. W. Alderson, secretary. The chairman stated the object of the meeting to be to form a claim association, for the purpose of making laws, etc., in relation to farming claims, and for mutual protection. On motion of W. W. Alderson, it was Resolved, First: that the

¹⁴Burlingame, "John M. Bozeman," p. 548; see also James C. Olson, Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 70-71.

¹⁵Houston, History of Gallatin County, p. 19.

town and district be called Bozeman, Resolved, Second: that the boundary of the district shall be as follows: Commencing at the northeast corner of Kimball's claim, thence east to the base of the mountains, to the Gallatin River, thence down said river to a point due west of said Kimball's claim, thence east to the place of beginning. Resolved, Third: that after any settler stakes out and records a claim he must be an actual resident thereof within ten days thereafter in order to hold said claim. On motion J. M. Bozeman elected recorder, and the sum of one dollar made the fee for recording a claim.¹⁶

With the formation of the town a pattern of growth began. Building took place on a larger scale, and six structures appeared during the summer and fall of 1864.¹⁷ By this time, there were enough travelers in Bozeman to warrant the building of a hotel. John Stafford and one Mr. Rice ran the small one and one-half story structure. They celebrated its completion with a grand ball held in it on Christmas Eve, 1864. The people attending characterized the occasion as "the first important social event in Bozeman." The hotel did yeoman service during the early years. The first wedding in Gallatin County and Bozeman took place there on January 11, 1865, when John Stafford and Sallie

¹⁶Minutes of the East Gallatin Claim Association, August 9, 1864 - February 11, 1865, Montana State University, Special Collections, Manuscript File.

¹⁷E. S. Topping, The Chronicles of the Yellowstone (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1888), p. 29.

Smith were married. It also served as a refuge for the women and children of the city during an Indian scare in July, 1865.¹⁸

John Bozeman earnestly promoted the town's growth. He played an important part in convincing Thomas Cover and P. W. McAdow to build a flour mill on the edge of Bozeman during the fall of 1864.¹⁹ This mill later became very important in the growth of the town and lent a measure of security to the oftentimes short food supply. The business community further expanded when in 1865 Caleb Fitz and his ten year old son opened and operated the first store.²⁰ At about the same time, Jack Mendenhall opened a saloon that also handled canned goods and sundry items.²¹ Dr. Achilles Lamme also arrived in 1865, and in partnership with L. M. Howell, he operated a store until 1869.²² It is interesting to speculate on why a qualified physician like Lamme

¹⁸Houston, History of Gallatin County, p. 19.

¹⁹Burlingame, "John M. Bozeman," p. 557.

²⁰M. G. Burlingame, "Beginnings in Bozeman" (a paper in Dr. Burlingame's possession, Bozeman, Montana), p. 2.

²¹Topping, Chronicles of the Yellowstone, p. 29.

²²Progressive Men of The State of Montana (Chicago: A. W. Bowen & Co., n. d.), p. 616.

would take up merchandising over his chosen profession. Perhaps he saw merchandising in a new community as a greater source of remuneration than the practice of medicine. Lamme, like the others, saw a future in Bozeman's burgeoning growth potential.

Two other men important to Bozeman's early history arrived in 1866. They were Lester S. Willson, a former general in the New York militia and personal friend of Horace Greeley, who ran a general store and freighting operation for years, and Nelson Story, who had been a vigilante in Virginia City and made a small fortune there with which he purchased a herd of longhorns to drive to Montana from Texas in 1866. Story ran a store for a short time but made his primary contribution to the community as a government contractor, freighter, and cattleman.²³

The necessity of feeding themselves at first preoccupied the Bozemanites. Because most of them didn't arrive in time to plant crops in 1864, preparation for the

²³Ibid., pp. 1871-1872, 1256-1257; see also T. B. Story, "History of Nelson Story," as narrated on tape by Ken Swenson and Tony Dassinger, Montana State University, Special Collections, Tape File; also Interview of Malcolm Story concerning Nelson Story, Sr., and Family, by Ken Swenson and Tony Dassinger, Montana State University, Special Collections, Tape File.

spring planting of 1865 began early. John Bozeman reported the following in the Virginia City Montana Post:

The valley is being fast settled up with farmers, many of whom came to Montana as a better class of miners and after a while quitting their original pursuits secured 160 acres of land on which they stick a stake giving the date, the name of their claim, they then build their cabins and go to work in true farmer fashion.²⁴

People continued filtering into the Gallatin Valley in 1865. Several men banded together and sent to Salt Lake City for seed grain. Tom Cover and P. W. McAdow imported the first threshing machine in 1865, in order to insure that they would have grain for their flour mill. Reapers also came to the valley by way of Fort Benton. Speaking about the advantages of farming in the Gallatin Valley, M. L. Wilson said that "Its rainfall is sufficient to grow fairly large cereal crops without irrigation, and its altitude is low enough to eliminate all dangers of frost." The Gallatin Valley shared several advantages with other mountain valleys in western Montana. Speaking about these, Wilson maintained that "A more favorable setting for agriculture can hardly be imagined, with high prices, proximity to markets, and almost protective tariff in the

²⁴Montana Post (Virginia City), September 17, 1864.

freight rate on food supplies from Salt Lake City, and fertile well-watered mountain valleys, free from Indian depredations."²⁵

In the fall of 1865 these industrious farmers realized the fruits of their labors. The Montana Post, reported that the Gallatin Valley produced 20,000 bushels of wheat that autumn.²⁶ Agriculture was placed on a firm footing, and the future of Bozeman looked bright indeed.

²⁵M. L. Wilson, "The Evolution of Montana Agriculture in its Early Period," Montana State University, Archives, Montana History Folder T-64, Agricultural Economics I Collection, p. 5.

²⁶Montana Post, March 3, 1866.

II

The year 1867 was an important one for Bozeman. The town stood on the eastern frontier of Montana Territory. Bozeman Pass, the gate to the Indian controlled lands of central and eastern Montana, lay only a few miles away. Bozeman residents became highly susceptible to frequent rumors concerning impending Indian attacks from the east because many travelers on the Bozeman Trail experienced clashes with the Indians. Nelson Story, a local merchant, wanted to supply all the forts on the Bozeman Trail but could only supply the northernmost one, Fort C. F. Smith, with goods. Business farther east seemed out of the question due to the fact that ". . . hostilities were constant from the Sioux."¹

Traditionally, Indians of this region considered the Gallatin Valley to be neutral ground. Various tribes used the valley to gain access to the rich buffalo lands farther east.

Rumors arose during the spring of 1867 that a large band of Sioux Indians, in the Platte River region, was

¹Hebard and Brininstool, The Bozeman Trail, Vol. I., p. 235.

readying itself for a push into Montana Territory. The Army "was planning a summer campaign against the Sioux north of the Platte River."² Local citizens feared that such a campaign would drive the Indians into the Gallatin Valley.

By February, 1867, the rumors of impending attack reached the Montana Post in Virginia City. The Post pointed out that although probably around 2,000 persons in the Gallatin Valley could bear arms, they occupied a very large area. It speculated that the valley faced "imminent danger," and that the emergency called for "an organization for mutual protection and defense."³

The residents of Bozeman were roused to action. They formed a committee to superintend the construction of a stockade around the Cover and McAdow mill. W. W. Alderson reported in his diary for March 23, 1867 that he had attended a meeting at which the resolution for erection of the stockade passed. He also reported: "Quite an Indian scare at Bozeman and throughout the valley on account of

²James L. Thane Jr., "Thomas Francis Meagher: The Acting One," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Montana, 1967), p. 67.

³Montana Post, February 9, 1867.

recent raids."⁴

Preparation continued during March and the stockade reached completion early in April, 1867. Thomas Cover, representing Bozeman residents, presented Acting Governor Thomas Francis Meagher with a request for arms and ammunition late in March of 1867. Governor Meagher responded by furnishing the Gallatin Valley residents with forty muskets and three thousand cartridges.⁵

For the most part, these rumors seem to have been only rumors nothing more. As often happens, these purported Indian scares seemed to bolster one another. A letter from John Bozeman to Governor Meagher further aroused alarm.

"General

"I take the responsibility of writing you a few lines for the benefit of the people of Montana. We have reliable reports here that we are in imminent danger of hostile Indians, and if there is not something done to protect this valley soon, there will be but few men and no families left in the Gallatin Valley. Men, women, and children are making preparations to leave at an early day. If you can make any arrangement to protect them, they will stay. If not, this valley will doubt-

⁴William W. Alderson Diary, March 23, 1867, Montana State University, Special Collections.

⁵Montana Post, March 30, 1867.

less be evacuated.

"J. M. Bozeman
"Bozeman City, March 25, 1867"⁶

Governor Meagher actively sought War Department permission to muster a force of volunteers sufficient to meet any situation that arose. Meagher telegraphed General U. S. Grant on April 9 that "The greatest alarm reasonably prevails . . . Danger is immanent [sic]."⁷ Meanwhile, Governor Meagher commissioned Martin Beem a captain and ordered him to begin recruiting and organizing volunteers.⁸

This stew of rumor, speculation and fear boiled over on April 18, 1867. While enroute to Fort C. F. Smith to secure flour contracts, in the company of Thomas Cover, John Bozeman was shot and killed. The commonly accepted story about Bozeman's death maintains that five Blackfeet Indians killed him. This occurred near the mouth of Mission Creek, close to the present-day site of Livingston.

Jefferson Jones, editor of the Bozeman Chronicle,

⁶Ibid., April 16, 1867.

⁷Thane, "Thomas Francis Meagher," p. 69, quoting Meagher to Grant, April 9, 1867, Division of the Missouri Special File, Indian Wars of 1867, Records of the United States Army Commands, Record Group 98, National Archives, Washington, D. C., Hereafter cited as Spec. File.

⁸Ibid.

put forth an interesting alternative explanation of Bozeman's death. He based his theory upon personal information given to him by T. B. Story, a son of Nelson Story, Sr., who was a contemporary of John Bozeman. T. B. Story's information came from his father, Nelson Story, Sr. T. B. Story reported to Jones that Bozeman "was murdered by his partner, Tom Cover." He supported his claim by pointing out that the shoulder wound that Cover had sustained in the fight was powder burned. Thus it appeared to have been self inflicted. Powder burns only occurred when the weapon inflicting a wound was held at very close range to the individual sustaining the wound. By Cover's own account he never got near enough to the Indians to receive a powder burned wound.

Upon hearing of Bozeman's death, Nelson Story sent an employee of his named Spanish Joe to the site of the murder in order to investigate the evidence before it was disturbed. Spanish Joe told Nelson Story that he could find no signs of Indians entering or leaving the murder site. In addition, Bozeman's belongings all seemed intact. Certainly this seems contrary to the normal behavior of marauding Indians. One might also wonder what five lone Blackfeet Indians were doing in the heart of Crow country.

Discovery by the Crows would have meant certain death for them.⁹

There were enough other inconsistencies in Cover's explanation to raise at least some doubt as to the validity of his account. Whatever the real explanation for Bozeman's death, its significance lies in what people believed. Most people thought he was killed by Indians. These real or imagined Indian deprivations during the spring of 1867 "sent a chill of fear over the frontier which in the hands of commercial and political leaders took on an added impetus."¹⁰

Acting Governor Meagher faced a grave problem. Historians generally question his handling of the situation facing him in the spring of 1867. Meagher, an Irish immigrant, had made a name for himself as the General who led the Irish Brigade during the Civil War. President Johnson rewarded him for his service with the position of territorial secretary of Montana. When Governor Sidney Edgerton

⁹Jefferson Jones, "The Murder of John Bozeman???", a paper presented at a meeting of the Q K Men's Club in Bozeman, Montana, December 13, 1955, Montana State University, Special Collections, Q K Club File, pp. 1-19.

¹⁰Merrill G. Burlingame, "The Influence of the Military in the Building of Montana," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, XXIX (April, 1938), 149.

left the territory in 1865, never to return, Meagher became acting governor.¹¹

Thomas F. Meagher was an aspiring individual. He might even be considered a glory seeker in the same class with George Armstrong Custer. The circumstances in the Gallatin Valley in the spring of 1867 lent themselves nicely to exploitation by a man like Meagher. Upon hearing of Bozeman's death, Meagher wired Secretary of War E. M. Stanton, that ". . . our Territory in serious danger from the Indians. Richest portion already invaded. Citizens murdered."¹² This is an obvious overstatement of the events that had occurred. But a weaker plea by Acting Governor Meagher would have had less effect on the military authorities.

The Acting Governor asked for authority to raise a force of 800 militia to deal with the alleged uprising. Federal officials, including Secretary of War E. M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman, hesitated to authorize

¹¹Thane, "Thomas Francis Meagher", see also Robert G. Athearn, Thomas Francis Meagher: An Irish Revolutionary in America (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1949), pp. 156-164.

¹²Thane, "Thomas Francis Meagher," p. 70, quoting Meagher and Hosmer to Stanton, April 27, 1867, Spec. File.

Governor Meagher to raise and equip a militia force at federal expense. Secretary Stanton told General Sherman that:

. . . discretion to call out the militia in Montana, or any other of our territories, cannot safely be lodged with their governors, for to be candid, each has an interest antagonistic to that of the United States. Meagher in Montana is a stampeder, and can always with a fair show of truth raise a clamor, and would have in pay the maximum number of men allowed.¹³

However, despite his skepticism, General Sherman finally consented. On May 7, 1867, he telegraphed Meagher permission to raise 800 volunteers. Later in May, General Sherman sent a telegram to Major William H. Lewis, his representative in Virginia City.¹⁴ He ordered Lewis to:

. . . muster in a battalion of eight hundred men at the cost of the United States, for two months. Equip them as best you can until the arms en-route reach Fort Benton. Move quickly to the threatened point. . . let the men furnish their own horses at forty cents a day and be rationed by contract. When the service is rendered I will order payment by regular paymaster.¹⁵

This telegram was shown to merchants and they began

¹³Ibid., p. 73, quoting Stanton to Sherman, May 3, 1867, Spec. File.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 75-79, see also James L. Thane Jr., "The Montana 'Indian War' of 1867," Arizona and the West, VIII (Summer, 1968), 153-170.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 78-79, quoting 42nd Congress, 2nd Session, House Misc. Doc. 215, 2.

"supplying the volunteers with everything from horses to whiskey to a ten-dollar truss, confident that the federal government would repay them." General Sherman later withdrew this authorization, but it was too late, the wheels of speculation had already been set in motion.¹⁶ Speaking about Governor Meagher's "War" against the Indians in the Gallatin Valley, Professor Robert G. Athearn said that he "was more interested in raising a command than in watching expenditures. It was a marvelous opportunity to raid the Treasury, and in a country where government funds were looked upon as fair game, the financial dredging proceeded with utmost avidity."¹⁷

Governor Meagher appointed General Thomas Thoroughman to command the field camp at Bozeman. Of the nine companies organized only two or three saw service in Bozeman. Fort C. F. Smith, which lay several hundred miles east of Bozeman, became the focal point of the "War." Rumors had it that the Sioux held it under siege and that the soldiers were in danger of starving. A relief force of forty volunteers under the command of Colonel W. W. DeLacey escorted

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁷ Athearn, Thomas Francis Meagher, p. 162.

a supply train from Bozeman to the fort.¹⁸ Aside from this one expedition, few other incidents occurred during the summer of 1867. The volunteers constructed Camp Elizabeth Meagher eight miles from Bozeman and Camp Ida Thoroughman on the Shields River forty miles from Bozeman.¹⁹ These outposts accomplished nothing. In fact the "expected Indian attack never materialized." The militia did kill three Indians involved in an act of horse stealing.²⁰ By October, 1867, the militia forces in Bozeman became discontented, and they "dissolved into bickering among themselves." Men began deserting and upon the recommendation of General Terry, the new Governor, Green Clay Smith, "mustered out the volunteers."²¹

One of the most important effects of the "Gallatin Valley Indian War of 1867" upon Bozeman was the fact that it led to construction of a permanent military post in late August of 1867 on the outskirts of the town. Bozeman's death in the spring of 1867 led to the militias entering

¹⁸Thane, "Thomas Francis Meagher," pp. 77-78.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 80.

²⁰Ibid., p. 83.

²¹Ibid., p. 84.

the valley for the summer and "sent a deep wave of fear through the frontier community, and a clamorous insistence brought the location of Fort Ellis."²² Captain R. S. LaMotte supervised the construction of the fort. E. S. Topping pointed out the importance of Fort Ellis to the fledgling town of Bozeman when he said: "From the moment this fort was definitely located, Bozeman's future was assured."²³

Settlement of the war claims against the federal government immediately became an important issue. Those merchants, ranchers, and farmers who had supplied the volunteer forces felt themselves entitled to reimbursement by the government. Bozeman residents held several of these claims against the government.

Montanans billed the federal government for \$1,000,000.²⁴ An investigation followed, but it was not until 1874 that a House committee authorized a scaled down payment of the claims. The committee passed an appropriation

²²Burlingame, "Beginnings in Bozeman," p. 3.

²³Topping, Chronicles of the Yellowstone, p. 68.

²⁴U. S. Congress, House Report 82, "Montana War Claims," Congress, 2nd Session, May 24, 1872, pp. 39-50.

for \$513,343 to pay the claims.²⁵

In 1872, Representative William G. Donnan, a member of the committee on military affairs, concluded:

There is no question that many irregularities, extravagant expenditures, and doubtful, if not fraudulent, transactions occurred in connection with supplies furnished, and especially with the final disposition of Government property, remaining on hand about the time these troops were disbanded, which have cast a cloud over the whole matter, and without doubt have prevented the payment of just claims of innocent parties . . . It further appears that in some instances vouchers were issued for a greater number of articles or larger amount of property than were actually furnished; and in still other instances that vouchers were issued for property at an extravagant value; and in still other instances for property which never was purchased at all.²⁶

This report also included a comparison of the prices charged with the prices at which the purchases could have been made. Hay sold for ten to twenty-five dollars above normal; coffee and flour sold for nearly twice their normal price; arms, saddles, clothing, medicine, and hardware prices rose from 25 to 60 per cent above normal.²⁷

²⁵U. S. Congress, House Exec. Doc. 9, "Montana War Claims," 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, December 19, 1874, p. 2.

²⁶U. S. Congress, House Report 82, p. 4.

²⁷Ibid.

A partial list of Bozeman men submitting claims included L. M. Black, Nelson Story, Loren Tuller, Charles Rich, William Tracy, Lester S. Willson, W. J. Beall, Thomas Cover, and P. W. McAdow.²⁸ The largest claims, over \$100,000, belonged to L. M. Black. When the government authorized payment in 1874, several of these individuals alone received an aggregate sum of \$40,000.²⁹ Obviously the claims paid to local men for the "Gallatin Valley Indian War of 1867" provided a substantial economic shot in the arm for the young community. They started several of the Bozeman area residents off on the right financial foot.

The end of the "War" also enabled local contractors like Nelson Story to continue doing business with the forts to the east. In the fall of 1867, Story contracted to deliver 100,000 pounds of potatoes to Fort C. F. Smith for the consumption of the soldiers during the following winter. He purchased the potatoes for one dollar per hundred weight and sold them to the government for ten dollars per hundred weight delivered.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., pp. 39-50.

²⁹U. S. Congress, House Exec. Doc. 9, pp. 2-5.

³⁰T. B. Story, "History of Nelson Story."

In the final analysis, the establishment of Fort Ellis and the "influx of federal money into the local economy" provided great impetus for the future growth of Bozeman.³¹ The frontier town learned to appreciate the advantages of federal monies at an early date.

³¹James L. Thane Jr., "Montana Territory: The Formative Years, 1862-1870," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1972), p. 198.

III

An evaluation of the early history of Bozeman would not be complete without a discussion of the town's social history. By 1865 enough families resided in Bozeman to generate an interest in the education of the young. During the winter of 1865-1866, a subscription school started in the back of a store operated by Caleb Fitz. Samuel Anderson instructed a class of six pupils in this first term of school. The following winter Miss Florence Royce conducted the second term of school in Bozeman. By 1868 the school age population had increased sufficiently to warrant the construction of a school with public money. This frame structure cost the taxpayers \$500 and served the community for eight years until a new brick school building replaced it in 1877.

In addition to public education, Bozeman also benefited from a private academy. In October, 1872, the Reverend L. B. Crittenden and his daughter Mary Gertrude opened the Bozeman Academy in the Good Templars' Hall on the present day site of the Episcopal Church. In the following year, 1873, Miss Crittenden started the Gallatin Valley Female Seminary at a private residence in Bozeman.

She later transferred it to Hamilton, a small town west of Bozeman in the Gallatin Valley.¹

In 1872 the cause of education in Bozeman advanced again with the establishment of the first library in Gallatin County. The Young Men's Library Association established it in a room over Alward's Drug Store. In 1873 the Young Men's Christian Association also started a library.²

By the end of 1874, local teachers were numerous enough to organize a Gallatin County Teachers Association. By the fall of 1878, the local educational requirements demanded a principal and a planned course of study. Professor W. W. Wylie became the first principal, and during this same year the second high school in the territory opened in Bozeman. There were twenty-five students in attendance and the first class of two people graduated in 1883.

These settlers, like all others, needed something more than knowledge gained in the traditional sense to sustain them. Organized religion flourished in Bozeman from the very beginning. W. W. Alderson, one of the first settlers in the area, was a licensed preacher of the Methodist

¹Houston, History of Gallatin County, p. 31.

²Ibid., p. 32.

Church. Shortly after he arrived, in the summer of 1864, he preached the first sermon in the Gallatin Valley at the Merrit and Oscar Penwell cabin west of Bozeman.³

Probably because of Alderson's influence, the Methodists were the first organized religious group in the Bozeman area. In July, 1866, Reverend W. W. Alderson organized the first Sunday school and continued as its superintendent for twelve years. In August of the same year, the Reverend A. M. Hough, Superintendent of Missions for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the territory, organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in Bozeman.

At about this time, plans arose to raise money for the construction of a church. The church was erected, on what is now the southwest corner of Main and Tracy streets, with donations contributed by local residents during 1866-1867. It served several purposes for the early community. A term of the district court was held in it with Judge Hezekiah Hosmer, then chief justice of the supreme court, presiding.⁴ In addition, several school classes convened in the church for a short time. The Methodists also

³Esther C. Niebel, A Century of Service (Bozeman, Montana: Artcraft Printers, 1966), p. 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

allowed visiting ministers of other denominations the use of the structure. This often left the mistaken impression that it was a "Union Church."⁵ In 1868, Bishop Daniel S. Tuttle arrived in Bozeman and organized an Episcopal Church. The Episcopalians held services in various locations in Bozeman until they purchased a building and fitted it out in 1876.⁶

The third and last church to organize in Bozeman during its early period was the Presbyterian Church. Reverend William S. Frakelton and Reverend Sheldon Jackson organized the local church in May, 1872. The Presbyterian congregation completed a church in 1880.⁷

When Bishop Tuttle arrived in Bozeman in 1868, he found "a town of about 150 people in some 40 dwellings, three stores, a hotel, a grist mill, a blacksmith or two and two saloons."⁸ The census of 1870 listed Bozeman's population at 574, a significant increase since 1868. But

⁵Marie Flaherty, "A Short History of Bozeman" (a paper in Dr. Burlingame's possession, Bozeman, Montana), p. 2.

⁶M. A. Leeson, History of Montana 1739-1885 (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Company, 1885), p. 621.

⁷Ibid., pp. 621-622.

⁸Burlingame, "Beginnings in Bozeman," p. 7.

