

## FORT BENTON, MONTANA.

THE first business enterprise in the region about Fort Benton, was a trading post of the American Fur Company, which was established by Jas. Kipp, in 1831, at the confluence of the Marias and the Missouri, twelve miles below the site of the present city. It was soon ascertained that the location was not a desirable one, and the post was moved to Brule bottom, a few miles up the Missouri; but even this site did not satisfy Major Culbertson, who succeeded Mr. Kipp in charge of the post. He finally, in 1846, removed to one of the most beautiful bottoms of the Upper Missouri, where nature had made ways of entrance and exit at every point of the compass. Fort Benton was then built, the finest and most complete trading post in the western country, the ruins of which still stand as a monument to the heroic spirits of that period. Thus was laid the foundation, not only of a magnificent business on the part of the American Fur Company, but as well (what was never dreamed of then) the foundation of the future commercial center of the great territory of Montana, at the head of navigable waters of the Missouri river.

Fort Benton was the key to the situation in this vast region during the supremacy of the American Fur Company, and this is no less true of the succeeding period, when the gold hunters made their way to the mountains and the steamboats plied the waters of the Upper Missouri. In 1860 the first steamboat arrived in Fort Benton, carrying only supplies for the fur company. In 1862 there were four arrivals, and in

1865 there were eight, bringing the pioneers of the mountains and general supplies. In 1866 thirty-six steamboats came, and thirty-nine in 1867, with increased numbers in succeeding years, and Fort Benton ceased to be exclusively an Indian trading post. Independent traders located, and the commerce which has since grown to such vast proportions, had its beginning. The rush to the mines from every direction added to the importance of Fort Benton, it became the *entrepot* of the territory—the point to which all freight and supplies were shipped by the river, and thence distributed by wagon transportation to the various mining camps—and was the "liveliest" town in the West. Business houses were established and fortunes rapidly made. In a few years, all the freight for the Northwest Territory of Canada came by way of Fort Benton, and was thence distributed by freighting outfits to all parts of the country. This condition of affairs continued—the town meanwhile growing to goodly proportions, and upon a basis so substantial as to render it famous in that respect throughout the Northwest—until 1882-3, when the completion of the Northern Pacific railroad on the south, and the Canadian Pacific on the north, completely changed the condition of affairs.

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In the foregoing, the attempt is made to show that Fort Benton is the natural trading point in this whole Northwestern region, and that through the fur and placer periods it was the center of trade and business, the most important point