

in the Upper Missouri country, or in the whole of Montana. In this connection it might be stated, that during the years of greatest activity in the fur business, scores of trading posts were established in this region, some of them on the Missouri river and others at important points on tributary streams, and today Fort Benton is the only town of consequence at any of these points to survive the extinction of the buffalo and other game. It is an illustration of the law of "survival of the fittest."

In 1883 the Northern Pacific was completed to Helena, and to the north of us the Canadian Pacific had forged its way through the prairie and wilderness to the Rocky mountains. These roads are nearly the same distance from Fort Benton, and they cut off on immense section of country, that, before that time, had been tributary to this city, in a greater or less degree. About the same time, or a little earlier, the buffalo "disappeared from the face of the earth," in a manner approaching the mysterious, and the lucrative trade in robes thus suddenly came to an end. But meantime other important changes were going on. The domestic herds and flocks were fast taking the place of the buffalo and deer, and thrifty settlers located in the valleys to engage in farming, combined with stock growing. If the railroads on either side of us cut off immense tributary country, they helped to people, and to some extent develop, what remained, and thus compensation was given and Fort Benton continued to be the trade center and chief supply point of Northern Montana, in which section a gradual growth in population and wealth was going forward. Having the Missouri river as an artery of commerce, upon which two or more lines of boats were constantly maintained during the season, our merchants were enabled to meet the competition of the railroad points, and

in some particulars had the advantage of them. A few figures from the assessment rolls will show how advancement was made during this period. We will take Choteau county, of which Fort Benton is the seat of government, to illustrate the case, although portions of other counties are, and have been, tributary to the river metropolis. In 1877 the assessed valuation of Choteau county was only a little over \$500,000.00, and this wealth, for the most part, was confined to the town of Fort Benton. In 1880, the assessed valuation of this county had increased to \$1,500,000.00, and in 1887, notwithstanding the severe stock losses of last winter, it will not be less than \$4,000,000.00. In 1880, the sheep industry in this county really had its beginning. As showing how this branch of the stock business has grown since that time, we quote the following extract from the statement of Mr. L. W. Peck, secretary of the Montana Wool Growers' Association, made at the banquet recently given by the Fort Benton board of trade, to the wool growers of Northern Montana: "Mr. Peck stated that he would confine his remarks principally to the business of the country tributary to Benton, or what is known as Northern Montana, and would simply state a few facts. From this section, after a hard winter, there would be marketed the fleeces of four hundred thousand sheep, aggregating two million two hundred and twenty thousand pounds. There will also be turned out forty thousand wethers for shipment and sale, as well as two hundred and fifty thousand pounds of pelts, which latter represents the serious loss of the past severe winter, the worst ever known in Montana. Upon the opening of the Milk river reservation, the territory tributary to Fort Benton will be doubled, and five million pounds of wool and eighty thousand wethers will be shipped from this point."