

Last year one million two hundred and fifty thousand pounds of wool were shipped by the Missouri river from Fort Benton, and this year the shipments will reach two million pounds, which represents, in cash, about \$500,000.00, the greater portion of which will be left with our merchants for supplies necessary to carry on the business till the next "harvest time." The growth of the cattle business has been equally rapid. In 1880 there were but a few small herds in Choteau county, where now there are over one hundred thousand head, valued at \$3,000,000.00. In 1880 the number of farms in Choteau county was exceedingly limited, while in 1886, thirty-nine thousand one hundred and sixty-four acres of improved land were assessed, the same being valued at \$284,470.00.

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We have now entered another and important period—one that will witness quicker and greater changes than have yet taken place—the railroad era. A miracle in railroad construction, almost, has been performed in the building of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba railroad from the Red river valley west across the trackless prairies of Northern Montana, to the Rocky mountains. Although four hundred miles of this road are through an Indian reservation, and probably an equal distance through unsettled public lands, yet the completed track reached Fort Benton September 20th, upon which occasion, with imposing ceremony, and in the presence of Mr. J. J. Hill and a party of capitalists from New York, a silver spike was driven in honor of the event.

For a distance of nearly two hundred miles the railroad passes through the center of Choteau county, and its influence in promoting the development of the various resources of this section will be simply wonderful. It will inaugurate a complete revolution by the settle-

ment of the country, the building of new towns, etc. The Manitoba will not long have the field to itself; other roads are certain to enter, and branch lines will be constructed in every possible direction; the mines of the surrounding mountains and our immense coal fields will be fully developed and pay rich tribute to the railroads; the ranchman, wool grower and stock farmer will take possession of Northern Montana; the vast herds will be divided up, and the occupation of the cowboy will be gone. These are some of the changes that will take place, and under this new regime, Fort Benton will keep pace with the progress of events about her. Situated at the head of navigation of the Missouri river, her position is the strongest possible one. It has proved so in the past, and will in the future. Just as all railroads in the Northwestern states lead to St. Paul, so they will in the New Northwest to Fort Benton. They must come to the river. In time, the railroads will be distributors and feeders for our great water way, the Missouri river, and Fort Benton, the City of Destiny, will be the commercial center of the North Rocky Mountain region.

Fort Benton is beautifully situated on the west bank of the Missouri river, on a large, high, gravel bottom. Its streets are broad and regularly laid out. It contains some of the heaviest and wealthiest mercantile firms in Montana, among which may be mentioned T. C. Power & Bro., who are also owners of the Block P line of steamers, plying between this city and Bismarck and way points. T. G. Baker & Co. are also well known, and are largely interested in business enterprises in the Canadian Northwest. Murphy, Maclay & Co., branch of John T. Murphy & Co., of Helena; Gaus & Klein, of Helena, and many others, comprise the business houses of Fort Benton.

There are many fine public and pri-