

The Grand Jury Accuses Special Police.

NO DIRECT EVIDENCE FOUND

Blames Chief of Police and Sheriff.

TAX COLLECTION IS COSTLY

Treasurer Should Perform That Duty—Auditor Should Report in Detail—Books Should Be Examined.

WHAT THE GRAND JURY SAYS.

The grand jury declares that grafting is going on, and that it is impossible to obtain sufficient proof to convict the parties implicated. It believes, however, that special police and Deputy Sheriffs are guilty.

The cost of collecting taxes is said to be excessive, and an expert examination of the books is recommended. (The County Court recently appointed experts.)

The County Auditor is recommended to make his reports more explicit regarding receipts and disbursements of various offices.

The County Clerk is requested to authorize suit to be begun to recover certain fees paid for the conveyance of insane persons to the asylum.

The County Commissioners are asked to place their proceedings at the disposal of the public.

Registration of voters is said to have been too costly.

The County Court is asked to keep expenditures within the tax levy.

A well-directed search is recommended for the county hospital.

The County Court is requested to recover \$1175 paid to D. M. Watson for digging wells at the Poor Farm.

The city jail is condemned, and various other public institutions are praised.

The final report of the grand jury, presented to Judge Sears yesterday, declares its firm opinion that systematic grafting has been practiced on the gamblers and other disreputable persons, and that the police beat the graft amounts to \$1000 a month; but says it has been unable to obtain evidence on which to base any indictments. The part of the report relating to this subject follows:

In the matter of gambling and grafting, we have examined 24 witnesses, and, while we are convinced that there has been and is now grafting going on, we are unable to secure sufficient proof to convict any party or parties. There is evidence to show that on one beat there are opportunities to graft to the extent of \$1000 per month, and, from the evidence we secured, we firmly believe that \$1000 per month, and possibly more has been and is now being collected by the city and county police and gamblers. Much of this money, we believe to be secured through threats of arrest if the weekly payments are not promptly made. It is evident that this large sum of money is distributed into the hands of different parties who form the city and county police, but we have no means at hand to prove who they are to the extent that they may be brought to justice.

The special police and Deputy Sheriffs who receive \$1 per month from the city are the parties who, we believe, collect the graft, and who, we do not doubt, know how it is divided among the gamblers and the police. The special officer gives them power to make such demands for blood money as they think the victim can stand. And they evidently claim him or her for all there is in it, or all he or she will stand. They cover this with a cloak of authority called "a special officer," who is generally supposed to be a man of authority and standing, and who, when he appears, is surrounded by a crowd of different places and premises. This grafting can be stopped, and that at once, if the proper officers want it done. It all lies in the hands of the Sheriff and Chief of Police. So long as we have special officers on the different beats, who have authority to collect blood money, for that is what it is, we will have grafting going on. Take away the Deputy, take away the chance or opportunity to graft, and let these people who are being granted understand that no blood money is demanded, and it will stop. If money is to be exacted or claimed from these people for running these houses, let it be collected with the other taxes, and let the collector be a man of authority, and not place the matter wholly in the hands of parties who obtain their appointment through claim of an unpaid election debt—alleged to be some political party faction. If owners of stores, workshops or any place of business want any special watchman to look after their property, let them hire their own watchman at their own expense to look after any specified section or district, to be known as a watchman, and not under the cloak of authority, where he can demand and force blood money from those who are easily bluffed into paying what is demanded of them. We want some who were already in the habit of being held up, and in such cases they were finally let alone, but strictly watched.

The report on other subjects reads:

We have had 20 witnesses, and have examined 18 cases, in which we have returned 23 true bills and five not true bills, and have examined 17 witnesses, and, in addition to these, we have carefully inquired into matters coming under the head of original investigations, of which no record has been preserved.

Cost of Tax Collecting.

In examining into the conduct of the various offices, we are impressed with the abnormal cost of collecting taxes, and an investigation into this matter confirmed us in our view that the expense of conducting this branch of the Sheriff's office is out of all proportion to results, and largely in excess of what it should be. As shown by the Auditor's report, there was expended for this purpose in the year 1901 \$43,542.97, and in the year 1902 \$53,942.90. From the same source we learn that a large number of men were employed as clerks in the tax-collecting department last spring, and we state unhesitatingly that the cost of conducting this department of the Sheriff's office has been grossly excessive, and we earnestly recommend that the proper authorities of the county take such steps as will prevent hereafter this abuse.

It would result in increased efficiency and economy if the Treasurer was made the Tax Collector and the advertising of delinquent taxes be done away with.

Collection of Taxes in Excess of Amounts Due.

In the month of May, this year, there was called to the attention of the County Court, by petition signed by numerous reputable and responsible citizens, the fact that from non-resident taxpayers there were in many instances collected as taxes due on property greater than amounts of taxes actually due, and the request made for the appointment of an expert to examine the books of every fiscal officer of the county should be expected every year, and that such examination should now be made.

We strongly recommend that the County Court appoint qualified experts, not only to investigate and report on the matter of collection of taxes, but also expert and report on the books of all other fiscal officers of the county.

Cost of Collecting Taxes.

As the last semi-annual report of the Auditor, published July 28, 1902, does not show the expense of conducting the different offices, nor of the fees received from them for the six months covering all said report, as all former reports of the Auditor do, we are unable to report fully upon this subject at this time. The report of the Auditor, however, shows that the office which, when the fee system was in effect, produced large revenue, now shows a heavy loss in their conduct. As the county now receives the fees formerly paid the officers, we are convinced that sufficient care has not been used in limiting the number of deputies employed, and we believe a careful scrutiny into this matter of limiting the deputies to a number sufficient to conduct the business of the office will lead to decreased expenditures.

We also find the law in regard to doctors and dentists recording their diplomas in the office of the County Clerk is not complied with as strictly as it should be. The law that drug stores procure a license to sell opiates is almost wholly ignored, there being only two druggists in this city holding such a license. The officers and public should see that these laws are complied with.

Fees for Conveying Insane to Asylum.

A former grand jury reported on this matter and advised bringing suit against the former Sheriff for fees due the county, amounting to \$1200. We are advised by the District Attorney that, in accordance with the County Court and his own convictions, he prepared a complaint for this purpose against William Watson, who was appointed Sheriff on November 14, 1901, to be verified by the County Clerk. On the 18th day of December, 1901, the then County Judge wrote to the District Attorney on behalf of the County Court, stating that no action was taken in the matter, and that it was deemed inadvisable to bring any action against the Sheriff. The complaint was thereafter returned unverified to the District Attorney's office. We cannot see any reason why the county should not make an effort to collect this money, and we view that such suit be brought; that the District Attorney again prepare and forward to the County Court a complaint, and, if the County Court is authorized to authorize him to institute an action against the Sheriff.

County Auditor's Office.

We recommend that the semi-annual report of the County Auditor be prepared as a separate report, and show in detail the receipts and expenditures from the various offices and purposes. The Auditor should also be requested to ascertain from such report how the affairs of the county are being conducted and the cost of the same.

County Clerk's Office.

We wish to express our approval of the act of the Legislature in consolidating the office of Clerk of the County Court, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Recorder of Conveyances into one office (County Clerk). Comparing the months of July, August and September, 1901, with the same months in 1902, the expense under consolidation has been reduced about \$1200 each month, while the receipts have increased. The office is run with less help than before, the books neatly kept, and the work is not permitted to fall behind. Mr. Fields deserves congratulations for the businesslike administration he is giving the public. With a few changes in the law, one which being a flat fee for cases of law and probate, this office will be a source of revenue to the county, and will not be a heavy expense, as it has been in the past.

The Commissioners' Journal has been supplied with a system of indexing which will be of valuable assistance. The system of indexing heretofore in vogue was that which was only cause for complaint in looking for desired information. We find that the journal has not been signed by the proper officers since January last, and recommend that requirements of law be more fully complied with in this respect. We recommend that the Commissioners place their proceedings at the disposal of the public as soon as practicable.

Expenses of Registration for 1900 and 1902.

We find that the total cost of registration for 1900 was \$2370 15, and for 1902 \$2490 95; the increased cost for 1902, \$119 40. We find that this increase in cost for 1902 was caused by making a duplicate of the registered voters, which was placed in an alphabetical arrangement, which the county did not have to do for the year 1900. We believe we have been a useless expense to the county, and we recommend that a complete record of the registered voters be kept.

Tax Levy.

In the past it has been customary to fix the levy for road purposes and then spend money in excess of that produced, to such an extent that the levy as made furnished no guide to the amount expended during the year. We recommend that in this connection the expenditures of the county be kept within the levy, for two reasons—first, so the taxpayers

will know the amount being expended for any given purpose, and second, to prevent any increase to the county debt.

County Jail.

We visited the County Jail and found everything in a satisfactory condition. The prisoners are well fed under contract by the Sheriff at a cost of 12 1/2 cents per meal, which seems to us as well as could be done. We are favorably impressed with the system there in vogue.

County Poor Farm.

We visited the poor farm and found it in good hands. The inmates seemed to be contented, and had no complaints to make. We think there should be more surgical instruments in the hospital, so that when operations are to be performed it will not be necessary to have them done elsewhere at a heavy cost to the county. We recommend the addition of a well-fitted surgical department. We find that the water supply is very short, but as we are informed that the Commissioners are arranging to have city water as soon as possible, we will not dwell on this subject further, but say that we think there should be one more bathtub placed on the ground floor of the hospital, obviating the necessity of carrying patients upstairs at times when they have to be carried.

County Poor Farm Water Supply.

It appears that the county made contracts with D. M. Watson to provide a water supply of 12,000 gallons every 24 hours for the period of one year for the use of the poor farm for the sum of \$1175. The original contract was made in November, 1900, but it was not fulfilled by Mr. Watson, and a later contract was made in April, 1902, taking the place of the previous contract, and which provided, among other things, that Watson should dig other wells and enough wells so as to produce the required supply of 12,000 gallons per day for a year, and should complete the contract by July 15, 1902. Watson also guaranteed the required supply according to the terms of both contracts, and agreed, upon failure, to return the \$1175 to the county. He also gave a surety bond guaranteeing the fulfillment of his contract. On May 9, 1902, the county issued a warrant for \$1175 in payment of this work. We find that the work has not been completed according to contract. The wells dug by Mr. Watson do not furnish 12,000 gallons of water every 24 hours, but six months have elapsed since the signing of the last contract of the water supply of the county poor farm. Now, when a good supply is most needed, it is only about 3000 gallons every 24 hours, instead of 12,000 gallons. The warrant for \$1175 issued for said work, and which was not earned, and the members of the County Court responsible for its issuance before seeing to a full compliance of the contract of Mr. Watson are censurable for their neglect. The county's interest is strongly recommended that the present County Court take immediate steps to recover said warrant. Yes, and the pathetic part of it is, it is also a good supply is most needed, it is only about 3000 gallons every 24 hours, instead of 12,000 gallons. 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