

## Lancaster Intelligencer.

TUESDAY EVENING, FEB. 14, 1882.

## THE COUNTY FINANCES

EX-COMMISSIONER ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

**He Again Discusses the Increased Tax Levy.**  
EDITORS INTELLIGENCER: A sense of duty impels me to give the public a second epistle on the management of the county finances, partly in correction of an oversight of a large item in my last calculation of the rate of taxation that was necessary to meet the current expenses of this county for the present year. I demonstrated that a levy of two and a half mills on the dollar was more than sufficient. In that calculation I entirely overlooked the extraordinary surplus of \$92,000 that was in the treasury at the end of the last term; \$50,000 of that, at least, ought to have been included in making up the appropriations for the present fiscal year. And still there would have been left \$42,000 to commence the new year with, quite as much surplus as the interests of economy allow to be carried from year to year. There always has been a deficiency of funds for a couple of months in the spring and it is in the interest of economy that it should be so. This has been provided for by temporary loans. It is a much cheaper method of bridging this chasm than to keep a sufficient fund on hand the whole year to meet it. There was an unusually large surplus on hand at the end of the year before, but over \$40,000 of it was absorbed in paying the bonded debt, and the last board might have paid \$30,000 more of that debt, but we were funding it for ten years, at the unusually low rate of four per cent, interest, a much less rate than money is worth to the taxpayers generally. Therefore, we thought that it would subserve their interests better to give them the benefit of it in the reduction of their tax this year, which is transparent I think to everybody.

I propose to state the reasons why I believe a two-mill tax this year would have been sufficient to pay current expenses, and leave a surplus of \$35,000. The valuation which is the basis of taxation is about ninety million dollars. A two-mill levy will yield \$180,000; add to this \$50,000 out of the surplus on hand from last year, this will make \$230,000. The entire expense of the county last year was \$210,000. There was included in that at least \$15,000 of extra expenses that will not occur this year, consisting of the following items: difference of interest on account of the difference between the bonded debt last year and this year (paying a year and a half's tax last year, which will not be required this year); repairs on court house, reindexing books, readjusting papers, files, &c., in the offices, and repairs at the prison, all amounting to considerable over \$15,000. Take this from the whole cost will leave \$195,000, which was the actual current expense of last year. The three present commissioners are all practical business men, and I presume they went at their new duties in a business-like manner, beginning by looking over the items of expense of last year. In thus doing they would have ascertained that the actual ordinary expenses were \$195,000, as above stated. This gave them a knowledge of what funds they needed for this year's expenses. On the other side a look into the treasury would have convinced them that there was at least \$50,000 available out of last year's surplus for this year's expense. With this knowledge surely they ought to have reduced the tax to two mills instead of raising to three. A three-mill levy will put them in possession of the enormous sum of \$320,000, an excess of \$125,000 over what is needed. This must strike everybody as a very extraordinary proceeding on the part of the commissioners, and as yet they have given no tangible reason for it. I see a communication in the INTELLIGENCER headed "What the People Say: A Vigorous Defense of the County Levy." I feel satisfied that it is the production of one of the commissioners from a talk I had with him on the subject, or I would not waste paper alluding to it. The "people" do not say anything such silly things as he alleges they say in his imaginary "vigorous defense" of his three mills levy. They deprecate it as they have good reason to. They don't want the board to raise \$125,000 more than is needed of the money they need in their business, to hoard in the county treasury for two years, lest one of those "periodical panics" may come sweeping along and rob them. They have no such visionary fears. They feel that they are capable of using and taking care of their own money until the public need it.

Also, he alleges as a reason why I criticise this levy that I have some overdue bonds that are drawing more interest than the funded debt, and I am afraid they will be called in on account of it. The difference of interest between the bonds I hold is one-fifth of one per cent (quite a consideration indeed). His reasoning in this trifling personal allusion is about as "vigorous," as his "defense of the county levy." He further says they can use it in canceling any of the ten year bonds that may be offered from time to time. There will be precious few of them offered, unless the rate of interest on money should advance, and in that event it would be impolitic to pay them in advance of their maturity. By so doing, he deprives the taxpayers of the benefit of a cheap loan. There are at least three-fourths of them now paying from five to six per cent, for money used in their business or on their property. This same money he proposes to take from them, and hoard for two years to pay a debt that they are only paying four per cent for. He further says the country is in a prosperous condition now, and we do not know how long it will continue so, and now is the time to do this kind of business. He does not seem to comprehend that it is in good taste the people want to use of their money. It is then they use it to advantage.

I see the board are determined to get possession of this money as soon as possible. They offer an abatement of four per cent, which amounts to \$10,800, to expedite its early collection, apprehensive, I presume, of the new approach of one of those "periodical panics" above referred to.

This unnecessary and unreasonable draw on the taxpayers surely foreshadows pre-meditated extravagance if nothing worse. It is already cropping out in the publication of the commissioners' annual statement in all the papers in the county. The law requires it to be published in one or more papers, and by a stretch or rather abuse of their discretion they have expanded the word "more" to include over twenty; and if there had been a hundred I presume they would have extended this benefit to them all. To a practical mind it would seem that a stretch of the word "more" from one to three would have been quite liberal under the fitting circumstances that exist, having three leading papers in the county representing both political parties, one or the other being taken by almost everybody that reads a newspaper in the county. This unreasonable and uncalled-for publication of this item will cost the county not less than fifteen hundred dollars more than it would have done had it been confined to those three papers. The only purpose that this unlimited publication can serve will be to secure for the commissioners the blandishment of those papers. They will have no doubt call them "courteous," "liberal" fellows, although the money they are thus wasting belongs to other people. The more dependent and baser ones of them will take up the cudgel and try to knock down anybody that in the exercise of his right or duty dares to criticise their official acts no matter how reprehensible they may be. This has been illustrated recently by the editor of the *Inquirer* in the gratuitous reckless-lying tirade of personal abuse that he piled upon me for saying that there was no necessity for the levy of a three mill tax, and he even goes farther and threatens if I say anything more about it that I live in a glass house and that will make it more interesting for my enemies than for myself. This demonstrates the pernicious influence that the dispensing of beneficiaries by public officers has on the press, at least the more servile portion of it. This sycophant of the *Inquirer* seems determined to get the inside track on his competitors for the more solid patronage of the commissioners' office. Hence this unwarrantable attack upon me. I shall not censore to answer it farther than to say to him to fly his missiles, hang his stones, but be sure he throws something solid. I bid him defiance so far as my official probity and integrity are concerned. I have the consolation to know that while a commissioner I labored assiduously to protect and promote the best interest of the taxpayers and have the satisfaction to know that I accomplished a great deal in reducing the expenses of the county, as a contrast of the expenses of last year with three years ago will abundantly show.

At this statement that has cast the county so much to publish does not give any definite idea of the financial condition of the county, I will state it briefly. At the end of the year 1881 the debt of the county was \$302,150, consisting of bonds \$295,000, running for ten years, the county having the option to pay them any time after three years, \$92,000 on hand at the end of the year from the debt will leave \$20,150, which was the real debt of the county then.

R. MONTGOMERY.

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When a young lady buys handkerchiefs for a friend she sees that she may receive some of these goods at a reasonable price, and though he thinks it a very valuable remedy, and will never be without it. For sale at H. E. Cochran's drug store, 12th North Queen street, Lancaster.

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