

# THE COURIER

LINCOLN, NEBR., SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 1900.

THE COURIER,  
Official Organ of the Nebraska State  
Federation of Women's Clubs.  
ENTERED IN THE POSTOFFICE AT LINCOLN AS  
SECOND CLASS MATTER.

PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY  
—BY—  
THE COURIER PRINTING AND PUBLISHING CO  
Office 1132 N street, Up Stairs.  
Telephone 384.

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Subscription Rates—In Advance.

Per annum.....	\$1 00
Six months.....	75
Three months.....	50
One month.....	20
Single copies.....	05

THE COURIER will not be responsible for voluntary communications unless accompanied by return postage. Communications, to receive attention, must be signed by the full name of the writer, not merely as a guarantee of good faith, but for publication if advisable.

## OBSERVATIONS.

### City Debt.

Lincoln needs money, but except for an emergency like the present one, of need for isolated quarters for small pox patients it is inexpedient to borrow money. The city cannot make money on a loan. It is not in business and a loan must be paid, frequently three or four times over in interest. It is the fashion of municipalities to borrow recklessly and lavishly, and most mayors authorize the borrowing. The size of Chicago's debt is illegal and has injured the credit of the city. Comptroller Kerfoot has just announced to the city council, by request, that the city has exceeded the state constitutional limit for municipal debt by \$15,428,278. If any tax-payer loved his country, and his city enough and still possessed ingenuous hopes of a time when city officials would order the spending of the peoples' money as their own, he might begin proceedings against the payment of this excess of fifteen million dollar debt and the courts would probably sustain his plea. The Chicago debt is shown by Comptroller Kerfoot's statement:

"The increase in debt under the Harrison administration is so enormous as to call for immediate and radical action by the city council. The figures taken from the Comptroller's report show the city's debt as it existed December 31st, 1899, consisted of a total floating debt of \$15,863,049 and a bonded debt of \$16,825,050; total debt, \$32,688,099.08.

"Paragraph 12 of section 9 of the

Constitution of 1870 of the State of Illinois reads:

"No county, city, township, school district, or other municipal corporation, shall be allowed to become indebted in any manner, or for any purpose, to an amount, including existing indebtedness, in the aggregate exceeding 5 per centum on the value of the taxable property therein, to be ascertained by the last assessment for State and county taxes previous to the incurring of such indebtedness."

"The taxable value of property for 1899 was \$345,196,419. The constitutional debt limit, 5 per cent of taxable property, would be \$17,259,820. The total debt is \$32,688,099. The excess of debt over the constitutional limitations is \$15,428,278.

"The approximate increase in the debt in the three years of Mayor Harrison is \$9,000,000. At best, the result of the council's investigation will be the locking of the stable doors after the horse is stolen; for the undeniable fact exists that the city's credit is gone. The Harrison administration has borrowed money until the banks have refused to lend more, fearing the loss of that which they have already advanced. Of the \$15,000,000 of debt which has been piled up on the city in excess of the constitutional limitation, the greater part would undoubtedly be set aside, or, at least, its legal standing would be seriously jeopardized, if a tax-payer should go into court and begin proceedings. This possibility confronts the loaners of money."

A Lincoln daily newspaper is continually urging the council and Mayor Winnett to order the paving done on P street irrespective of the fact that there is no intersection fund. The Councilmen and Mayor are liable on their bonds for any such unauthorized expenditure and the present administration, executive and legislative, not likely to take any risks of borrowing money that they themselves will be responsible for. It is fortunate indeed for Lincoln tax-payers that the Mayor and council are thus mindful of the constitutional limit of their authority. If preceding mayors and city councils had had the same restricted rules of city expenditure and had set the same limits to their power of spending city money the city would not now be paying so large a proportion of its income in interest.

In regard to the power of Nebraska cities the size of Lincoln to vote bonds, I quote the Nebraska Statutes: "That any county or city in the state of Nebraska is hereby authorized to issue bonds to aid in the construction of any railroad or other work of internal improvement, to an amount to be determined by the county commissioners of such county or city, not exceeding ten per centum of the assessed valuation of all the taxable property in said county or city, provided, the county commissioners or city council shall first sub-

mit the question of the issuing of such bonds, to a vote of the legal voters of the said county or city in the manner provided by chapter only in the Revised Statutes of the State of Nebraska for submitting to the people of a county the question of borrowing money (1869 & 192 G. S., 448.)"

The old city charter revised in 1897 grants to Lincoln the special and additional privileges of voting for \$100,000 for sewerage, \$200,000 for a water system, and \$25,000 for city parks. This \$325,000 which should be added to the total constitutional capacity for debt.

The total assessed valuation of taxable property real, personal and railroad in Lincoln last year was \$4,777,835. The bond debt, exclusive of paying debts which are paid directly by individuals, is \$1,169,000. Ten per cent of the assessed valuation plus our chartered loan-contracting privilege of \$325,000 is \$802,783.000. The debt of \$1,169,000 is therefore \$366,217 dollars larger than we have any right to make it and any tax-payer who has time and money to spend in a lawsuit has the elements of a good case here.

### Federation Gossip.

One hour before the meeting of June 8th, it was whispered, a writ of mandamus was to have been served by Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the colored woman whose application for admission to the Federation as a delegate from the New Era Club of Massachusetts, had been tabled by the board of directors. Mrs. Ruffin had decided to ask in this way for the return of the dues paid by the New Era Club to the treasurer of the Federation. The warrant was sworn out, a lawyer and a constable had been engaged and on the advice of the former the latter was in readiness to serve the writ, in the convention hall just as the new officers were taking the places of the old ones. But the directors heard of it at noon. Mrs. Lowe called a secret meeting, and in a few minutes Mrs. Ruffin opened a little envelope with \$7.50 inside it.

But the color question is not settled. "What are you going to do with her?" the Massachusetts women asked of Mrs. Lowe that morning, and Mrs. Lowe answered: "Why, that's for you to answer. I didn't bring her here with me. What are you going to do?"

"Well, I hope Mrs. Ruffin will bring suit against the federation," said Mrs. Anna West of Massachusetts.

Not a delegate from Massachusetts voted for Mrs. Lowe. Miss Whittier of Massachusetts nominated Miss Margaret J. Evans of Minnesota, who secured 191 of the votes cast. Mrs. Lowe got 754 and Mrs. Helmuth of New York two. The election of Mrs. Lowe seemed to be what the big audience of women wanted. They waved their hands and hats, sent bouquets

to Mrs. Lowe, and laughed and cried. The apparent good feeling in the election was lost when Miss Evans was nominated in opposition to Mrs. Lowe. The states of Massachusetts, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Utah were responsible for it. Miss Evans was the successful candidate for vice president and the delegates were mystified by her candidacy for the first place. A number of requests were made from the floor for her withdrawal before the balloting began. Miss French Octave Thanet was one who insisted that Miss Evans should relieve her position of ambiguity before the voting began, but the request fell on deaf ears for there was no response.

### A Crime in Nebraska.

By actual count Commandant Fowler of the Soldiers' Home at Milford has cut down or destroyed by burning a thousand of the finest trees on the Home's demesne. There were no trees in the state like those made into fence posts by this Milford assassin. If he had killed a man it would have been a greater ethical crime, but no one man is capable of giving or conferring upon so many for such a prolonged period the comfort and blessings of a forest in Nebraska, where trees are scarce and primeval big trees of a diameter of more than a foot, grew in any number, so far as I know, only at Milford. This man Fowler, who cannot have the imagination and discrimination of a beast of the field, which surely appreciates the trees, has dared to cut down the trees of a hundred year's growth, trees which hundreds of people from Lincoln and from other places contiguous to Milford made yearly pilgrimages to see, to listen to, and to be comforted by. Under their branches, it was not difficult to recall the mighty oaks, elms and maples of Maine, Massachusetts, New York and of the middle western states of Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. The deep, cool depths of this one Nebraska forest was a balm to all homesick ones brought up within the magic of the sound of leaves, the creaking of branches and in a storm the tumult of twisting branches and whispering, rustling leaves. That one ruthless, beauty hating, deformed soul, should have been allowed to burn and cut down this one little Nebraska forest is incredible. The Board of Public Lands and Buildings is supposed to prevent destruction of the state's property. It requires a long time to cut down a thousand trees. Even a spiteful commandant who resents a refinement he does not understand might have been stopped by a vigilant board before he had cut down more than a hundred of the big trees, each of which were an embodiment of dignity and vitality. The people in India account for such an act of wanton unprovoked, assault upon human happiness by the theory that every man and woman has the