

The Progress Unquarantined

(1887)

Foreword

In the spring of 1886, Gus and Theo Beaulieu prepared to publish a newspaper – *The Progress* – to serve the White Earth Reservation, where they resided.¹ T. J. Sheehan, the federal Indian Agent on the Reservation, however, thought they were unfit for such an enterprise and, with a posse, seized their press, forbade publication of the paper, and ordered them from the premises.

In a long forgotten chapter in the history of freedom of the press in this country, the Beaulieu's sought protection of their right to publish in federal court. United States District Court Judge Rensselaer R. Nelson accepted jurisdiction over their suit, and ruled in their favor. The case then went to a jury on the question of damages.

The publishers recounted this battle in the maiden issue of *The Progress* in 1887. They concluded with an “apologetic” to their readers for the delay. In the history of American journalism, few publishers have expressed their joy at being free to publish a newspaper as fervently and colorfully as the Beaulieu Brothers.

This article from the first issue of *The Progress* was reproduced in *A Pioneer History of Becker County*, published in 1907.² It follows, complete and reformatted. ◇

¹ They were the sons of Clement Hudon Beaulieu Sr., a man of French and Indian descent, a prominent fur trader, and resident of White Earth since 1873. For a profile of the Beaulieu Family, see Jessie Campbell West & Alvin H. Wilcox, *A Pioneer History of Becker County* 257-261 (1907).

² *Id.* at 273-74.

THE PROGRESS.

"A Higher Civilization: The Maintenance of Law and Order."

GUS. H. BEAULIEU, Publisher.

THEO. H. BEAULIEU, Editor.

Vol. I. WHITE EARTH AGENCY, MINN., THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 1886. No. I.

SALUTATORY.

With this number we make our bow to the public. The novelty of a newspaper published upon this reservation may cause many to be wary in their support, and this from a fear that it may be revolutionary in character.

Our motto will undeceive such. We propose to remain true to this motto, true to the standard of social and individual morality it would express. We shall aim to advocate constantly and without reserve, what in our view, and in the view of the leading minds upon this reservation, is the best for the interests of its residents. And not only for their interests, but those of the tribe wherever they are now residing.

The main consideration in this advocacy, will be the political interests, that is, in matters relating us to the general government of the United States. We shall not antagonize the government, nor act in the presentation of our views in any way outside of written or moral law.

We intend that this journal shall be the mouth-piece of the community in making known abroad and at home, what is for the best interests of the tribe. It is not always possible to reach the fountain head through subordinates, it is not always possible to appeal to the moral sentiment of the country through these sources, or by communications through the general press.

Hence we establish *The Progress* as an organ, and an organ only in this sense.

ARROGANT SUPPRESSION OF THE PRESS !

A MENIAL AND SERVILE ACTION.

A Decision of the Judge and the Verdict of an Intelligent Jury, Maintains the Freedom of the Press on the Reservation!

Oct. 8th, 1887.

In the month of March last year, we began setting the type for the first number of *The Progress* and were almost ready to go to press, when our sanctum was invaded by T. J. Sheehan, the U. S. Indian Agent, accompanied by a posse of the Indian police. The composing stick was removed from our hands, our property seized, and ourselves forbidden to proceed with the publication of the journal. We had, prior to this time, been personally served with a written notice from Mr. Sheehan detailing at length, surmises beyond number as to the character of *The Progress*, together with gratuitous assumptions as to our moral unfitness to be upon the reservation, charging the publisher with the voicing of incendiary and revolutionary sentiments at various times. We did not believe that any earthly power had the right to interfere with us as members of the Chippewa tribe, and at the White Earth Reservation, while peacefully pursuing the occupation we had chosen. We did not believe there existed a law which should prescribe for us the occupation we should follow. We knew of no law which could compel us to become agriculturists, professionals, "hewers of wood and drawers of water," or per contra, could restrain us from engaging in these occupations.

Therefore we respectfully declined obeying the mandate, at the same time reaching the conclusion that should we be restrained we should appeal to the courts for protection.

We were restrained and a guard set over our property. We sought the protection of the courts, notwithstanding the assertion of the agent, that there could be no jurisdiction in the matter.

The U. S. district court, Judge Nelson in session, decided that we were entitled to the jurisdiction we sought.

The case came up before him, on jury trial. The court asserted and defended the right of any member of a tribe to print and publish a newspaper upon his reservation just as he might engage in any other lawful occupation, and without surveillance and restrictions. The jury before whom the amount of damage came, while not adjudging the amount asked for, did assess and decree a damage with a verdict restoring to us our plant.

EXPLANATION.

By referring to the date on the first page of this issue, our readers will observe that we made our bow, or rather, more strictly, we began to bow, but a heavy hand was laid upon us, and we have not been able to resume the perpendicular until now. In another column, we give a detailed account of the proceedings which arrested our work, together with the subsequent events which issued in our being able to finish the bow began so long ago. Our editorial back is straight once more, and we return to the work we laid out for ourselves so many months ago, with vigor and courage in no wise abated, and with renewed determination to advance the interests of the reservation, and the welfare of the Indian in general.

APOLOGETIC.

Kind readers, many of you have looked for our coming long and patiently, and now that we are with you and you have looked us over, you may feel that your yearning was

unfitting the occasion; to such we would say, that the long time which has elapsed since we first attempted to launch our little craft, which was attended with difficulties, the rough blustering breezes, the general unfavor of the weather, the unnecessary quarantine we were subject to, and the time employed in dry dock, etc., somewhat disorganized our material and we have had to alter our once set course to suit circumstances.

Now that we are once more at sea, fumigated and out of quarantine, and we issue from dry dock with prow and hull steel-clad tempered with truth and justice, and with our clearance registered, we once more box our compass, invite you all aboard, and we will clear port, set sails to favorable breezes, with the assurance that we will spare no pains in guiding you to a "higher civilization." ■

—X—

Posted MLHP: July 3, 2014.