

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

LARAMIE FRAUD

Number 154

Revised February 1966

A large influx of Confederate refugees, particularly from Missouri where conflict had been especially harsh, made the Idaho 1863 election an exceptionally bitter struggle. Democrats of southern sympathy dominated the mining region east of the Continental Divide, not part of Montana. A. J. Edwards, an outspoken secessionist, was chosen to represent that area in the Idaho Legislative Council. Yet he offended the Idaho Unionist leaders so severely that some of them were ready to do almost anything to keep him out of office. As far as they were concerned, Edwards was the traitor to the United States during time of war. Because most of the Confederate refugees in the Boise region had arrived in Idaho too recently to qualify to vote, the southern element there did not dominate the election in the way that they would have had they all been voters. In the congressional campaign, Lincoln's personal and political friend, Idaho's Governor William H. Wallace, campaigned vigorously. He thrived by a moderate margin, 3,810 to 3,543. Then, just as the votes were ready for canvassing, December 2, an unexpected Fort Laramie return increased Wallace's total to 4,389. Wallace was credited with 479 of the 486 "votes" filed from Fort Laramie. Although United States Marshal, D. S. Payne's September census had shown Fort Laramie with only 100 voters out of a 218 population, the 486 votes nevertheless were counted in the territorial and legislative totals. Yet the Fort Laramie return was irregular in a number of ways, and it is surprising that the territorial canvassers ever counted it. Aside from showing an excessive number of voters, the Fort Laramie tabulation listed the wrong names for election officials. In the event that the regularly appointed officials did not serve, provision had been made for the election of alternates--but if alternates had to be chosen, the return had to show positively that the regular officials had failed to function. This requirement was not met. Neither were a number of other specifications, which need not be enumerated here.

As soon as the fraud became apparent, responsibility for the false return from Fort Laramie generally was assigned to United States Marshal, Dolphus S. Payne. He was the officer responsible for collecting the returns, including the irregular result from Fort Laramie. Although he had a strong interest in promoting Unionist victory, Payne did not manufacture 486 Fort Laramie votes to help Wallace in the congressional contest. Everyone knew Wallace had won before the Fort Laramie business finally materialized. (For a time, fears had been expressed around Boise Basin that the eastern Democratic vote had defeated Wallace, and Payne possibly may have conceived the Laramie fraud under that kind of misapprehension. Payne had personal incentive to get Wallace elected to Congress in order to create a vacancy in the Governor's office, for which he was a candidate for appointment.) When the flub was actually consummated, Payne actually intended to accomplish something quite different. By providing a large Union return from Fort Laramie, he hoped to exclude A. J. Edwards, whom he detested bitterly, from the council. Padding

Wallace's total, though, scarcely could be avoided. If the false votes had been reported only in the council contest, the fraud would have been entirely too transparent. Payne did not plan that Edwards' opponent, Nathaniel P. Langford, should gain a Legislative seat by fraud; he intended only to exclude Edwards. Langford, in fact, did not come to Lewiston for the Legislature at all. Most likely unaware that he was certified as elected, he proceeded to the national capital to lobby for the creation of Montana from part of eastern Idaho. (If he heard at all of his "election" to the Idaho Legislature that winter, he ought to have gotten the news in Washington, D.C., from Wallace and Payne, who also went East to the national capital at the same time.) The way things turned out, neither Edwards nor Langford was on hand when the Legislature convened, and the seat was vacant. As much as some of the Union party members of the Legislature may have disliked Edwards, they did not go so far as to refuse him his place in the council when he belatedly arrived in Lewiston some two weeks after the session had met. The council voted to disregard the suspicious Laramie return, resolving the election--which Edwards naturally contested--in Edwards' favor. Finally, A. L. Downer, one of the leaders of the Union party for which the fraud was committed, wrote to Fort Laramie and found that no election had ever been held there at all.

Payne, meanwhile, worked hard in the East with the help of Wallace to become Governor of Idaho now that Wallace had been promoted to Congress. Though he had the support of Roscoe Conklyn--a rising New York Congressman who eventually dominated state politics there--Payne lost out to another Upstate New Yorker. Lincoln seems to have promised Thurlow Weed and Secretary of State W. M. Seward that Caleb Lyon of Lyonsdale would be made Idaho's governor in Wallace's place. Attempts to get Lincoln to break the promise failed entirely. Wallace himself may have grown less eager to have Payne succeed him after he received news from his old Idaho colleagues that Payne had perpetrated the Laramie fraud. Wallace was warned that local opinion vigorously objected to Payne on that account. Should he have anything further to do with Payne's political fortunes in Idaho, he and Payne both would be ruined. Democratic leaders in Idaho and Washington naturally were making a great issue that the United States Marshal ought to enforce the law rather than violate it. Even the Idaho territorial union convention denied Payne's action outspokenly in 1864: "Resolved that we lament the corruption in office of D. S. Payne . . . and those concerned with him in his iniquitous schemes, and trust that we may not be again annoyed with a like infliction." Then, too, the Nez Perce County Grand Jury indicted Payne for election fraud. So as matters turned out, Payne naturally took no more active part in Idaho affairs. Wallace himself was not renominated for Congress. Unlike Payne, Wallace came back to Idaho in 1864 to campaign for a Unionist successor as Congressional delegate. Yet in that election, the Democrats gained overwhelming control of Idaho. Their strength was so great that even though they did make quite an issue out of the Laramie fraud, they would have won just about as easily without even mentioning the matter. In the long run, Payne not only failed to keep A. J. Edwards out of the Legislature; he also gave his bitter political opponents a scandal to talk about for years after that.

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