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COCHRAN, DANIELS AND THE GOLDEN AGE

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The political stability of Idaho territorial government in the 1860's was hindered by a number of factional rows. An important early fight involved acting Governor William B. Daniels and the Golden Age, a prominent Lewiston newspaper. During the first session of the Idaho Territorial Legislature, Daniels had tried to purchase the Age from editor and proprietor Frank Kenyon in order to give the administration an outlet for its political opinions. Daniels, who had given Kenyon all of the Territory's printing contracts for the past six months, assumed that he had Kenyon's support in the project. Since Kenyon was looking for a buyer anyway, the deal seemed as good as closed. But to Daniels' consternation, the Age editor held off, and as the first session progressed Kenyon turned out editorials increasingly critical of the acting governor's administrative views. Those mild barbs suddenly turned into cannonades when Kenyon sold half-interest in the paper in late February to Alonzo Leland, a Lewiston pioneer and chief advocate of Lewiston's capital ambitions. Leland's influence turned the Age into a bitterly hostile anti-Daniels sheet. In an act of vengeance--by this time, the acting governor thought the entire town was nothing but a "hellhole of traitors"--Daniels took the Age's monopoly on public printing away. When the acting governor announced that he would send the first session laws to San Francisco for printing, Leland blasted back in a spate of sarcasm. Under the anonymity of an unsigned letter to the Age, either Leland or a Lewiston cohort wrote that Daniels was "wholly unfitted to fill the position of acting-Governor, or Secretary, for want of a sufficiently strong and cultivated

intellect..." But Daniels was not incompetent, said the letter.

Instead of lacking brains, he lacked ethics. He showed a shrewd, calculating mind during the first legislative session by trying to make as much money out of his office as possible. For example, he tried to draw extra compensation from the territorial auditor both as acting governor and as secretary. He also tried to get his own salary claims audited three months in advance in order to be paid before the treasury ran out of funds. Further, he charged illegal fees, made improper appointments to newly created county offices, and finally, bargained with the south Idaho delegation in a conspiracy to remove the capital to Boise.

In short, Daniels was not stupid; he was simply a crook! Editor Leland confirmed the opinions of the correspondent and added, "The public good will not admit that we pass over his derelictions in silence." None of the charges against Daniels, however, were ever substantiated or followed up. W. B. Daniels simply escaped from Idaho, leaving territorial secretary Silas D. Cochran to serve as acting governor and to cover Daniels' problems.

References:

Daniels to Wallace, January 5, 1864, Cochran to Wallace, March 3, 1864, Daniels to Wallace, May 10, 1864, Wallace Papers (University of Washington Manuscript Collection, Seattle), Box 1; Daniels to U. S. Controller of the Treasury, April 22, 1864, Misc. Accounts of the Dept. of the Treasury, First Auditor's Office, No. 161864, National Archives, Record Group 217; Boise News, March 12, 1864, p. 2, c. 1; Golden Age, March 12, 1864, p. 2, cs. 4-5; p. 2, c. 3.

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