

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

CHARLES HENRY TOMPKINS AND THE NEW YORK CANAL

Number 475

More than a year after the Idaho Mining and Irrigation Company was incorporated (June 23, 1882), C. H. Tompkins, the company president, and his son came to Boise with A. D. Foote to examine the project. Foote surveyed a 75-foot canal which, with an extensive lateral system, might irrigate a large tract in Boise Valley as well as provide water for major Snake River placer operations. The initial stage of the project required an investment of one- to one-and-a-half million dollars. Satisfied with the prospects of Foote's proposal after his trip to Boise in September, 1883, Tompkins arranged to have Pope and Company of Baltimore supply the necessary capital. The Panic of February, 1884, led to the failure of Pope and Company, and the creditors of the Idaho Mining and Irrigation Company refused to negotiate a settlement by which they would relinquish much of their claims which had become uncollectible. After a delay of two and a half years, Tompkins finally managed to take an option for most of the practically valueless New York and Idaho Mining Company stock at a low price in December, 1886.

Finally in 1890, A. D. Foote and C. H. Tompkins (the son who had come to Boise in 1883 with his father to investigate the canal proposal) got into a position to contract with W. C. Bradbury to commence work. In order to reach the Snake River placers sooner and to get irrigation underway, they undertook to complete the Phyllis Canal stage of their overall project. Bradbury used the \$116,000 that Foote and Tompkins had available (an amount less than ten percent of what was needed) and, when they failed to come up with any more capital, advanced \$184,000 to get the Phyllis Canal into operation. (That was just about Bradbury's only hope of recovery, considering the financial limitations of Foote and Tompkins.)

When Bradbury took a \$184,000 lien in March 1891, Foote withdrew from the enterprise, and Tompkins succeeded him in handling the interests of the company. Bradbury reached the limit of his resources and had to shut down in July of 1890, after which Tompkins (unable even to do assessment work on the New York Canal) kept relocating a 100,000 acre-feet water right every sixty days. This continued, as A. J. Wiley described the situation in 1906, "for a long period of time." Finally, Bradbury had William E. Borah foreclose on the lien, April 8, 1893, after which Borah purchased the New York and Phyllis canals for him at a sheriff's sale held on February 8, 1894.

During the Panic of 1893, defunct canal companies did not bring much at sheriff's sales. Bradbury, in fact, was simply taking over the Idaho Mining and Irrigation Company properties in return for his advance in constructing the canal. The company lost only \$116,000 (compared with the \$184,000 Bradbury had been forced to invest in the enterprise) in addition to earlier surveying expenses and costs of assessment work, and at this point, C. H. Tompkins' interest in the New York Canal was extinguished.

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