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Idaho has made her way through another election campaign [1970], although it will probably be months before all the election posters or billboards on telephone poles disappear. We have become accustomed to the 'electronic age' of campaigns and elections, with well-done radio and television commercials for the candidates and instant counting and prediction of votes.

However, campaigns were not always conducted, and elections results reported, with such speed and immediacy.

One hundred years ago, of course, most of the newspaper commentary was on other elections; Idaho was a territory and had her governor appointed. However, there were some interesting items to be commented upon. One, which must have been unique to the "Wild West," concerned political fund-raising efforts in Nevada, already a state. It seems that some uncommonly fervent supporters of one of the major political parties had not once but twice, held up a train to 'raise' money! Our Boise editor commented ironically: "We hail with the joy the contemplated railroad through our territory. We are sadly behind the times."

The first presidential election after territorial status was granted, in 1864, passed nearly unnoticed. The chief national news was of the Civil War, and all eastern information came via the Overland Stage. In 1866 there was still a time gap. The summary of election returns from November 6 was not published at all until the 15th, and scattered returns continued to trickle in for days thereafter. They still came by stage; the first newspaper to use telegraphic reports began the service in 1874.

And while this service may have helped supply out-of-territory news rapidly, it did not do much for Idaho reporting. In the 1892 elections, detailed east-coast voting returns were available the morning after the balloting, while Idaho returns were at that point so minimal (18 precincts!) That no trends whatsoever could be discerned.

With statehood came direct involvement in, and excitement about, presidential elections. One campaign picture, from the files of the Idaho State Historical Society, shows a most attractive young lady, Minnie Mae Straight, prepared to march in a parade supporting the candidacy of William Jennings Bryan, Democratic nominee for President in 1896. Bryan himself did not visit Boise; but free silver was a potent issue in the silver-producing states of the West, and he carried the state easily.

Another campaign picture raises some intriguing and unanswerable questions. The gentleman feeding the pretzel to a donkey--kissing babies isn't the only offbeat chore candidates must perform!--is Senator William E. Borah, who in 1912 was campaigning for reelection after his first term. This picture was taken in Bruneau, probably on September 21, and the donkey is wearing a sign indicating that the citizens of Owyhee County were going to vote on the site for their county seat. The 1912 senatorial elections were the last to be conducted in state legislatures; the Seventeenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in May of 1913, provided for direct election of senators. It is interesting to note that when the Idaho legislature conducted its senatorial election in January of 1913, although Borah won overwhelmingly (21-3 in the Senate and 54-4 in the House) the representatives of Owyhee County voted against him in each case. Could it be that his taking sides on the county issue was not appreciated?

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