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EARLY ONEIDA COUNTY

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Established January 22, 1864, Oneida County originally took in almost all of later Wyoming west of the Continental Divide, along with southeastern Idaho. The largest of Idaho's original 1864 set of counties, and as big as the state of Indiana, in fact, Oneida had about everything necessary for a successful government operation except population. Most of the people who actually lived in the county would not admit it. Franklin, the oldest settlement, had been settled April 14, 1860, in what was then Spokane County, Washington. Residents of Shoshone County from January to December 20, 1861; of Idaho County from then until January 12, 1863; and finally of Boise County until Oneida was established in 1864, the inhabitants of Franklin thought they lived in Cache County, Utah. Soda Springs, a Morrisite community established next to Camp Connor, May 20, 1863, was designated county seat. This was reasonable. None of the newer Mormon Bear Lake Valley settlements (beginning with Paris, which had been founded September 29, 1863) admitted to being in Idaho either. A few days before Oneida County was created, Rich County, Utah, had been established for Bear Lake Mormons, with St. Charles, Idaho, as county seat. Oneida County efforts to exercise jurisdiction over the Cache Valley and Bear Lake communities were rejected for almost a decade, when a boundary survey (accepted as the official territorial line, February 15, 1872) cleared up the dispute.

Well over a year went by before the Oneida County officials got around to assuming office. Finally on April 2, 1865, Oneida County was organized, partly by outsiders appointed for the purpose and partly by Morrisites around Soda Springs, the county seat. No one represented Oneida County in the legislature late in 1864, since an unorganized county could not hold an election. Oneida also skipped the next legislative election, which was held only 12 days after the county organized. But that legislature, responding to some important freight and stage road interests (involved in toll roads to serve traffic on the route from Salt Lake to the Montana mines), transferred the county seat from Soda Springs to Malad, January 5, 1866. Taken entirely by surprise by this unexpected move, most of the county officers refused to move from Morrisite Soda Springs to the new Mormon town of Malad. The county organization was disrupted almost completely, although M. A. Carter, a gentile county clerk and auditor, made the move. Eventually county government got underway again, and Malad quickly developed into a diverse community with two kinds of Latter-day Saints (original and reorganized) as well as gentiles and apostates who had left Utah for the nearest Idaho settlement.

After some curious election contests between the Overland Stage toll road interests and the other citizens, Carter's successor as county clerk, B. F. White (who later served as governor of Montana) welded together a county administration incorporating all elements of the community. That was quite an accomplishment, and B. F. White's crew did not run into serious trouble until after 1872, when the Cache Valley and Bear Lake Mormons began to

participate in Idaho affairs. In 1874, White's combine turned anti-Mormon, but continued to control the county. Becoming the Independent Anti-Mormon Party of Oneida County, White's outfit got by partly because Bear Lake County was established January 5, 1875, leaving Oneida with a much smaller Mormon vote. In the next legislative session, December 4, 1876 to January 12, 1877, Oneida more than made up for the territorial loss to Bear Lake by receiving a strip from Alturas that included the Montana road from present Idaho Falls north to the territorial boundary.

From 1878 through early 1880, the Union Pacific built the narrow gauge Utah and Northern Railway north through new communities of Blackfoot and Eagle Rock to the Montana line. Settlement of upper Oneida County proceeded rapidly.

Finally, B. F. White's Malad ring (as it was later known) ran into opposition from ambitious politicians in Oxford and Blackfoot in 1880. White's Malad ring defeat that year led to disaster for the Independent Anti-Mormon Party of Oneida County until Fred T. Dubois revived the Oneida anti-Mormons in 1884.

Election of an anti-Mormon legislature in 1884 brought major changes to Oneida County. Most of the county was detached to form a new anti-Mormon Bingham County, January 13, 1885. Oneida, which had grown into one of the largest populous counties of the territory, suddenly decided that thereafter no Mormon should be allowed to vote, to hold office, or to serve on a jury. That left important parts of Oneida County with very few voters or potential jurors to participate in law enforcement. Eight years went by before these restrictions were removed.

With the creation of Franklin and Power counties, January 30, 1913, Oneida County got its present boundaries. Malad remains the county seat, but the county contains only a small part of the large area that comprised original Oneida County--in 1864 the last of Idaho's really large counties.

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