



IDAHO STATE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

CALEB LYON'S STATEHOOD SCHEME

Number 377

July 13, 1966

Most Idaho non-resident Territorial governors had political ambitions beyond their territorial positions. For example, Caleb Lyon, Idaho's second governor, eagerly looked forward to securing a United States Senate seat when Idaho became a state. After Lyon left for the east on an extended leave of absence early in 1865, the Democrats published a story which attempted to explain the reasoning behind the Governor's political actions since the summer of 1864. H. C. Street, editor of a Democratic Idaho City newspaper, said he had "positive and direct" evidence to prove conclusively that Lyon returned to Idaho the previous autumn with an Idaho statehood scheme in mind. Lyon and his Republican backers worked hard to get bills through the second legislative session which would leave practical political control in the hands of the Republicans of the territory, even though Idaho was still in the Democratic camp. If these efforts had been successful, the Lyon force planned to call a constitutional convention and seek admission to the Union as a Republican state, just as Nevada had done earlier. After that was accomplished, Lyon's payoff would be a seat in the Senate. The grand scheme failed however, said the editor, because second session Democrats threw out the Republican bills. Lyon then left the territory in disgust. All of this explanation, except for the part about the second session, was later supported by the Republicans themselves after Lyon had fallen out with his own party. A New York correspondent to the Idaho Statesman, December 28, 1865, said Lyon kept the Idaho governorship only through the influence of Senator Edward Dennison Morgan of New York. The correspondent claimed that Morgan, who was supporting the statehood scheme in order to make later use of Lyon in the Senate, put pressure on the administration to prevent Lyon's removal. The movement for Wallace had become so strong by the summer of 1865 that President Johnson had his commission "made out and signed. But [Thurlow] Weed, through Morgan's influence, stopped Wallace's commission in the State Department." The Statesman editor added that although Lyon had tried hard, he failed to stir up support for a

constitutional convention after he returned to Idaho in November, because most people realized that statehood in 1865 was overly premature. In an editorial soon after, the editor of the Owyhee Avalanche agreed that no statehood movement would be feasible until the present court system was perfected. The editor later pointed to Nevada's financial calamities as lucid examples of what premature statehood might lead to.

References:

Idaho World, March 18, 1865, p. 2, c. 2; Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman, February 3, 1866, p. 2, cs. 2-3, April 10, 1866, p. 3, cs. 2-3; Owyhee Avalanche, June 2, 1866, p. 2, c. 2, March 16, 1867, p. 1, c. 2.

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428