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JOHN T. MORRISON

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John T. Morrison came west from Pennsylvania and New York to settle in Caldwell in the summer of 1890, just at the time Idaho became a state. He had excellent credentials for success when he commenced his Idaho career. In 1880, he entered Wooster College in Ohio, where he excelled in literature, debate, oratory, and baseball as well as in traditional academic pursuits. There he became a close friend of William Judson Boone, who had come to Caldwell to serve as pastor of the Presbyterian Church in 1887, just when Morrison (after time out to teach) completed his A.B. at Wooster and moved on to law school at Cornell. Later in 1890, John C. Rice, who had also graduated from Cornell that spring, came out to join in his law practice. When Boone founded the College of Idaho the next year, the law office of Morrison and Rice contributed substantially to getting that institution started. Morrison served for the first two years as professor of English and history, while Rice handled Greek and mathematics. Rice went on to serve as Idaho's Chief Justice, and both of these young attorneys supported Caldwell's Presbyterian Church in a major way. One of half a dozen or so Presbyterians to occupy the governor's office, Morrison had a really distinguished career as a religious leader, serving as Commissioner to the National General Assembly of his church five different times--a record rarely matched.

Boone testified that he also "was a discriminating reader and a real literary critic . . . His home in Caldwell was a gathering place for all who enjoyed the best in music, literature and art . . ." Noted more as a humanist and as a compassionate churchman than as a government leader, Morrison showed too much independence to win consistently after he entered politics. Four times unsuccessful as a candidate for high office, he gave little consideration to picking the winning combines necessary for political success. Often misunderstood in government, he found that much of the Progressive program that he worked for had to be put into effect by others who had more talent in political salesmanship. Yet he joined in bringing a new era to Idaho politics that finally had considerable impact upon the state.

Morrison's initial candidacy for high office scarcely could be regarded as promising. In 1896 four more or less major Idaho parties entered a slate of candidates for state and national office. Least consequential of these parties--all of which were composed primarily

of advocates of unlimited silver coinage--the McKinley Republicans (a decided minority of Idaho's Republicans who could not go quite so far as to place William Jennings Bryan at the head of Idaho's Republican ticket), nominated Morrison for Congress. With 6,054 votes, he ran well behind the 8,984 given William E. Borah (another promising young attorney who also had come to Idaho in 1890), a Silver Republican nominated when Fred T. Dubois failed in his efforts to develop a solid Democratic-Populist-Silver Republican combine for congressional as well as state offices. Both lost to a Populist nominee whose Democratic support increased his vote to 14,487. Not entirely discouraged, Morrison agreed to serve as McKinley Republican State Chairman, March 3, 1898. Even though Silver Republicans as prominent as Borah and state auditor Bartlett Sinclair, who had represented Governor Frank Steunenberg's interests in suppression of the Western Federation of Miners in the Coeur d'Alene region, shifted to Morrison's Republican faction prior to convention time in 1900, McKinley and his adherents could not win in Idaho that year either. Morrison made a second attempt at election to Congress and did better than the other McKinley Republicans. Unlike Sinclair, D. W. Standrod (who ran for governor), and W. B. Heyburn (who managed a conservative Republican faction in the McKinley Republican forces), Morrison and some of his associates criticized the administration of martial law in the Coeur d'Alene mines as a denial of civil rights and as an unsuccessful operation against the offending miners. This divergence became more prominent in 1902.

As had been the case with every nineteenth century Idaho governor (aside perhaps, from McConnell), selection of a United States senator dominated the entire election. In 1902, Borah decided to challenge Heyburn along with former Senator George L. Shoup and several other conservative candidates for a Senate opening. Prior to the 1902 Republican State Convention, Borah had joined forces with Frank R. Gooding, a prominent sheep rancher who had become state chairman and remained prominent as a leader of the organized Republicans (as opposed to those of more independent inclination) for a generation. Then Gooding unexpectedly shifted into an alignment with D. W. Standrod. This forced Borah to accept Morrison as a political associate. (Ever since Morrison as Republican candidate for Congress, had deposed Gooding as state chairman because he was personally objectionable, Morrison and Gooding had irreconcilable differences that affected the course of Republican factionalism in Idaho for several years.) In a few hours after these shifts in lineup, Borah and Morrison defeated Gooding and Standrod for ascendancy in the 1902 Republican State Convention. This time Morrison did not bother to oust Gooding as state chairman, but Borah dominated the party without excessive regard to Republican organization forces. (Borah continued to get along in Idaho politics in spite of opposition of the state organization for most of the next forty years.) With Morrison as a nominee for governor, and with a Progressive platform appropriate for the twentieth century, Borah led a successful Republican campaign

based primarily upon national issues. As a beneficiary of this reversal of Republican misfortune, Morrison entered the governor's office relatively free from encumbrance of divisive local issues associated with mine labor wars, sheep and cattle wars, and similar conflicts that had disturbed previous administrations.

Most of Borah's 1902 Republican platform did not involve proposals for state action: government ownership of railroads, anti-trust demands, and direct election of United States Senators, for example, required national attention. Morrison asked the state legislature for statutory regulation of state banks, for improvements (with more state participation) in Idaho's irrigation district act, for increased support and better planning for the state university, and for equal rights legislation that would give women the same status and powers that men had in ownership and control of property. His request for bank regulation was deferred until the next legislative session. But women's property rights, equality, reform in the irrigation district act, a new fish and game act, and some important additional progressive reforms gained legislative approval. These included a pure food law, arrangements for state inspection of weights and measures, and provision for party primaries to nominate delegates to local and county political conventions. He was also willing to approve a program to assist the Mormons in starting major Idaho sugar beet factories.

Most legislative attention went to the matter of electing a United States senator, however. Borah had the most votes, but not a Republican majority. More than anyone else he had the 1902 Republican victory to his credit. Still, he ran into a combine of conservatives who had run the party unsuccessfully from 1896-1900. Heyburn had been cool toward Gooding until hostility between Borah and Gooding gave him an opening. In a crisis during the Senate contest, Heyburn took advantage of the Borah-Gooding split to enlist Standrod's support. Other conservatives lined up with him. They wanted to avoid electing another Idaho Progressive, capable of matching Senator Dubois' Progressive record. By consolidating all their support behind W. B. Heyburn, they delivered a Republican legislative majority to a strong Conservative Coeur d'Alene mine attorney. Although the Democrats in the legislature were prepared for another fusion arrangement (that had elected Dubois two years before) to give Borah the election anyway, he decided that he ought to honor the Republican caucus decision and avoid the kind of fracas that had come out of most previous Idaho Senate elections. He had to put together a broader combine, though, so that when he might try again in 1906, a similar consolidation of opposition would not ruin his prospects.

In order to break up a solid front of party organization Republicans who had denied him a place in the Senate, Borah decided to join forces with Frank R. Gooding, again. He really had no alternative. Other party leaders such as Heyburn offered no possibility for cooperation. Borah's arrangement left Governor Morrison in a hopeless situation. In 1904, Gooding wanted a chance to

become governor, and Borah decided that he had better go along this time. As a result, Morrison had no opportunity to try for a second term. Although the somewhat unnatural Borah-Gooding combine fell apart again prior to the state convention in 1906, neither Gooding nor Borah had strength enough to exclude the other from high office. So they managed a compromise in such a way that Borah was nominated to the Senate and Gooding secured reelection in 1906.

Still entirely opposed to Gooding, Morrison had no political opportunity either in 1904 or in 1906. He encountered more than a modest amount of enmity from some timberland interests who objected to his policy of gaining a higher return on school endowment land deals.

Friends of a Republican state treasurer were alienated after Morrison got the legislature to provide that returns on investment of idle state funds should accrue to the state treasury, rather than to a private account of the state treasurer. (That system had been standard procedure prior to Morrison's time.) Other complaints of a similar nature afflicted Governor Morrison. At the same time, espousal of public interest in situations like these contributed some political strength to his campaign.

Morrison gained an unexpected opportunity to represent an interest contrary to Governor Gooding's preference after 1906. Along with Edgar Wilson, he joined as local defense counsel for William D. Haywood, who as secretary of the Western Federation of Miners had to respond to charges of conspiracy in the assassination of Frank Steunenberg. Gooding had secured reelection in 1906 on the promise of vigorous prosecution of Haywood. Lack of evidence to corroborate Harry Orchard's confession that, as an employee of Haywood and the Federation, he had blown up Steunenberg, as charged by Gooding among others, ruined the state's case against Haywood. Morrison came out victorious on that issue, but his position brought him a great deal of public misunderstanding. In 1908, Morrison had strong support as a candidate for attorney general. But his legal service for Haywood incurred opposition sufficient to ruin him as a potential candidate, although he had gained strong support.

Enactment of direct primary legislation in 1909 gave Morrison a chance to test his strength in two additional state elections. In 1910 he almost gained a Republican nomination for attorney general. This time he lacked only 383 votes. Then he tried for governor again in 1912. Two other candidates--a Progressive and Conservative--came out ahead of him. Yet again, the 1912 election ran incredibly close.

Only fifteen votes separated the high candidates. Morrison lacked only 396 votes of gaining another nomination. Yet by dividing the Progressive vote, he finally helped a Conservative Republican become governor.

Aside from addiction to political misadventures that retarded his career in government, Morrison had an austere personality designed to negate his effectiveness in public affairs. His Caldwell associate and supporter, Rees H. Davis, identified part of his problem as:

lacking in that graceful quality which enables some men to wear a perennial smile of cordiality. He probably feels it, but can't look it. He gives the impression of lacking generous interest in other people's affairs. He imparts confidences grudgingly and receives them sparingly. His attitude towards the leading party workers is not that of a co-laborer.

Regarding the opposition of organization politicians (such as Gooding) as a credit, he chose some of his associates in government with less skill than his situation demanded. "Consequently he is surrounded (in 1904) and victimized by a class of people who, while seeking for themselves every sordid advantage that politics can yield, pretend to be altogether too lovely to mix in the filthy pool." In church circles, where he felt more comfortable and less imposed upon, he presented a much more friendly and sympathetic appearance. And appropriately enough, he functioned much more effectively and productively in his assignments in church government. Although he compiled a record of substantial achievement in public affairs while governor, he had too hard a time assembling and retaining an effective political combine to enable him to follow an independent course the way Borah did, yet stay in office. As a governor he made a good one-term chief executive; he wasn't the only one of his time to run into that kind of discouraging experience.

As Idaho's best example of a Progressive Republican governor, Morrison deserves credit for initiating an era of reform that had to be developed by some of his successors. He was prepared to go a good deal farther than they were, and aside from losing a few elections by exceptionally narrow margins, he and his Progressive colleagues could have had far greater opportunities to advance their reform program. Morrison, as a Republican, and Moses Alexander, as a Democrat, represented a nationally typical transition from an era of Populist proposals to Progressive reforms characteristic of those who advocated significant political change after 1900. Supporting that trend more clearly than other Idaho governors did, their administrations commenced (in Morrison's case) and concluded (in Alexander's terms) that interesting period of Idaho's development.

(This information has not been edited.)