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EARLY IDAHO SECRETARIES IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Number 123

Most early Idaho secretaries are fairly obscure by now, but one or two at least, are known to have had interesting times.

Silas D. Cochran, who served as private secretary to acting Governor William B. Daniels, got into a situation that the ordinary secretary did not often meet up with. After Caleb Lyon of Lyonsdale took office in 1864, Cochran continued in Lyon's service, acting as territorial secretary. Then when Lyon sneaked out of Lewiston—pretending to hunt ducks—to avoid embroilment in the litigation over legality of the second session of the Idaho legislature, Cochran had to act as governor, although he held no office in the government at all—he was just the secretary who was left holding down all the executive offices when the regular officials were out of town. He was not helped in the least in the management of his office when the sheriff and six deputies—acting under the mandate of the local probate judge—hailed his office files and records off to the Lewiston jail, locked them up, and kept them under a perpetual guard. Suspicious of all Idaho officials after Lyon's getaway, they did not trust Cochran to protect his office files from theft; for a while, in fact, they felt dubious about trusting Cochran not to leave town clandestinely the way Lyon had, and they offered to lock Cochran up in the jail with his office files to make sure he did not disappear also. Cochran showed little enthusiasm for being locked up, but he did promise to stay in town until some regular Idaho executive should turn up to relieve him of the burden of being governor and territorial secretary.

After two months, the regular secretary showed up. He had spent the summer and fall of 1864 trying without success to cross the plains during some Indian wars, and finally had to come to Lewiston by way of Panama and San Francisco. Cochran, relieved of his duties as a private secretary, went off to Elk City to try mining.

Cochran's second successor as a private secretary for the early executive officials of Idaho also had his troubles. Since Congress had failed for a time to provide any funds for running Idaho, the territorial credit had got off to a bad start. Then the regular territorial secretary, Horace C. Gilson, absconded to Hong Kong with the unexpended balance of \$42,788.25 of Idaho governmental funds—what amounted to the whole territorial treasury. (He apparently was the best paid secretary in a governmental office in early Idaho history. No government secretary in any other territory of the United States did anything like that well, for that matter.) Although the defalcation itself was not known until later, Idaho's territorial credit got still worse as time went on with no funds to run the government. By the summer of 1866, both of the regular executive officials had absconded: Governor Lyon had made off with all the Indian money—\$46,418.40—just when the territorial secretary had run off with the Idaho treasury. S.

R. Howlett, like Cochran, a private secretary left in charge of Idaho's government when the regular executive office staff was gone, found that he had to pay for his governmental office purchases out of his own private funds. He did better than Cochran, though. When Idaho finally got a governor again in the summer of 1866, Howlett was given an official appointment as territorial secretary. He served in that office for several hectic years.