

## THE NORTH IDAHO ANNEXATION ISSUE

The tourist who follows the Yellowstone Trail from Missoula to Spokane climbs the Bitterroot mountains and on the summit of the pass leaves the state of Montana and enters Idaho. Here a mountain range separates two political divisions. A few hours later he crosses the Idaho-Washington line in the level valley of the Spokane, where the dividing line is entirely artificial. He has crossed the Idaho Panhandle, and may wonder why, in a land where it would seem that the topography would determine the political areas, this narrow strip of Idaho along the western slopes of the Bitterroot range should be wedged in between the bulky masses of Montana and Washington.

Idaho extends from the forty-second parallel on the south to the forty-ninth on the north. Its area comprises some 83,000 square miles and over 80% of this lies south of the forty-sixth parallel. This extension of the state north of the parallel contains less than one-fifth of its surface and lies across the railroads and the principal routes of travel which run from East to West. For many years and until the building of the North and South Highway, the person who wished to go from North Idaho to Boise, the state capital, had to make a circuitous journey through neighboring states.

The late Harvey Scott once wrote in an *Oregonian* editorial: "It has always been held by many people that the Old Oregon country, when cut up into territories which were subsequently erected into states, was very badly divided."<sup>1</sup> He was referring to the Panhandle strip as an example of inconvenient and faulty division. Because of these conditions the citizens living in the northern counties tried to separate from the rest of Idaho Territory and either to establish a new territory or to be annexed to Washington. Although the crux of the matter lay in the separation of the Panhandle from South Idaho, the annexation idea was so constantly in the minds of the people at the time when its attainment seemed possible and so often was the attempt designated as the "Annexation" movement in the newspapers of the period, that the term has been employed in the title of this article. It began to be a political and economic issue soon after the removal of the territorial capital to Boise in 1864 and continued until the admission of Idaho as a state in 1890.

The story of the way the Panhandle came to be formed goes

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oregonian*, June 13, 1907.

back to the days of the Civil War, when matters that seemed of minor importance received a casual and hasty treatment. When Washington Territory was organized in 1853, its southern boundary was the Columbia river to its intersection with the forty-sixth parallel, and from this point it followed the said parallel to the main range of the Rocky mountains. Oregon was admitted to the Union in 1859 with its present metes and bounds, and all the eastern part of Oregon Territory which had been cut off when the state was created was joined for the time being to Washington Territory. Washington Territory from 1859 to 1863 included the present states of Washington and Idaho, the northwestern part of Montana, and the southwestern part of Wyoming. The only change that occurred in these four years was the transfer, in 1861, from Washington Territory, of a strip east of the thirty-third meridian (Washington) and lying between the forty-second and forty-third parallels of latitude. This was incorporated into Nebraska Territory.<sup>2</sup>

The Indian wars in the region of the upper Columbia were ended in 1858, and an influx of prospectors and settlers followed. Placer gold mines were discovered in the valley of the Clearwater in 1860, and in the Salmon river country in 1861. Warrens and Boise Basin were found in 1862. By 1863, several thousand men were working in the mining camps, while many hundreds were employed in packing food and implements to the miners. Supply points like Walla Walla and Lewiston gave promise of becoming permanent towns.

There was a need now for a government in the interior less remote than the Washington territorial government at Olympia. And at the same time an opinion was growing in the Puget Sound country that both sections would be better off if separated. In an editorial in the *Washington Standard* (Olympia), April 5, 1862, Mr. John Miller Murphy argued that the time had come for a division, "in order that the mining portion may be able to form a system of laws which will suit their peculiar circumstances, and thus avoid that conflict of interests which must result from an attempt to bring them under the control of laws now in operation and which are well suited to the agricultural portion of our territory." The editor went on to argue for a boundary line running north from the northeast corner of the state of Oregon, as such a division would leave Washington a territory of good shape and reasonable size with large and valuable

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<sup>2</sup> 12 Stat. L. 244.

agricultural areas east of the Cascades to balance the commercial and lumbering interests west of the mountains.

Later in the year, November 1, 1862, the *Standard* printed the following editorial from *The Golden Age* of Lewiston: "Several of our leading citizens, after an exchange of views touching our present position in Washington territory, have decided to make a movement toward dividing the territory, and a committee has been appointed to confer with the citizens in every mining town or camp east of the Cascades. We are glad to see this movement on the part of our citizens. We should much prefer to enter the Union as a state, but if we cannot do so, as our sister state California did, let us enter the Union as the Territory of Idaho. The committee proposes to take the Columbia river down to the Oregon state line as its western boundary; the northern, eastern, and southern boundaries will be such states or territories as are contiguous to us. This will give the Territory of Idaho about one hundred thousand square miles, and in five years, we predict it will prove one of the richest states in the confederacy."

The *Standard* in commenting on the above heartily approved the idea of division, but objected to the separation of the Walla Walla region and the establishment of the Columbia as the western boundary of Idaho. "It is more reasonable that our domains should extend far enough east to give Washington Territory an area equal to Oregon, so that we may hope to be admitted as a state sometime during the century."

An unsuccessful attempt was made in the Washington legislature of 1860-61 to memorialize Congress to create a territory embracing the new settlements in the interior, to be known as the territory of Walla Walla.<sup>3</sup> In 1863, a proposal to get legislative backing from the same source in favor of the organization of a state of Idaho was defeated in the lower house, after passing the Council on the last day of the session, January 29, 1863.<sup>4</sup> The majority in the Washington territorial legislature representing the people west of the Cascades was not yet ready to support the political aspirations of the people of the interior, but Congress had already taken the preliminary steps to form a new territory in the mining regions.

On the 15th of December, 1862, Mr. Kellogg, of Illinois, introduced a resolution that the Committee on Territories should be instructed to inquire into the propriety of establishing a territorial government for that region of the country in which were situated

<sup>3</sup> *Wash. House Journal*, 1860-61, pp. 410-411.

<sup>4</sup> *Wash. House Journal*, 1862-63, p. 220.

the Salmon river gold mines, and that they should report by bill or otherwise.<sup>5</sup> The first result of the Committee's activity was reported to the House seven days after the Kellogg resolution, but the bill which embodied the final judgment of the Committee was not acted upon until February 12, 1863, when Mr. Ashley, Chairman of the Committee, reported back H. B. 738 to provide a temporary government for the Territory of Montana, with a recommendation for its passage.<sup>6</sup> There was a brief debate; an effort to strike out the clause forbidding slavery in the territory was lost, 38 to 96; and the bill passed by a vote of 85 to 39. In H.B. 738, the proposed Territory of Montana included all the present state of Wyoming except a quadrangular area in the southwestern part, of about 4000 square miles; all of Idaho south of the forty-sixth parallel; and the southwest corner of Montana, with an area of some 15,000 square miles. It will be noted that it had its main axis running east and west.<sup>7</sup>

On the following day, February 13, H.B. 738 was received by the Senate, referred to the Senate Committee on Territories, and the next day Mr. Wade,<sup>8</sup> Chairman of the Committee, reported the bill to the Senate without amendments. Here the matter stood and nothing further was done until the last day of the life of the 37th Congress, March 3rd, 1863. That was a fateful day in the history of North Idaho.

The bill came up in due order<sup>9</sup> and Senator Doolittle (Wis.) urged as a practical matter the consideration of the Montana bill. Grimes (Iowa) inquired where the proposed territory was situated. Ten Eyck (N.J.), Wilkinson (Minn.), Davis (Kan.) and Nesmith (Ore.) advocated its consideration and Nesmith declared that in consequence of the gold discoveries, 50,000 to 60,000 men would be in the region in the next few months.

On the other hand, Harris (N.J.), and Howe (Wis.) opposed consideration. Harris stated that according to his information there

<sup>5</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 37th Congress, third session, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 37th Congress, third session, p. 914.

<sup>7</sup> Boundaries according to the House bill: Commencing at a point formed by the intersection of the forty-fifth degree of north latitude with the twenty-seventh degree of longitude west from Washington; thence due west on the forty-fifth degree of north latitude to a point formed by its intersection with the thirty-third degree of longitude west from Washington; thence due north along the thirty-third degree of longitude to its intersection with the forty-sixth degree of latitude; thence west along the forty-sixth degree of latitude to a point formed by its intersection with the eastern boundary of the State of Oregon in the channel of the Snake river; thence south along the boundary line of Oregon till it intersects with the forty-second degree of north latitude; thence east along the forty-second degree of latitude to a point formed by its intersection with the thirty-third degree of longitude west from Washington; thence south along the thirty-second degree of longitude to a point formed by its intersection with the forty-first degree of north latitude; thence east along the forty-first degree of latitude to a point formed by its intersection with the twenty-seventh degree of longitude west from Washington; thence north along the twenty-seventh degree of longitude to the place of beginning.

<sup>8</sup> The Senate Committee on Territories: Wade, Wilkinson, Hale, Browning, Lane (Kansas), Carlyle, Wilson (Missouri).

<sup>9</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 37th Congress, third session, p. 1509.

were few people and no settled population in the proposed territory. Howe urged the importance of substituting civil government for military control in those parts of the Confederate states occupied by the Union armies. It was the last day; civil government seemed to him a vital necessity, and he urged the postponement of the Montana question.

In reply, Wilkinson (Minn.) urged that other business should be laid aside so that consideration might be had on the measure, and Nesmith seconded his efforts. The senior senator from Oregon remarked that there were 15,000 to 20,000 people already in the proposed territory. The Senate proceeded with the consideration of the bill.

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*(To be continued)*