

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### NATIONAL ISSUES IN IDAHO DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Number 478

1975

With the breakup of the national Democratic Party in the election of 1860, Abraham Lincoln emerged as president of the United States even though most of the nation's voters rejected his candidacy. Then in the southern secession crisis which followed Lincoln's election, partisan political structure in the Pacific Northwest went through the same kind of upheaval and reorganization that brought turmoil and war to the rest of the country. In 1866, both Oregon and Washington had Democratic factions supporting Stephan A. Douglas and John C. Breckenridge for president, and Senator Joe Lane of Oregon gained national attention as Breckenridge's candidate for vice president. Washington's congressional delegate, Isaac I. Stevens, also supported Breckenridge, and after the election, he retired from politics to resume his military career as a general in the United States Army. Lane retired also, preferring to maintain the Union but regarding the Civil War as an absurd way of trying to do that. Republican supporters of Abraham Lincoln elected John R. McBride to Congress and shared one of Oregon's two Senate seats with the Douglas (anti-Lane) Democrats. So when the Idaho gold rush brought a horde of miners to newly established Shoshone County, most of the voters of that region had gone on record as preferring a war to preserve the Union. But they differed considerably on whether or not to support President Lincoln along with the war. Lincoln had much less strength in the Idaho mining camps, though, than in the older settlements of the Pacific Northwest.

In the confusion of Washington's congressional campaign of 1861, three candidates contested for votes. Lincoln appointed as new territorial governor an old friend who had settled on Puget Sound a few years before. But before the new governor--William H. Wallace--could return to Washington and take office, he became the Republican nominee for Congress. A Douglas Democrat, Selucius Garfielde, gained the opposing nomination. But the Breckenridge Democrats (who had lost control of their party after Steven's departure and after a delegation from the Idaho mines provided the Douglas pro-war faction their margin of victory in the Democratic territorial convention) chose to provide an additional candidate of their own. For this dubious honor they presented former Chief Justice Edward Lander. Like Joe Lane and Oregon's Breckenridge Democrats, they persisted in offering to preserve the Union without resorting to war. Garfielde and the Douglas Democrats endorsed the war, but with slightly less enthusiasm than Wallace and the Lincoln Republicans. With the secessionist and anti-war vote, Lander had his greatest strength around Walla Walla (where he came close to winning a popular majority) and in the Idaho mines. He did nearly as well in Shoshone County (99 votes) as Wallace did (107 votes), but Garfielde and the Douglas Democrats were closer to the Republicans than to the Lander Democrats. So the Idaho miners started off by supporting the Union and the war, but by rejecting Lincoln and the Republicans.

In the congressional elections of 1862, Oregon voted for the Union Party (a combine of Republicans and Douglas Democrats), but the victorious Union candidates all were of Democratic origin: This result matched the previous year's vote in the Idaho mines. But by 1862 (a bad year nationally for Lincoln and the Republicans, but a good year for the Union Party that gave Lincoln a broader base of support), a strong Confederate element had moved into the Idaho mines. By 1863, when Idaho became a

territory with W. H. Wallace as governor, the Confederate element had gained ascendancy--especially in the mines that became Montana in 1864. But in Idaho's congressional election of 1863, most of the population could not vote. Many of the new Confederate Democrats voted anyway, disregarding Idaho's organic act that restricted the electorate to those who had reached Idaho by the time Congress created the new commonwealth. But Wallace, with the help of the Garfield Democrats, gained another term in Congress by a narrow margin. That same year, Washington returned to the Democratic fold, and Lincoln fared poorly in the Pacific Northwest as a whole. In Idaho's 1864 Union convention, Lincoln conservative supporters gained control long enough to nominate a congressional candidate. However, a second territorial convention (held to appease the North because the original convention represented only the Boise region) replaced the original, quite moderate, Republican candidate with a Radical. By this time, the overwhelming Confederate Democratic majority could vote, and in 1864, Idaho entered a long era of Democratic control. Enough of the Democrats had arrived as Confederate refugees from Missouri that, once the legislative apportionment began to reflect the popular vote after 1864, Idaho emerged as a strongly southern territory. (In 1864, the legislature--still unresponsive to the popular majority--remained Union in control, but the next year, only one Union Party candidate got elected to the entire legislature.) Lincoln and his Union Party had lost Idaho by the end of the Civil War, and in the bitter contest between confederate Democrats and Radical Republicans that followed, the Radicals soon had to resort to military support from Fort Boise for protection. When Lincoln approved the act of Congress establishing Idaho as a territory on March 4, 1863, he had the support of a new Union territory. But within a year, shifting patterns of emigration had changed the situation entirely, and Lincoln did not enjoy substantial popular support in the expanded Idaho mines. His adherents, in fact, had to keep pretty quiet during the Fourth of July celebrations in order to survive.

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