

The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard

Thoughts of Utah history always come to mind as Utah celebrates its anniversary of becoming a state on January 4, 1896. This year that was anniversary #128. I tend to think of Brigham Young as governor and then as Utah receiving statehood with little thought about what happened in between.

Utah first petitioned for statehood in 1849 as the State of Deseret. This name was chosen by Brigham Young and would have included a large land area including most of Utah and Nevada as well as sections of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon. It was almost 50 years later that a smaller area was designated as the State of Utah.

In that half century, probably the most historic event was the Civil War, but there were many events that helped shape the future of Utah. Among those that I found interesting was that fact that it didn't go from Brigham Young to statehood without the help of the thirteen other governors that held office during that time.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the men were attorneys with a few being newspaper editors and some working entirely in politics. Half were in favor of the Mormons in Utah and the other half against them and their beliefs. There were nine Republicans, seven Democrats and one that belonged to the Know Nothing Party. Some changed affiliations from one party to another. While most served at least one term, there were six who were in office a year or less, sometimes only one month. Three were brigadier generals in the Civil War, although not all on the same side and one spent the war years as a prisoner of war.

Brigham Young was, of course, the first governor of the territory. He served in that office for eight years. He was appointed by President Millard Fillmore and reappointed for a second term by President Franklin Pierce. He had many concerns regarding the territory and its beginnings including organizing the territorial government, selecting the location of the capital and building a territorial statehouse, establishing a public library, improving relations with the Indians and between the federal government and the Mormons, and developing manufacturing and agriculture. Rumors circulated that the Mormons were rebelling against federal authority, so President James Buchanan replaced Young as governor in 1857.

Alfred Cummings became the second governor of the territory, being appointed by President James Buchanan. Accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, he was escorted to Utah by a large military force under the command of Colonel Albert Johnston. The officials in Washington, D.C. were certain a "rebellion" was underway in Utah. When they arrived, they found Salt Lake City nearly abandoned. Cummings was determined to avoid any violence so the "Utah War" was quickly settled. He had many goals for Utah including the construction of roads and bridges, mail service, and cattle rustling and other lawlessness which needed addressing. He left Utah in May of 1861, knowing that President Abraham Lincoln was not going to reappoint him.

The third governor of the territory was John Dawson. He was a lawyer, farmer and newspaper editor before going into politics. President Abraham Lincoln appointed him to that position in 1861. He was against the Mormons and they showed no good feelings toward him in return. He left to go back East after less than a month in office and was attacked as he traveled through Parley's Canyon. His attackers were killed by law enforcement officers.

A former attorney, Stephen Selwin Harding served as the fourth governor and was also appointed by President Lincoln. He was friendly toward the Mormons for a while then soon became critical of church leaders and the practice of polygamy. The residents successfully petitioned for him to be removed from office after less than a year.

Also appointed by President Lincoln, James Duane Doty became the fifth governor. He held several public offices in Michigan and Wisconsin, including being a territorial governor. He was skillful in working with people and relations between the Mormons and the federal government improved. He emphasized the importance of schools and Indian treaties. Reappointed by Lincoln, he died in office in 1865 and was buried in the Fort Douglas cemetery.

Charles Durkee was a businessman and civic and political leader in Wisconsin who had served as territorial legislator, congressman and U.S. senator. He was appointed the sixth governor in 1865 and moved forward with his ideas for development and good will with the Mormons. He served for four years.

John Wilson Shafer served as the seventh governor for only a short time. He served as a brigadier general in the Union Army and was active in politics before being appointed by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1870. He was determined to end the "rebellion" in Utah. He died suddenly in Salt Lake City the year he arrived.

Vernon H. Vaughn was appointed the eighth governor by President Ulysses S. Grant when Governor Shafer passed away. He had been serving as Territorial Secretary in Utah. Vaughn was not reappointed after his one year in office.

George Lemuel Woods, the ninth governor, was originally from Missouri but moved to Oregon where he prospected for gold and practiced law before entering politics. He was named to the Oregon Supreme Court and then became governor of Oregon. When he was not re-elected, President Grant named him governor of Utah in 1871. He was critical of the Nauvoo Legion, probate courts, and polygamy. He served only one four-year term in office.

The tenth governor of the territory was Samuel Beach Axtell, appointed by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1875. He practiced law in Michigan and California and served in Congress as both a Democrat and a Republican. He was more moderate than those who had come before him and was criticized by the people who were against Mormons. He had only served a few months when President Grant sent him to New Mexico to be the governor there.

George W. Emery served as eleventh governor. Originally from Maine, he was a federal tax collector in the south before President Grant chose him for governor of Utah. He

accomplished election reforms and helped to expand government service of the population which was growing rapidly. When President Grant visited Utah in 1875, he was pleasantly amazed at how friendly the people were to him and told Governor Emery that he had been “deceived about the Mormons.” Emery County was named for Governor Emery.

A native of Kentucky, Eli Houston Murray was a brigadier general during the Civil War. He was also an attorney, a U.S. marshal and a newspaper editor before being appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes as the twelfth governor of Utah. Murray’s attacks on the Mormons influenced national policy. Twenty-three bills dealing with polygamy were put before Congress during this time. President Chester A. Arthur reappointed Murray as governor but President Grover Cleveland dismissed him in 1886. The city of Murray was named after him.

Caleb Walton West was selected by President Grover Cleveland as the thirteenth governor in 1886. He served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War and was a prisoner of war for most of that time. Before becoming governor, he had been a municipal judge. He visited with some of the polygamists who had been put in jail but they refused his offer of a conditional amnesty. His first term ended when Benjamin Harrison became President and he became governor again in 1893 when Cleveland returned to office. In January 1896, the governorship was given to Heber M. Wells, the first state governor of Utah.

Arthur Lloyd Thomas was named the fourteenth governor of the territory of Utah in 1889 by President Benjamin Harrison. He replaced Governor Caleb West who would go on to serve another term following that of Governor Thomas. Improving education and the development of irrigation to open more land were his two major objectives. He ran for the office of first governor of the state of Utah but was unsuccessful. He eventually became the postmaster of Salt Lake City.

With Utah achieving statehood, Heber M. Wells became the first governor of the state on January 4, 1896.

(In looking for information about the men listed above, I found several articles by the Utah Division of State History, Wikipedia and others. I invite you to check them out online and read in detail about these men who were our early governors.)

Heber M. Wells

First Governor of the Territory of Utah from 1850–1858



Brigham Young



First Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1850–1858

Named governor in 1850 by Millard Fillmore, he was reappointed in 1854 by Franklin Pierce when Lt. Col. Edward J. Steptoe refused the post. Young as territorial executive was concerned with organizing the territorial government, selecting the location of the capital and building a territorial statehouse, codification of laws, organizing and establishing a territorial library, normalizing relations with the Indians and between the federal government and the Mormons, and developing home manufacturing and agriculture. Acting on rumors that the Mormons were rebelling against federal authority, James Buchanan replaced Young as governor in 1857.

Governor Young was born in 1801, and died in 1877.

Alfred Cumming

Second Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1858–1861
Democratic Party



Born in Sand Hills, Georgia, in 1802, Cumming served in federal, military, and civic posts, including mayor of Augusta, Georgia, before his appointment as governor in July 1857 by James Buchanan. Accompanied by his wife, Elizabeth W. Randall, he was escorted to Utah by a large force under Col. Albert Sidney Johnston. En route, in January 1858, he was reappointed to a full term as governor. On orders of Brigham Young, Salt Lake City was almost abandoned when he arrived. Cumming was determined to avoid violence, and the so-called Utah War was quickly settled. Cumming's concerns as governor included the unusual powers of the local probate courts; Indians; construction of roads and bridges; the sale of public lands; mail service; lawlessness, including cattle rustling and murder; and poor penal conditions. He left Utah in May 1861, knowing that Republican Abraham Lincoln would not reappoint him. He died in Augusta, Georgia, in 1873.

John W. Dawson

Third Governor of the Territory of Utah, 1861
Republican/Democratic Party



Born in 1820, a native of Cambridge, Indiana, Dawson married Amanda Thornton and was a lawyer, farmer, and newspaper editor before entering politics as a KnowNothing. He later was a Democrat, and finally a Republican. Abraham Lincoln named him governor in 1861.

Antagonistic toward the Mormons and despised by them, Dawson left for the East after less than a month in Utah, and was attacked and beaten as he traveled through Parley's Canyon. Three men allegedly involved in the assault were later killed by law officers. Dawson died in 1877 in Indiana.

See also: *Tribune* article, ["Third Governor Was Run Out of Utah After 3 Weeks"](#)

Stephen Selwyn Harding

Fourth Governor of the Territory of Utah from 1862–1863
Republican Party



A native of Ontario County, New York, and an ardent abolitionist, Harding married Avoline Sprout and practiced law in Indiana before Abraham Lincoln named him governor of the Utah Territory in 1862. Conciliatory toward the Mormons at first, he soon became critical of church leaders and the practice of polygamy. The Mormons successfully petitioned for his removal. He served as chief justice of the Colorado Territory until forced out of office for alleged incompetence and immorality.

Governor Harding was born in 1808 and died in 1891, in Indiana.

James Duane Doty

Fifth Governor of the Territory of Utah from 1863–1865
Democratic Party



Born in Salem, New York, in 1799, Doty married Sarah Collins and served in several government posts in Michigan before moving to Wisconsin, where he was a delegate to Congress, territorial governor (1841–44), and state legislator. Originally a Democrat, he became a Free Soiler and then a Republican. Abraham Lincoln named him superintendent of Indian affairs for Utah in 1861 and then to the vacated position of governor in 1863. Under his skillful management, federal relations with the Mormons improved. He emphasized the importance of schools and Indian treaties, and suggested using the Colorado River to transport Utah products to markets in California. Reappointed by Lincoln, he died in office in 1865 and was buried in the Fort Douglas cemetery.

Governor Doty was born in 1799.

Charles Durkee

Sixth Governor of the Territory of Utah from 1865–1869
Liberal/Republican Party



A native of Royalton, Vermont, born in 1805, Durkee became a business, civic, and political leader in Wisconsin, serving as territorial legislator, congressman, and U.S. senator (1855–61), affiliated at various times with the Liberty, Free Soil, and Republican parties. Appointed governor in 1865, Durkee pursued an energetic course oriented toward territorial development and harmony with the Mormons, although he was critical of the lack of public schools. He returned to Wisconsin in late 1869 and died in 1870 in Omaha.

John Wilson Shaffer

Seventh Governor of the State of Utah, in 1870
Republican Party



He was born in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1827, but little else is known of his early life. Brevetted brigadier general in the Union Army, he was active in Republican politics in Illinois before Ulysses S. Grant named him governor of Utah in 1870. He was determined to carry out Grant's policy of crushing "rebellion" in the territory, a stance that brought him into conflict with other officials. Among other things, Shaffer attempted to neutralize the Nauvoo Legion by proscribing military drills and gatherings. He died suddenly in Salt Lake City the year of his arrival. Following Masonic rites, his body was sent to Illinois for burial.

Vernon H. Vaughan

Eighth Governor of the State of Utah from 1870–1871
Republican Party



Born in Alabama, in 1838, Vaughan was Territorial Secretary in Utah when Governor Shaffer died. Ulysses S. Grant named him to fill the vacancy. The only event of consequence during his administration was the Wooden Gun Rebellion—an illegal (according to Shaffer’s proclamation) drill in November 1870 by members of the Nauvoo Legion. Undoubtedly a lark, the incident nevertheless resulted in the arrest and trial of those involved, but all were released. Vaughan was not reappointed. He died in 1878 in Sacramento.

George Lemuel Woods

Ninth Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1871–1875
Republican Party



Born in Boone County, Missouri, in 1832, Woods moved with his family to Oregon, where he attended school. He prospected for gold and practiced law before entering politics. A founder of the Republican party in Oregon, he was named to the Idaho Territory Supreme Court in 1865 and ran successfully for governor of Oregon in 1866. When Woods failed to win renomination, Ulysses S. Grant named him governor of Utah in 1871. Woods saw the Nauvoo Legion as a threat to federal authority, and he also criticized the unusually broad jurisdiction of locally controlled probate courts. He urged the establishment of free public schools, comprehensive mining legislation, the abolition of polygamy, further railroad development, and federal funds to improve irrigation. He was not reappointed, however, and returned to practicing law. He died in Portland, Oregon, in 1890.

Samuel Beach Axtell

Tenth Governor of the Territory of Utah, 1875
Democratic Party



Born near Columbus, Ohio, in 1819, Axtell attended Oberlin and Western Reserve Colleges, married Adaline S. Williams, practiced law in Michigan and California, and served in Congress (1867-71) as both a Democrat and a Republican. Ulysses S. Grant named him governor of Utah Territory in 1875. More moderate than his immediate predecessors, he was harshly criticized by the growing anti-Mormon element in Utah. After only a few months in Utah, he was sent by Grant to New Mexico Territory as governor and was later chief justice there. He died in 1891 in Morristown, New Jersey.

George W. Emery

Eleventh Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1875–1880



Born in 1830 in Penobscot, Maine, Emery graduated from Dartmouth, studied law in Albany, New York, and was a federal tax collector in the South before Ulysses S. Grant named him governor of Utah Territory in 1875. Despite the bitter Mormon-Gentile feud of the late nineteenth century, Emery accomplished election reforms and expanded government services for a fast-growing population. When President Grant visited Utah in October 1875 he was amazed at his friendly reception and reportedly told Emery he had been deceived about the Mormons. In February 1880, after Emery's term had ended, the legislature named a new county in central Utah after him. He died in 1909 in Marshfield, Massachusetts.

Eli Houston Murray

Twelfth Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1880–1886



A native of Cloverport, Kentucky, born in 1843, Murray attained the rank of brigadier general during the Civil War and also completed a law degree at the University of Louisville. He married Evelyn Neal and was a U.S. marshal and newspaper editor before Rutherford B. Hayes named him governor in 1880. Murray certified the election of Allen G. Campbell (who never served) as delegate to Congress, although George Q. Cannon, an LDS church leader and a polygamist, received more than ten times as many votes. Murray's attacks on the Mormons influenced national policy. Following the Cannon incident, twenty-three bills dealing with polygamy were introduced in Congress. Chester A. Arthur reappointed Murray, but Grover Cleveland dismissed him in 1886. Murray worked as a journalist in San Diego before returning to Kentucky. He died in Bowling Green in 1896. The city of Murray in Salt Lake County is named for him.

Caleb Walton West

Thirteenth Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1886–1888 *and* 1893–1896
Democratic Party



Born in Cynthiana, Kentucky, in 1844, West attended Millersburg Academy and served in the Confederate Army, incarcerated most of the time as a prisoner of war. He married Nancy Frazer. A lawyer and a municipal judge, he was selected by Grover Cleveland to replace Eli Murray in 1886. A moderate Democrat—the first Democratic governor since Alfred Cumming—he visited imprisoned polygamists, but his offer of conditional amnesty was refused. He encouraged the organization of groups such as the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce that would serve broad community interests and include all elements of society. His first term ended with the election of Benjamin Harrison in 1888, but he returned as governor in 1893 following the re-election of Cleveland. By then the Woodruff Manifesto of 1890 had ended church-sanctioned polygamy, and national political parties had replaced the old Peoples (Mormon) party and Liberal (non-Mormon) party. In January 1896 the governorship passed from West to Heber M. Wells, the first state governor. West was a special agent for the U.S. Treasury on the West Coast until 1901. He died in 1909.

Arthur Lloyd Thomas

Fourteenth Governor of the Territory of Utah, from 1889–1893
Republican Party



Born in 1851 in Chicago, Thomas grew up in Pittsburgh and married Helena Reinberg. He filled staff positions in the U.S. House of Representatives before serving as territorial secretary under governors Emery, Murray, and West. A member of the Utah Commission, he was named governor in 1889 by Benjamin Harrison. Regarding the Mormons, Thomas seemed ambivalent, favoring first the harsh measures in the Cullom Bill and, later, amnesty for convicted polygamists. Improved education for children and the development of irrigation to open more land for settlement were two of his major concerns. An unsuccessful candidate for the Republican nomination for the first state governor in 1895, Thomas remained in Utah as postmaster of Salt Lake City from 1898 to 1914, and was also involved in land development, mining, and publishing. He died in Salt Lake City in 1924.



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