NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

VOLUME XXXII SUMMER 1989 NUMBER 2


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NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

The *Quarterly* solicits contributions of scholarly or popular interest dealing with the following subjects: the general (e.g., the political, social, economic, constitutional) or the natural history of Nevada and the Great Basin; the literature, languages, anthropology, and archaeology of these areas; reprints of historic documents (concerning people, flora, fauna, historical or archaeological sites); reviews and essays concerning the historical literature of Nevada, the Great Basin, and the West.

Prospective authors should send their work to The Editor, *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, Nevada 89503. Papers should be typed double-spaced and sent in duplicate. All manuscripts, whether articles, edited documents, or essays, should conform with the most recent edition of the University of Chicago Press *Manual of Style*. Footnotes should be typed double-spaced on separate pages and numbered consecutively. Correspondence concerning articles and essays is welcomed, and should be addressed to The Editor.

The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* (ISSN 0047-9462) is published quarterly by the Nevada Historical Society, 1650 N. Virginia, Reno, NV 89503. The *Quarterly* is sent to all members of the Society. Membership dues are: Student, $5; Senior Citizen without *Quarterly*, $7.50; Regular, $25; Family, $30; Sustaining, $35; Contributing, $50; Associate Fellow, $100; Corporate Fellow, $250; Associate Patron, $500; Patron, $1,000; Life, $2,500. Membership applications and dues should be sent to the Director, Nevada Historical Society, 1650 N. Virginia, Reno, NV 89503. Second-class postage paid at Reno, Nevada. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, 1650 N. Virginia, Reno, Nevada 89503.

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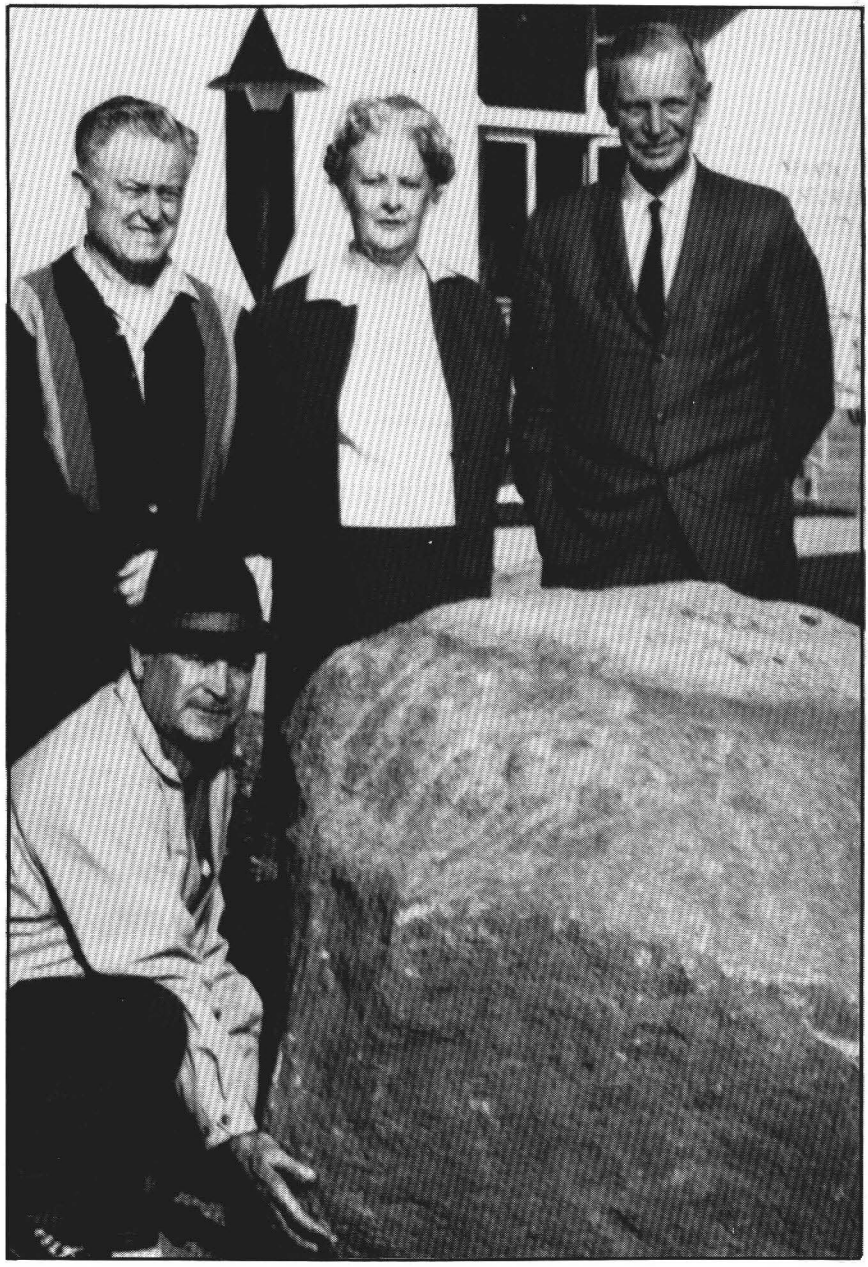
FRONT COVER; Photo collage. George Wingfield, c. 1928 and the *Nevada State Herald*, Wells, Nevada, January 31, 1930. *(Nevada Historical Society)*



Mrs. Andy Welliver, in front of the Nevada Historical Society on December 13, 1989 with (l) Board of Trustee member Jack Horgan and (r) Idlewild Park Superintendent Ivan Sack, at the installation of a Native American ceremonial rock removed from the Matley family ranch. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

IN MEMORIAM
MRS. ANDY WELLIVER

PETER L. BANDURRAGA

MRS. ANDY WELLIVER DIED IN RENO on August 23, 1988. Born Marion E. Bernhard on September 1, 1905, in Marin County, California, she served as director of the Nevada Historical Society from 1969 to 1972. She began work with the Historical Society as an assistant to the director, Clara Beatty, in 1958. She became assistant director in 1963 and was named acting director on Mrs. Beatty's death in 1967. The "acting" was dropped by the Board of Trustees in 1969. Earlier she had been a stringer for the International News Service and attended the University of Nevada at Reno.

During her years at the Nevada Historical Society, Mrs. Welliver oversaw a number of important developments, including the construction of and moving into the Historical Society's museum and library on the UNR campus. She edited the *Quarterly* for over a decade.

When she retired at the end of 1971, Chairman of the Board of Trustees Russell R. Elliott thanked her for her hard work and excellent achievement for the Historical Society: "It will be difficult to find a suitable replacement for Mrs. Welliver, since her long years of public service, her extensive knowledge of places, events, and individuals associated with the history of Nevada, and her wide acquaintance throughout the state cannot easily be duplicated."

INTRODUCTION

ERIC N. MOODY

FROM VIRTUALLY THE MOMENT, MORE THAN EIGHTY YEARS AGO, that he burst upon the scene as a major mine owner in Goldfield, George Wingfield has held an important place in Nevada's history. His death in 1959, at the age of eighty-three, marked the end of his involvement in state affairs, but not the controversy that surrounded his life and career.

Wingfield, who readily described himself as a "capitalist," was the single most important force in the economic and political life of Nevada for some two decades, from just before World War I to the early years of the Great Depression. The bases and accoutrements of his power were clearly visible: companies he directed or held controlling shares in owned fabulously rich mines (Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company made him a millionaire when he was only in his early thirties; the Getchell Mine enabled him to recoup the fortune he lost in the Great Depression); he owned a dozen banks, several major hotels, ranches, and a variety of other businesses; his early business partner, George Nixon, was a United States senator, and Wingfield himself declined an appointment to the Senate in 1912 upon Nixon's death; he was a longtime Republican national committeeman from Nevada and served on the board of regents of the state university; his attorneys, George Thatcher and William Woodburn, ran the state Democratic party machinery; in 1928 he prevailed upon the Nevada legislature to forgive 70 percent of what he could have been liable for when state officials insured by his bonding company and a cashier from one of his banks embezzled half a million dollars from the state. Everyone in Nevada was well aware that George Wingfield was a powerful and influential man.

What is less certain, and forms a basis for lively discussion even today, is the nature and extent of Wingfield's power, and the manner in which he exercised it. His economic power was immense, especially where his chain of banks was concerned, and—while there is some disagreement over his exact net worth—there is little question that he dominated Nevada's economic

Eric N. Moody is Manuscript Curator at the Nevada Historical Society. He is the author of *Southern Gentleman of Nevada Politics: Vail M. Pittman* and *Flanigan: Anatomy of a Railroad Ghost Town*. He is pursuing a doctoral degree in history at the University of Nevada, Reno, and is currently studying the early history of legal gambling in Nevada from 1931 to World War II.

affairs. The extent of his political power, however, is more open to debate. Although he declined to seek major elective offices, he was the single most important figure in the state's Republican party. In fact, his influence extended beyond his own party and across the spectrum of Nevada politics; Democrats who shared his views and interests were not automatically looked upon with disfavor. He was a political partisan, but not to the point where partisanship might be detrimental to his economic interests.

It was the fact that Wingfield's business interests were his primary concern, and that his activities were directed toward the protection and enhancement of those interests, that probably gave rise to the concept of the bipartisan machine, the shadowy political entity that fascinated Nevadans of his day, and gave it credibility. It was alleged by certain of Wingfield's contemporaries that he headed an unusual political organization whose aim was to elect friendly candidates, regardless of party, to state offices and keep one Republican and one Democratic senator in Washington at all times so that changes in national administrations would not adversely affect Nevada. The evidence cited to show Wingfield's hand in the machine, or in the type of political activity commonly attributed to the machine, is probably nothing more than that which documents his larger effort to influence matters affecting his finances, but it has nonetheless been taken by some as proof of his determination to closely dominate both of the state's political parties.

The reality of the bipartisan machine and its nature, if it did exist, have been hotly debated, both by Wingfield's contemporaries and later historians. While there is little evidence of a formal organization that would have constituted such a machine, it is acknowledged that Wingfield almost invariably got what he wanted in important matters. The question then naturally arises, just how active was he in the political process? Did he make decisions and direct activities that were carried out by subordinates to achieve specified goals, or did he simply make it known—or *let* it be known—what he wanted, and his wishes were acted upon? Did he really even need to act to have a functioning bipartisan machine? It has been contended by some observers that the so-called machine was nothing more than an informal association of like-minded individuals from both parties who had common economic interests, and who supported each other for the purpose of achieving mutually beneficial goals. Other commentators have seen in Wingfield's political maneuverings evidence of a direct and ruthless attempt to manipulate public affairs for his own benefit, reward those loyal to him, and punish his enemies.

The four articles that follow examine various aspects of George Wingfield's life and career, political and economic, and indicate the differing views of the man that are presently found among historians. Elizabeth Raymond presents an overview of Wingfield's career before moving on to a discussion of the bipartisan machine, whose existence as a formal entity she discounts. Her article, which is certainly the most personally focused of those included here

(it contains perceptive observations on his character and personality) is the product of research directed toward a full-scale biography of Wingfield.

Sally Zanjani's study of Wingfield's Goldfield years, when he made his fortune and "began to develop the political methods he would later perfect," is highly critical of the rising "king of Nevada." Focusing chiefly on his role in the formation and development of Goldfield Consolidated and his participation in the Goldfield labor struggles of 1907, she finds a Wingfield just as ambitious and driven as Raymond's, but more ruthless, even unscrupulous.

Jerome Edwards, in his essay on Wingfield's place in Nevada politics, apparently also sees a more ruthlessly powerful figure than does Raymond, but stresses Wingfield's indirect role and oblique methods in the exercise of his political might. Edwards emphasizes the uniqueness of Wingfield's position: he was able to accomplish what he did in the political realm largely because his field of operations was sparsely populated, significantly urbanized Nevada of the early twentieth century.

The final article, by Cheryl Fox, relates Wingfield's association with the Getchell Mine in the 1930s and 1940s, which allowed him to recover a measure of the wealth he had lost in the Depression. While it does not deal significantly with the question of Wingfield's political influence in his heyday, it does offer evidence of his ability, even at a late date, to marshall economic resources needed for business ventures and get what he wanted from the political system with which he was so familiar. The story of the Getchell Mine, one that has not previously been told, demonstrates that there still is much about Wingfield and his activities—for example, his banking, ranch investments, and role in the passage of divorce and gambling legislation—that remains to be examined. The articles offered here tell us more, and in greater detail, than we have known before about the complex Wingfield and his endeavors; they point toward further study, not only of the man, but of the state of Nevada during the time he was instrumental in shaping the course of its development.

The articles in this issue of the *Quarterly* were first presented as a series of lectures that accompanied the Society's museum exhibit, "George Wingfield: King of Nevada," in the fall of 1988. The guest editor for the issue is William D. Rowley, of the University of Nevada-Reno history department and book review editor of the *Quarterly*.

GEORGE WINGFIELD'S POLITICAL MACHINE: A STUDY IN HISTORICAL REPUTATION

C. ELIZABETH RAYMOND

IN THE REALM OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY NEVADA HISTORY, the name George Wingfield is truly one to conjure with. Portrayed by contemporaries alternately as Nevada's benevolent "friend in need" or as the "Vice-czar [who] rules lust-mad Reno's whirlpool of vice and corruption," he was arguably the state's central economic and political force for the years from 1906 to 1935.[1] During that time he made a gold-mining fortune estimated to be in excess of $25 million, refused an appointment to the United States Senate, became the major force in the state's banking system, and allegedly operated the infamous Nevada bipartisan machine from his office on the second floor of the Reno National Bank Building. When his twelve banks failed in November 1932, they held almost 60 percent of the total assets and liabilities of all banks in the state, and their closure forced the state government temporarily to suspend its operations.[2] After attempts to reorganize the banks succumbed to fierce local and national opposition, Wingfield was forced into personal bankruptcy in 1935, simultaneously toppling both a political and an economic power.

As even this capsule summary of his life suggests, George Wingfield was a major figure in Nevada. Until his death in 1959, and even afterward, his reputation was hotly debated.[3] Critics charged bluntly that he was a crook, just one more in the long line of exploiters who ruthlessly, and perhaps illegally, manipulated the political system and stripped Nevada of its resources for personal profit. Supporters, on the other hand, praised him effusively for his personal loyalty and economic commitment to Nevada, reflected in his decision to remain there with his enormous fortune and invest in his adopted state.

C. Elizabeth Raymond is assistant professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno. Professor Raymond has been involved with researching the life of George Wingfield since she was hired by the Nevada Historical Society to process his manuscript collection in 1980. She is currently writing a full-scale biography of Wingfield.

George Wingfield, c. 1898, about two years after he took up residence in Winnemucca, Nevada, at the age of 20. The photographer was J. D. Richards of Winnemucca. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Even during his lifetime, however, Wingfield was a man who generated controversy by virtue of his prominence. The extent of his empire, and the nature of his political dominance in the two central decades of his power, from 1912 to 1932, were not matters of agreement even among his contemporaries. Two representative press accounts are evidence of the range of opinion. In 1928, commenting disapprovingly on George Wingfield's campaign to gain Nevada support for Herbert Hoover, the *Sacramento Bee* described him as the consummate political boss, "backed by the octopus-like influence of his enormous wealth and the strangle hold he has on the political and financial life of Nevada."[4] At the time, Wingfield was Republican national committeeman for the state, active in ranching, banking, hotelkeeping, and mining. He owned a thoroughbred racing stable south of Reno at the Nevada Stock Farm. He had just built the luxurious new Riverside Hotel in Reno, and owned the Golden Hotel as well. He operated a total of eleven banks across the state, and, through the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company, controlled mining properties both in Nevada and in Canada. Along with a small cadre of skillful mining engineers, office managers, bank officers, and attorneys, Wingfield presided over an impressive, far-flung empire.

The *Bee* writer, however, found Wingfield to be a sinister figure, and the 1928 article went on to recount in detail the ominous means by which he held sway over the state:

> Of Wingfield's place in the line-up they speak only in whispers in Reno. For the Wingfield influence stretches far afield, reaching over the desert, through his chain of banks, into the mortgage-ridden homes of cattle and sheep men and filtering into the cash registers of merchants and realtors through other loans and mortgages.
>
> Churches, institutions of learning, uplift organizations and semi-charitable bodies are not exempt from the Wingfield influence. Gifts and donations, discreetly placed, have served to still the voices that might have been raised against Wingfield dictatorship, and protests by the righteous have been smothered by the weight of the Wingfield pocketbook.

Clearly the man thus portrayed controls virtually everything that happens within his realm. The Wingfield that the *Bee* warned against can truly be styled the owner and operator of the entire state of Nevada. In this view, Wingfield not only profited from Nevada, but also wantonly manipulated his power in order to dominate the state.

Yet, at virtually the same time, another outside newspaper, the *San Francisco Bulletin*, depicted quite a different George Wingfield. In a 1929 article, the *Bulletin* writer presented a beneficent banker, "always ready to aid his state when it needs assistance." The man described by the *Bulletin* bears no resemblance to the *Bee*'s vicious octopus. Instead, Wingfield was hailed as a "popular celebrity," admired because, "unlike many who passed before him with millions made out of mines, he remained in his own state and invested

his money there."[5] Lest anyone miss the point, the laudatory *Bulletin* continued:

> Most of the credit due for the financing of numerous industries belongs to George Wingfield. He contributes money to the raising of cattle and other livestock. He grubstakes innumerable prospectors. He aids banks and other business institutions. . . . Wingfield is a modest, unassuming man who still rolls his own. Fortune has not turned his head and he may be daily seen on the streets of Reno fraternizing with some unkept [*sic*] miner, a cowboy or a broken-down bearded resident, once affluent. . . . those who know his good works hold him the savior of Nevada.

To the *Bulletin*, George Wingfield's influence was gentle and beneficent—far from greedily exploiting his adopted home state, he was seen as generously nurturing it with his much-needed capital.

Was George Wingfield, then, octopus or savior, villain or hero? Was his influence in Nevada an economic strangle hold or a loving caress? Any accurate assessment of George Wingfield must sort out the actual, complex man from the proliferating myths that transform him into a one-dimensional caricature, either devil or saint.

His story is an impressive one in either event, reminiscent of Horatio Alger. Born into a Methodist family, August 16, 1876, near Fort Smith, Arkansas, Wingfield moved as a young child by way of northern California to Lake County, Oregon. His father operated a cattle ranch, and Wingfield was educated through the eighth grade in Lakeview. Reportedly an "incorrigible boy,"[6] he left home at an early age to work as a cowhand and perhaps also as a jockey and a gambler. He apparently made his first trip to Nevada at the age of fifteen, in 1891. He moved to the state permanently in 1896, residing first in the railroad town of Winnemucca, which had been the traditional railhead for cattle drives from southeastern Oregon.[7] By 1898, he had moved north to the smaller copper-mining camp of Golconda, where he operated the California Saloon, raced horses, scouted likely copper prospects, and gambled on the side. His customary game was faro, although he was also a skilled poker player. Of medium height and undistinguished appearance, Wingfield was most often described as tough, taciturn, and poker-faced.

When the silver-mining boom in Tonopah began to create excitement in 1901, Wingfield sold his Golconda property, including the race horses, and moved on to the new central Nevada camp, where he arrived in May. At first he relied on his gambling skills for economic support, running a faro game at the famous Tonopah Club Saloon. Evidently skilled at his chosen trade, he made enough money to buy into partnership in the successful club. He also began to invest significantly in other Tonopah real estate, including houses and business buildings as well as saloons and hotels. Meanwhile, beginning in 1902, Wingfield also began to act as a representative for Winnemucca banker George S. Nixon, then the state agent for the powerful Southern Pacific Rail-

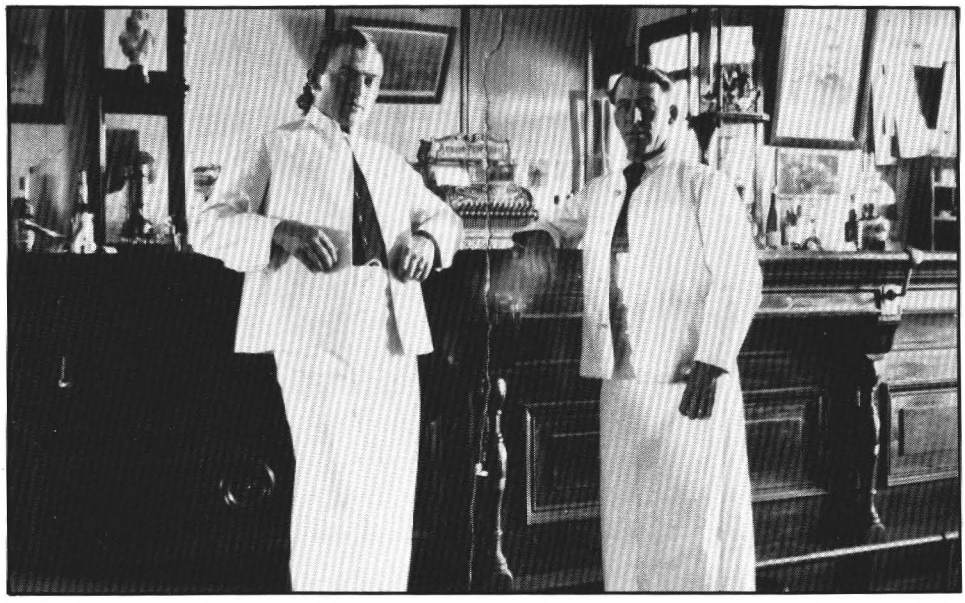
road, and soon to become, in 1905, a Republican United States senator. Although the apocryphal story that Nixon loaned Wingfield the money he used to stake himself in Tonopah is often told, a more plausible version of their association is recounted by Wingfield himself. According to Wingfield, Nixon had told him before he left Golconda that if he found anything that "looked good" around Tonopah, he should let Nixon know.[8] When Wingfield duly reported that prospects were excellent, the two began investing in common ventures, buying and trading mining stocks, and loaning money to prospectors and businessmen at a healthy eight percent rate. Wingfield also continued to have private investments of his own, including some mining claims, while in other endeavors he simply acted as Nixon's local agent, without participating personally.

By 1904, as the new gold-mining boom town of Goldfield was beginning to attract attention to the south of Tonopah, the financial partnership of Nixon and Wingfield was well established. The partners were buying and selling mining claims in Esmeralda County in 1903, and started to buy real estate in Goldfield in 1904. In 1905, Nixon and Wingfield began to invest together in banks for the new communities. About this time, Nixon, who was Wingfield's senior by sixteen years, counselled his partner to give up gambling and concentrate exclusively on their joint business affairs:

> I really believe, old man, as you have told me several times that you wanted to get out of the card business, that the time is now ripe for you to do it. In this stock business you can do better than any of those lobsters, and I believe if you should cut out the cards, you, Ramsey and myself can open a brokerage office in Tonopah . . . and make all kinds of money.[9]

Apparently Wingfield took his partner's advice. While he remained a skilled card player, and retained a nervous habit of shuffling stacks of silver dollars together with one hand while thinking, he never again relied on gambling to earn his living.[10]

Instead, within a matter of only a few years, George Wingfield underwent a miraculous metamorphosis, from rough and boisterous cowhand and faro dealer to dignified multimillionaire investor, who, in 1908, signalled his social arrival by marrying a San Francisco banker's daughter, Maude Murdoch. The instrument of his transformation was the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company, which he founded in 1906, again in partnership with then Senator Nixon. By drawing on substantial eastern capital from Bernard Baruch and Henry Clay Frick, among others, Wingfield and Nixon were able to combine six of the richest gold claims in the fabulous new boom town of Goldfield. The resulting company, capitalized at $50 million, thus avoided dissipating its considerable profits in combatting lawsuits brought by rivals, and made its principals multimillionaires overnight. Although the extent of Wingfield's re-



The 1900 U.S. Census listed George Wingfield as a saloon keeper in Golconda. Wingfield (left) is pictured here at the Banquet Saloon, Golconda, Nevada, c. 1900. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

sulting fortune can not be accurately ascertained, it was commonly put at somewhere between $20 million and $30 million. He was thirty years old.

During the next six years, Wingfield consolidated his position. He and Senator Nixon extended their banking empire throughout the state, while the Goldfield Consolidated continued to pay handsome dividends to its stockholders. Apparently following his partner's lead in politics as in other things, Wingfield became a Republican, although he had been elected as a delegate to the Nye County Democratic Party Convention in 1902. In 1910, he supported Nixon against a Democratic challenge from later Senator Key Pittman. For the most part, however, it was Nixon who supervised Nevada Republican politics, while Wingfield managed their joint properties.[11] In 1909, the two men amicably split their holdings, with Wingfield taking the Goldfield Consolidated, and Nixon retaining the banks. Newspaper accounts of the dissolution attributed it to Nixon's desire "to strengthen himself for his coming fight for reelection to the senate."[12] In an unguarded telegram to his personal assistant, Wingfield was more exuberant, proclaiming, "I have took over everything."[13]

After his society marriage Wingfield moved to Reno in 1909. The town remained his center of operations for fifty years, until his death in 1959. During most of that time it was the largest town and the political power center of Nevada. It was also generally acknowledged to be Wingfield's dominion,

especially after the death of Senator Nixon in 1912. That event brought Wingfield into the national limelight when he was offered an appointment to fill Nixon's Senate seat by Republican Governor Tasker Oddie. Wingfield's refusal, which came only after consultation with Baruch, Frick, and other prominent eastern backers, was made on the grounds that he could do more for the state "at present," by remaining there to take care of his business interests than by going to Washington.

In the national press, Wingfield instantly became "the cowboy who refused a toga,"[14] but his reasons for doing so were sound and shrewd. Always an intensely private man, Wingfield did not want to risk focusing public attention on his past, which included certain embarrassing souvenirs of a wild youth, among them a scurrilous suit for divorce brought by a common-law wife in Tonopah in 1906.[15] Never happy for long outside his adopted state, he genuinely did not want to move to Washington. And most important, Wingfield realized that he was no politician; reserved, and not at all charismatic, he was always more comfortable as a private businessman than as a public figure. Those who knew him acquiesced in his view. Key Pittman reported in a 1912 letter to a third party, *before* Nixon's death, that despite considerable executive ability, "George is not equipped to hold a position as a U.S. Senator," as "his observations of Senator Nixon's career must have convinced him."[16] From the beginning, Wingfield seems instinctively to have assumed the role of power behind the throne. It was one that he played comfortably and enthusiastically for the next twenty years.

Nixon's death provided the opportunity for him to do so, since Wingfield immediately assumed the mantle of financial leadership in Nevada's Republican party. Although he announced his intention in 1914 to run for election to the Nevada legislature from Reno's Washoe County, he later withdrew. In 1928, he was elected for a ten-year term to the nonpartisan office of university regent. Other than that, Wingfield spent the whole of his prominent career in politics as a man behind the scenes, thus engendering the wildly varying accounts of his political activities that are suggested by the newspaper reports quoted above, and that have been debated among Nevada historians ever since. It is those accounts, and particularly the allegations as to the notorious bipartisan machine, that must be addressed in any account of George Wingfield's career.

"The general thesis of Nevada bipartisanship," according to historian Russell Elliott,

> is that the two major parties agreed to keep one Republican and one Democratic senator in Washington in order to ensure proper patronage and representation for the state no matter which party was in power in Congress. The machine was supposed to operate on the local level by supporting candidates for the Nevada legislature from each party who could be depended upon to vote for the establishment.

George S. Nixon, a Winnemucca banker and U.S. Senator, was Wingfield's friend and business partner. Their business alliance began in Tonopah and became a major force in Goldfield after 1903. It was Nixon who persuaded Wingfield to give up card playing as a profession. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Thus, no matter who controlled the legislature, business interests such as those represented by Wingfield would benefit.[17]

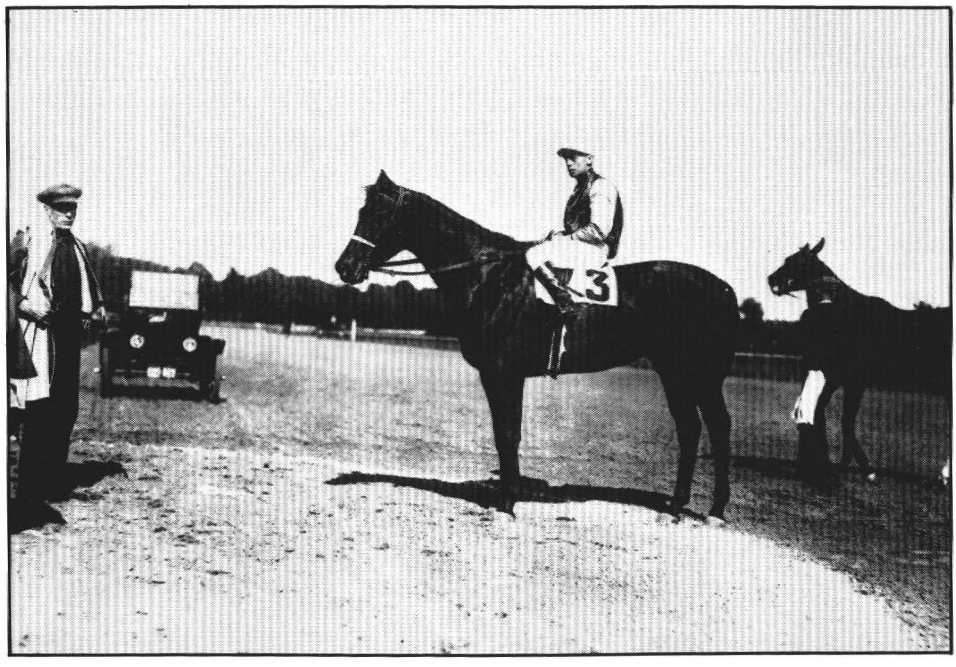
The case for this machine is strengthened by proximity. On the same floor as Wingfield's office in the Reno National Bank Building, and sharing with him a receptionist and a switchboard, was the law firm of Thatcher and Woodburn. Between them George Thatcher and William Woodburn controlled the Nevada Democratic Party for most of this period, with Thatcher as national committeeman. Wingfield, who was known to run his extensive economic interests by delegating authority to expert assistants, was also known to rely heavily on the advice of his Democratic attorneys.

Furthermore, as Elliott points out, Nevada did, in fact, have a United States senator from each political party throughout the period in question. Although Wingfield was Republican national committeeman from 1920, he is alleged to have supported the Democrat Pittman for reelection in both 1922 and 1928. In 1922, for example, he temporarily resigned from his position as Republican national committeeman; and in 1928, although he circulated an open letter supporting the Republican candidates, he was supposedly lukewarm toward senatorial candidate Sam Platt.

There is also the matter of Wingfield's tremendous economic stake in Nevada. After Nixon's death, Wingfield purchased from his estate all of the banking interests they had formerly owned together. Building on this base he went on to establish or buy other banks, which effectively operated as a chain although branch banking was illegal at the time. By 1932, his twelve banks controlled well over half of the total deposits and perhaps eighty to eighty-five percent of the loans outstanding in the state.[18]

In addition, Wingfield owned Reno's two largest hotels, the Golden, purchased in 1915, and the plush Riverside, popular resort for Reno's fashionable divorcées, which he built in 1927. The former was the location of Reno's infamous Bank Club, an illegal gambling establishment leased and operated by notorious underworld figures William Graham and James C. McKay. In addition to the Nevada Stock Farm, which raced prize-winning thoroughbred horses throughout the country, Wingfield also had interests in ranching companies in Nevada and California, and in a pioneer rice-growing effort in Butte County, California. He founded and operated Nevada's only bonding company, the Nevada Surety and Bonding Company. And although he continued to live in a relatively simple house at 219 Court Street, his real estate holdings in the city of Reno were also considerable. Giving modestly but conscientiously to virtually every charity that approached him, Wingfield took seriously the responsibilities incumbent upon him as the recognized King of Nevada.

All this wealth, and the prominence that it brought in a small state, placed Wingfield in a position of undeniable power, which he did not hesitate to use.



Wingfield's thoroughbred champion "General Thatcher," with jockey M. Garner at Saratoga, New York, August 23, 1923. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

When Republican Tasker Oddie was governor in 1911, Wingfield stated his case more directly than he was to do later, but the argument was one that governed his conduct throughout the period of his ascendancy:

I notice they are trying to pass some drastic labor bills, which of course are annoying. The people of Nevada have always howled because people who make money don't stay there to spend it. Am afraid such legislation will help drive others out who have attempted to stay and help build up the resources of the state . . . the man who puts his money in the ground should be incouraged [*sic*] instead of discouraged.[19]

Having committed himself to remain and invest in Nevada, George Wingfield felt entitled to special considerations both from its legislature and from its citizens. He fully expected that his opinions would carry some extra weight.

In view of his position, it is hardly surprising that Wingfield thought he would have a voice in political decision making, regardless of whether he held political office. Certainly he never hesitated to let his opinions be known. In 1912, speaking of Theodore Roosevelt's impending campaign visit as Progressive Party candidate for the presidency, Wingfield gave Oddie clear marching orders:

The "Big Noise" will be here the 14th and I think it would be a sad mistake for any of us fellows to get on the platform that night. I am going to be at Sacramento that day,

and hope *sincerely* that you will not let them get you up on the stage for it would lend them ammunition and we have a hard fight this fall.[20]

Yet it is significant, and perhaps a better gauge of Wingfield's influence than some Nevada historians would admit, that Oddie, who was always considered Wingfield's faithful lieutenant, went anyway and met with Roosevelt.

There *is* some evidence that Wingfield was not consistently a Republican partisan. In 1916, writing to one of his Tonopah friends, he put the matter clearly:

I want to call your attention anyway to the importance to us all, as business men, of seeing that we get the right kind of men into the Assembly this year, *whether they be Democrats or Republicans*, who will help us block any attempts to change the present so called liberal laws on racing, gambling and divorce. . . . We want to do this quietly without making it an open issue that would antagonize the reform element. We are trying to have the right men picked all around without giving any reason for it [emphasis added].[21]

Later the same year, once the ticket had been settled, he wrote to the superintendent of one of his mines, enclosing a sample ballot "showing you how we want to go on this election. . . . We would like to see it all go Republican, except the Assembly."[22]

Clearly, partisan politics in this case were subordinate to the proper stand on matters that might threaten Wingfield's economic interests, such as outlawing horse racing or lengthening the divorce residency period from six months to one year. Similarly, in 1921, Wingfield groused privately to now Senator Oddie about insubordination in the state Republican ranks, and threatened disappointment to two or three who, undoubtedly, "will be around to see me later concerning campaign expenses."[23] Wingfield's support of the Republican ticket *was* qualified at times, varying with his assessment of how closely the particular candidates might conform to his own view on political issues.

Yet George Wingfield could also be a fanatical Republican when the occasion warranted. In 1928, in the aftermath of a special session of the Nevada legislature—which had been summoned to settle the problem of a half-million-dollar defalcation perpetrated by the state treasurer and controller, together with the cashier of Wingfield's Carson City bank—the state's ostensibly bipartisan boss was feeling distinctly partisan. To the manager of one of his banks in Elko, he wrote:

The Democratic State administrations have cost me nearly two hundred thousand dollars through embezzlement of State funds.

They have turned their guns loose on me in the Democratic Press, through their lieing [*sic*], underhanded tactics of which some of their tribe are responsible for, so I am going to ask you to turn into them and ask every employee in the bank to do likewise as we are in politics now, and we are in it to win.[24]

Wingfield's anger was somewhat surprising because the widespread opinion, repeated by the *Sacramento Bee*, among others, was that he had actually gotten off lightly in the special session. Despite the fact that his Carson Valley Bank cashier had knowingly issued bogus cashier's checks, and that, as bondsman for the state officials, Wingfield was personally responsible to the amount of $75,000, he engineered a compromise in the special session whereby he paid only 30 percent of the state's losses ($154,986 out of $516,322). Both the *Bee* and the Republican *Reno Gazette* railed about the injustice of a settlement that required from Wingfield less than half of the total loss. However, as Wingfield had pointed out in a letter to the legislature, he had the option of simply liquidating the bank, taking a loss on the $45,000 of capital he had invested there, plus the $75,000 due from him as bondsman, and leaving the state liable for the remainder. From his perspective, then, the $155,000 that he did pay was already $35,000 more than he owed, and his actions ought to have been regarded as those of a public-spirited citizen.[25] Hence his angry outburst to the Elko bank manager, referring to the same 1928 election in which his support for the Republican senatorial candidate, Platt, is characterized by some as having been so weak as to constitute support for the Democrats' Pittman.

Other, consistently discounted, evidence against the existence of the bipartisan machine is the testimony of the alleged principals themselves. Wingfield always considered himself to be a loyal Republican, in spite of his occasional failure to support every Republican candidate. He regularly wagered against his Democratic friends on the outcome of both local and national elections, and was a reliable and generous donor to Republican campaign funds. In October 1922, when he told his Democratic attorney, Woodburn, that "he proposed not doing a single thing against [Pittman]," he was making the realistic choice between an experienced Democratic senator and a Republican newcomer, Charles S. Chandler, who, though he had defeated Wingfield's own choice for the senatorial race, was not a strong candidate.[26]

Although Wingfield's temporary resignation as Republican national committeeman in 1922 is always cited as evidence of active assistance to the Democratic campaign, it is also true, as he maintained in his letter of resignation, that he was in poor health. After breaking his neck the previous year, an accident which had confined him to bed for more than four months, Wingfield was hospitalized for it again in 1922, in San Francisco. Even though the resignation was eventually withdrawn, there is no particular reason to doubt the sincerity of Wingfield's motive for resigning. Indeed, a few months earlier, even Woodburn had not been so certain of his client's cooperation. In August, Woodburn had confided to Pittman that, while Wingfield was perfectly satisfied that Pittman should be reelected, "he is dead against Scrugham and . . . it is likely that before it is over that on account of us fellows standing with Scrugham that he may get in and support the *whole* Republican ticket" (emphasis added).[27]

The traditional picture of a monolithic political machine, centrally controlled from "the capital of Nevada" in the Reno National Bank Building, begins to break down in the face of evidence from the men who were reputed to run it. In 1928, the same year that Wingfield heatedly announced his partisanship to his Elko bank manager, Woodburn and Thatcher were responding to accusations by perennial Democratic outsider Patrick McCarran that they were part of a Wingfield machine. Clearly feeling the charge untoward, Woodburn justified himself in a private letter to Pittman: "During the ten years that we have been with Wingfield he has never once mentioned politics or suggested a deal."[28] Although such a claim seems ingenuous from a man who faithfully reported Wingfield's political position to Pittman just six years earlier, it was one made repeatedly by both sides. In 1934, after the collapse of the Wingfield banks and the related defeat of Republican Tasker Oddie by Democrat Pat McCarran, Key Pittman elaborated on the official version in a letter to Democratic national committeeman George Thatcher:

> I know that you and Billy [Woodburn] have always opposed George Wingfield politically. I know that you have always supported the Democratic ticket in spite of Wingfield's support of the Republican ticket. I know that never has an election passed but what you have bet with Wingfield on the success of the Democratic ticket and on most occasions have won. It is true, however, that the general layity [*sic*] do not understand or believe that such relationships can exist.[29]

Obviously, neither the general laity nor the *Sacramento Bee* nor many Nevada historians can quite believe that such a close, yet untainted, political relationship existed. And perhaps, as Russell Elliott suggests, the most important feature of Nevada's bipartisan machine is that so many people at the time thought it existed, whether it did or not. However, the consistent denials from those allegedly involved have been unduly discounted. The operation described by the vituperative *Sacramento Bee* as the "political machine of Boss George Wingfield," was perceived by those men involved as a group of active partisans on both sides, all of whom sought men and measures that would economically benefit the state of Nevada.[30] Wingfield's primary political concern was protection of his economic interests, and not political control of the state.

The classic political machine is a disciplined organization that exists to win elections, and in so doing to secure for its participants some measure of wealth, status, or power.[31] The bipartisan Wingfield "machine" was none of those things. It was not a tightly structured organization for controlling elections or dispensing favors. Indeed, the most common description of its operation is that it had no boss, that Wingfield never had to issue directives, because his associates simply "knew what he wanted done."[32] Furthermore, the members of the apparent machine already enjoyed a full measure of wealth, status, and power in the state; and their political activities found them in friendly conflict with each other more often than in cooperation.

Wingfield's political activities focused on advancing and protecting his multitudinous business interests, and he consistently operated according to the theory he first impatiently voiced to Governor Oddie in 1911. If a man of substantial resources is going to be good enough to stay in Nevada, then he is entitled to consideration for doing so. In a small state, chronically short of resources, which, as another student of Wingfield has suggested, was "in the habit of being led by men who had both economic and political control," there was nothing extraordinary about Wingfield's assumption. It was the same assumption that had governed Nevada politics during the nineteenth-century years of domination by Comstock mining interests, and the railroad as well; and it is one that continues to shape Nevada politics today in the form of the gambling industry.

In order to protect his economic interest in Nevada, Wingfield used all the resources of political persuasion at his disposal, and he never hesitated to inform employees of his preferences. Generally, these were Republican. Occasionally, because he could not control the outcome of state conventions, they were neutral or Democratic. He was in any event, however, far from uniformly successful, and he assuredly was not, contrary to his most fanatic critics' claims, in effective control of both political parties. Former Wingfield employees testify uniformly that while his preferences in most elections were well known to them, he scrupulously avoided placing either personal or economic pressure on them to vote according to his lights.[33]

George Wingfield was a wealthy man in a poor state. By reason of his extensive empire, he qualified during his prime as the principal economic power in the state of Nevada. However, evidence from his papers and from his alleged accomplices suggests that those who argue for Wingfield's single-handed control of the state's political fortunes are badly overstating their case. Powerful though he was, George Wingfield was simply *not* Nevada's sole political operator, and the reputed bipartisan machine never functioned as smoothly or as reliably as it was reputed to either in the popular mind or in the public press of the period.

NOTES

[1] "Wingfield Again Averts Bank Crisis in Nevada," *San Francisco Bulletin*, July 31, 1929; Laura Vitray, "Vice-Czar Rules Lust-Mad Reno's Whirlpool of Vice and Corruption," *Sacramento Bee*, January 5, 1931.

[2] Susan Kennedy, *Banking Crisis of 1933* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973); Jerome E. Edwards, *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982).

[3] A fuller exploration of the historical reputation of George Wingfield is presented elsewhere in this issue in the article by Jerome Edwards. In contrast, the discussion here will be confined to the contemporary views of George Wingfield's political influence during his lifetime.

The principal source for this study is the collection of George Wingfield's papers at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno (hereafter GW Papers). Secondary interpretations of Wingfield in addition to those cited in subsequent notes include: Loren Chan, *Sagebrush Statesman: Tasker L. Oddie* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973); Russell R. Elliott, *Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom* (Reno: University of

Nevada Press, 1966); Betty Glad, *Key Pittman: Tragedy of a Senate Insider* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Richard G. Lillard, *Desert Challenge: An Interpretation of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1942); Gilman M. Ostrander, *The Great Rotten Borough* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); William D. Rowley, *Reno: Hub of the Washoe Country* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, 1984).

[4] Arthur B. Waugh, "Wingfield Uses Strangle Hold on Nevada to Secure Votes for Herbert Hoover," *Sacramento Bee*, October 19, 1928.

[5] "Wingfield Again Averts Bank Crisis in Nevada," *San Francisco Bulletin*, July 31, 1929, p. 2.

[6] The characterization, based on interviews with Wingfield family members, was reported by Barbara Thornton in her 1967 M.A. thesis at the University of Nevada-Reno, "George Wingfield in Nevada from 1896 to 1932."

[7] J. Orrin Oliphant, *On the Cattle Ranges of the Oregon Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 138.

[8] This version is reported in an undated biographical sketch [c. 1915] in the GW Papers, clearly dictated by Wingfield.

[9] George S. Nixon to George Wingfield, July 11, 1904, Nixon Papers, Nevada Historical Society.

[10] From his early years in the state, George Wingfield was a personal friend and close associate of well-known Nevada gamblers, particularly of Reno underworld figure James C. McKay. During his years of prominence in Reno, he was often rumored to be involved in the gambling houses and other illicit businesses operated by McKay and William Graham. However, while Wingfield did lease extremely profitable space in his Golden Hotel for the Bank Club casino operated by Graham and McKay, there is no evidence that he was personally involved in their business, nor did he ever hold a gambling license after Nevada's legalization of the profitable business in 1931. The casinos in his various hotels were always operated by concessionaires.

[11] Evidence for the division of duties between Nixon and Wingfield comes from the GW Papers, 1908-1909. Wingfield is notably absent from political correspondence of the period, e.g., Key Pittman Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter KP Papers), 1906-1910.

[12] *San Francisco Call*, March 10, 1909, p. 9.

[13] George Wingfield to Clarence F. Burton, March 30, 1909, GW Papers.

[14] Arthur Dunn, "Cowboy Who Refused a Toga," *Sunset* 24 (October, 1912), 446-7.

[15] The complaint alleged, among other things, willful infliction of syphilis by Wingfield, beatings, and the theft of diamond jewelry. The suit was unsuccessful, with the judge ruling that there had been no common-law marriage, but a settlement was paid to the plaintiff, who styled herself May Wingfield, to secure her agreement not to file any future suits. The case is summarized in Edwards, *Pat McCarran*, 10; original complaint is in the Patrick McCarran Papers, Nevada Historical Society, Box 1.

[16] Key Pittman to A.B. Gray, 8 January 1912, KP papers.

[17] Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 270.

[18] Kennedy, *Banking Crisis of 1933*, 62.

[19] George Wingfield to Tasker L. Oddie, 18 February 1911, Tasker Oddie Papers, Huntington Library (hereafter TLO Papers, Huntington). Wingfield's animosity toward organized labor dated from the IWW strike against the mines at Goldfield in 1906-07. For details of the latter encounter, and an estimation of Wingfield's role as principal strikebreaker, see Sally Zanjani and Guy Louis Rocha, *Ignoble Conspiracy: Radicalism on Trial in Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986).

[20] George Wingfield to Tasker Oddie, 11 August 1912, TLO Papers, Huntington.

[21] George Wingfield to R.B. Govan, 7 September 1916, GW Papers.

[22] George Wingfield to A.H. Westall, 2 November 1916, GW Papers.

[23] George Wingfield to Tasker Oddie, 7 March 1921, Tasker Oddie Papers, Nevada Historical Society.

[24] George Wingfield to Hayden Henderson, 6 October 1928, GW Papers.

[25] For a full account of the affair, known as the Cole-Malley case after the two state officers involved, see Edwards, *Pat McCarran*, 33-42. For Wingfield's letter, see Thornton, "George Wingfield in Nevada," 37.

[26] William Woodburn to Key Pittman, 16 October 1922, KP Papers.

[27] William Woodburn to Key Pittman, 29 August 1922, KP Papers.

[28] William Woodburn to Key Pittman, 18 May 1928, KP Papers.

[29] Key Pittman to George B. Thatcher, 19 March 1934, KP Papers.

[30] The series, by Arthur B. Waugh, ran in the *Sacramento Bee* from 2-5 January 1934.

[31] See Alexander B. Callow, Jr., ed., *The City Boss in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Scott Greer, ed., *Ethnics, Machines, and the American Urban Future* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing, 1981).

[32] E.G. Thornton, "George Wingfield in Nevada," 51-56; Norman Biltz, "Memoirs of the Duke of Nevada," Oral History Program, University of Nevada, Reno, 1967, 103.

[33] Interviews with Harold F. Gorman, employed in several capacities by Wingfield at the Reno National Bank, 1986, and Joseph Fuetsch, assistant cashier of the Riverside Bank, 1989.

GEORGE WINGFIELD: THE GOLDFIELD YEARS

SALLY S. ZANJANI

ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1905, A MIDDLE-AGED MINING engineer named George W. Hayes obtained a lease on a 373-by-700-foot section at the southern end of the Mohawk Mine in Goldfield, Nevada. Although Hayes had reputedly acquired a fortune before he turned twenty-one from mining in Arizona and Mexico, little of it had survived to finance his explorations of the Mohawk. In a matter of weeks, he was out of funds and obliged to take in a partner, former Cripple Creek mining operator M. J. Monnette. This solution proved to be only a stopgap because the pair was bereft of money in short order and forced to appeal to two visiting Chicago capitalists, Harry Benedict and J. W. Smith. Despite Monnette's position as Smith's representative on his Goldfield investments, the Chicagoans were clearly unimpressed by the proposition. The absence of any ledge or surface indication suggesting a body of pay ore, combined with the circumstance that no valuable ore had been found in or near the Mohawk, lent little credence to the belief of Hayes and Monnette that their hole in the ground pointed toward a hidden bonanza. To Smith and Benedict, it seemed like too much of a long shot. They shook their heads and boarded the train for San Francisco. Then, after the train had proceeded nearly one hundred miles through the desert, a sudden mutual impulse led them to change their minds and dispatch a wire to Goldfield. On October 26, 1905, they bought a half interest in the Hayes-Monnette lease for $5,000.

The infusion of capital enabled Hayes and Monnette to dig for another six months, but finally their faith in the Mohawk drained away, along with their funds. After a gloomy conference in mid April, they agreed upon a final effort in an area earlier abandoned. Dispirited, dead broke, and devoid of the last vestiges of his belief in the Goldfield prospects, Monnette departed on the train for Colorado. Before he had reached Ogden, Utah, however, a messenger boarded the train with a telegram from Hayes announcing a great strike in the Mohawk. Monnette was unconvinced. Although a few stringers and small

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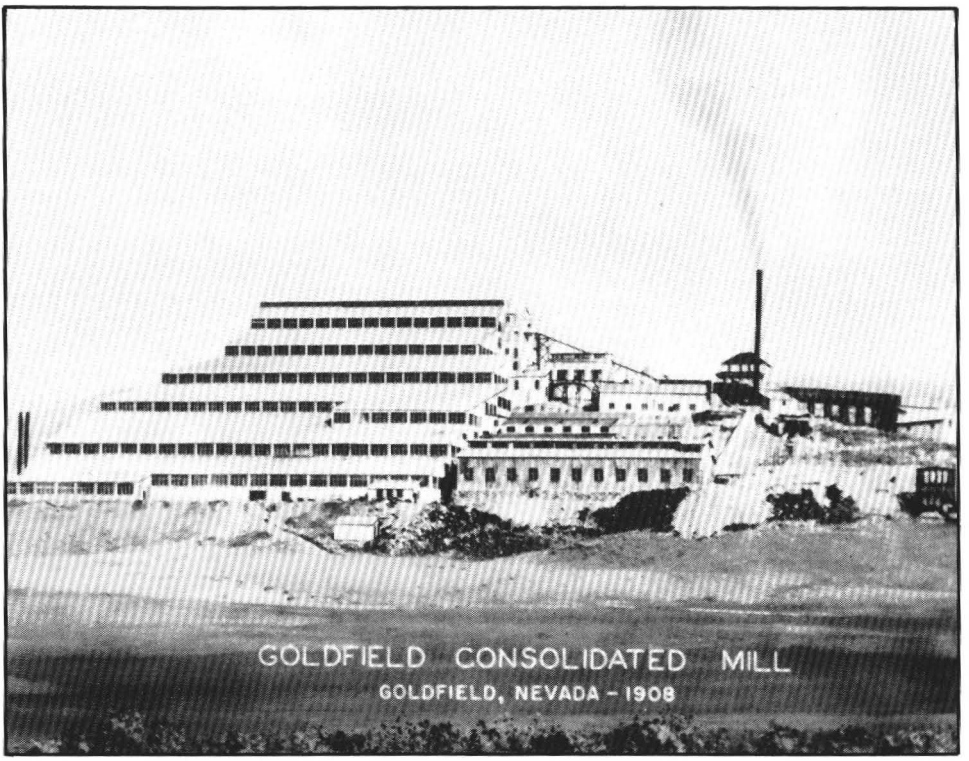


The Goldfield Consolidated Mill, 1908, symbolized Wingfield's financial empire. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

veins had been cut in the last several months, each gleam of hope had quickly been rubbed out on the barren rock of the Mohawk. Monnette continued his journey. But at every stop another batch of excited telegrams declared that the strike was not only promising but beyond all expectations. Eventually, Monnette turned back. He arrived in Goldfield to find himself a very rich man.

In a small chamber like Aladdin's cave, miners were knocking down sulfide ore so weighty and rich that assays were superfluous. With the naked eye, a man could see its dull yellow color in the flickering candlelight. Because they soon realized that this fabulous bonanza could not be fully exploited before the clock ran out on their lease, Hayes and Monnette subleased sections of their ground to the Frances-Mohawk Company and others.[1] During the months remaining after the April 17 strike of pay ore, these two bonanza leases, the Hayes-Monnette and the Frances-Mohawk, produced about $5,800,000, more than 80 percent of production from all Goldfield mining operations during 1906 and 30 percent of production by all leasers during the five-year period 1904–08. As the small, gleaming Aladdin's cave that Mon-

nette had seen upon his return expanded into huge caverns, these two leases yielded more gold in eight months than any mine in the Americas, Europe, or Asia (except Mexico's Esperanza.) These spectacular developments sent the bonanza spirit soaring in Goldfield. The massive Hayes-Monnette headframe became a kind of shrine pointed out to visitors as the premier landmark of the city. Newspaper editors never previously at a loss for extravagant language declared that "new words" would be needed to describe adequately the wonders of this "marvel of all mines."[2]

Great bonanzas and grandiose schemes were bound to go hand in hand, and one of the visionary possibilities discussed was the consolidation of the principal mines of the district. Speculation about such a move tended to center on the famous eastern financier, Charles Schwab, who had been an active player in the Greenwater district in California. But even as reporters questioned Schwab, another man, waiting on the sidelines, had doubtless already conceived his own plan, though he was probably hampered by the circumstance that the needed capital was nowhere within his reach. This was George Wingfield, one-time cowhand and gambler, and until then a minor figure eclipsed by larger mining operators in the district.

Although the enthusiastic interest of Wingfield's occasional investment partner, Winnemucca banker George Nixon, in the first claims located at Goldfield had sparked the initial rush to the district, Wingfield's own early moves at the camp showed no great perspicacity. Despite myths to the contrary, he apparently grubstaked none of the prospectors in the Goldfield district. At a time when such future premier mines as the Florence, Jumbo, and Combination were available for little more than pocket change, Wingfield purchased none of them, and he also turned down the Goldfield townsite when it was offered to him by Al Myers, known as the father of Goldfield. In accordance with his policy of spreading his bets widely over central Nevada, he made some acquisitions, probably received in payment for gambling debts in the Tonopah Club, but most of these were claims of negligible value. During 1904 his primary efforts were directed elsewhere in such stillborn camps as Stone Cabin and Cloverdale. It was Nixon, acting through another friend, Harry Ramsay, who acquired an interest in the Mohawk, as well as a host of other claims originally located by prospector Con Crook, and who organized the Mohawk Mining Company. Apparently he cut Wingfield into the enterprise at some later date. Not until the autumn of 1905 did Wingfield belatedly see where his future lay and move his office from Tonopah to Goldfield.[3]

To a conservative investor without Wingfield's gambler's instincts, his position at that point might not have appeared promising. Wingfield's share of the Sweeney lease on the Florence Mine and his royalties from the Sandstorm Mine (Nixon's first purchase in the district), coupled with winnings from his gaming table in the Tonopah Club, stock purchases, and Nixon's financial resources, had enabled him to stay in the Goldfield game. Thanks to Nixon,

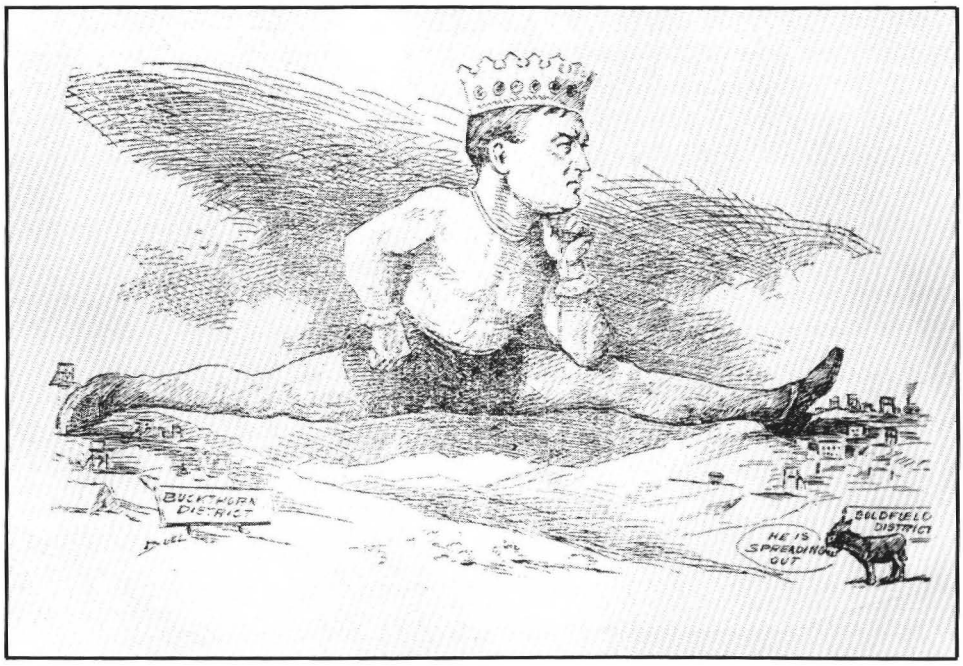
Main Street in Goldfield, September 15, 1905. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

Wingfield was an officer in Goldfield's premier bank, the John S. Cook and Company, of which he owned a large share. He also controlled several lesser Goldfield mining companies, such as Blue Bull and Laguna, possessed considerable stock in the Florence Mine, as well as a great deal of stock in marginal Goldfield mines, and was believed by his contemporaries to have acquired a sizeable stake. Nixon's ascension to the United States Senate in 1904 had lent new prestige to their partnership and might eventually be turned to good account with eastern investors. All the same, there was no denying the fact that all the mines securely stacked in Wingfield's pile of chips appeared nearly worthless. The Sandstorm no longer produced much; most of the others had never produced, despite the numerous gopher holes sunk by hopeful leasers; all the properties yielding steady revenues remained beyond his grasp. Had he a mine like the Florence in hand, he could have parlayed his worthless mining companies into hundreds of thousands and his ace mine into millions. Without it, he seemed destined to remain a minor personage on the Goldfield scene, dwarfed by such figures as Al Myers and January Jones, whose doings crowded the pages of the newspapers, a man who had done as well as could be expected with mines such as the Laguna for assets, but had missed out on the really big money. It was then, in what had

appeared the most worthless of Wingfield's many barren mines, that Hayes and Monnette struck bonanza.

At last Goldfield's shrewdest gambler had drawn the high card he needed, and at the end of October, with royalties from Hayes-Monnette and the other Mohawk leasers piling in at an ever increasing rate, he made his move. While even more royalties would have accrued with the passing months, several factors argued for immediate action, among them the presence on the scene of several other investors who had designs upon the mines that Wingfield planned to include in the merger. Also, rumor had it that Charlie Taylor, long an unlucky gambler and the owner of the Jumbo and Red Top Mines, had suffered a recent series of heavy losses at the gaming tables. According to the usual story, as soon as Wingfield and Nixon reached their decision, they hastened to Taylor's house and rousted him out of bed to hear their proposition. Another version holds that Charlie Taylor unwisely sat down to a game of poker with George Wingfield.[4]

In either case, the outcome was the same. On October 24, 1906, Wingfield secured an option to purchase Taylor's controlling interest in the Jumbo and the Red Top for a total price of $1,330,000. On November 13 Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company was organized with a capitalization of $50,000,000, and 5,000,000 shares of stock were issued at a par value of $10. Now Wingfield moved to gain control of the Combination, one of the top mines in the district. Litigation then in progress between the Mohawk and some of the Combination leasers may have provided an additional incentive for purchase. Other investors who had secured options were persuaded to step aside, and by December 15 Wingfield was able to enter into a contract for nearly all stock in the Combination; the total purchase price was $2,580,000, with a million of it due on January 20 and the rest payable in two installments in March and May. To assist in meeting these obligations, Nixon, on December 28, secured a million-dollar loan from New York financier Bernard Baruch. Goldfield Con thus included six constituent mines: the Mohawk, Red Top, Jumbo, and Combination (all of them producing mines), as well as Goldfield Mining, a recently purchased property of no value aside from its location, and the Laguna, a claim Wingfield acquired some time earlier, allegedly in payment for a gambling debt. Though Wingfield valued these last two mines at $2,000,000 each when Goldfield Con issued its stock, they apparently never produced at all. On the safe assumption that the undisclosed purchase price of Goldfield Mining was minimal, it will be noted that the properties Wingfield purchased for this merger capitalized at $50,000,000 had cost him less than $5,000,000—a good deal less, in fact, since the Combination stockholders agreed to accept a large portion of the payments due to them in Goldfield Con stock. In connection with the Combination transaction, stock sales yielding more than $7,000,000 were anticipated. Company reports show that, as compensation for these exertions in the winzes and stopes of finance,



Cartoon illustration by Arthur Buel, *Reno Evening Gazette,* December 13, 1909.

Wingfield awarded $2,500,000 worth of stock in Goldfield Con to Nixon and himself.[5]

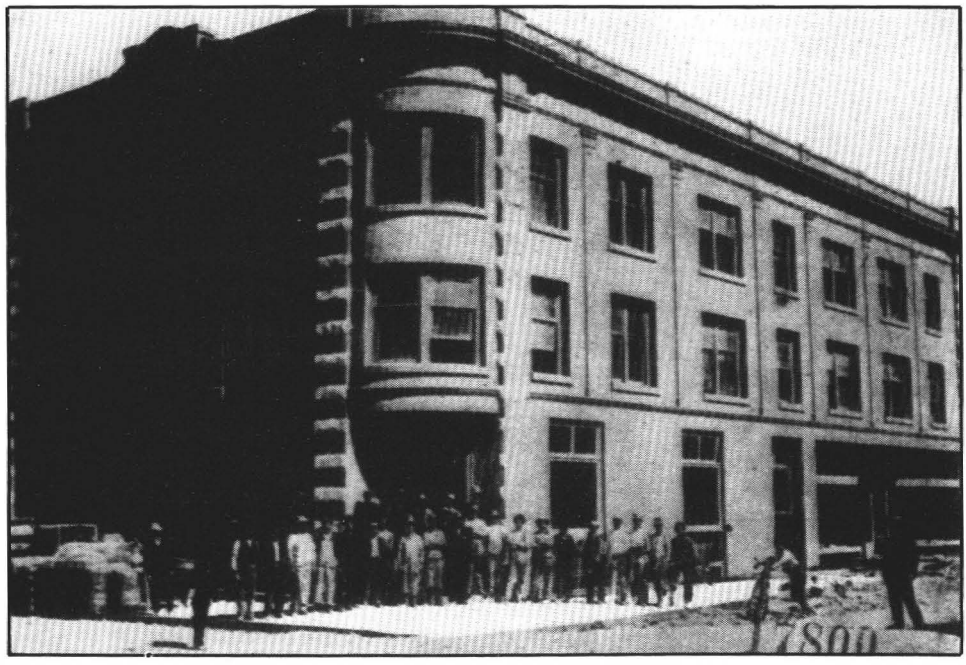
The great merger was accompanied by what George Graham Rice, born Jacob Herzig, con artist and stock promoter, described, with what may have been a shade of envy, as a "stock-market campaign for higher prices that stands unprecedented for audacity and intensity in the history of mining stock speculation in this country since the great boom of the Comstock."[6] The press noted that at the Goldfield stock exchange, collarless, coatless, hoarse, and perspiring brokers massed about the caller, "frantically buying and selling." "Semi-suffocated humanity" pushed inside behind them, packed "like sardines." The mining-stock craze reached such a pitch of frenzy that even the Goldfield press, usually the first to applaud any favorable development in the stock market, warned that investors were paying stiff figures for stock in mines that had "never developed a pound of ore" and that a day of "reckoning" was bound to come.[7]

Such warnings were useless, as stock prices soared under Wingfield's guiding hand. Jumbo stock, which sold for 73 cents a share in 1905, leapt to $5.20 on November 9, two weeks after the merger story hit the newspapers; Red Top followed a similar progression, from 41 cents to $4.95; Mohawk, which had been listed as merely a "prospect" on the exchanges prior to the Hayes-Monnette strike and had not even been patented, rose from 17 cents in 1905

to $17.75; and even Laguna, unlisted in 1905, and Goldfield Mining went from 41 cents to $2.10 and 72 cents to $1.90, respectively. Taylor no doubt noted that the difference between the $2.00 price at which he had sold his shares of Jumbo and Red Top to Wingfield and their prices on the stock market two weeks later was $2,049,000, a sum more than one-and-a-half times larger than the entire purchase price of his stock. Because Goldfield Con allowed a period during which the stockholders of the constituent companies could exchange their shares for stock in Goldfield Con, shares in the constituent companies continued to be separately listed and traded on the stock exchanges for more than six months. Rice believed that Wingfield, who was always personally present at the exchange in the thick of the fray, utilized this system to unload large blocks of his Mohawk stock at the time when it had more than quadrupled in value, as well as profitable chunks of Jumbo and Red Top. Whatever the truth of this charge, Wingfield would have needed a far duller head than anyone supposed he possessed if he had failed to profit when all boats in the exchange were rising with the swelling tide. Nixon had earlier urged Wingfield to "cut out the cards" and devote his attention to stocks, where, as Nixon put it, "you can do better than any of those lobsters."[8] Events in the stock exchange during 1906-07 amply proved his prescience.

Wingfield, or Nixon, held the presidency of no fewer than five Goldfield mining companies in addition to Goldfield Consolidated (Columbia Mountain, Conqueror, and Kendall, among others), and they undoubtedly retained large holdings in companies they had originally organized, such as the Blue Bull, as well as substantial miscellaneous holdings. Stocks in these companies, with the exception of Sandstorm, had sold for only 12 to 18 cents in 1905, when they sold at all. During the November 1906 stock craze, even the most sluggish of these stocks nearly doubled in price, while the most volatile skyrocketed by more than 500 percent.[9] There can be little doubt that Wingfield was in the process of amassing an enormous personal fortune in the stock market at the same time that he was organizing one of the most productive gold mines in America. But two Goldfield labor unions, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and its radical offshoot, the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW), had merged and were becoming increasingly assertive. At the close of 1906, peak year of the Goldfield boom, the highest-stakes game that George Wingfield had ever played was not yet over.

In the spring of 1907 Wingfield's campaign to eliminate the union commenced. While it is necessary to bear in mind that the miners' union and the IWW throughout this period were under broad attack from Bisbee, Arizona, to the Canadian border and that in many localities the manner in which they were crushed was irreconcilable with our constitutional traditions, still it would be difficult to deny that the antiunion methods used in Goldfield involved extraordinarily serious abuses of the American legal system. It was in



Nixon Block, Goldfield, Nevada, 1905. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

recognition of this fact that the Nevada Board of Pardons granted posthumous pardons to union radicals Morrie Preston and Joseph Smith in May of 1987, eighty years after their convictions, apparently the first posthumous pardons in the history of Nevada.

To briefly summarize the complex events of 1907 on the union front: When union organizer Morrie Preston shot and killed restauranteur John Silva in self-defense during a picketing dispute, chance once more dealt Wingfield a lucky card that he would exploit to the fullest. When Preston was later convicted of murder on the basis of testimony that the shooting was an assassination planned by the union, and union organizer Joseph Smith was also convicted of manslaughter as an alleged conspirator, public fears of union violence seemed confirmed; perjured testimony purchased by Wingfield's bodyguard and lieutenant "Diamondfield Jack" Davis and the special prosecutors hired by Nixon and Wingfield helped to accomplish this result. The public hysteria surrounding the shooting had already enabled Wingfield to unite Goldfield's long-divided mine owners and leasers in a lockout against the union and to make the newly organized Goldfield Mine Owners and Businessmen's Association the de facto government of the city. As the lockout dragged on, a force of Goldfield Con company guards patrolled the streets, and Wingfield issued an ultimatum to the union: "Compromise be damned. The Goldfield mines will stay closed down until hell freezes over before we

open them to let a lot of anarchists tell us how to run our property." After thirty-eight lean days of soup kitchens and hardship, the union capitulated to Wingfield's demands. The influence of the radicals in the miners' union continued to wane over the ensuing months, and that fall most of the radical leaders under indictment as conspirators in Silva's murder agreed to leave the district in return for dismissal of the charges against them. Vincent St. John, the most famous of these leaders, was effectively removed by a fusillade of bullets from a conservative union rival in early November.

Less than two weeks after the St. John shooting, Goldfield Con announced that, because of the cash shortage accompanying the October financial panic, the miners would be paid in scrip and offered no guarantee of eventual redemption in cash. Opposition to scrip, or worthless paper, as many miners called it, speedily dissolved all differences between radicals and conservatives in the union. The vote for a strike to begin on November 27, 1907, was unanimous. Not until later did anyone realize that a strike fitted nicely with Wingfield's plans.

On December 2 the mine operators' association cancelled its agreements with the union, and a committee led by Wingfield called upon Governor John Sparks. On December 5, Sparks telegraphed to President Theodore Roosevelt his request for troops for the purpose of maintaining order in the face of "domestic violence and unlawful combinations and conspiracies." The arrival of federal troops the next day was a surprise to local officials, who had not asked for military assistance, to the union, and to the Goldfield populace. Aside from the usual crowds and carousing, the city was entirely at peace. When Roosevelt shortly afterward began to doubt whether Goldfield was actually plagued by domestic violence, he dispatched a presidential commission to investigate. Their report provided a clear post mortem on the real reason for the military presence at Goldfield:

> The action of the mine operators warrants the belief that they had determined upon a reduction in wages and the refusal of employment to members of the Western Federation of Miners, but that they feared to take this course of action unless they had the protection of federal troops, and that they accordingly laid plans to secure such troops, and then put the programme into effect.

So said the report. The Preston and Smith convictions, engineered by Wingfield, were virtually the only proof of union violence the mine owners could present in support of their request for troops. Over the next four months the miners' union died a lingering death, while the mine owners cut wages, introduced an illegal card system, and began recruiting scabs from neighboring states. Humble offers from the once proud and powerful union to purge its ranks of radicals and to negotiate on virtually any terms were rejected out of hand. By spring, the union had been effectively destroyed.[10]

The Revolution in Our Day and Time, as the union radicals had named it,

was not the only dream that trickled away in the gravelled sands of Goldfield during the winter of 1907-08. Stock prices had dropped with little surcease since the speculative frenzy of November 1906, and the day of reckoning continued its inexorable advance. As *Mining and Scientific Press* had predicted in a discussion on the "two extremes" of financial chicanery, "Gold mining in Nevada is likely to suffer as much from the inflation of stocks representing splendid mines as she has suffered from the sinking of money into worthless schemes."[11] The crux of the problem lay in the ballooning of mining stocks, led by Goldfield Con, to price levels far beyond their real values and in the public willingness to plunge into risky investments in hope of huge returns. Financial practices then prevalent in Goldfield, however, undoubtedly exacerbated the situation. Rice recalled that while the market was rising the John S. Cook and Company Bank, in which Nixon and Wingfield held a large interest, "stimulated speculation and managed to spread a feeling of security" by loaning sixty to eighty percent of the purchase price for shares of Goldfield Con. Many borrowers and margin traders took advantage of this opportunity to buy the stock and pledged it as collateral for further purchases.[12] And these, be it noted, were the practices of the more reputable brokerage firms; wildcatters were restrained by no scruples whatever as they scrambled for investors' dollars, and the skyrocketing prices of Goldfield securities during November of 1906 furnished them a convincing argument, which they used to gull investors throughout the United States.

As stock prices slumped, dangerously overextended brokers in Goldfield and San Francisco began to go under, beginning with Rice's own L. M. Sullivan Trust Company in early January of 1907—an inauspicious omen for the new year. Among the Goldfield fraternity, it was a rare broker who was able to meet his obligations when margins were exhausted and the Cook bank demanded payment. By July a plethora of firms, including the once wealthy and respected Kenneth Donnellan and Company, had succumbed, taking with them untold sums in investor dollars.[13] Worse was still to come.

"SHOT TO PIECES" read the *Goldfield News* following the October 1907 panic. Conqueror (at 7 cents a share), Columbia Mountain (18 cents), Kendall (8 cents), and other Wingfield companies had dived to the pre-boom levels of early 1906, accompanied by a host of other unproductive mines. Goldfield Con, issued at $10.00 a share a year earlier, struck rock bottom at $3.80 on November 30. The Goldfield press, though always eager to avoid any appearance of knocking the camp, acknowledged that the average decline in Goldfield stocks over the past year was sixty-five percent, and many had fallen eighty percent or more. Transactions at the Goldfield exchange alone had shriveled from a daily high of 2,580,000 shares worth $1,180,000 during the top week to 280,000 shares worth $30,000. As Rice recalled, "The carnage was awful." Losses to American investors as a whole cannot be fixed with

certainty, but Rice, whose figures appear to be generally accurate, estimated them at $150,000,000.[14]

During Goldfield's remaining time, the impossible mirage of wealth glimpsed during the bonanza year was never seen again. By the end of 1910, Conqueror, Kendall, and other Wingfield companies, as well as a host of comparable wildcat properties, had dropped off the stock boards entirely, wiping out every dollar invested in them, and the market had withered to the point that only 17,200 Goldfield shares were traded in a typical day. Of eighty-four Goldfield mining stocks listed on the exchange in December of 1906, only sixteen were still quoted four years later. Although Goldfield Con recovered to $8.25 a share and ultimately paid a total of $29,780,000 in dividends, Hugh Shamberger has calculated that this amounted to only $8.20 per share, and those who had bought stock at the $10 issue price would never have recouped their investments.[15]

Possibly it is fitting that none of the original fraternity of prospectors whose boundless hopes against all odds had created the camp continued to play a significant role in Goldfield mining after the bonanza spirit was shattered in the crash of 1907. In late June of 1908, the press reported the sale of Al Myers's last holding in a major Goldfield mine, the Combination Fraction, to Wingfield, who soon afterward took control of the property. Despite general expectations that the Combination Fraction would be added to Goldfield Con, with which it was contiguous, it remained in Wingfield's vest pocket, suggesting that his object was not the greater glory of Goldfield Con but the personal mastery of the district. However, his apparent efforts to acquire the Florence, the only top mine that remained outside his grasp, were frustrated by owner Tom Lockhart's absolute refusal to sell.[16] No other obstacles impeded Wingfield's drive toward domination. At the end of March 1909, following a period in which news of the discovery of the exceptionally rich Hampton stope in the Combination was allegedly suppressed while adverse rumors were circulated to avoid an inconveniently timed boom in the stock market, Nixon transferred his shares in Goldfield Con to Wingfield in exchange for Wingfield's interest in banking ventures other than the John S. Cook Bank in Goldfield. Wingfield could then announce in a triumphant telegram, "I have took over everything."[17]

Despite the great admiration that Wingfield's organization and operation of Goldfield Con evoked from many of his contemporaries in an era when newspapermen termed him the Napoleon and the King of Nevada Mining and Finance, criticism was heard from some quarters. One of the principal targets was his company's policy on dividends. Stockholders grew restive because a mere $355,000 had been paid out in a single ten cent dividend—and this at a time when the company's production figure exceeded $6,000,000 and Wingfield and Nixon had just awarded themselves a $2,500,000 stock bonus. The

company offered various excuses, none of them especially persuasive. This low ratio of dividends to production did not conform with standard practice among Goldfield mining companies in the period. For example, the Red Top under Taylor's management had paid a dividend after producing fewer than 2,500 tons of ore, and the Reilly lease had paid out a whopping 78 percent of production in dividends. It should, however, be noted that some doubt surrounds Goldfield Con's initial production figures. The attempt to untangle the obfuscations and discrepancies in Goldfield Con's 1907 annual report led Thomas A. Rickard, editor of the prestigious and highly respected out-of-state publication *Mining and Scientific Press,* to throw up his hands in disgust, while clearly implying that the figures defied credibility—this was, after all, the same company that had casually published an $800,000 error in its original prospectus.[18]

The overcapitalization of Goldfield Consolidated at $50,000,000 aroused even more serious criticism. *Mining and Scientific Press* observed that, if Goldfield Con's capitalization figure had been realistically related to the proven ore reserves and to the selling prices of the constituent mines, the merger stock would have been worth a great deal less. Goldfield Con is a "great mine," the editor soberly concluded, "but in the exuberance of their speculative activities the promoters have overcapitalized it." A more realistic capitalization figure would probably have been in the $25,000,000 range.[19]

During these declining years, the fortunes of Goldfield Con, source of more than 80 percent of the ore produced in Goldfield from 1909 through 1918, were increasingly the fortunes of the district, and George Wingfield was the undisputed kingpin, all other contenders having abdicated in his favor. No one else matched Wingfield's relentless drive toward mastery of the district. Highgraders he pursued like an avenging nemesis, even after the union, which had abetted the miners in this form of theft, had been broken. When he felt that county officials might fail to pursue the campaign with sufficient vigor in the Mike Smith case, he publicly reminded them that Goldfield Con was the county's largest taxpayer and they would thus be well advised to exercise themselves in his interests. Enemies and rivals he crushed with a ruthless hand, though some fought back tenaciously. Rice, for example, believed that Wingfield and Nixon had a hand in the downfall of his brokerage company. Even after he landed in the federal penitentiary for mail fraud several years later, Rice continued to insist that his own financial misdeeds were mere petty peccadillos in comparison to Wingfield's grand raid on the stock market. Rice was not Wingfield's only detractor. Tom Lockhart, who adhered to the stodgy idea that the business of mining companies was to produce ore rather than to promote stock, voiced some thinly veiled criticisms of Wingfield's stock manipulations and dividend policies, while Wingfield, for his part, circulated adverse rumors about Lockhart's Florence Mine in an apparent effort to hammer down the stock. In his duel with Donald

Mackenzie, broker and part owner of the Frances-Mohawk lease, law suits were Wingfield's primary weapon. Although Mackenzie won a partial victory in the courts, contending that Wingfield's suit was a malicious action brought for the sole purpose of ruining him, Wingfield had already succeeded in destroying Mackenzie's credit and attaching the assets of his business, once lauded in the press as the "largest and most successful" in the region.[20]

By the end of 1908, the last great boom of the western mining frontier had evaporated, and Goldfield declined to a species of company town, so successfully subdued that Wingfield could safely leave its affairs in the hands of his lieutenants. Although he sometimes returned for a triumphal visit, there were no more bonanzas to be had for a fistful of dollars, no more million-dollar deals to be made, and no more stock crazes in which he could swing a frenzied throng his way. Now that he had scraped Goldfield into his pile of winnings, the game was over, and George Wingfield moved on to the next phase of his career, in Reno.

To sum up, what basic points and themes can be discerned in the colorful and rather complicated story of George Wingfield's years in Goldfield? First—and this is a point often overlooked—luck played a very large role in Wingfield's rise to dominance. There was nothing foreordained about Nixon's purchase of the Mohawk or the discovery of its bonanzas. Goldfield's small, rich deposits of gold occurred in such a random way that geologists often failed to predict them, and, had the bonanza uncovered by Hayes and Monnette remained undiscovered for a few more years, the course of Goldfield's history might have been very different. In that event, Wingfield would probably have been a major player on the Goldfield scene but not the absolutely dominant figure familiar to us. Recognizing the large role that good luck in the form of the Hayes-Monnette bonanza had played in Wingfield's rise does not, of course, detract from his achievement in the realm of finance: Many fortunes were made and lost in the mining camps, but when fate dealt Wingfield a lucky hand, he had the skill and nerve to exploit it to the full and the wisdom to retain his winnings.

Second, in the overcapitalization of Goldfield Consolidated and in other financial matters, it seems fairly clear that normal mining business practices and the interests of stockholders had far lower priority than Wingfield's drive for personal profit.

Third, Wingfield's thrust for power—in more theoretical terms, we might call it the businessman's drive to control his environment—was total in its scope. He apparently attempted to secure all the major mines of the Goldfield district. When he destroyed the miners' union, he destroyed it totally, and compromise and negotiation seem to have formed no part of his *modus operandi.* He was capable not only of ruthless behavior toward an enemy but also of real vindictiveness, as was evident in the vendettas he waged against Mackenzie and *Goldfield News* editor Charles Sprague, among others.

Fourth, already in Goldfield we can see the preference of the future boss of Nevada's bipartisan machine for a behind-the-scenes role in which he could act through trusted lieutenants. This arrangement permitted him to exercise political power without the broad responsibility or the public scrutiny entailed in holding elective office. His preference for acting behind the scenes was coupled with a belief that the first and foremost responsibility of public officials was not to their constituents at large but to him, as was evident in the Mike Smith case. When officials failed to act according to his wishes, Wingfield had several modes of response: He might by-pass them for more compliant officials, as he did in Goldfield when he persuaded the governor to summon the federal troops; he might merge official entities with those under his control, as when the Goldfield Con security forces and state detectives were essentially melded under Wingfield's security chief, Clarence Sage; or he might create a private shadow government that exercised real power alongside formal governmental institutions. This was the strategy when he organized the Goldfield Mine Owners and Businessmen's Association that ran the city in the spring of 1907. Another arena of involvement predictably involved elections. While Wingfield's political activities are sometimes difficult to trace, the evidence is fairly clear as to his attempts to influence the election of 1910 in Goldfield.

Finally, it is important to look at the Goldfield years, when Wingfield was first rising to power, not only for the evolution of his political and financial methods but also for his associates there, because many of the key figures in the future bipartisan political machine were part of what Wingfield himself later called the old Goldfield crowd. Like veterans of a war, these men were forever set apart by their common experience in the great rush to Goldfield, and Wingfield may have regarded them with favor because they were personal witnesses to what may well have been the most stirring scenes in his career.[21]

In conclusion, let me say that it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the three year period 1905-08 that Wingfield spent in Goldfield. Not only did Goldfield provide him with the immense personal fortune that was the foundation of his power, but it was also Goldfield in which he made the personal contacts that formed the nucleus of the Goldfield crowd and began development of the political methods he would later perfect.

NOTES

[1] *Goldfield News* (cited hereafter as *GN*), 1906-07 annual issue, 70.

[2] *GN*, 22 September 1906. See also issues of 5 January and 2 March 1907; Hugh A. Shamberger, *Goldfield* (Sparks, Nev.: Western Printing and Publishing Company, 1982), 199, 201; and *Mining and Scientific Press* 96 (1 February 1908): 161.

[3] *Tonopah Bonanza*, 6 and 13 June 1903; Book of Deeds, Esmeralda County Courthouse, Goldfield; Thomas A. Rickard, "Goldfield II," *Mining and Scientific Press* 96 (16 May 1908): 664; George S. Nixon to

John S. Cook, 7, 18, and 23 January and 5 February 1904, George S. Nixon Collection, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

[4] Carl B. Glasscock, *Gold in Them Hills* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1932), 242; George G. Rice, *My Adventures with Your Money* (New York: Bookfinger, 1974 reprint of 1911 original), 124.

[5] *GN*, 27 October and 3 November 1906, 2 March 1907; Shamberger, *Goldfield*, 194; *Goldfield Chronicle (GC)*, 23 September 1907.

[6] Rice, *Adventures*, 125.

[7] *GN*, 10 November 1906.

[8] Nixon to George Wingfield, 11 July 1904, Nixon Collection. Also see the daily stock quotations in the Goldfield press; the *GC*, 23 September 1907; the *Goldfield Daily Tribune*, 11 July 1907; and Rice, *Adventures*, 129, 148.

[9] See daily stock quotations in Goldfield press.

[10] Sally Zanjani and Guy Louis Rocha, *The Ignoble Conspiracy: Radicalism on Trial in Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986); Russell R. Elliott, "Labor Troubles in the Mining Camp at Goldfield, Nevada 1906-1908," *Pacific Historical Review* 19 (1950): 369-84; Guy L. Rocha, "Radical Labor Struggles in the Tonopah-Goldfield Mining District, 1901-1922," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 20 (1977): 3-45; and *New York Times*, 15 May 1987, p. 11.

[11] *Mining and Scientific Press* 95 (3 August 1907): 128.

[12] Rice, *Adventures*, 129-30.

[13] Ibid.; *GN*, 29 June 1907.

[14] Rice, *Adventures*, 128, 130; *GN*,22 November 1907; *Goldfield Review*, 12 August and 22 November 1907. Also see the stock quotations.

[15] Shamberger, *Goldfield*, 210; *GN*, 1 December and 7 December 1906, and 16 December 1910.

[16] Shamberger, *Goldfield*, 190-91; *GN*, 2 April 1909; and *GC*, 5 February 1908.

[17] Wingfield to George K. Edler, 31 March 1909, George Wingfield Collection, Nevada Historical Society, Reno. Also see the *GN*, 30 and 31 March 1909.

[18] *Mining and Scientific Press* 95 (21 December 1907): 758-59. Also see Shamberger, *Goldfield*, 199 and the *GN*, 13 April and 14 December 1906.

[19] *Mining and Scientific Press* 94 (5 January 1907): 16.

[20] Sally Zanjani, "The Mike Smith Case: A Note on High Grading in Goldfield, Nevada, 1910," *Labor History* (1983): 580-87; Rice, *Adventures*, 175. On Lockhart, see the *GN*, 23 March 1909; on Mackenzie, see the *GN*, 18 March 1909, and Goldfield Mohawk Mining Company v. Frances-Mohawk Mining and Leasing Company, District Court, *Nevada Reports* 33 (1910): 491-507.

[21] Sally S. Zanjani, *The Unspiked Rail: Memoir of a Nevada Rebel* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981), 173, 239-40, 243, 252-53. Also see Jerome E. Edwards, *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982), 27-29, and James W. Hulse, *The Nevada Adventure: A History* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1965), 180-84.

WINGFIELD AND NEVADA POLITICS—SOME OBSERVATIONS

JEROME E. EDWARDS

ALTHOUGH GEORGE WINGFIELD WAS THE DOMINATING FIGURE in Nevada for more than a quarter of a century, relatively little is known about him. During his lifetime he allowed few interviews and was protective of his privacy. In 1967, eight years after his death, his voluminous papers were given to the Nevada Historical Society in Reno, but under a fifty-year seal. When my biography of Senator Patrick McCarran appeared in the early 1980s, I mentioned that the likelihood of there ever being a biography of Wingfield was slim because of the lack of information.[1]

Little has therefore been written about Wingfield, and the two most informative books deal with him only incidentally to their main subjects. Clel Georgetta's *Golden Fleece in Nevada* (1972), a personal and idiosyncratic study of Nevada's sheep industry is highly favorable in its estimate of Wingfield. By contrast, Sally Springmeyer Zanjani's superb biography of her father George Springmeyer, *The Unspiked Rail: Memoirs of a Nevada Rebel* (1981), offers a devastating portrayal of Wingfield. My own *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (1982), although reflecting McCarran's own negative assessment of Wingfield, provides information on the McCarran-Wingfield relationship, the nature of the so-called bipartisan machine, and the Cole-Malley case. Also available is Barbara Thornton's "George Wingfield in Nevada from 1896 to 1932," a 1967 master's degree thesis written at the University of Nevada-Reno; although illuminating in its insights and information, it is, however, far too brief. Thornton did not have access to Wingfield's papers, but her study benefits from many private interviews with people who knew Wingfield well, and who are no longer living, people such as Roxy Thoma Wingfield, his second wife, and George Wingfield, Jr. Other published studies containing less, but still useful, information on Wingfield include Russell Elliott's *History of Nevada* and *Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom: Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely*, C.B. Glasscock's *Gold in Them Hills*, Loren B.

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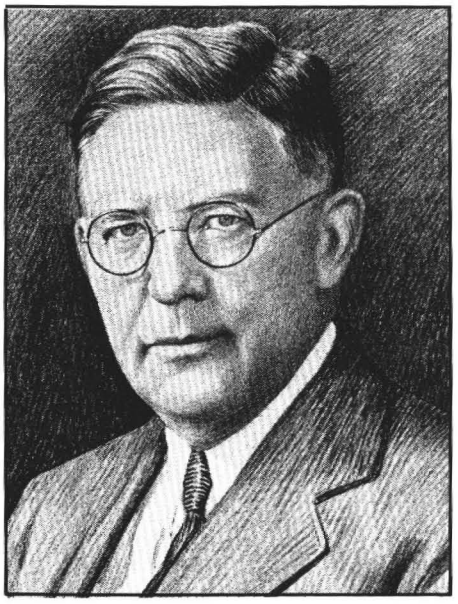


George B. Thatcher (l) and William Woodburn (r), Wingfield's attorneys, shared the same suite of offices with him on the second floor of the Reno National Bank Building. (From Boyd Moore, *Nevadans and Nevada,* 1950)

Chan's *Sagebrush Statesman: Tasker L. Oddie of Nevada,* Gilman M. Ostrander's *Nevada, The Great Rotten Borough, 1859-1964,* and William D. Rowley's *Reno, Hub of the Washoe Country.*

All this adds up, however, to a major gap in our information about Nevada, and hence Wingfield, from 1907 (the date of the Goldfield labor strike) to the 1930s. Fortunately, there are now two major works in progress that will greatly enhance our understanding of Wingfield, and his era in state history. Indispensable to these works was the opening of the Wingfield papers in January 1988 through the efforts of Elizabeth Raymond of the faculty of the University of Nevada-Reno, who had previously catalogued the collection. Raymond is presently working on a full-scale biography of Wingfield that will be a major contribution to the growing bibliography on the history of twentieth-century Nevada. Also in progress is the second volume of John Townley's history of Reno; entitled *Mr. Wingfield's Town,* it will cover the years from 1900 to approximately 1950. Townley's study is enhanced by his meticulous reading of contemporary newspapers.

Since these works by Raymond and Townley are not yet completed, we still lack vital information regarding the nature of Wingfield's alleged bipartisan political machine, its reality, and its chief characteristics. The very existence of the machine is still in dispute; although most writers accept the notion of its existence, the concept lacks definition. This observer does not

pretend to be an expert on Wingfield or the bipartisan machine. However, I do believe it is not premature to hazard some general observations as to the nature of the Nevada political structure from 1907 to the 1930s, the period of Wingfield's ascendancy. Because of the status of present research, these observations must be suggestive rather than definitive.

The differing views of historians and other observers as to the nature of Wingfield's political power are revealing. It is appropriate to begin with the editorial in the *Reno Evening Gazette* that appeared immediately after his death in 1959. The author of the editorial was that knowledgeable observer of Nevada politics, John Sanford.

> For more than 50 years George Wingfield was a mighty power in Nevada and for a greater part of that half century his rule was absolute. Through a political machine it controlled both parties and quickly smashed any opposition. And through a banking system it wielded a power of life and death over business and individuals. Any criticism of the Wingfield machine's methods and operations, any rebellions against its rule, were quickly and mercilessly put down. Only a few strong individuals dared to stand up against it at the height of its reign.[2]

By contrast, Gilman Ostrander, a historian who is usually quite critical of Nevada in his *Nevada: The Great Rotten Borough* (1966), downplays the existence of a machine. In his brief portrayal of the man, political power seems almost to be an absent-minded afterthought.

> Whether Wingfield used the power he possessed systematically and extensively is a baffling question. The most scholarly authority on twentieth-century Nevada history [which he curiously says is the *Sacramento Bee*] has written that "The real capital of Nevada was Room 201 in the Reno National Bank Building, Wingfield's main office and headquarters for his henchmen, the lawyers George B. Thatcher and William Woodburn." This may have been so, but no good evidence has been produced to prove it, and the evidence that is available indicates that it was not the case.
>
> The findings imply that because Wingfield ruled the state economically, he was constantly drawn into a world of politics about which he cared little. . . .
>
> What appears to have been the case is that Wingfield, trying to mind his own business, was involved in politics in spite of himself, but by virtue of his great economic power.[3]

These contrasting viewpoints each appears to offer a confident depiction of reality from 1907 to the 1930s. The fact is, however, that definitive proof of the existence of a Wingfield political machine cannot be established from the written record as it is now available. There are clues from associates and subordinates, perceptions from contemporaries, but there is at present no irrefutable written evidence from Wingfield himself of much intervention in the realm of political affairs. There is, I am assured by those who have made a thorough search through the Wingfield papers, no smoking gun there, a situation quite different from that in the deliciously explicit and gossipy cor-

respondence between McCarran and Pete Petersen, in which the outlines of a McCarran political machine are delineated for everyone to see.

This leads therefore to a major problem for historians and other writers. Is historical truth to be found only from written documentation? If the necessary documents are missing, can—indeed, should—the historian speculate about the historical reality? How solid can this speculation be? These are important questions, especially today when individuals reveal less of their private thought in correspondence and more in telephone messages or other forms of communication that do not leave a paper trail.

Let us look at Wingfield's political operation as it was perceived by many contemporaries and by later observers. We can perhaps then establish how much of their perception was accurate by making some inferences from the larger picture of Nevada politics and society at this time. The head of the so-called machine (a term I do not particularly care for and which I shall try to redefine later) was George Wingfield, who held primacy in Nevada politics from 1907 to 1934 or so because of his economic power. By 1932 he owned twelve out of Nevada's thirty-two banks; these twelve held approximately sixty percent of all deposits in the state. He owned two major Reno hotels, the Riverside and the Golden, and had considerable mining, ranching, and real estate interests.

The existence of a bipartisan machine is attested to by John Sanford in a striking quotation from his oral history.

> Every little thing that went on around here, everybody said, "Well, now, how's that gonna get along with the boys up there in 'the cave'?" By that, they meant the upstairs of that old Reno National Bank Building there. And in one political campaign, those who opposed the Wingfield machine used to bring up the war cry of "4111 in Nevada politics." That was a telephone number. And 4111 gave you the Reno National Bank, George Wingfield, George Thatcher, and Bill Woodburn. George Thatcher at that time—let's see, I believe he was Democratic national committeeman, Bill Woodburn was state chairman, and George Wingfield was national committeeman for the Republicans. So you can see what 4111 meant. And every one of the state conventions that was held around here, Republican or Democrat, the influence of that machine was in there.[5]

Wingfield's great economic power, at least as wielded through his banking system, could be used ruthlessly to achieve political ends, or so argues John Sanford and others who shared his perception.

> And it had its influence even over the newspaper business around the state through its loans that it had made, and that was one of the things that haunted the *Nevada State Journal* for years and years when Scrugham bought the paper. He gave a $60,000 note to the—well, the Wingfield banks, and more particularly, Thatcher and Woodburn. And when Fred McKechnie bought the paper from Scrugham, he thought that was just a plain legitimate note, one that could be handled and paid off. He found out afterwards that wasn't so. That was a club over the paper and its publisher.[6]

Senator Patrick McCarran, pictured here in 1933, tried to establish the existence of the alleged bipartisan machine by grilling Wingfield on the stand during the Cole-Malley trial in 1927. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

This machine crossed party lines. Republicans rumored to be associated with Wingfield at one time or another include Tasker Oddie (governor 1911-14, United States senator 1921-33), Fred Balzar (governor 1927-34), Morley Griswold (lieutenant governor 1927-34, governor 1934), Mayor E.E. Roberts of Reno, Johnny Mueller, Norman Biltz, Lester Summerfield, and Noble Getchell. Democrats associated one way or another with Wingfield include William Woodburn, George Thatcher, Key Pittman (United States senator 1913-40), James Scrugham (governor 1923-26), George Cole, Ed Mal-

ley, Sam Pickett, Ray Baker, and George Bartlett. This is a fairly good representation of the power structure that ran Nevada over a twenty-five year period.[7]

The organization had its share of enemies, however. Several major newspapers not only thought there was a Wingfield machine, they consistently fought agianst what they perceived as its political dominance. The *Sacramento Bee* was a California newspaper that occasionally reminded Nevadans that outsiders were looking in. In 1935 the paper was to win a Pulitzer Prize for "meritorious public service" by running a series of articles purporting to expose Wingfield's political machinations. The articles were written by Arthur B. Waugh and continued the argument of a series of crusading, muckraking articles written in 1931 by Laura Vitray. Then, too, there was the *Reno Evening Gazette*, always conservative, invariably Republican, but, under the leadership of Graham Sanford, consistently anti-Wingfield. In the 1920s it was easily Nevada's leading newspaper and by far its most solvent one. Both the *Bee* and the *Gazette* believed that the legislative decision as to whether Wingfield or the taxpayers should bear the cost of the embezzlements in the George Cole-Ed Malley case demonstrated Wingfield's enormous political power.[8] Among politicians, probably the most prominent Nevadan to cross Wingfield was Patrick McCarran, who represented the defendants in the Cole-Malley case and who was too gutsy (or bullheaded, depending upon one's point of view) to serve the master. In return, McCarran was cast into political limbo for more than fifteen years. Other politicians, while not exactly enemies of Wingfield, were simply irrelevant to the workings of the alleged machine; an excellent example of these is Emmett Boyle (governor 1915-22).

Such are the outlines of what was perceived to be an organization that dominated the state of Nevada for approximately a quarter century. I believe that the preceding sketch is accurate in its essentials, that the Sanford interpretation of a political machine is closer to reality than the competing Ostrander interpretation. I am also the first to admit that the evidence is not entirely conclusive, and that one must look at the larger realities of the Nevada experience for a better understanding of the situation. As stated before, the following argument is intended to be suggestive rather than definitive.

The word *machine*, although often used by contemporaries, is surely misleading. *Machine* connotes something akin to a Boss Richard Daley type of operation, that is, a tightly structured, patronage-wielding operation tied in with a dominant political party, and in which unswerving loyalty is exacted from subordinates. In twentieth-century Nevada, the political operations of Senator McCarran better fit that classic mold. For Wingfield, the preferable term might be *network* or *web of associations*, where everyone implicitly knew what might be expected of them *on certain major issues*. Even *organization* is preferable to *machine*, although it, too, might suggest something more institutionalized than the apparent reality of the situation.

Whatever term we use, Wingfield's contemporaries, and especially those

Bill Graham (l) and James McKay (r), pictured with Jack Dempsey breaking ground for a racetrack and fight arena in Reno in 1931. Graham and McKay, owners of the Bank Club and major figures in the Reno underworld, were widely assumed to be part of the Wingfield machine. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

who were critical of him, certainly were convinced there was something there. Patrick McCarran, in February of 1933, commented in a letter to his daughter Sister Margaret "that too much power was vested in one individual, and whenever too much power is vested in one human being, that power usually turns in the form of a flame to destroy the political, financial and moral power of the state—as for the last fifteen years been vested in George Wingfield." The then newly elected senator rejoiced that "The power that controlled the throttle of this state is at an end," and that "He was an avaricious controller, demanding the pound of flesh in every line in which he bent his efforts."[9]

The *Sacramento Bee*, that faithful and noisy enemy, printed a series of articles by Laura Vitray in 1931, one of which bore the headline, "Peon Citizens of Nevada Outlaw State, Are Serfs in Toils of Rich Politician." This is the type of sensationalism for which the paper later earned its Pulitzer Prize. In the article, Vitray stated that Wingfield was "king of the State of Nevada" and was "directing its legislation." The state's "official life and the operations of the courts . . . all semblance of democracy" had disappeared.[10] Even earlier Nevada politicians had perceived a Wingfield political power, something they thought akin to a machine. In 1918, former governor Tasker Oddie, defeated a second time in trying to regain the governorship, vented his feeling to his brother: "The trouble is, that there is a rotten machine in this state which can handle things as it wants to. I tell you these things, but I do not say anything about them outside. It would be like squealing and I won't do that."[11]

The preceding testimony to the machine's existence may have been so many sour grapes. It would be well here to look at the nature of the state's political and social structure to see whether any of the characteristics of Nevada's unique society might provide some insight on the problem.

For one thing, Nevada was quite a small society. In 1920 it had rather fewer than eighty thousand people. From its admission as a state in 1864 until 1959 (when Alaska was admitted), it was always a dismal last in population among the states. When Wingfield was at the apogee of his power, Nevada was little bigger in number of people than a Chicago ward, although the number was distributed over a vast area. But the distribution was concentrated in towns and crossroads. Because of the tiny population, Nevada voters tended to know their leaders fairly well. The political and financial elite knew each other personally. There was not the distance between leadership and people, or among leadership, that is ordinarily observed in societies that have larger populations and more complex organizations.

With this small population, there was not much in the way of competing power centers. To a great extent, power was centered in the one city with national fame and metropolitan pretensions—Reno. With but eighteen thousand people in 1930, Reno had dominated the state financially and politi-

cally since 1910. The elite of Reno and Nevada lived in a small and cohesive area, all within a half mile of each other, in the city's near southwest side. They attended many of the same business, social, and club functions, and they could see each other on a daily basis if they so desired. Of this group, Wingfield was universally acknowledged to be the most powerful. With such a concentrated population, power brokers did not need to send letters to each other. If Wingfield, who lived at 219 Court Street, wished to contact someone at 435 Court Street, he could have lunch with the individual, meet at the office, or on the street. There would likely be no documentary trail.

Not only did the elite of Nevada tend to live close together, they had also known each other over a relatively long period. The leadership of the state, after the turmoil of the Tonopah-Goldfield boom, was not an especially mobile group. Indeed, Nevada suffered economic malaise through most of Wingfield's era. Many of the leaders had come out of Tonopah-Goldfield, and, with the fading of the mining prosperity, they moved to Reno. There was an old-boy atmosphere, and many of the associations lasted for years. Not all the leaders liked each other, but they had known each other for some time.

This network of personal relationships was enhanced by the weakness in Nevada of the two-party system. The division between Republican and Democrat at this time was not an especially deep one. If a bipartisan organization existed, as rumor had it, it was made possible because the leaders of both political parties shared many of the same values and were in close proximity, not only geographically but also ideologically. There was a community of interest and of values that transcended party. What were these values? A belief in the vulnerability of Nevada to outside forces, particularly to the federal government; a belief in Nevada's development, a development they envisioned they themselves would lead; and a belief in silver almost as an article of religion. Then, too, the leadership of both parties was generally conservative.

The evidence is that Wingfield was quite interested in politics, and did not separate the financial and political spheres. Both his second wife, Roxy Thoma Wingfield, and his son, George, Jr., stated in interviews with Barbara Thornton that he enjoyed politics "particularly *from behind the scenes*" [emphasis added]. His refusal of a United States Senate seat in 1912 did not indicate a disdain for politics; rather, it demostrated a desire to remain in Nevada and attend to his business affairs. He participated in the political sphere as a member of the Republican National Committee from 1920 to 1932. The common testimony was that George Wingfield "loved politics" and "thoroughly enjoyed being a big fish in a little pond where he could run his 'one-man' political show."[12]

Yet, Wingfield did not enjoy applying his power directly; his methods were

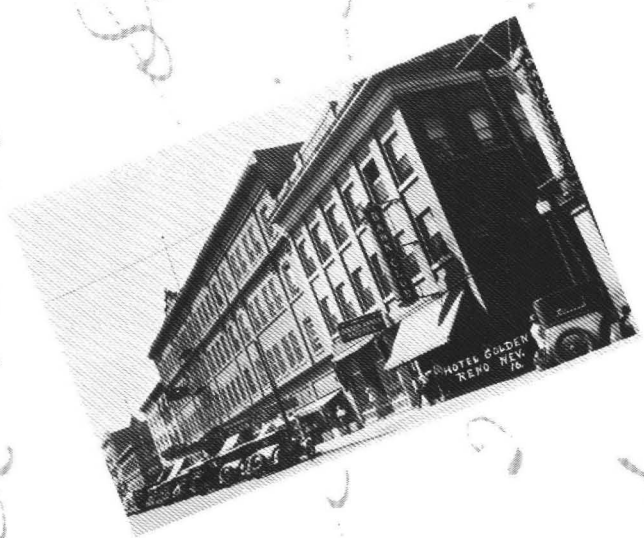
oblique. Clel Georgetta, who observed him closely, saw some of the characteristics of the former professional card player that he was:

> No one could read George Wingfield's mind by the expression on his face. His eyes blinked less often than those of most men. With a steady gaze he looked straight into the eyes of anyone who conversed with him, and nearly always waited for the other person to speak first. . . . He was a "poker player" all the days of his life—to the very end.[13]

If Wingfield did not exercise his authority directly, his power was certainly understood. He preferred to work through underlings, who translated into action intimations from their leader. Thomas Miller, for example, was detailed to get George Springmeyer removed from his position as United States attorney. The same Miller was also directed by Wingfield to indicate to Tasker Oddie how he should run his successful campaign for United States senator in 1920—the advice was that Oddie should place himself "absolutely in the hands of your State Committee or in Wingfield." But Miller was the intermediary.[14]

Clarence Thornton, an agricultural administrator in Reno stated, "If he wanted something, it filtered down through his friends that 'the old man' wanted such and such and it was taken care of."[15] Since there was a community of interest in Nevada, a leadership well acquainted with each other, it was not necessarily difficult to know what the old man wanted. These subtleties are well illustrated by some of the testimony in the Cole-Malley trial in 1927. Patrick McCarran, attorney for the defendants, was attempting to grill Wingfield on the witness stand in order to pin down the extent of the bipartisan machine's intervention in a Reno municipal election.

> McCarran: Is it not true that on that occasion you were trying to assemble all of the forces that would work for your interest in the City Campaign?
>
> Wingfield: I had some of them working. . . .
>
> McCarran: Did you ask Mr. Thatcher to ask for Malley to come to Reno on Tuesday?
>
> Wingfield: That might be different. I asked Thatcher and Woodburn both to do what they could.
>
> McCarran: And they were working for your interest in the City Campaign?
>
> Wingfield: Evidently. Evidently.
>
> McCarran: At your suggestion, were they not?
>
> Wingfield: I don't hardly think I had to suggest it. We were all in the same office and they knew what I wanted.
>
> McCarran: What you wanted—that would be what Thatcher and Woodburn would want?
>
> Wingfield: In that particular case.
>
> McCarran: That goes in politics generally?
>
> Wingfield: Not always.
>
> McCarran: Have you ever known of an exception?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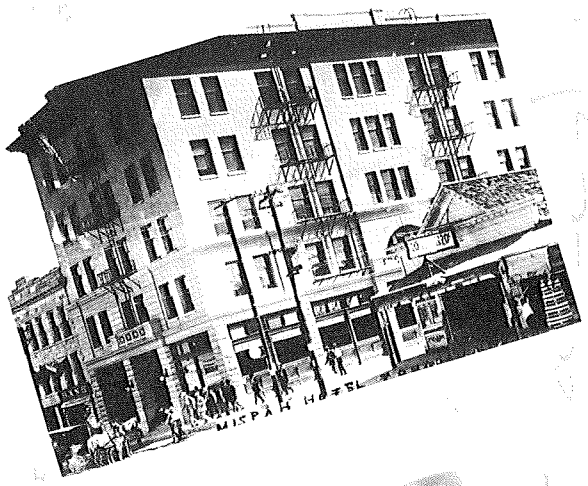
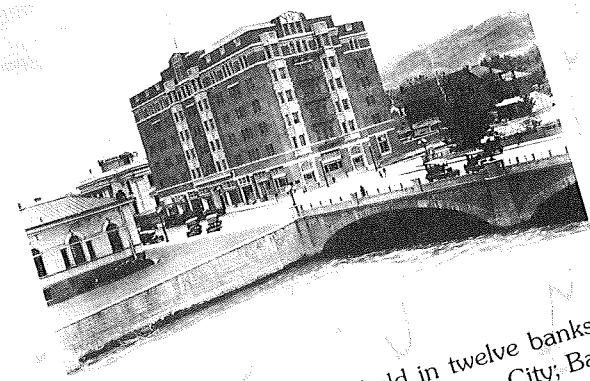
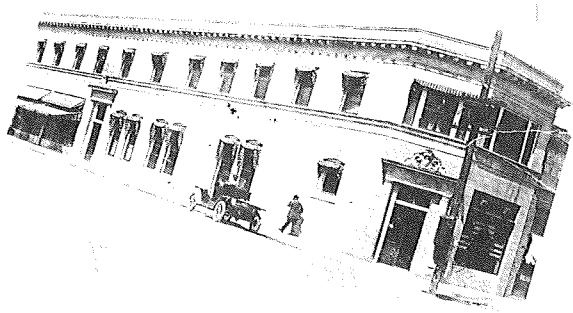
RENO NEV.





Part of Wingfield's financial empire included interests he held in twelve banks and numerous hotels. Left page, top to bottom: Bank of California, Virgina City; Bank of Sparks; Hotel Golden, Reno. Right page, top to bottom: Mispah Hotel, Tonopah; Riverside Hotel, Reno; First National Bank Building, Winnemucca. *(Nevada Historical Society)*



WINGFIELD: Yes, I have known of a great many of them.

MCCARRAN: You have. But as regards your instructions, those were your instructions were they not to your attorneys, Mr. Thatcher and Mr. Woodburn?

WINGFIELD: I do not know that I gave them any instructions. They knew what I wanted. It was up to them to help out in a local situation of that kind.

MCCARRAN: And to accomplish the result for you, if possible.

WINGFIELD: Yes, they were trying to accomplish the result I desired.[16]

In his summation, McCarran was to pick up on this theme: "They knew what I wanted." "Can individuals go into bondage and come out; can this sovereign state go into the bondage of gold and come out?" he asked. Nevada, he argued was in the "grip of a multimillionaire." "Where do I get my authority for this statement?" he demanded. "I get it from one statement made by a multimillionaire—it's the permeating thing in this case. 'They know what I want.' "[17]

Some things, the major things, were simply understood by a leadership that was well acquainted with each other, and that operated in close geographical proximity. Wingfield got his way by subtle and indirect persuasion, not imperial fiat. He was not interested in all the details, and there was plenty of flexibility for friendly political differences on lesser matters. Nevada's social milieu was conducive to such informal arrangements.

NOTES

[1] Jerome E. Edwards, *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982), 29.

[2] *Reno Evening Gazette*, 26 December 1959.

[3] Gilman M. Ostrander, *Nevada, The Great Rotten Borough, 1859–1964*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 140-41, 142.

[4] Nevada Historical Society, "George Wingfield: King of Nevada" (brochure), Reno, 1988; text taken from Elizabeth Raymond, "A Guide to the George Wingfield Papers," Nevada Historical Society, Reno; Francis Wilfred Barsalou, "An Economic Analysis of Commercial Banking in Nevada" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1954), 214-18.

[5] Quoted in Edwards, *Pat McCarran*, 29.

[6] John Sanford, "Printers Ink in My Blood," (oral history, University of Nevada-Reno Library, 1971), 46.

[7] See *Reno Evening Gazette*, 7 May 1927, p.2, for a contemporary listing.

[8] Edwards, *Pat McCarran*, 42.

[9] P.A. McCarran to Sister Margaret P. McCarran, 12 February 1933, McCarran Collection, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

[10] *Sacramento Bee* file folder, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.

[11] Loren B. Chan, *Sagebrush Statesman: Tasker L. Oddie of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), 80.

[12] Barbara Thornton, "George Wingfield in Nevada from 1896 to 1932" (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada-Reno, 1967), 16, 50.

[13] Clel Georgetta, *Golden Fleece in Nevada* (Reno: Ventura Publishing, 1972), 384.

[14] *Sagebrush Statesman*, Chan, 96; Thomas W. Miller, "Memoirs of Thomas Woodnut Miller, a Public-Spirited Citizen of Delaware and Nevada" (oral history, University of Nevada-Reno Library, 1965), 219-20; Sally Springmeyer Zanjani, *The Unspiked Rail: Memoir of a Nevada Rebel* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981), 303-25.

[15] Thornton, "George Wingfield in Nevada," 57.

[16] Quoted ibid., 24-25. Thornton's source was the typed transcript of the trial (District Court of Ormsby County, *State* v. *Ed Malley, George A. Cole, and H.C. Clapp*. Proceedings 15 August 1927 through 10 September 1927, 1062-64. This typed transcript no longer exists.

[17] *Reno Evening Gazette*, 12 September 1927.

GEORGE WINGFIELD'S COMEBACK: THE GETCHELL MINE, 1936-1945

CHERYL A. FOX

THE MAKING OF A MULTIMILLIONAIRE

GEORGE WINGFIELD WAS BORN IN 1876 NEAR FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS. He moved with his family to Oregon in the early 1880s and attended public school in Lakeview. Following a visit to Nevada in 1891, Wingfield returned in 1896, moving permanently to Winnemucca to work as a cowhand. It was here that he first became involved with mining and professional card playing. He was twenty years old.[1]

In 1901 Wingfield moved to the mining camp of Tonopah, where he invested in mining stock, ran the Tonopah Club Saloon, and continued to gamble. It was this setting that induced a partnership between Wingfield and George S. Nixon, owner of the Winnemucca Bank, who later became United States Senator from Nevada. Their investments included the John S. Cook and Company Bank in Goldfield, and the Tonopah Banking Corporation, founded in 1905.

The partnership was formalized in 1906 in the Goldfield Consolidated Mines Company, a venture that merged six of the richest mining companies in the area. This investment was backed by New York financier Bernard Baruch, whose assistance marked the beginning of a relationship that was to span a lifetime. With the success of Goldfield Consolidated, Wingfield and Nixon became multimillionaires. By 1907, they controlled all but one of the operating mines in Goldfield.[2]

In 1905, George Nixon had won election to the United States Senate. He remained in Washington until his death in 1912, with Wingfield supervising operation of the Goldfield Consolidated and other businesses in his absence. By 1908, the two decided to dissolve their partnership, with Wingfield taking

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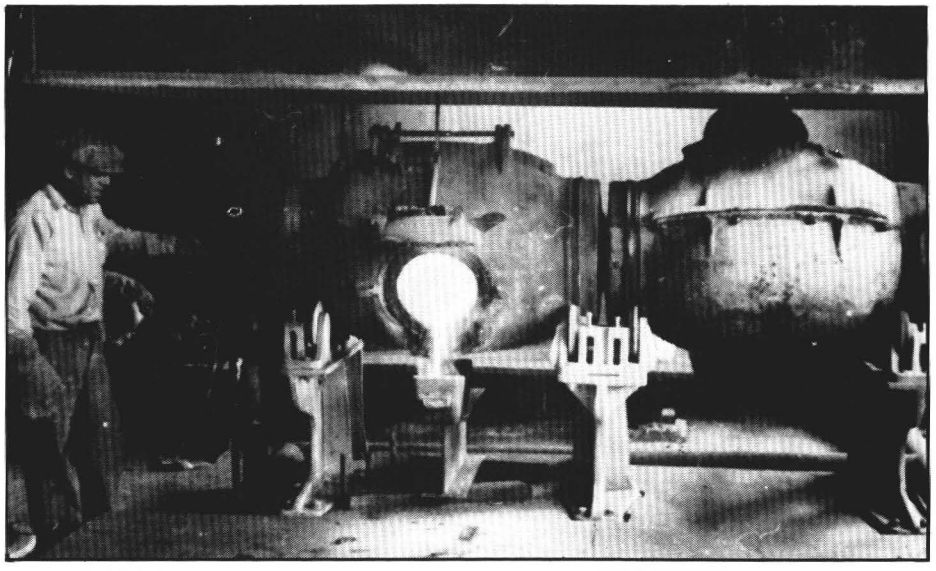


Smelting at the Getchell Mine, late 1930s. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

the mining interests and the John S. Cook and Company Bank, and Nixon retaining most of the real estate and the remaining banks. In that same year, Wingfield married and moved to Reno, where he lived out the remaining forty-seven years of his life.[3]

After Nixon's death in 1912, Governor Tasker Oddie appointed Wingfield to serve the remaining senatorial term of his former partner, but Wingfield refused. He did so on the advice of eastern capitalists, who suggested he remain in Nevada to attend his business interests, and also because he genuinely did not want to leave the state.[4]

Although Wingfield continued to invest in mining interests after he moved to Reno, he began to take part in other economic interests as well. In 1914 he organized the Reno Securities Company, which owned and operated the Hotel Golden and later the Riverside Hotel and the Spanish Springs Ranch. In addition, he began to invest heavily in banks, including the Reno National Bank, where he located his office in room 201. Known as the Wingfield Chain, the twelve banks he owned by 1932 controlled 57.2 percent of all bank deposits and 59.9 percent of the total assets and liabilities of all banks in the state. In addition, his banks held a considerable percentage of state government funds.[5]

Wingfield was at the height of his power both financially and politically from 1928 to 1932. This power was consolidated into what was referred to as the Wingfield bipartisan machine, a force dominant in Nevada politics for several decades. Reinforcing public belief in the existence of this machine was the fact that Wingfield's attorneys, George Thatcher and William Wood-

Noble H. Getchell was the principal organizer of the mine that would be the basis of Wingfield's comeback. Photo c. 1950. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

burn, both powerful leaders in the Democratic Party, shared his suite of offices and telephone number in the Reno National Bank Building. Although Wingfield never desired to hold office, he was the Republican national committeeman in Nevada from 1920 through 1932. That Wingfield held enormous power is obvious, and it is believed that he used this power to secure appointments of his friends to government positions at both the state and federal level. However, no amount of political power could change the course of events that led to the downfall of the financial empire amassed by this King of Nevada.[6]

THE BANK FAILURE

The financial devastation of the stock market crash in 1929 hit Nevada hard, as it did most of the country. The chain of Wingfield banks was weakened by losses generated by declines in the price of cattle, in which the banks were heavily invested. Cattlemen's defaults on loans amounted to $3,500,000 by 1932, greatly depleting the assets of the chain. The Recon-

struction Finance Corporation (RFC), organized by President Herbert Hoover to lend money to depressed financial institutions, loaned the Wingfield banks more than $5,000,000 in 1932, but the banks were unable to recover. On October 31 Governor Fred Balzar, who was in Washington, D.C., petitioning the RFC for additional funds, sent a message to Acting Governor Morley Griswold to release to the newspapers a memo he had written before leaving the state. Consequently, on November 1, 1932, the first bank holiday of the Great Depression was declared in the state of Nevada. Although the holiday was initially declared for twelve days, the banks did not reopen.[7]

Only a few days later, another disaster rocked the Wingfield machine: Patrick McCarran, Democrat, was elected to the United States Senate, defeating Wingfield's friend and supporter, Tasker Oddie. Franklin D. Roosevelt's election to the presidency was likewise considered a development unfavorable to Wingfield's interests. The election of these two powerful Democrats had considerable impact on the bipartisan machine and revitalized Nevada's Democratic Party, which remained dominant for years to come. It was not as easy for Wingfield to control political matters as it had been in the past. The country and state had voted Democratic, and no matter how bipartisan Wingfield's machine may have been, it was controlled by a Republican. There was no way to fight Roosevelt's popularity or McCarran's determination. Within less than a week, George Wingfield had collapsed both financially and politically.[8]

McCarran had in a 1906 divorce proceeding represented Wingfield's common-law wife. Wingfield was vindicated at least to the extent of an annulment, and McCarran, then district attorney from Nye County, did not take losing lightly; thus began a rivalry between these two that would last for the rest of their lives. One year later, when they challenged each other again, the setting was not a courtroom but rather the town of Goldfield during the miner's strike of 1907-08, a conflict stemming from the refusal of union members to accept their pay in scrip. The mine and mill operators and owners persuaded Governor John Sparks to call for federal troops to quell what was actually a reasonably peaceful demonstration. McCarran publicly denounced both the call for troops and the subsequent legislative action to create a state police force. Because of these stands, "McCarran began gaining a reputation as a dangerous radical."[9]

It is interesting that McCarran and Wingfield both moved to Reno in the same year, 1909. Not surprising, though, is the fact that they lived within a block of each other. Reno was not a large town, even though it had the largest population in Nevada, and there were only a few "better" sections of town in which to live.

McCarran had a very difficult time getting elected to office. He tried repeatedly to defeat the Wingfield machine, consistently failing. But with the closure of the Wingfield banks only days before the 1932 election, voters

The bar of the Hotel Golden, c. 1921, was a popular place for congregating in Reno. Wingfield purchased this hotel in 1914. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

were not ready to reelect Wingfield's man, Tasker Oddie, to office, or any Republican, for that matter. Oddie's campaign leaders, however, did not consider McCarran to be a serious contender. McCarran campaigned rigorously, gaining tremendous support in the state and especially in sparsely populated Clark County, and was thus able to win the election. The days of the Wingfield machine were over.[10]

Although Wingfield could do nothing about McCarran's victory over Oddie, he fought desperately for the next two years to reopen his banks. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, however, was extremely conservative and refused to lend the banks additional funds. The banks were ordered into

receivership in 1933, and Wingfield himself filed petition for bankruptcy on November 30, 1935.[11]

The Crocker First National Bank of San Francisco foreclosed on Wingfield to protect the loans it had made on his properties, thus becoming owner of the Reno Securities Company, which in turn owned the Riverside and Golden hotels. Wingfield was, however, allowed to serve as manager of the two hotels and to retain his office in the Reno National Bank Building. He had prudently transferred ownership of his home to the name of his wife, Roxy Thoma Wingfield. No longer a multimillionaire, he was certainly not destitute.[12]

THE GETCHELL MINE

In 1935, Wingfield's old friend Nobel Getchell, mine owner and state senator from Lander County, approached him concerning a claim that he was interested in developing in Humboldt County. Getchell took Wingfield to the site, accompanied by Wingfield's brother-in-law, Roy Hardy, a mining engineer who had constructed the American Flat mill near Virginia City. Hardy reported that it was "elephant hunting grounds," as it had large veins with little value. According to Hardy, "It was decided to go ahead and do some work by driving a cross-cut tunnel about two-hundred feet below the croppings and see what the vein looked like at that elevation. When intersected, it was all ore." As a result, Wingfield went into partnership with Getchell and Emmet Chase, the prospector who had discovered the ore.[13]

Emmet Chase and Ed Knight had been investigating mining properties in the Osgood Range of the Potosi Mining District, forty-five miles northeast of Winnemucca between Midas and the railhead at Golconda in 1934, when they discovered the ore. The team could not afford an assay, so they convinced Noble Getchell, who held interests in the Gold Circle Mine at Midas and the Betty O'Neal, to assay the ore for them. It tested out at $11.85 a ton. This enticed Getchell to take samples at every two feet across the twelve-foot diggings. He found the ore to assay at $9-10 a ton. Getchell then provided Knight and Chase with supplies and a small commission in return for a one-third interest. Knight eventually sold his third to Getchell for $500 because he did not believe there was gold in the area.[14]

Getchell discovered that lying within 500-600 feet of his property were 640 acres of agriculturally patented land owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad. Needing title to protect his interests and secure the land, he journeyed to San Francisco to meet with officials from Southern Pacific. They were reluctant to sell small parcels in the middle of 640 acres, but Getchell convinced them to sell by paying premium dollar: $18.00 an acre for land that normally sold at $2.50 an acre. The railroad was suspicious and sent mining engineers to inspect the property. Getchell made sure that they did not get near the "best

showings." Later, upon meeting Getchell at a restaurant in San Francisco, the president of the Southern Pacific Railroad is purported to have half-jokingly said, "I don't know whether we should speak to you. You misled us. Here you have one of the biggest mines in the United States on property bought from us." Eventually, Getchell was able to secure all of the property he wanted except for a small portion owned by Joe Riley, who organized the Riley Mine.[15]

By the time Getchell approached Wingfield, he was certain of the mine's potential. Since Wingfield was bankrupt, Getchell suggested that he again turn to Bernard Baruch. Back in 1933, Baruch had told Wingfield, "After you are cleaned up and out of debt, I wish you would let me know as I would like to discuss with you then . . . letting you have a small stake to go on with, if you want. You know I have great faith in your ability and unswerving belief in your integrity." Getchell told Wingfield, "I'll cut you in fifty-fifty, with the understanding that you can interest [Baruch] to put up the necessary money to build the mill, develop the mine and take his investment out of the earnings. But we will run it."[16]

Wingfield was interested enough to fly to New York to visit Baruch. It was agreed that Baruch would assist in financing after one of his engineers had inspected the property. Henry Carlisle was sent in from San Francisco, whereupon he and several of his engineers took more than three hundred samples. The samples, of course, proved to be of high gold content, and Baruch agreed to finance the mine in conjunction with the Newmont Mining Company. The interest in the Getchell Mine was divided so that Getchell and Wingfield received one third each, while Baruch and the Newmont Company split the remaining third.[17]

During 1935 several tunnels were developed, creating the need in 1936 for a mill. By March of that year the mine employed 120 men who were living in "modern houses . . . and numerous cottages constructed for the workers and their families." The company town boasted a boarding house, twelve small bunkhouses, and eighty cottages.[18]

Two gravel roads connected the property to rail terminals at Golconda, twenty-eight miles to the northeast, and Red House, sixteen miles north, both on the main lines of the Southern Pacific and the Western Pacific railroads. Red House served as the railhead for the mine and Golconda as the post office. Water for the town was obtained from springs above the mine, and water for milling was pumped from a well drilled at Kelly Creek, six miles distant.[19]

On November 5, 1936, the Getchell Mine was incorporated for 1,500,000 shares, with George Wingfield as president, Noble Getchell as vice-president, and Roy Hardy as consulting engineer. Hardy designed the flow sheet and designated the machinery to be used in the mill. Further development of the mine revealed ore with a high arsenic content; although it created

more work for the engineers, this later became a profitable and essential mineral for the mine.[20]

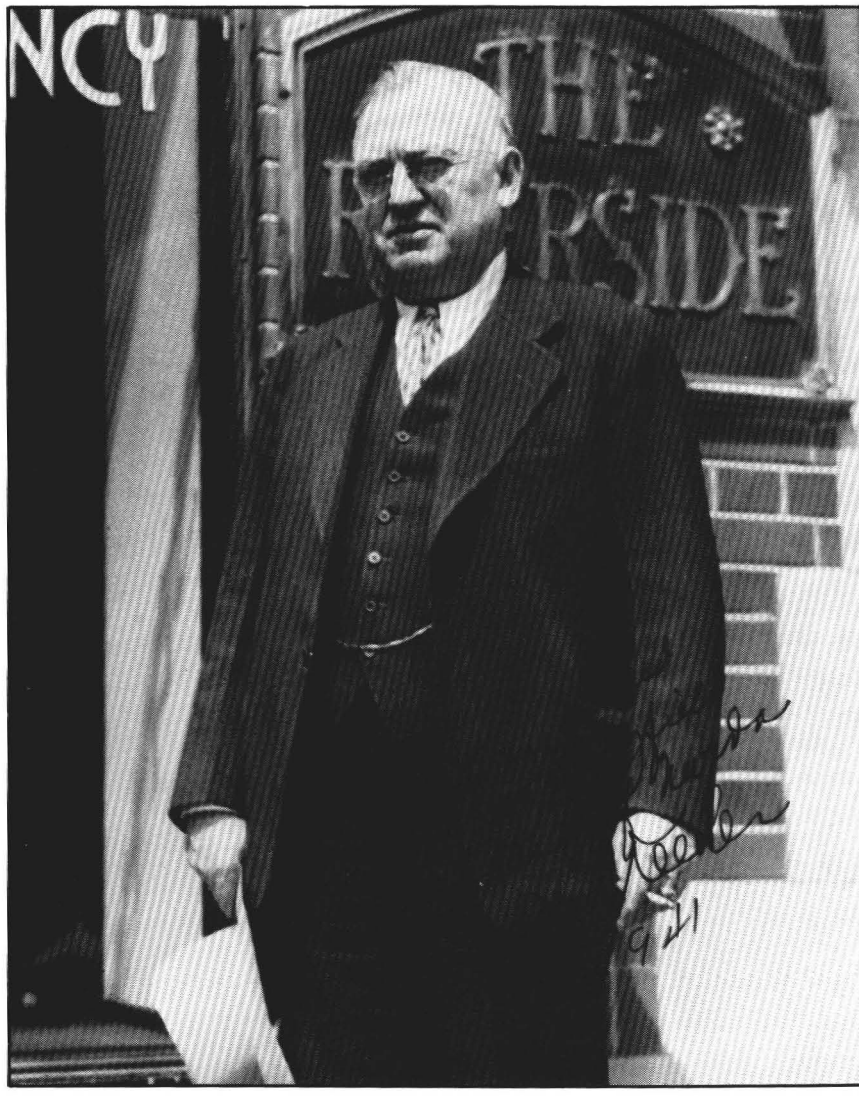
Construction of the Getchell Mine began in June 1937, but there were numerous delays because of labor strikes. Metallurgical tests continued, as did excavation for a 400-ton-capacity cyanide mill on the property. Nine tunnels crosscut the ore channel, some more than one hundred feet wide.[21]

Concurrently, the outbreak of hostilities in China drew attention to tungsten, the increasing demand for which was emphasized by the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. China was a major supplier of tungsten to the United States, and there were expectations in 1936 that Chinese imports would be curtailed. As predicted, contracts with China did not materialize, and United States exports more than doubled in that year. The United States production total was the largest on record, excluding World War I. New properties were prospected and developed in other states and old mines reopened, but Nevada was the principal tungsten producer in 1936. A large part of the output was scheelite ore (tungsten) concentrates from mines of the Nevada-Massachusetts Company near Mill City and Mina, Tungsten Metals Company in Ely, Nevada Tungsten Company in Gardnerville, and Union Carbide and Carbon Company then developing in the Rose Creek District of Pershing County.[22]

The principal use of tungsten was in the manufacture of high-speed tool steels and cemented tungsten carbides, used alone or in combination with other metal carbides, notably tantalum and titanium; it was also essential for the manufacture of hard alloys for metal-cutting tools, as well as for electric-light and radio-tube filaments. In addition, tungsten was used in the preparation of various chemicals, such as pigments.[23]

The Getchell Mine began production on March 1, 1938, and was at full capacity by June with 600 tons of ore treated daily. Two types of ore bodies existed, gold and scheelite. The gold ore was mined in an open pit and delivered to the 600-ton cyanide plant by truck. Oxide ore was treated by slime agitation and sand leaching, and sulfide ore by roasting. On September 21 the company declared its first dividend of $75,000 to be issued to the stockholders; by October 19, when the second $75,000 was issued, the Getchell Mine was referred to as Nevada's largest and most modern milling plant. By the end of the year, the mine was well established as the leading mining enterprise in Humboldt County, and it had become the third largest gold producer in Nevada. The mine closed out its first year having paid a total of $200,000 in dividends.[24]

The Getchell Mine began to expand its operation during 1939, with Roy Hardy designing refinements in the cyanide mill and roasting plant. Additions in the mill increased its capacity to 1,000 tons per day, as a 200-by-6-foot stack was completed in November. In his annual report to the stockholders on December 31, Wingfield was able to boast of 58 new mining claims (mak-



George Wingfield in front of the Riverside Hotel in 1941. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

ing a total of 140) in addition to a pair of 160-acre placer claims and 17,463 acres of patented land currently held by the mine. A total of $570,000 in eleven dividends was issued to the stockholders during the year. With the expansion, the Getchell Mine became the undisputed leading gold producer in Nevada during 1939. The increased production allowed Nevada gold mines to break a twenty-three-year record, with production at its highest since 1916, and the value of ore the greatest since 1912.[25]

In 1941, Wingfield and Getchell approved the installation of a second 7.5-by-260-foot rotary ore-roasting kiln. In addition, the recovery of arsenic from the gold ore began at the 1,000-ton cyanide mill. During the spring, with the war escalating in Europe, the Office of Production Management (OPM) in Washington felt that the competition between gold mines and the baser metal mines in obtaining equipment should be narrowed. Since gold was not a strategic metal needed for the war effort, the OPM denied gold mines the priority rating needed to obtain machinery.[26]

By July, Germany had invaded Russia and Japan had marched into Indo-China; England was at the end of her resources and desperately needed aid. New demands for strategic metals forced the OPM to place priority ratings on machinery. On July 29, the Office of Production Management issued Preference Rating Order P-23, which "assigned an A-3 rating for deliveries of materials needed in the production of mining machinery." This selective rating applied to only certain machinery manufacturers. The order was intended to be temporary, scheduled to expire in November. By September, further steps were taken, and Preference Rating Order P-56 was issued to approximately 15,000 mines that were essential to "defense or civilian needs." These mines were given serial numbers and the opportunity to apply for a priority rating. Gold placer mines were not included as they were not essential to the war effort, and it was believed that their operation could be "discontinued without deterioration of equipment."[27]

Following the December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States officially entered World War II. The war had affected gold mining even prior to United States involvement, and the future of the western gold mines was uncertain and extremely unstable at best. With the Getchell Mine retaining its status as the leading gold producer in Nevada for 1941 and the recovery resulting in a capitalization exceeding $2,000,000, mine owners Wingfield and Getchell were certain to have been uneasy over the coming year.[28]

In January of 1942, the War Production Board (WPB) was organized as successor to the Office of Production Management; it was "the chief agency concerned with the industrial production for war, including war administration of metals and nonmetallic minerals other than fuels." The Metals Reserve Company, created in June 1940 by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, commenced operation with the object of creating stock piles of strategic metals. It contracted for the purchase of materials on a delivery basis and ultimately purchased more than $2,750,000,000 worth of metals in the western states. The Metals Reserve Company figured prominently in the life of the Getchell Mine during the war years, since the company contracted for the building of U.S. Vanadium in Salt Lake City, which handled the tungsten produced by the mine later in the year.[29]

By March, War Production Board chairman Donald M. Nelson was convinced that all gold mines must be closed. Pressure from E. R. Stettinius, Jr.,

Administrator of the Office of Lend-Lease Administration, led to the decision. Stettinius was primarily concerned with the supply of mining equipment to foreign countries:

> Originally the British asked us for 100,000 tons of steel to increase their South African gold production. Naturally, in view of the steel and shipping shortage here, we turned them down. However, one of the most acute shortages in this country is nitroglycerin which is used extensively in gold mining. In addition, gold mining requires large amounts of hardened steel and the use of a considerable body of capable mining labor which might well be used in other fields.[30]

On March 3 George Wingfield received a telegram from Wilbur A. Nelson, administrator of the Mining Branch of the Materials Division of the WPB, informing him of the decision to revise Preference Rating Order P-56, removing gold and silver mines from the order. However, if 70 percent or more of the dollar value of a mine's output was represented by strategic minerals, reclassification would be considered. Wingfield spent a good part of his day sending out telegrams of his own. To his mining superintendent, Fred Wise, he said, "We are not letting any grass grow under our feet as we are doing everything we can to have this order modified which I think would be very disastrous to the gold and silver mines if it is not modified."[31]

Wingfield also drafted letters to congressional leaders in hopes they would provide the backing and influence necessary to promote awareness in Washington of the distress of the gold mines. To Senator William Langer of North Dakota he wrote, "We old-timers who have been through this political game so many years understand the inside workings and realize how far political enemies will stoop to undermine a man to gain their point." And to Senator Pat McCarran he said, "It appears to me that this order would close all of the gold and silver mines in the western states who are responsible for the payment of very heavy taxes to the government as well as to the states and counties in which they are situated . . . I am satisfied that you can do a great deal toward eliminating such a drastic order."[32]

In fact, McCarran had been working on this issue. The P-56 order included the 30-percent clause, and defined mines eligible to operate as follows:

> Any plant actually engaged in the extraction by surface, open-pit or underground methods, or in the beneficiation, concentration or preparation for shipment of the products of mining activity, but not including any plant more than 30 percent of the production of which in dollar value consists of gold and/or silver.[33]

The exclusion of mines whose production was more than 30 percent gold and/or silver resulted in cancellation of 373 serial numbers held by gold-producing mines and caused considerable protest from the western mining industry. McCarran opposed the 30-percent clause and fought diligently for its repeal. The March 4 *Reno Evening Gazette* announced that he was draft-

ing a measure to provide immediate cash payments for ore produced in small quantities for defense.[34]

On March 12 the University of Nevada in Reno was the setting for a meeting of representatives from the War Production Board with various western senators and governors to discuss Order P-56. In attendance were Governors E.P. Carville of Nevada, Ralph Carr of Colorado, Sidney Osborn of Arizona, and Chase Clark of Idaho, as well as Senator Pat McCarran and Congressman James G. Scrugham of Nevada. Wilbur Nelson of the WPB Mining Branch was present to defend his office's decision regarding Order P-56:

> I can assure you that where any mines are producing appreciable amounts of copper, lead, or zinc, irrespective of the amount of gold and silver produced along with these strategic metals, those mines will get back their priority ratings. A mine producing nothing but gold, unless it can be shown that it is a siliceous flux for a smelter and that the smelter cannot get along without it, will have to work on a lower priority rating.[35]

Nelson went on to say that many plants manufacturing mining machinery had been taken over by the Army and the Navy. He added:

> The capacity of every mining machinery plant in the United States is taken up in part in making munitions. . . . We are at war. There is a definite shortage of critical materials and this is well known in Washington. The operators of gold and silver mines will find supplies running shorter all the time. To those in industries not essential to the war industry, I suggest they get into some industry that is essential.

His words were less than encouraging to western miners.[36]

George B. Thatcher was at the meeting, where, according to the *Reno Evening Gazette*, he represented "a number of mine owners"; he was obviously speaking for Wingfield and Getchell, whom the paper did not state were in attendance. Thatcher declared, "We in the West don't want the mineral resources of the West thrown into some bureaucracy in Washington. Today we have been asked to increase metal production, but there has been no increase in prices, although most of the other products have gone up." He said that the amount of materials needed to keep mines operating was so small it would not affect the war effort. Wingfield had been through hard times before, and he was not going to give in now to Washington bureaucrats.[37]

The following day, March 13, Wingfield wrote to his good friend and mining partner, Bernard Baruch, informing him of the results of the "red hot meeting" held in Reno. "I think I put in more time with Wilbur A. Nelson . . . than any other person while he was here and I put our case before him fully. He is a man who grasps things quickly; however, I don't know how we are going to come out in the way of keeping our operation going on the gold end. We cannot produce arsenic unless we are running the gold plant."[38]

Two months later the Senate's Special Committee on the Investigation of Silver convened a subcommittee to discuss the 30-percent clause, with Senator McCarran among the loudest objectors. The pressure became too great for the WPB, and the clause was removed. It was the belief of the WPB, however, that the change would have no practical effect, as no person can use the ratings assigned unless a serial number is assigned by the Director of Industry Operations, and gold and silver mines which produce no substantial quantities of critical materials have not been and will not be issued serial numbers."[39]

Wingfield knew that the production of tungsten and arsenic at the Getchell Mine was his only hope of remaining open during the war. Construction of the tungsten plant in the 1,000-ton cyanide mill was well under way by the spring of 1942 with the expectation of being in operation by mid-August. A scheelite zone was partly developed within a few hundred feet of the gold ore body supplying the mill. Original plans for the mill, first designed to treat 600 tons of gold ore per day, provided for a tungsten plant within the large structure. In addition, there was a shortage of arsenic in the United States after the bombing of Pearl Harbor since Japan was a major supplier of the mineral. The recovery of arsenic trioxide at the Getchell Mine had already begun in late 1941. Arsenic was used in small amounts in alloys with lead for shot, as a weed killer, particularly by Hawaiian pineapple growers, and as an insecticide, as well as being used in dyes, wood preservatives for telephone poles and mine timbers, and drugs for treating syphilis.[40]

As expected, by August 250 to 300 tons of scheelite were being treated per day within the mill structure. The tungsten plant was also able to handle ore from a nearby property developed by the U.S. Vanadium Corporation. This subsidiary of Union Carbide was directed by Clarence H. Hall of Winnemucca, on a property leased by W.C. Rigg of the Arizona Molybdenum Corporation. The concentrate was shipped to a new Salt Lake City plant built and operated by U.S. Vanadium for the Metals Reserve Corporation.[41]

While production of tungsten was under way at the Getchell Mine, groups in Washington were still debating closing the gold mines. Word of these discussions leaked, and there was a deluge of letters, including one from Senator McCarran. In this letter to Wilbur Nelson, McCarran restated his opposition to closing the mines:

> . . . the object to be accomplished by those who propose shutting down the gold and silver mines will not be accomplished; . . . the only accomplishment coming out of such an order would be the irreparable injury of communities dependent upon the mines for their existence . . . I respectfully suggest . . . that any order closing down the mines . . . would avail nothing in the way of increasing labor for mines of strategic metals . . . if such an order were enforceable, its principle [sic] result would be the destruction of the moral and economic life of communities in the several states, without any beneficial results.[42]

Senator McCarran offered alternatives to increasing the supply of labor available to the nonferrous metal mines. His solutions were to provide direct subsidies to essential metal mines, to remove price ceilings on essential metals, and to expedite government loans. Wilbur Nelson's September 1 reply to McCarran denied the accusation that the War Production Board had plans to close the gold mines. He said that the WPB was looking for a source of mine laborers who could be used in the nonferrous metal mines, adding, "Naturally our thoughts have included gold mines, but we have not at this time reached any conclusions thereon."[43]

The Labor Production Division (LPD) of the War Production Board believed that a minimum of 4,000 to 5,000 workers would be released if the gold mines were closed. There was considerable debate on this figure, which even the Mining Division of the WPB believed was too high. Opponents argued tht gold miners would not be willing to work in copper mines and would be unwilling to move their families to other job sites. The LPD held its ground and said that gold mining was not essential to the war effort, and that this reservoir of hard-rock miners could be utilized in the copper mines. The WPB had even requested that the Army furlough 4,000 soldiers to work the copper mines, but the Army was reluctant to do so since the supply of laborers in gold was yet untapped.[44]

By October Wingfield's mining situation had worsened. On October 7, 1942, Wingfield wrote to Berkeley Bunker, Nevada's Democratic senator from 1940 to 1943, reporting that the Getchell Mine was not producing gold, but was producing arsenic by milling gold ore as well as about 200 tons per day of tungsten ore, an amount which would likely double in the future. "I don't know what position we will be in should the order come out closing all gold mines," said Wingfield, "but it appears that we should be allowed to carry on, on account of producing two strategic minerals."[45]

The following day the War Production Board issued Order L-208, which closed all gold mines in operation in the United States and its territories. By the terms of the order, the director general

> prohibited all operators of gold mines, whether lode or placer: (a) from breaking ore or proceeding with any development work or new operations after October 15, 1942, and (b) within 60 days from October 8, from carrying on any operations incident to gold mining except to the minimum extent necessary to maintain buildings, machinery, and access facilities in safe and accessible condition.[46]

The only mines not affected by Order L-208 were those that produced 1,200 or fewer tons of commercial ore in 1941, and which were not going to produce more than 100 tons per month during the war. Similarly, placer mines that treated fewer than 1,000 cubic yards of material in 1941 could be excluded if their projected monthly production was less than 100 cubic yards per month.[47]

The Getchell Mine was exempt from the order because of its production of arsenic and tungsten. Most mines in Nevada were not as lucky; every other major gold or gold-silver property in operation was shut down. In an appeal to President Roosevelt dated October 10, Senator McCarran urged a stay of Order L-208. This document, signed by twenty other senators (representing Arizona, Colorado, California, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Oregon, and Washington), opposed closing the gold mines, and cited statistics showing the number of miners to be relieved for strategic metal mines was minimal, only 750 men. This appeal, however, proved fruitless.[48]

Even with the release of laborers from the other gold mines, the Getchell Mine experienced a labor shortage in 1942. Conditions had so deteriorated by the end of the year that production was affected. Mining Engineer Roy Hardy reported to Wingfield in October that the labor shortage prevented any development at the mine except for work on the tungsten deposits. "It is practically impossible to find miners by recruiting. We have found the Mexican miner to be an able workman, and if the administration will authorize their importation to this country for fall harvesting, we believe all our western mines producing war-needed metal could greatly increase their production."[49]

Despite the labor problems the Getchell Mine came out ahead at the end of 1942. In the annual report to the stockholders, Wingfield's statistics revealed that the mine had milled and treated 317,127 tons of gold and tungsten ore capitalizing at $1,720,868. Four distributions to stockholders amounted to $165,000. With the installation of a flotation plant in the cyanide building, a total of 21,635 tons of tungsten ore was milled during the last four months of the year. The resultant concentrates were sold to the Metals Reserve Company in Salt Lake City, which also took the arsenic trioxide recovered from the gold ore. In addition, the Getchell Mine was now milling tungsten for several other mines in the area, including the Kirby and Granite Creek mines.[50]

In 1943, Metals Reserve established a stockpile of tungsten ore from the Potosi District mines to be treated at the Getchell Mine. A total of about 80,000 tons of ore was purchased from the Riley, Granite Creek, and Kirby mines. Ironically, the supplies of tungsten ore and concentrates made available in 1943 greatly exceeded requirements. The allocation of ore was discontinued at the end of the year, and, by late spring of 1944, tungsten production was halted at the Getchell Mine. However, in August 1945, the mill reopened under contract to Metals Reserve to treat tungsten ore remaining in the stockpile.[51]

Throughout the war the demands placed on Getchell were great. The closing of the mine often seemed imminent, primarily because miners enlisted in the armed forces or migrated to other war industries. On April 13, 1945,

Wingfield wrote to Bernard Baruch, "We have had a bad winter at the mine and conditions are such that there is no use to continue operations until things are better." Five days later in another letter to Baruch, the end was near. "We are in the process of closing the mine down. It will take a few days to get everything in order." By the end of spring, Wingfield announced that the mine would close because of the labor shortage and difficulty in obtaining supplies. "As a consequence, this condition has caused the directors of the company to suspend all operations. However, should the Government require arsenic or tungsten again at any time these metals will be produced by the company."[52]

The Getchell Mine was the largest gold producer in Nevada for seven years, from 1939 through 1944. It paid dividends in excess of $3,000,000 to its stockholders and was a financial savior to Wingfield, coming at a time when his financial resources were limited and his debts great.[53]

THE RENO SECURITIES COMPANY

While the Getchell Mine was producing gold and paying dividends, Wingfield was also directing the affairs of the Reno Securities Company. Organized in 1914, this company owned the Hotel Golden and rebuilt the Riverside Hotel in 1927. The company also purchased the Spanish Springs Ranch, where Wingfield often spent his weekends. When the Crocker First National Bank foreclosed on the two hotels in 1932, Wingfield was put in charge of managing them and given the option of regaining ownership pending payment of the $700,000 owed to the bank. On March 31, 1937, a $700,000 note, secured by a deed of trust on the two hotels, was taken out between Wingfield and the bank with the stipulation that it be paid in ten years.[54]

On January 28, 1938, George Wingfield became President of the Reno Securities Company. At the time, the hotel business was not good; the net profits from hotel operations fell almost $47,000 from 1937 to 1938, a decrease attributed to slowed room revenue and increased operating expenses. By 1939 there was a slight increase in revenue, but it was offset by operating expenses because "the minimum wage act covering female employees has resulted in a substantial increase in the operating expenses of the hotels." Undaunted, Wingfield undertook a series of improvements on both the Riverside and Golden beginning in 1941, when hotel profits were low. Hotel operations showed another decrease in 1942, but business subsequently improved through the remainder of the war years.[55]

Profits from the Getchell Mine were healthy prior to and during World War II, but particularly so from 1938 to 1941. As an example, by February 1941, dividends amounting to $1,342,500 had been paid since September 1938; Wingfield's share was $447,500. Even though the hotel business was quiet, mining was active, which could explain how Wingfield was able to pay

the $700,000 note to Crocker First National in 1944, only eight years after it was taken out and two years before it was due.[56]

CONCLUSION

George Wingfield was clearly a provocative individual. His association with Nevada and its citizens was a dominant one from the turn of the century until the failure of his banks in 1932 and his personal bankruptcy in 1935. His influence in the political arena was unparalleled in the 1920s and early 1930s. It is generally believed that the power exerted through his financial empire during the early twentieth century was not limited to Nevada but extended also to the East Coast. Although he did not care to hold public office, as evidenced by his refusal to accept a senatorial appointment in 1912, he did have compelling influence on those who were elected to represent the Silver State.[57]

Some historians believe that Wingfield's political power was dependent upon his financial power, the failure of his banks thus diminishing his political strength. The political climate after 1932 was certainly not conducive to the Wingfield machine. The Republican defeat was dramatic, and Democrats were in control for the remainder of the decade. Clearly, the most important victory for the Democrats in Nevada was Patrick McCarran's triumph over Tasker Oddie. This defeat was significant not only because Oddie, who had held the office since 1921, was a Republican and close friend of Wingfield's, but also because it placed one of Wingfield's strongest rivals in a place of considerable power. And, more important, Wingfield no longer had the financial edge with which to mold political situations to his choosing.[58]

Wingfield was a clever businessman and accustomed to taking risks. When Noble Getchell approached him in 1936 with the prospect of a new mine, he made the decision to invest. It was the right decision—the mine paid off handsomely and Wingfield was able to make a small comeback by regaining a portion of his financial empire. The fact that he was not able to rebuild his political machine was due to the effects of his personal economic debility, as well as to the New Deal, which was revolutionizing the 1930s. McCarran had won in Nevada, and Roosevelt had taken the country. Wingfield found that the Democratic administration was not sympathetic to a struggling Republican who was losing his shirt in Nevada. Under the Hoover administration, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation had loaned him money to help save his banks, but once Roosevelt took office no additional loans were made.[59]

The decade of the 1940s was much kinder to Wingfield than the 1930s had been. The Getchell Mine was the largest gold-producing mine in Nevada, and it was even allowed to remain open during World War II. As president of Reno Securities in charge of the Golden and Riverside hotels, Wingfield accrued profits that were not enormous, but that steadily increased through-

out the war period. By 1944 he was able to pay off an enormous debt, thus making the hotels his again, free and clear. He continued improvements and renovations on these properties as well as at the Spanish Spring Ranch which, although it steadily lost money, he was refurbishing. In 1945, he sold 120 acres at Spanish Springs and all of his Goldfield Consolidated stock. It was a new era for George Wingfield and, though no longer King of the Nevada, he was and remained an integral part of the state.

NOTES

The author would like to thank William Rowley of the University of Nevada-Reno for his helpful suggestions in reading this manuscript.

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[50] Accident Reports of the Getchell Mine, 1942, GW Papers, Box 80; Report to the Stockholders, 31 December 1942, GW Papers, Box 80; Wingfield to Newmont Mining Company, 14 October 1942, GW Papers, Box 80. The War Manpower Commission instructed employers not to hire miners west of the Mississippi, including Alaska, who had worked in gold mines prior to October 7, 1942, without referral from the U.S. Employment Service. For more information on the effects of Order L-208, see War Production Board, *Gold Mines*, 47-48, 54-57.

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