

## A.E. Spriggs – An Enigma

Recently I wrote about how Broadwater County was created and also about W.A. Clark and his ties to Broadwater County. In both of those articles, Townsend resident A.E. Spriggs was a prominent player. He was the driving political force that pushed the creation of Broadwater County through the legislature and also responsible for the astounding attempt to get W.A. Clark into the U.S. Senate.



Beyond any doubt A. E. Spriggs was a master politician and political operative. His role in supplanting Meagher County legislators opposed to the creation of Broadwater County was a lesson in political maneuvering. His role in the ethically questionable attempt to appoint W.A. Clark as U.S. Senator to replace W.A. Clark after he resigned his Senate seat is almost beyond belief.

A.E. Spriggs was born in Kansasville, Wisconsin in 1866. He came to Montana in 1888 and taught school in Confederate Gulch before moving to Townsend and working as a store clerk then a store manager in Winston. Spriggs was a partner in a lumber store and a cigar store in Townsend and managed to buy several mining claims.

In 1893 Spriggs ran for House of Representatives from Meagher County and was narrowly defeated. Over the next 2 years he worked hard at becoming very well known in Meagher County and in his political maneuverings to get Meagher County candidates elected that were favorable to creating Broadwater County.

Spriggs was elected to the Montana House of Representatives in 1895 where he established himself as a smart, hard-working Representative noted for his integrity. He kept alive a bill to create Broadwater County until the very last day of the legislative session when it failed.

In 1897 he became the Montana Lieutenant Governor and as such was the President of the Senate. This allowed Spriggs to appoint committee members and to control the Senate legislative agenda. This time A.E. Spriggs was successful in

getting Broadwater County created from Meagher County, Jefferson County and a small part of Lewis and Clark County.

Spriggs was elected at the same time that W.A. Clark bribed his way into being elected U.S. Senator from Montana. When the U.S. Senate refused to seat Clark due to the very open and well-known bribery scandal, Spriggs and Clark concocted a plan whereby Clark resigned his Senate Seat and returned to Montana. In the absence of the Governor, Spriggs became acting Governor and appointed Clark to fill his own empty position as U.S. Senator. Fortunately, the Governor heard about the plot, rushed back to Montana and rescinded the appointment.

Not surprisingly, after his term as Lieutenant Governor, Spriggs left politics and went to work as an executive for Henry Frank, a partner of Clark. Spriggs again showed his talents and excelled as a manager and eventually became president of Jib Mining Company that reopened a mine in Basin. A 1911 New York Times article detailed an extensive agreement between Guatemala and a French-American mining company headed by – A.E. Spriggs. The terms of the agreement were so broad that a New Zealand news paper called it “The Buying of A Republic”.

In 1915, Spriggs was appointed by Montana Governor S.V. Stuart to establish an Industrial Accident Board to help workers injured on the job – particularly miners in Butte. Spriggs managed to convince his old friend and political ally from Townsend, Gordon G. Watt to return to Montana to become Secretary of the Industrial Accident Board.

Watt was a man of undeniable integrity who could not be bribed by W.A. Clark in his bid for the U.S. Senate. Part of Watt’s decision to take the position with the Industrial Accident Board was to “stick it” to Clark whom he detested.

Given A.E. Spriggs long association with W.A. Clark, the decision to ask Watt to head up the Industrial Accident Board is intriguing.

You decide, was W.E. Spriggs a smart, talented man of integrity or just a political hack that used his connections to further himself?

Much of the information in this article came from research and writing by Paul Putz, Historian.