

The Creation of Broadwater County

Many people, even here in Broadwater County, do not realize that until 1897 Jefferson County went east all the way to the Missouri River including the towns of Radersburg, Hassel, Winston, Springville, Bedford and the “Ems” (Hog’em, Beat’em and Cheat’em). Meagher County went west all the way to the Missouri River and included Townsend, Toston, Canton and Diamond City. At one time Radersburg was the county seat of Jefferson County and Diamond City was the county seat of Meagher County.

The creation of Broadwater County is a story of incredible political planning and execution by A. E. Spriggs (former Governor of Montana), Peter J. Meloy and Gordon G. Watt.

The first attempt to create a new county was made by Van H. Fisk from Bedford who introduced a bill in the Montana Legislature in 1885. The bill was easily defeated never making it out of committee.

In 1892, W.E. Tierney, Senator from Meagher County (and an early Townsend leader) introduced a second bill to the Montana Legislature. The bill was strongly opposed by Senator Folsom of Meagher County and Senator Cardwell of Jefferson County. Both were popular, powerful politicians and easily defeated Tierney’s bill.

After the defeat of the W.E. Tierney’s bill, it was realized that the support of a new Broadwater County needed to have a strong, popular leader of their own that could garner statewide support and they found their man in A.E. Spriggs – a man of integrity and ability. Peter Meloy, A.E. Spriggs, Gordon Watt and Tierney worked hard to get A.E Spriggs elected as a Representative from Meagher County.



Once in the legislature, A.E. Spriggs soon established himself as a popular Representative, well-liked and widely respected for his integrity and ability. In 1895 he introduced another bill to establish Broadwater County. Spriggs knew the bill would not succeed, but he got it out of committee and passed by the Montana House. It was defeated in the Senate on the last day

of the session. Even though it did not succeed Spriggs demonstrated strong support for the bill by keeping it alive throughout the entire session.

The next election saw the Republican vote split between Silver Republicans and Populists. Spriggs saw an opportunity to get a slate of candidates that would support the new County elected in Legislature. At the same time people from Niehart and Monarch wanted to split from Meagher County and become part of Cascade County. Spriggs joined forces with the Niehart delegation to support each other.

Spriggs also ran for and was elected Lieutenant Governor of the State. As Lieutenant Governor Spriggs was the President of the Senate and his duties included appointing committee members and setting the legislative agenda.

In 1897 the bill creating Broadwater County from Jefferson, Meagher and small parts of Gallatin finally passed! Spriggs leadership and mastery of politics were responsible for the creation of Broadwater County.

The information for this article came from the memoirs of Peter J. Meloy as detailed in the *Broadwater Bygones* and *Hidden Tales Well Told* – both books available at the Broadwater County Museum. Visit the Museum to learn the full extent of the political maneuvering it took to create Broadwater County.