

## YesterYear

### Broadwater County's "Granddaddy"

Just inside the front doors to the main entrance of the County Courthouse is a bronze plaque commemorating 3 men who worked hard to get Broadwater County created. At the 1935 laying of the cornerstone of the Broadwater County Courthouse the Chairman of the County Commissioners recognized Gordon G. Watt as "the Grand-daddy of the County".



These men worked side-by-side to push the legislation for formation of Broadwater County. A.E. Spriggs, G.G. Watt, Peter J. Meloy.

Picture scanned from the Bywater Bygones

If you ask residents of the county, even those who have lived here all their lives, about Gordon G. Watt you are likely to get a blank look. Even the venerable Broadwater Bygones has no mention of him except in a caption of a photo of A.E. Spriggs, Gordon G. Watt and Peter Melloy.

According to biographer Vince Maranto, Watt was born in 1857 on Prince Edward Island in

Canada. The family moved to Texas after the Civil War. On a trip across the country, Watt was talked into going to Montana and ended up in early day Townsend, then part of Meagher County.

After moving his family to Townsend, Watt tried mining and was later "dragged in" to politics by friends and acquaintances. He ran for the Meagher County Clerk and Recorder; his campaigning largely consisted of driving a horse and buggy throughout the county distributing whiskey and cigars to the Meagher County voters. He lost the race for Clerk and Recorder by 4 votes.

Undeterred by the loss, Watt was elected to the Montana State Senate representing Meagher County. In 1885, Representative Van H. Fisk (Townsend resident) introduced the first of 3 attempts to create a new county in the Missouri Valley (now Broadwater County). Gordon Watt, A.E. Spriggs (Montana Lieutenant Governor from Townsend and Peter Meloy) put together a political alliance to push the creation of the new county.

In 1887 the political maneuverings of Gordon Watt and Lieutenant Governor Spriggs succeeded in getting the Montana Legislature to create a new County – named after Col. Broadwater – from parts of Jefferson County, Meagher County, Lewis and Clark County and from part of Gallatin County.

Watt continued his career in politics after the creation of Broadwater County; but corruption and money ruled in the Montana State Legislature. William A Clark (famously reported to have once been the wealthiest man in the United States) bribed his way to being elected as Montana Senator to the United States Congress. The U.S. Senate refused to seat Clark and during hearings on the scandal, Clark was quoted as saying “He never bribed a man that didn’t want to be bribed”.

Gordon Watt was a man of high moral standards and he rejected William Clark’s offered of \$25,000 for his vote. Watt developed an intense dislike for the morally challenged William A. Clark.

In 1908, Gordon Watt left Montana for the warmth of California where he helped found the city of Venice, California where he served as the city’s first city clerk, city marshal and city assessor. After only 3 years A.E. Spriggs persuaded Watt to return to Montana where he was appointed Clerk of the House of Representatives.

In 1915, Montana established the “Industrial Accident Board” primarily to take care of the numerous workers who were casualties of the mines. Watt was appointed Secretary of the team that was given six months to set up the office. For Watt it was a way to stick up for the little guy, and according to Vince

Maranto, "Watt found great pleasure in that because it was a way for him to get back at Clark" whom Watt detested.

To learn more about this almost forgotten Broadwater County leader visit the Broadwater County Museum where you can read hand-written excerpts from Gordon G. Watt's diary.