

COLORADO GOVERNORS

James H. Peabody



Scope and Content Note

The James H. Peabody Collection comprises approximately 20 cubic feet of material spanning his term from 1903-1905. Record series in the collection include extraditions and requisitions; correspondence; the Executive Record; reports; and speeches and messages to the General Assembly. Strengths of the collection include documentation concerning the labor strife that occurred in the towns of Victor, Telluride, Colorado City, Trinidad and Las Animas. Additional information concerning the National Guard's involvement including photographs may also be found. Some of the records originating with the National Guard have restricted access. Please contact the Colorado State Archives for information about the restricted records. The controversial 1904 gubernatorial election is well documented through Governor Peabody's records as well as those of Governor Alva Adams.

Biography

The life of James H. Peabody was a series of unusual circumstances, events and achievements. Even his birth was unique as he was the youngest of 17 children! He was born on August 21, 1852, in Orange County, Vermont, where his family raised crops and children. James attended school in Vermont, and later furthered his education at the Bryant and Stratton Commercial Colleges at Barre and Burlington, Vermont. Three of his brothers fought for the Union in the Civil War.

His father moved to Pueblo, Colorado, in 1871 and established the dry goods firm of Peabody & Jordan. James followed him after receiving his business college education in 1872, and worked for three years keeping the books. Early in 1875, he went to work for James Clelland in Clelland's general mercantile store in Canon City, Colorado. He worked his way up to become manager and then a partner of the firm. In 1882, he purchased the business and operated it until 1885, when he was elected county clerk. He defeated the incumbent who had held the post for 18 years. On March 19, 1878, he married Frances Lillian Clelland. They had four children, James, Clellan, Cora May and Jessie Anne.

In his fourth year as county clerk, he joined several other men in organizing the First National Bank of Canon City. In 1891, he was elected president of the bank. He also continued his public service by serving two years as city treasurer and two years as alderman. He was an organizer of the Canon City Water Works Company, and for many years was its secretary and treasurer. He also assisted in forming the Electric Light Company of Canon City and was its first president.

Peabody had a great interest in the Masonic Fraternity and established a phenomenal record with them, not only in Colorado, but throughout the nation. At the age of 32, he was chosen to be the Grand Master of the Colorado Masons, the youngest grand master in America.

Through his business and civic connections, Peabody became widely known throughout the state. Being active in Republican Party politics, he was nominated for governor in 1902. He was elected based on his law and order platform. However, his administration was marked by widespread labor troubles. Miners' wages and recognition of labor unions were the primary contentious issues. These troubles extended from the metal mines in Clear Creek, Cripple Creek and Telluride to the coal fields of Las Animas County. Striving to settle the numerous strikes and to keep the peace, Peabody ordered out the Colorado National Guard whenever he found it necessary. As a result, Peabody's first administration proved to be two of the most turbulent years in state history.

By 1903, the Western Federation of Miners was well entrenched in the mining areas and strove to extend its membership. At Cripple Creek in Teller County, Federation members held most of the political offices including sheriff. Most non-union miners had been driven out. The mine employers were intent, however, in their refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the union. Denying completely the concept of collective bargaining, the mine owners insisted that their working relationships with the miners was based on individual contracts. For the union, the ultimate weapon opposing this policy was the strike which was supposed to force the owners into negotiation. The mine owners countered the strikes by employing non-union workers. They believed that if union men left their jobs then other workers would be glad to replace them, which would then force the union to disintegrate.

Both sides resorted to violence. The Cripple Creek mine operators imported non-union labor from outside the mining area which was countered by the union forming armed camps to barricade the roads and railroads leading into the fields. The mine owners appealed to Governor Peabody, who sent an investigatory committee to the area. On their recommendation, Peabody dispatched the militia. Nearly 1,000 men were sent into Teller County on his order of September 4, 1903. Cripple Creek police and deputy sheriffs were relieved of their duties and all citizens were required to register their firearms.

As the strike continued, it became warfare for unconditional surrender. The climax to the violence occurred on June 6, 1904, when Harry Orchard, who was employed by the union, dynamited the railroad station at Independence, Colorado, killing 13 non-union miners. The mine operators moved in and took over the press of the Victor Record, which was a newspaper that had remained friendly to the union. They also rounded up strikers and either confined them in the infamous "bullpens" or took them under guard to the Kansas border and abandoned them there. Dozens were arrested without warrants and held without formal charges. General Sherman Bell of the Colorado National Guard shouted, "Habeus Corpus, hell! We'll give 'em post mortems."

With the support of the militia, the mine owners regained control over the Cripple Creek mines. By midsummer, 1904, the strike was broken although it was never officially terminated by the Western Federation of Miners. The owners reopened their mines with non-union labor and the union never again assumed its prominence in Cripple Creek. By 1905, organized business had won an important victory against Colorado's union mine workers.

Peabody ran again for a second term in 1904 against Democrat, Alva Adams. The slogan for the Democrats was "Anybody but Peabody!" Adams criticized Peabody's handling of the Cripple Creek and other strikes and promised that he would do a better job of ending the industrial warfare. Despite Adams'

apparent victory, the Republicans who controlled the legislature, insisted that fraud and corruption had dominated the balloting process in certain counties. Apparently, however, both parties had used methods that prevented a fair election. Since the legislature was charged with deciding contested seats, the Republicans prevailed and voted to unseat Governor Adams. Peabody was then pronounced the winner upon condition that he resign immediately after taking the oath of office. The governor's chair was then handed over to the Republican Lieutenant Governor, Jesse F. McDonald. Colorado thus had the dubious distinction of having three different governors in one day.

Following the election, Peabody returned to his home in Canon City where he retired to private life, devoting his time to caring for his various financial interests. He died November 23, 1917 and is buried in Canon City.

Governor Peabody's Resignation from March 17, 1905. This document may be viewed in pdf format, however the Adobe® Reader is required. You may download the reader free of charge from the Adobe® web site.

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Newspaper Articles

- Denver Post, 11/23/1917, p. 24.

- Newspaper Files of James H. Peabody. Denver Public Library Western History Collection.
- Rocky Mountain News, 11/24/1917, p. 7.
- Taylor, Ralph C. "Governor Peabody Faced Labor Strife." Pueblo Chieftan, January 5, 1969, p. 6c.

Series Descriptions

Executive Record

The Executive Record contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requisitions; honorary citations; and proclamations that were issued by Governor Peabody during his term of office from 1903-1905.

Correspondence

Included in this series is correspondence between Governor Peabody and his constituents, state agencies, and other public officials. There is also a significant amount of correspondence related specifically to the strikes at Las Animas, Victor, Cripple Creek, Trinidad and Telluride and the military operations involving the Colorado National Guard. Some of the information originating with the Colorado National Guard may have restricted access. Please contact the Colorado State Archives for information about the restricted records. The correspondence is either organized alphabetically by correspondent or by subject.

Proclamations

This series consists of Executive Proclamations issued by the governor and deposited as filings in the Office of the Secretary of State. Included are the proclamations relating to the dispatch of troops to the mining areas which were considered to be in a "state of insurrection and rebellion."

Speeches and Messages

Peabody's Inaugural Address and his Biennial Address comprise this series.

Extraditions and Requisitions

This series includes documentation concerning the surrendering of alleged criminals to a different jurisdiction for trial. Documentation may include the application for extradition, the warrant for arrest, and correspondence from the Attorney General's office concerning the extradition.

Reports

The reports consist primarily of reports from state agencies and more specific reports concerning various topics.