

# BACK STORY

## TASKER ODDIE: BITTEN BY THE MINING BUG

BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

Republican Tasker Oddie was the first lawyer elected governor of the state. Nevada's 12th governor (1911 to 1914), Oddie attended night school in New York to obtain a law degree. In 1898, at age 28, he moved to Nevada to work for banker Anson Phelps Stokes' interests in Austin, which included everything from a railroad to silver mines. Ultimately, the Stokes companies severed ties to Nevada, leaving Oddie free to look elsewhere for opportunities.

Though he was admitted to the Nevada Bar Association in 1898, the practice of law failed to captivate Oddie, while the opportunities to strike it rich in the mining industry did draw his interest. He moved to Belmont in Nye County and began working the Barcelona Mine, an abandoned mine that produced gold, silver and cinnabar.

He obtained an old wagon and a pesky mule team and hauled his supplies six miles east to the mine. Using a pick and shovel, he worked the mine, but his money ran out before he reached the ore at the end of the tunnel. He could not afford to buy a handcar, so he used an old wheelbarrow to remove the dirt and ore. When his wheelbarrow wore out, he borrowed one from a friend. He could not pack it onto his burro's back, so he struggled and finally wrestled it up the steep mountain to the tunnel himself.

In 1900, the voters elected Oddie Nye County District Attorney, without opposition. At the time, he had never actually practiced law, nor had he any trial experience. During his two-year term, he learned the law on the job and got some courtroom experience at the same time.

While living in Belmont, Oddie met Jim Butler, who discovered the rich mining ore in Tonopah around 1902. Butler brought Oddie some ore samples, which he sent to an assayer friend in Austin. The promising results kicked



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNR SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

off the mining boom in Tonopah. Oddie, Butler and others partnered in their mining operations, with Oddie acting as the manager of the gold and silver mines.

With his new-found riches, Oddie invested in numerous mines in Goldfield, Bullfrog and Rhyolite. He also branched out, investing in banks, ranches, livestock and other industries.

In 1904, Oddie ran on the Republican ticket and was elected to represent Nye County as state senator; he served a four-year term. He introduced a number of bills that protected the mine owners and operators.

In the national panic of 1907, overextended, Oddie lost everything. In 1910, he ran for governor on the Republican ticket. With no money for campaigning, he drove a clunker of a car, modified so he could sleep on his bed roll in back. He traveled the state as friends provided gas and meals along the way. He defeated Acting Governor Denver Dickerson.

When Oddie ran for reelection in 1914, Emmet Boyle beat him, so he returned to his mining roots. In 1920, the voters elected him to the U. S. Senate and reelected him in 1926. He served on the Committee on Mines and Mining in Congress. Democrat Pat McCarran defeated him when he ran for reelection in 1932, and also

when he tried for a comeback in 1938. Oddie left Nevada and died at age 80 in San Francisco, in 1950. ■



Nevada Lawyer Editorial Board Chair **PATRICIA CAFFERATA** maintains a private law practice in Reno. She is a part-time hearing officer for Nevada Department of State Personnel and chair of the Nevada Equal Rights Commission.