

## FIRST DRAFT

# ANYTHING GOES

## Fraud, intimidation and ballot stuffing marred Colorado's 1904 gubernatorial election



**PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**  
Incumbent Republican Gov. James Peabody challenged the election results, and was sworn in for a second time on March 16, 1905. But he resigned the same day.



**PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**  
Alva Adams, the Democrat who won the most votes in the 1904 election, although his vote total was contested by Republicans amid charges of fraud.



**PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**  
Jesse McDonald, the Republican lieutenant governor, became governor on March 17, 1905, after both Adams and Peabody resigned.



**PUBLIC DOMAIN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**  
This cartoon appeared in 1904 while James Peabody was still governor.

Democrat Alva Adams must have thought he'd received an early Christmas present based on the Dec. 22, 1904 edition of the Rocky Mountain News. Nearly two months after the Nov. 8 election, Adams' rival for the office of Colorado governor was going to "Quit the Game," the paper proclaimed.

"Within the next forty-eight hours, Governor James H.



**BOB SILBERNAGEL**

Peabody will announce ... that he no longer makes any claims to the gubernatorial succession and waives any and all objections

to the seating of Alva Adams," the News added.

Alas, for Adams and the state of Colorado, the Rocky Mountain News story was premature. Peabody, the incumbent Republican governor, refused to concede to Adams. He and his supporters continued to protest the election results, and it wasn't until mid-March that a governor was finally seated. But the victory didn't go to either Adams or Peabody.

On March 17, 1905, Lt. Gov. Jesse McDonald became Colorado's 16th governor.

Actually, Colorado had three different governors within a span of 24 hours at the conclusion of what has been called the most corrupt election in Colorado history.

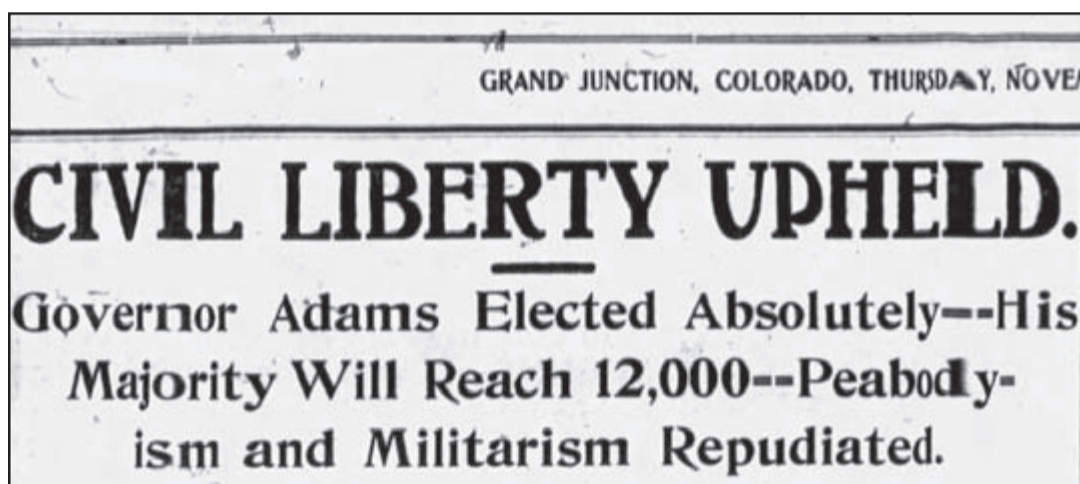
First was Adams, who had been sworn into office in January, having received the most recorded votes — a margin of at least 10,000 votes. But with a Republican-dominated Legislature supporting Peabody, he wielded no power.

Adams was nominally governor until March 16, when he resigned and Peabody took the oath of office. But Peabody did so only on the condition that he would immediately step down. When he did, McDonald was sworn in early on March 17.

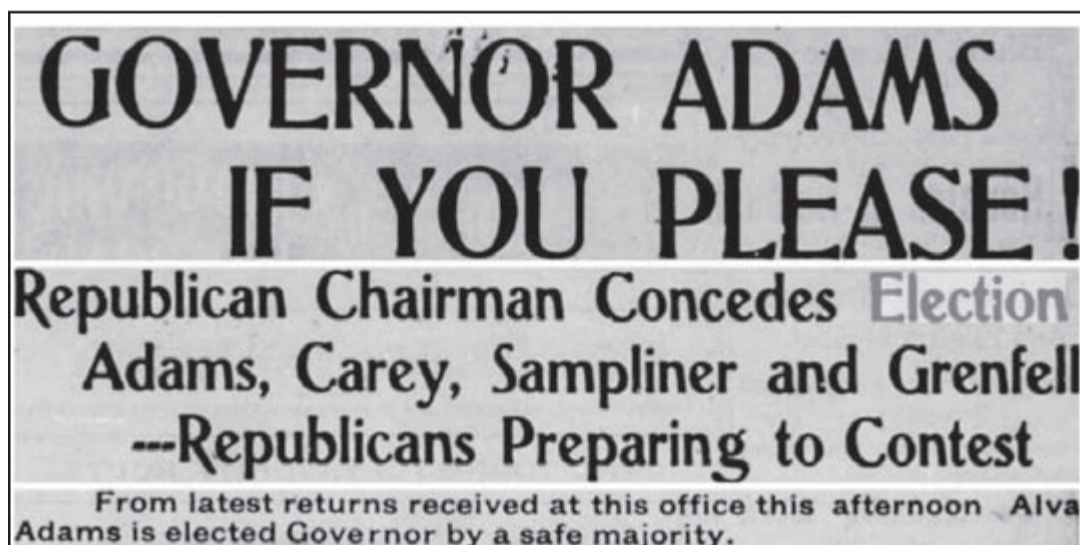
In addition to the gubernatorial musical chairs, there had been multiple incidents of voter fraud and intimidation. The fraud was so widespread that one legislative report declared it was "wholly impossible for us to separate the legal ballots from the illegal ones, and equally impossible for us to determine whether [Adams or Peabody] received an honest majority of legal votes."

Multiple precincts, especially in Democratic strongholds in Denver, had more votes cast than registered voters.

In Republican-led mining



Here's how The Daily Sentinel reacted to Alva Adams perceived victory.



This headline in the Florence Daily Tribune on Nov. 10, 1904, proclaimed what appeared to be a certain victory for Democrat Alva Adams. But sorting out the election took another 4½ months.

camp, mine owners warned workers that anyone who voted for Adams would be fired, and the mines would be closed if the Democrat won.

Additionally, one Republican county clerk, who'd been ordered to personally deliver a ballot box to Denver, jumped off a moving train rather than deliver the box.

Also, before he relinquished power at the end of 1904, then-Governor Peabody was authorized to appoint two new members to the Colorado Supreme Court, the judicial body that would help determine the election's outcome. One of those appointees was "a young lawyer whose principal distinction is that he is a nephew of Governor Peabody," the Daily Sentinel reported.

In the 1904 national election, President Theodore Roosevelt won a landslide victory over Democrat Alton B. Parker, in what was a relatively mild campaign.

But in Colorado, the election for governor took place against the backdrop of two years of Colorado labor wars. A half-dozen strikes had occurred in 1903 and 1904, from Cripple Creek to Telluride and Denver to Durango.

Governor Peabody, who'd

been elected in 1902 on a platform of law and order in regard to labor strife, had the backing of mining companies in the state. As governor, he repeatedly called out the national guard to halt strikes and arrest union miners, earning him the undying enmity of union leaders and most miners.

By 1904, Alva Adams had already served two separate terms as Colorado governor, having been elected in 1886 and again in 1896. He supported workers and helped create the State Board of Arbitration to settle labor disputes without strikes. But his inability to peaceably resolve labor disputes in Leadville and Cripple Creek weakened his political clout.

Even so, after two years of Peabody's regime, Democrats eagerly supported Adams in 1904. One popular campaign slogan was "Anybody But Peabody." That led to some highly illegal campaign activity.

Denver Police Chief Michael Delaney met with several hundred gamblers, saloon keepers, ex-convicts and prostitutes in early November, according to the Journal of the Colorado General Assem-

bly for 1905. Those he spoke to were election "repeaters" who were paid to go from precinct to precinct and vote for Democrats.

"Well, we've got to win this election," Delaney reportedly told the group. "We will see that you don't go to jail."

Delaney succeeded in coaching the "repeaters." One man was found to have voted 169 times, and in one Denver precinct with only 100 registered voters, 717 Democratic ballots were cast.

In another Denver precinct, "over 150 bogus ballots" were found in a single ballot box, according to the Delta County Independent.

Republicans were far from innocent when it came to election malfeasance. In one court filing, Adams and his attorneys argued that large corporations in the state had "entered into a conspiracy with each other and with the Republican State Central Committee ... to secure the election of James H. Peabody as Governor of the State of Colorado."

The corporations sent large sums of money to various counties to buy votes, pad voter registration lists and to attempt to corrupt election of-

ficials, the Democrats stated.

Additionally, there was abundant evidence of voter intimidation on the part of mine owners. One miner later told legislators investigating the election that "If the people had been allowed to go to the polls and vote as they seen fit, without any intimidation or coercion of any kind, the Democratic ticket would have been elected" by a landslide.

Then there was Huerfano County, where Democrats accused the Republicans of having manufactured votes. Adams' team subpoenaed Huerfano County Clerk Juan Montez, but when he made the trip to Denver, he failed to bring the ballot box from Precinct No. 23, a coal camp for Colorado Fuel and Iron.

Montez was arrested for contempt, and ordered to return to Walsenburg to retrieve the ballot box from Precinct No. 23. A policeman accompanied him to make sure the request was honored. But Montez had other plans.

"Before the train got under good headway, Montez jumped from the train, leaving his guard to go on to Sedalia," one newspaper reported on Feb. 16, 1905.

Montez was eventually captured and charged with election fraud. And the ballot box from Precinct 23 was recovered, but it was empty.

Democrats alleged that CF&I officials determined how many votes they wanted recorded in the precinct, and ordered Montez to report that number, without bothering to gather any actual ballots. "This is the most flagrantly corrupt incident that has ever happened in Colorado history," the Rocky Mountain News declared.

After all this drama, a compromise was finally reached, although neither side was truly happy about it. Adams resigned as governor. Peabody was sworn in, then resigned.

Jesse McDonald, a mining engineer, owner of several small mines, former mayor of Leadville and former state senator, was sworn in. He served two relatively quiet years as governor, and he chose not to seek election 1906.

**Sources:** "Three Governors in a Day," by Marjorie Hornbein, Colorado Magazine, Summer 1968; "1904: The Most Corrupt Election in Colorado History," by Devin Flores, History Colorado, www.historycolorado.org; historic newspaper articles at www.newspapers.com and www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org.

Bob Silbernagel's email is [bohsilbernagel@gmail.com](mailto:bohsilbernagel@gmail.com).

# OFF THE CLOCK

Find all your go-and-do events for the weekend and beyond, every Wednesday and always at [gjsentinel.com](http://gjsentinel.com).

# GO-AND-DO