

COLORADO GOVERNORS

Elias M. Ammons



Scope and Content Note

The Governor Elias M. Ammons collection comprises approximately 20 cubic feet of material and 1 roll of microfilm spanning his term as governor from 1913-1915. Record series in the collection include the Executive Record; correspondence; reports; speeches and messages; extraditions and requisitions; and proclamations. The official acts of Ammons' administration are documented in the Executive Record including those concerning the coal strike near Trinidad and the subsequent "Ludlow Massacre." The correspondence has significant documentation of these events as do other records in other series. Other aspects of Ammons' administration are well documented in the Executive Record, correspondence, reports, speeches, and proclamations.

Biography

Governor Ammons is the epitome of the self-made man. He was born on a farm near Franklin, North Carolina on July 28, 1860. His family later moved to Colorado in the spring of 1871 seeking a better life. Up to this point, Ammons had received little education, instead working very hard at a variety of jobs. He hauled lumber and railroad ties, including the first five thousand ties used by the Denver & South Park Railroad. He worked constantly outdoors even in the winter without gloves or overshoes.

Elias was eventually able to get back to school although during his high school years, he still worked nights lighting the gas street lamps in his neighborhood. At this time he contracted a bad case of measles which permanently damaged his eyes. Ammons also suffered a severe injury in 1880 when he was accidentally shot in the head while hunting.

Despite all these hardships, he started a career in journalism and was doing quite well until his problems with his eyes forced him into another profession. He started a cattle business with Thomas F. Dawson as a partner. They were able to develop a small outfit of eighty acres and twenty five head of cattle in Douglas County into one of the largest cattle ranches in the state.

Ammons' interest in cattle led him to help organize the Colorado Cattle and Horse Growers' Association. He was also instrumental in starting the National Western Stock Show which has greatly stimulated the livestock industry in Colorado. Elias was also active in banking and organized the First National Bank of Littleton. He served on several school boards and was a major promoter of education throughout his life.

On January 29, 1889, he married Elizabeth Fleming in Denver, and they raised a family of three children. One son, Teller, later served as governor of Colorado from 1937 to 1939.

In 1890, Elias Ammons was elected to the State Legislature as a Republican. In 1896, the Republican Party supported the idea of adopting the gold standard which Ammons strongly disagreed with. As a result, he subsequently left the party. Despite his changed political allegiances, Ammons was still elected as a State Senator. The divisiveness among the Republicans nationally, between Roosevelt and Taft, helped him then to get elected as the Democratic candidate for governor in the fall of 1912. He only served one term from 1913 to 1915.

Elias Ammons was known as a reformer in the legislature, and he continued this tradition as governor. The following are the highlights of his administration: he encouraged education and established the schools of agriculture at Ft. Collins and Ft. Lewis in southwestern Colorado; he strengthened the civil service system in the state; he helped to revise the taxation system making the distribution of taxes more equitable; he promoted more public highway construction; automobiles were licensed for the first time; he improved public utilities laws as well as conflicting banking and insurance laws; he helped establish a system of state parks; and finally, helped define the eight hour working day and coal mining laws more clearly.

Although these accomplishments were not trivial, the event which dominated his administration was the "Ludlow Massacre". In September, 1913, striking coal miners around Trinidad in southern Colorado demanded recognition of their union, a 10% increase in wages, enforcement of the eight-hour work law, health and safety regulations, and the right to select their own living quarters, eating houses and doctors.

The mine operators, with the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company acting as spokesman for the group, attempted to open their properties with non-union labor. John D. Rockefeller of New York was one of the absentee owners of this company. The miners attempted to keep the strikebreakers out of the coal fields. The mine owners then sent appeals to the statehouse and Governor Ammons asking for militia intervention, who then sent National Guard troops to the region in order to keep the mines operating.

Miners formed tent colonies after being evicted from the company-owned housing. On April 20, 1914, they were attacked by National Guard soldiers at Ludlow Station, eighteen miles north of Trinidad, for failing to vacate their tents and removing themselves from company property. Five miners and one militiaman were killed along with two women and eleven children who either suffocated or were burned to death when their tents were torched. The United Mine Workers Union labeled it the "Ludlow Massacre".

For the next ten days, war ensued between the two groups. Ammons asked President Wilson for help, who sent U.S. troops to enforce a truce by disarming everyone in the area. Negotiations proceeded and the strike officially ended in December, 1914, with the union miners being permanently replaced by non-union workers. Two years later, the Democrats in Colorado had to campaign under the real handicap of trying to explain away the uproar resulting from the Ludlow incident and the violence in the coal fields. The Republicans captured the Statehouse at the next election and the coal mines never economically recovered.

After serving as governor, Elias Ammons became president of Farmers Life Insurance Company. He died in Denver on May 20, 1925, and is buried there at Fairmont Cemetery.

Bibliography - Governor Elias M. Ammons

Books

Colorado Adjutant-General's Office. The Military Occupation of the Coal Strike Zone of Colorado by the Colorado National Guard, 1913-1914. Report of the commanding general to the governor for the use of the congressional committee. Exhibiting an account of the military occupation to the time of the first withdrawal of the troops in April, 1914. Denver, Press of the Smith-Brooks printing company, 1914.

Stone, Wilbur Fisk (ed). History of Colorado, 4 Vols. Chicago, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1918, pp. 59-69.

Ubbelohde, Carl, Benson, Maxine, and Smith, Duane. Colorado History. Boulder, Colorado, Pruett Publishing Co., 1972. Public Records and Collections

Colorado State Archives. Records of the Office of the Governor. Elias M. Ammons, 1913-1915. Correspondence.

Periodicals

"Ammons and the Anti-conservation Movement in Colorado." The Colorado Magazine, Vol. 54, No. 1, Winter, 1977, pp. 26-43.

Unpublished Materials

Ammons, Elias Milton, 1860-1925. Development of the West. Address by E.M. Ammons before the Governors' conference at Boston, August 24, 1915, Colorado State University Library.

Ammons, Elias Milton, 1860-1925. Forty Years of Progress in Colorado. Colorado State University Library, 1916.

Series Descriptions

Executive Record

The Executive Record contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requisitions; honorary citations; and proclamations which were issued by Governor Ammons during his term of office from 1913-1915.

Correspondence

Included in this series is correspondence between Governor Ammons and his constituents, state agencies, and other public officials. There is also a significant amount of correspondence related specifically to the coal strikes and the military operations at Ludlow including communications with mine owners. 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. There is a proclamation entitled "Insurrection, Riot" that relates to the coal mining strikes as well as proclamations concerning the "National Horse Show" and "Mid Winter Fair."

Speeches and Messages

Ammons' Inaugural Speech in 1913, his Biennial Message to the General Assembly in 1915, and a Speech to the Public Lands Convention comprise this series.

Reports

This series consists primarily of reports from state agencies including a Commissioner of Mining report "Mining Development Report."

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.