

# COLORADO GOVERNORS

## John F. Shafroth



### Scope and Content Note

The John F. Shafroth Collection comprises approximately 30 cubic feet of records and 3 rolls of microfilm spanning his term as Governor from 1909-1913. Major record series included in the collection are correspondence; the Executive Record; applications and appointments; reports; extraditions and requisitions; and proclamations. His 1909 inaugural address exists in the collection as well as an M.A. Thesis by J.W. Dickson III, "Progressivism in Colorado: The Administrative Reform of John F. Shafroth," 1975.

Records concerning the appointments that Shafroth made to various state offices are voluminous in the "applications and appointments" series. The operations of the state agencies are also well documented through correspondence and reports. Shafroth's election reform measures may be tracked through his Inaugural Address, the Executive Record, correspondence concerning bills and other legislative matters, and proclamations, while his support of irrigation and conservation projects is documented well through

correspondence and other series.

### Biography

The man who earned the title "Honest John" in Colorado politics served in the United States House of Representatives from 1895 to 1903, as Governor of Colorado from 1909 to 1913, and in the United States Senate from 1913 to 1919.

He was born at Fayette, Missouri, on June 9, 1854. He attended the public schools of Fayette and then went to the University of Michigan where he graduated in 1875, having earned a law degree. He returned to Fayette and became a law partner there until 1879, when he decided to move to Denver. He married Virginia Morrison in 1881 and they raised a family of five children.

In 1882, he became involved in the political arena as an assistant to one of the prosecuting attorneys in Denver. Shafroth was later elected Denver City Attorney for two terms from 1887 to 1891. For the next three years, he practiced law in partnership with a former Denver judge, Platt Rogers.

A considerable amount of personal prestige must be assumed to account for the next major event in Shafroth's life. In spite of comparatively little experience in public office, and none whatsoever at the federal level, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives on the Republican ticket in

1894, 1896, and 1898. In 1900 he ran and won as a Democrat and remained in this party for the rest of his life. In Congress, he was one of the leading advocates for women's suffrage and also fought for the economic development of the West through support for reclamation and irrigation projects as well as for good roads. He favored campaign reform through changing campaign donation procedures and stemming the corporate influence on elections.

Ironically, his opponent for the House seat in the 1902 election claimed fraud and Shafroth, rather than hold a seat tainted by fraud, resigned. While fraud was proven on the part of Democrats and Republicans alike, Shafroth's reputation remained unscathed. Although he lost the election of 1904, this action which caused people to call him "Honest John," helped to elect him Governor of Colorado and later, U.S. Senator.

Shafroth did not return to politics until 1908 when he was elected Governor and served two terms. He has been called the "reform governor" due to a list of reform measures enacted during his administration. Shafroth used his personal influence to push through many of these proposals against the wishes of a reluctant legislature. Direct primary law, direct election of senators, the Australian (headless) ballot, a registration and corrupt practices act, as well as various initiative, referendum and recall laws were cited as accomplishments of his administration in his last address to the legislature.

Immediately after his term as Governor ended in 1913, Shafroth was elected to the U.S. Senate. Senator Shafroth, as Representative Shafroth before him, proved to be a very effective legislator. He was instrumental in the framing and passage of the extremely important Federal Reserve Act of 1913. His efforts on behalf of women's suffrage, public land laws which would benefit the western states, and matters relating to banking and currency continued to be very influential.

Senator Shafroth's many interests kept him so busy, however, that he forewent the usual custom of taking time out during an election year to "mend his fences". Apparently as a result of his failure to make a vigorous campaign effort, he was unseated in 1918 by Lawrence C. Phipps. Although he was not re-elected to the Senate, he received another important opportunity to serve the people of Colorado and the western states as the chairman of the War Minerals Relief Commission.

The last few years of Shafroth's life were spent in supporting the political and legal ambitions of others, in private practice in Denver, and in travel in Europe with his wife. He died in Denver, on February 20, 1922, and is buried at Fairmount Cemetery. Several members of Governor Shafroth's family have since been prominent in Colorado and national affairs.

## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

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- The John Franklin Shafroth Collection 1854 to 1922. State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, 1955.

### **Government Publications**

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### **Periodicals**

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### **Miscellaneous**

- Colorado Senate and House Journals for the 17th, 18th, and 19th Sessions (1909, 1911, and 1913) contain numerous messages from Governor Shafroth.
- John Franklin Shafroth's Probate record, including his Will may be viewed at the Denver Probate Court at the Denver City and County Building.
- The Congressional Record, which may be used for the study of an individual congressman with the aid of the Congressional Record Index, is available at the Denver Public Library. This collection includes many of Shafroth's speeches and comments in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

### **Series Descriptions**

## **The Executive Record**

The Executive Record documents the official actions of the governor. It contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requisitions; honorary citations; and proclamations which were issued by Governor Shafroth during his terms from 1909-1913.

## **Correspondence**

Approximately half of the collection is correspondence either organized by subject or alphabetically by correspondent. Correspondence with State agencies comprise a large portion of this series including one box devoted to the Attorney General's Office. There are also minutes of a few boards and committees as well as reports included in the correspondence. Subjects that are well documented include irrigation and conservation projects; Rio Grande River water rights; irrigation congresses; legislative matters; the Penitentiary; pardons; and tuberculosis.

## **Applications and Appointments**

This is an extensive series comprising approximately 8 cubic feet of documentation concerning gubernatorial appointments to state agency offices, various boards and commissions, public trustees, and county commissioners.

## **Reports**

The majority of this series is comprised of annual or biennial reports to the governor from various state agencies, boards, and commissioners. There are approximately 9 cubic feet of reports.

## **Proclamations**

This series consists of one cubic feet of Executive Proclamations issued by the governor and deposited as filings in the Office of the Secretary of State.

## **Extraditions and Requisitions**

The extraditions and requisitions comprise 3 cubic feet of material concerning the surrendering of alleged criminals to a different jurisdiction for trial. Records may include the application for extradition, the warrant for arrest, and correspondence concerning the extradition.