

JUDGE L. S. TRIMBLE AND THE IMPEACHMENT OF ANDREW JOHNSON

by Mark B. Thompson

Which (future) New Mexican voted against the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson? No, it was not Edmund G. Ross, governor of New Mexico, 1885-89, famously portrayed by John F. Kennedy in *Profiles in Courage*. Ross, a senator from Kansas, voted with the majority *against conviction* after the trial in the Senate. The vote against impeachment (indictment) was cast by (future) Albuquerque lawyer, Lawrence S. Trimble, then a member of the House of Representatives from Kentucky.

In 1868 Trimble was in his second term as the representative from Kentucky's 1st District, the area of western Kentucky centered in Paducah. As a Democrat who had supported the Union in the war, Trimble was by 1868 providing party line votes against the so-called Radical Republicans guiding the Reconstruction agenda. On Feb. 24 he was on the short end of the 128 to 47 vote on the resolution calling for impeachment.¹ On March 2 and 3 he dutifully voted against the articles of impeachment, which obviously also passed by wide majorities. Trimble did not participate in the floor debate on impeachment, but in July he placed a speech in the record he entitled "Partisan Vindictiveness," expressing a restrained if fairly typical southern Democrat point of view.²

Lawrence Strother Trimble was born Aug. 26, 1825, in Lawrence County, Kentucky, and was admitted to the bar at the age of 22. He relocated to Paducah in McCracken County where he practiced law and became a successful politician, serving in the state legislature from 1851-53 and as a judge of the 1st Judicial District of Kentucky, 1860-65. Although he was later considered a Union supporter in the politically divided "border state," he was also a slave owner in 1860.³ After being denied renomination in 1870, he nevertheless continued to seek a congressional seat during the 1870s, losing the nomination effort for the final time in 1878.⁴

The following year Trimble moved to Albuquerque and entered the practice of law, by all accounts becoming a well-regarded member of the New Mexico Bar. He also bought a ranch east of town near Tijeras Canyon; but Judge Trimble, as he naturally continued to be known, did not completely give up politics. He ran for and was elected a delegate from Bernalillo County to the Constitutional Convention of 1889. It was in this capacity that Trimble once again made history—he was the only Democrat among the 73 delegates!⁵ Perhaps because of his status as a minority of one, or perhaps because he was respected by the other 17 delegates who were also lawyers, Trimble was elected temporary president in one of the first items of

business and was given the opportunity to make the opening address to the convention.⁶

The Convention of 1889 and the proposed constitution it produced created one of those interesting footnotes in the history of New Mexico's 66-year quest for statehood. The territory had been rejected for statehood in the middle of that decade and, as expressed in his opening remarks by the permanent president, lawyer J. Francisco Chaves of Valencia County, part of the reason for the convention

was to refute "the charges [in Washington] that we were incapable of self-government." Unfortunately, the territory never got to prove its case with a new constitution—it was rejected by the voters at the special election in 1890.⁷

Judge Trimble mostly retired from the practice of law after the convention and spent his last years tending to his ranch. He died Aug. 9, 1904, and his funeral was described as "a notable event" and a "signal tribute to [the] worth of the late jurist."⁸ Judge Trimble is buried in the Fairview Cemetery on Yale Boulevard in Albuquerque, also the final

resting place of that other New Mexican linked to President Andrew Johnson, Governor Edmund G. Ross.

Effect of the Vote on the Eleventh Article of Impeachment



Elation—At the White House

Depression—At the Tribune Office

Endnotes

¹U.S. House Journal 1868. 40th Cong., 2d sess., p. 392.

²Cong. Globe, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess.), p. 464 (July 21, 1868).

³L.S. Trimble household, 1860 U.S. census, McCracken County, Kentucky, population schedule, District 2, Paducah Post Office, page 97, dwelling 672, family 674; Slave Inhabitant Schedules, District 2, McCracken County, Kentucky, p. 14; National Archives micropublication M653, roll 383.

⁴H. Levin, *The Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky* (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1897), p. 404. Trimble's biography in the same publication ignores his unsuccessful political efforts. See p. 413.

⁵Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1912), p. 505.

⁶*Journal of the Constitutional Convention, Territory of New Mexico*, N.M. Territorial Archives (Microfilm ed., 1974), roll 138.

⁷See generally, Robert W. Larson, *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood, 1846-1912* (U. of New Mexico Press: 1968), pp. 147-68.

⁸"Trimble Funeral A Notable Event," *The Albuquerque Morning Journal* (Aug. 15, 1904), p. 6.

About the Author

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