by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

Many Nevadans believe that Henry Goode Blasdel was the Silver State's first governor after statehood was granted on October 31, 1864. However, Blasdel, elected on November 8, did not take office until December 5. Someone had to be running the 36th state. So, who was Nevada's first chief executive?

James Warren Nye of New York, commissioned by President Abraham Lincoln on March 22, 1861 as governor of Nevada Territory, continued as Acting Governor of Nevada under Article XVII of the newly adopted Nevada State Constitution. Any government takes time to be organized after its creation and Nevada's founding fathers described the duties of certain territorial officers until the swearing in of the elected state officers. Nye spent five weeks laying the groundwork for the new state.

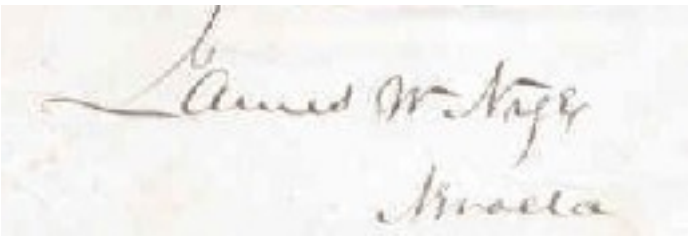
On October 31, 1864, Nye's first action as the Acting Governor of Nevada was to certify President Lincoln's proclamation declaring Nevada's statehood. Lincoln's statehood proclamation and Nye's certification was published in Nevada's newspapers beginning the following day. The certification was signed James W. Nye, Governor, and attested to by Orion Clemens, Secretary of State.

Governor Nye's principal task was to oversee the first state elections on November 8, which included electing a governor and selecting presidential electors. There were no steam railroads

in Nevada in 1864 and official election results delivered by stage and other means took time to arrive in Carson City. The official canvas of the vote was completed on November 26. Republican Henry G. Blasdel defeated Democrat David E. Buel for governor by a vote of 9,834 to 6,555. Abraham Lincoln won the presidential race and three electors were chosen to vote for him at the Electoral College. However, only two electors voted for Lincoln because one, A. S. Peck, of Aurora, found himself snowbound and could not make the trip to Carson City. The new state, not yet having a legislative session, had no law defining how a replacement would be chosen.

Nye continued to make appointments during the interim that included judgeships, county commissioner positions, and military commissions. He also issued his final Thanksgiving proclamation on November 14 for Thursday, November 24, this time as Governor of Nevada. President Lincoln, beginning in 1863, had designated the last Thursday of November as a national holiday of Thanksgiving

Governor Nye concluded his tenure in office with a "Valedictory Address" on inauguration day, Monday, December 5, 1864 in Carson City. His speech was a lengthy one including an overview of his three and one-half-year tenure as territorial governor and the profound change he had observed in Nevada. "I take my leave of you, in official capacity, this day, but in that capacity alone," Nye concluded. "Among you I intend to live; here I expect to die," he vigorously proclaimed. "Governor, I now commit to you and your associates the interests of this new State, entertaining that no doubt that with your hands they will be ably defended, and by your vigilant eye carefully watched and guarded."



Nye then turned the reins of government over to Governor Blasdel. However, he was not out of office very long. The recently convened state legislature, among its first items of business, elected James W. Nye as one of Nevada's first two U. S. Senators on December 15, the other being attorney and former territorial legislator William M. Stewart. Nye drew the short term ending on April 4, 1867. The Senator was reelected by the legislature in 1867 and served until 1873.

In failing health, Nye's intention, which he had shared with Nevadans upon leaving office as

governor in 1864, to die in the state was not realized. Nevada's only territorial governor and the state's first governor, died on Christmas Day, 1876, in White Plains, New York. Nevadans had not forgotten the "Old Grey Eagle," as he was affectionately known. The last territorial legislature named a county in his honor: Nye County.

Photograph of Senator Nye by Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, Washington, D.C., and signature of James W. Nye from paper photographic mat courtesy of Nevada State Library and Archives.

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