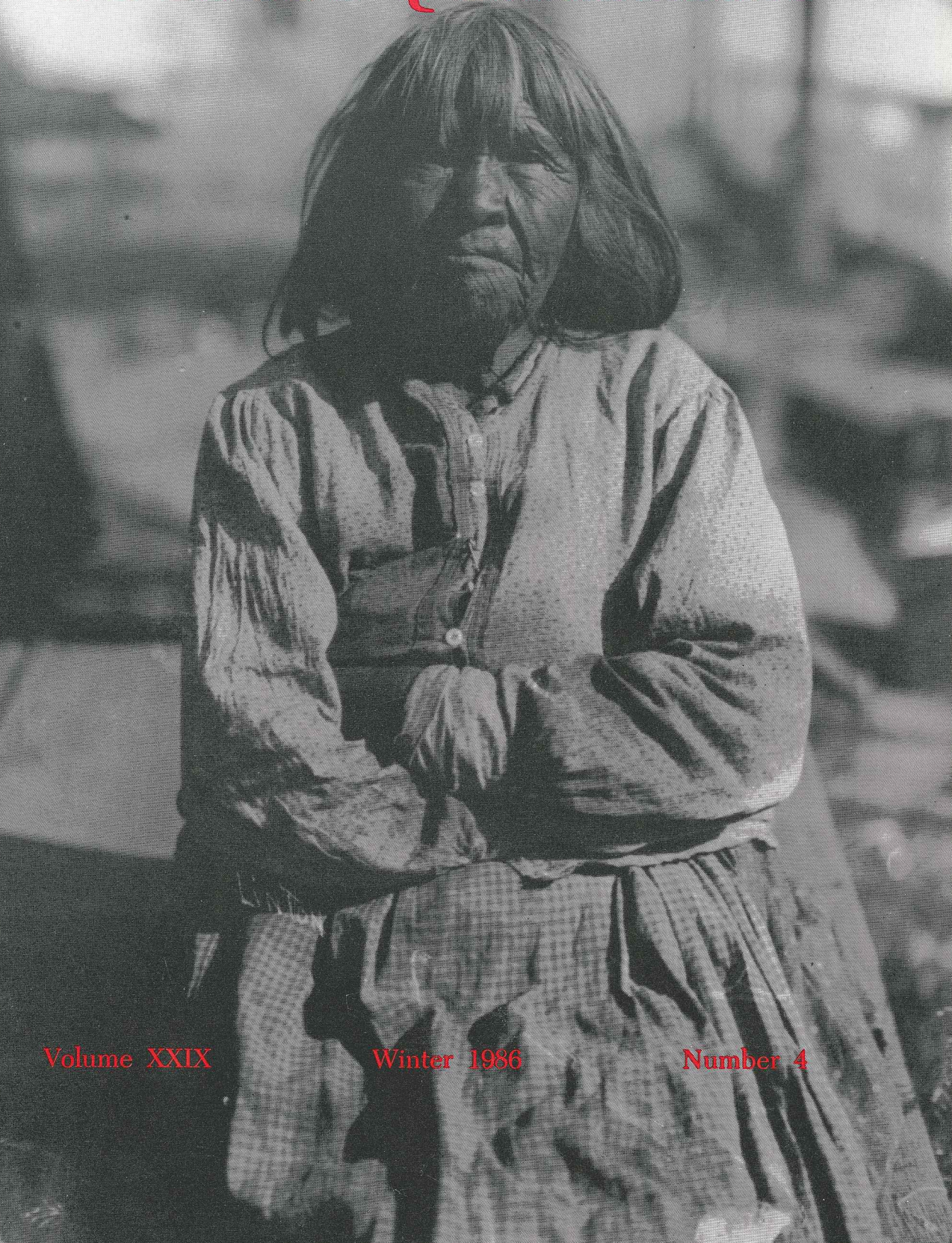


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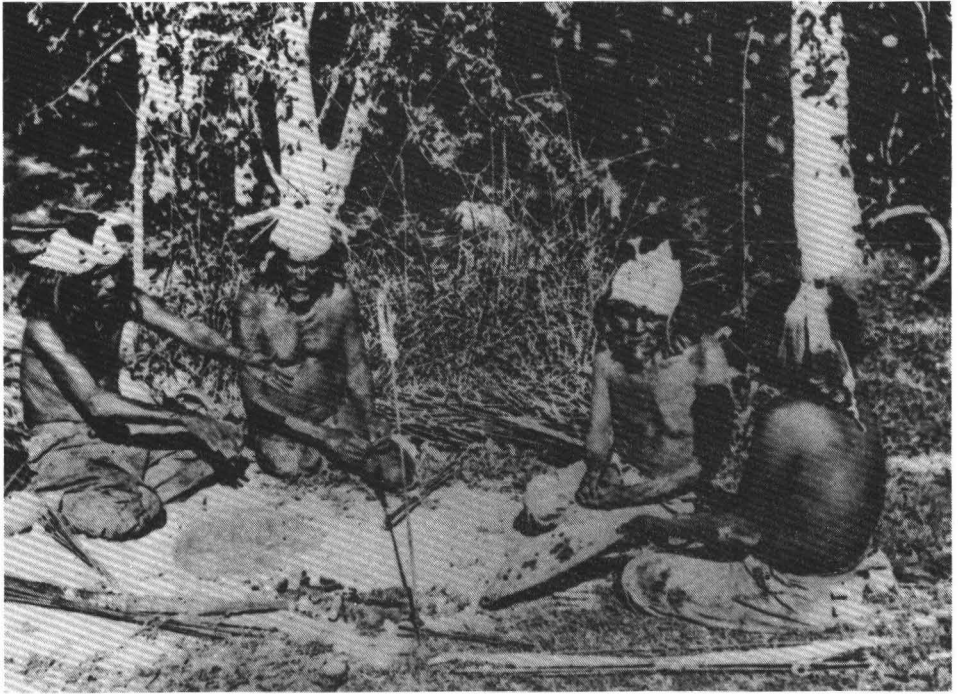
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*"Totell Disregard to the Wellfair of the
Indians:" The Longstreet-Bradfute Controversy
at Moapa Reservation*

SALLY S. ZANJANI

In 1887 at the Moapa Reservation, a basic conflict over the abuse of official power surfaced through a controversy between two unlikely protagonists: Andrew Jackson ("Jack") Longstreet, a Moapa Valley rancher with a shadowy past, and Colonel W.R. Bradfute, reservation farmer and ruler of an isolated domain far outside the effective supervision of his superiors. Longstreet represented a long tradition of American frontiersmen who had pushed westward into Indian country, taking Indian wives and learning the Indians' language and customs, before the slower moving tide of white settlement caught up to them. Little has as yet been confirmed on Longstreet's origins before he emerged in northern Arizona's Gold Basin Mining District in 1880 and moved on to the Moapa Valley in 1882, first as the proprietor of a combined saloon and drugstore, and shortly afterward as a rancher, but where his sympathies lay was very clear indeed.

Colonel Bradfute, by contrast, represented the darker side of officialdom at the Indian reservations. While there were some happy and honest exceptions to the rule, venality among the personnel was a problem that continued to plague the agencies throughout the eighties. At one reservation after another it was the same sorry story: phantom saw mills, grist mills, and other buildings never built for the Indians, while government appropriations for their construction mysteriously disappeared; clothing and blankets sold for profit instead of being distributed to the Indians; rental charges for the farming tools, seeds, and draft animals that the agents were supposed to provide to the Indians free of charge; the exaction by agents of such proportions of reservation produce that the Indian farmers effectively became sharecroppers; the rental of the best Indian lands to white settlers as an extra perquisite for the agent; rental fees levied upon the Indians for using their own land. As Sarah Winnemucca put it, the Indian agents "get rich very soon, so that they can have their gold-headed canes, with their names engraved on them."¹ Colonel Bradfute did not, so far as is known, go in for gold-headed canes, but



“The Old Gamblers,” near Las Vegas. (J.K. Hillers photograph, 1873; Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives)

Longstreet soon discovered how he treated the Indians. This may well have been the source of the escalating quarrel between the two men.

The Moapa Valley, where this conflict was played out, was still remote and sparsely settled in the eighties. In 1865 a substantial colony of Mormons had settled in this fertile valley where Indians had lived long before the coming of the white man. Over the next six years the Mormon settlers built adobe houses covered with earth or tules, plowed the land, established the towns of St. Thomas, St. Joseph, Overton, and West Point, dug canals, built roads, planted cottonwoods, and began draining the swamps. Then, in 1871, they abruptly departed when government surveyors placed the community within the Nevada state line and the settlers found themselves subject to taxes four times higher than Utah’s. By 1882 a few settlers had homesteaded the best of the abandoned Mormon lands, a handful of Mormons had returned, and the *Pioche Record* reported a white population of sixty-four in the entire valley.²

Apart from these settlers, the greater part of the Moapa population was Southern Paiute (Nuwuvi), though few of these Indians still lived on the reservation. At the time that special commissioners John W. Powell and George W. Ingalls wrote their 1873 report on the condition of the Indians in the region, Moapa was envisaged as a possible future residence for more than

2,300 Indians from Nevada and adjacent areas of Utah, Arizona, and California. The Indians were eager to cultivate the land and raise cattle in the grass lands of the upper valley. Moreover, the distant bands expressed themselves ready to move to Moapa, and the four hundred Indians already there told the commissioners that they were willing to live together with the others. The commissioners recommended buying out the white settlers' lands for \$32,000 and securing control of the water rights for the Indians, since they were unable even to plant crops without the settlers' indulgence. "There is now no great uninhabited and unknown region to which the Indians can be sent," warned the commissioners. "He is among us, and we must either protect him or destroy him."³

Protection was not to be the choice. Not only did the Powell-Ingalls recommendation fail to win approval, but also the capacity of the Moapa Reservation even to provide for the resident Southern Paiutes appeared increasingly doubtful when the land area set aside for the Indians at the reservation's establishment in 1873 was sharply reduced in 1875. In the same year the South East Nevada or Pi-Ute Agency was consolidated with the Nevada Agency. Although loss of the reservation's status as a separate agency and the lodging of effective authority in a resident Reservation Farmer were not necessarily detrimental changes, the reservation soon entered a confused and violent period in which Reservation Farmer Benjamin Holland was shot and killed and Robert Logan, who took charge of the reservation without official sanction, was ejected and arrested for cattle theft. Colonel Bradfute's criticism of conditions at the Moapa upon his appointment in 1879 implied that reform was imminent; unfortunately, signs presently emerged that the new Reservation Farmer was neither honest nor competent. Nevada Indian Agent James E. Spencer's investigation the year after Bradfute took office uncovered "gross neglect or mismanagement" at the reservation.⁴ On the lighter side, the *Pioche Record* reported on one occasion that Bradfute had planted and carefully tended an apple orchard, only to discover at harvest time that his rows of young trees were really quaking aspens. It may be noted that, as Reservation Farmer, instructing the Indians in agricultural matters was among his primary duties.⁵

When Bradfute emerged from his customary seclusion one day in mid-May in 1887, the incipient quarrel with Longstreet at last surfaced. Both had repaired to Phil Wright's hostelry for liquid refreshments, which the *Pioche Record* later reported "incited the awakening of trivial animosities" over a small beef bill and an equally picayune poker debt. Amidst the ensuing hilarity among the men at the bar, Bradfute proceeded to discuss Longstreet's reputation, pronouncing it "decidedly bad." When the Colonel's right hand dropped to his side, Longstreet assumed he was about to draw and "snaked out his own battery with one hand and with the other hit the Colonel a diff alongside the jaw," knocking him off his box. Hostilities wound up with



“Wu-nav-ai Gathering Seed”; Moapa Paiute woman, Moapa River Valley, Nevada, 1983. (J.K. Hillers photograph, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives)

Longstreet throwing another punch at Bradfute outside the Wright establishment.⁶

Determined to vent his rancor against Longstreet if it took a hundred mile ride to do it, the angry colonel set off to the Lincoln County Seat at Pioche, where he swore out a warrant for assault and battery against Longstreet.

Sheriff Turner and his deputy journeyed south to arrest Longstreet, and it appears that a certain friendliness developed between the law officers and their tall, long-haired prisoner during the lengthy trek back to Pioche. On May 31, 1887, Longstreet stood trial and was promptly acquitted. Pioche was obviously incensed over this "farce of a trial" at the taxpayers' expense, "all on account of a black eye induced by bug juice."⁷ The verdict may have been intended to suggest to Bradfute that recourse to the courts over mere fisticuffs was not considered appropriate in this part of the world. The Colonel himself ascribed his failure to secure redress from the law to another cause: "The Sheriff through this man Colburn fixed the jury," he wrote, and after additional fulminations went on to say that the presiding justice was "so drunk he could not hold his head up." The judge and jurors were "taken to the saloon and filled full of whiskey before the court was opened. I am sixty four years old but I never witnessed such degradation in a court of Justice before."⁸

Now it was Longstreet's turn for revenge, a desire that may well have been intensified by Bradfute's efforts to persuade government authorities to prosecute him as a cattle thief. Whatever his motives, Longstreet was, so far as we know, the only man in the Moapa Valley to speak out against the injustices suffered by the Indians in this period, and he may have been moved by grievances a good deal larger than his own. The resulting documents, one written on June 20 to Nevada Indian Agent W. D. Gibson at his headquarters at the Pyramid Lake reservation, and the other on June 26 to the Secretary of the Interior, Lucius Q. C. Lamar, are the only writings by Longstreet that have yet been uncovered. Their grammar and spelling suggest an early encounter with some frontier school but not too prolonged an acquaintance. The second of these letters, which were nearly identical, informed the secretary:

"Sir I Charge Mr. W.R. Bradfute of the Moapa Reservetion or the Mudy River agency of being corrupt dishonest and incompetent to preform the duties of farmer at this agency."

"Specifications"

"1 I charge him with killing and selling Government catell for his own use and benifit"

"2 I charge him with hiring out those Government mules for pay and converting the same to his own use and benifit"

"3 I charge him with hiring men to brand the anuel increas of the Government catell and paying for the same with Government property"

"4 I charge him with willfull neglect to look after the Government property comited to his charge Resulting in a totell loos to the Government of more than 500 head of catell since he took charge here there have been branded something over 300 calves witch together with there increas can not be accounted for"

"5 he has Rented out the Government land to private parties that raised their on severall hundered bushells of Grain using the Goverments farming impliments and the Goverments team and taking in payment there for a part of the crop witch he sold and coverted to his own use and benifit"



Southern Paiute Indian near Las Vegas, 1883. (*J.K. Hillers photograph, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives*)

“finaly”

“I charge him with conducting the agency soley for his own pecuniary benifit and with a totell disregard to the wellfair of the indians”

“I their fore demand an investigation when I shall be prepard to prove all of the above charges”⁹

Bradfute, evidently aware that these charges were forthcoming, had already endeavored to deflect them by a letter to his superior, Agent Gibson.

Following some remarks on the continued destruction of the Indian crops by roving cattle from the government herd, in which he displayed a new and tender concern for the Indians, Bradfute went on to suggest that Longstreet had been engaged in the thievery of horses and reservation cattle. However, prosecuting Longstreet on this charge would not be an easy matter, largely as a result of the practical difficulties that Bradfute candidly foresaw in bribing witnesses who would otherwise be unwilling to testify on his behalf:

"In reference to A.J. Longstreet I am fearful that a case cannot be sustained against him . . . as all the Indians upon whom I am depending as witnesses are participants with him in the crime. This is the opinion of the district attorney of this county, unless I can find out through an interpreter others who were not mixed up with them . . . there is no one here now that can interpret sufficiently to find them out . . . and I am wholly unable to speak the language . . . my previous statements are true but this version of the case makes me very doubtful as to the final results, then the Indians would have to be satisfied or made so before they are taken to Carson that they would not be molested or abused in any way. & then they will do nothing without they are paid for it, which would be another point in law against us should the opposing attorney discover it upon the whole it is a very notty case to handle. . . ."

Bradfute was worried that Longstreet's close friend, a wealthy Meadow Valley Wash rancher named Colburn, who was scarcely less intimate with the Indians than Longstreet himself, would provide valuable advice on Indian matters to Longstreet's attorney. Bradfute concluded: "a failure to convict would make matters worse. Longstreet is [a] bad man and capable of any crime that is known."¹⁰

Agent Gibson, having read these charges and counter charges, aligned himself with Bradfute and sent the resident farmer's June 11 letter, together with his own commentary, to John D.C. Atkins, United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. While acknowledging that he was unfamiliar with the Moapa Reservation, having visited it just once for a few hours' time, Gibson explained that he believed Bradfute, primarily because no accusations of dishonesty had previously been lodged against him. Gibson also argued that a small increase in the size of the reservation cattle herd demonstrated that Longstreet's charges concerning Bradfute's machination with the cattle were "flimsy." He thought "Longstreet may have done this to screen himself or to gratify a revengeful feeling." Wide experience had shown Gibson that "criminals when removed or detected, are ready to cry out 'wolf.'" He did not, however, recommend prosecution of Longstreet, and his high estimate of the one to three thousand dollars in expenses a trial would probably entail suggests that prosecution was an undertaking he was by no means anxious to pursue.¹¹

The matter was presently referred to the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Although that official requested the United States attorney to prosecute Longstreet, legal action did not ensue, no doubt because government



Young Paiute women in Southern Nevada, 1873. (*J.K. Hillers photograph, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives*)

lawyers found the evidence insufficient and recognized that Bradfute was rapidly backing away from his initial charges. On July 13 the Acting Commissioner wrote his conclusion to the Secretary, "I consider Longstreet unworthy of belief." The sole foundation cited for this opinion, aside from the Gibson and Bradfute letters, was a Washington visitor of the previous year whose praise for the Reservation Farmer had convinced him that Bradfute deserved a position.¹²

Commissioner Atkins and the acting Secretary of the Interior were less convinced. Bradfute was scarcely a disinterested party, the caller was probably a friend of his, and office seekers and their advocates were well known in Washington. Moreover, it was abundantly clear that Gibson neither knew anything about conditions at the Moapa nor acknowledged any responsibility for finding out. Even if he had belatedly done so, it was Atkins's policy to give little weight to the recommendations of agents in personnel matters, which he preferred to settle in Washington. In addition, the weight of probability rested on Longstreet's side because charges of corruption in the Indian service had often proved all too well founded.¹³ Finally, it is not entirely unlikely that officials might have perceived something in Longstreet's unlettered scrawl concerning the "wellfair of the indians" that sounded like the sharp ring of truth.

Accordingly, toward the end of September, the acting secretary wrote a note to Commissioner Atkins, and the commissioner decided to dispatch an independent investigator for the dual purpose of closing down the Moapa as a sub-agency and investigating the charges. While the 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act, which sought to hasten Indian assimilation by dividing the reservations into allotments for each Indian family, was then in the process of implementation, Atkins envisaged an informal division of the Moapa Reservation lands to give each family an "imaginary proprietary right" pending a more definitive survey of the area. As for Bradfute, the commissioner's instructions revealed two conflicting currents of thought: a presumption on behalf of the Reservation Farmer as a "man of good judgment" whose advice might be relied upon "with confidence" and an apprehension that the "actual condition of affairs" at the Moapa might prove quite different from the representations of Gibson and Bradfute.¹⁴

The ensuing reports by Special Indian Agent Henry S. Welton of Kingman, Arizona, are the only disinterested evidence we have on the Longstreet-Bradfute dispute. In addition, they provide a graphic picture of the Moapa region's remoteness and privation in the late nineteenth century. After receiving a September 24 letter from the commissioner with instructions to investigate and report on affairs at the reservation, Welton set off on a nine day march over two-hundred-thirty miles of desert to reach the Moapa. He noted that he started the trek "very *poorly prepared*. taking but one blanket, a shawl, and but little food. but soon found *every one* must take their own supplies as nothing can be bought on the way." Welton was not to again sleep in a bed until his return to civilization.

"On arriving at the reservation," Welton reported, "I found Mr. Bradfute living like a miserly Hermit. He was without meat coffee or in fact anything and living on squashes. He has not been out from there in over 8 years (since he went in) I gave him Bacon Sugar Coffee etc He told me had had no meat in over three months and others told me he at one time lived three weeks on *watermelons* alone."

However, Bradfute's eccentric diet concerned the special agent less than did the situation he found at the reservation. It contained four hundred acres of good, arable land, only thirty-five of which were under cultivation, and but six Indian families "camping" on the reservation while Bradfute rented out the cultivated land to white ranchers "for *his own* benefit." (Bradfute's stewardship of more than eight years had evidently contributed to a sharp decline from the level of 370 acres under cultivation by a large number of Indians in the vicinity of West Point noted by Ingalls in 1874.) Welton was unable to estimate the current population of the tribe "as they are scaterd over the surrounding country for 200 miles in all directions." Understanding his superior's desire that the Indians should "continue to be selfsupporting and remain in small, desirable numbers among the whites" in the interests of caution and thrift, Welton hoped to persuade twenty to twenty-five families to reside on the reservation. This would necessitate the promise of a cow to each family and the far greater incentive of Bradfute's departure, for the Indians "refuse to come while he remains."¹⁵

Welton at once set to work to put matters in order on the reservation. He saw to it that reservation lands were enclosed by fencing or screw bean mesquite hedges, and Bradfute's ideas on where the fence line should be run were acidly rejected ("I shall surely take *all* the land that belongs to the Indians"). As he endeavored to advertise the sale of the government herd in preparation for abandoning the Moapa as a sub-agency, Welton wrote to disabuse his superiors of their misconceptions regarding the region:

"You speak of having the printing done at *Overton*. Overton is 22 miles from the reserve, and contains but three families, all living in adobe houses with dirt floors. St. Joe (where you speak of advertising) contains but *one* house. where a man widower named Logan lives by himself. All other 'surrounding settlements' are of the same character. *This* [St. George, Utah] is the nearest town, (114 miles) and is still 125 miles from a R[ail], Road I wanted my printing done here but there is no press . . ."

And above all, he attended to the prime necessity, the dismissal of Bradfute, who unceremoniously departed from the Moapa without further delay:

"I am sorry to find Mr Bradfute has the ill will not only of all his white neighbors, but of the Indians as well. He is 65 years old, irritable and stubborn, is opposed to giving out the land in severalty [a holding by individual right, as opposed to joint interest], or leaving the mules harness wagon [e]tc for their general use and benefit. and as *he* had no plan to offer or sugestions to make (except for the Govt. to continue to keep a manager there) and as I could get much more assistance from both Whites & Indians in his absence, I discontinued his services from the date of my receipts to agent Gibson. *Manual labor* is all I require, and *he* is unfited by *age*, disposition, education, and *habits*, for that."¹⁶

On December 28 Welton returned from his second journey to the Moapa and mailed his final report to Washington. Believing that the location of the

range made it impossible to prevent annual thefts of stock from the government herd, Welton considered that Bradfute's neglectful practices were not the cause of these losses, nor did he find Bradfute guilty of butchering and selling government cattle for profit. However, he fully sustained Longstreet's charges that Bradfute had rented reservation lands, as well as the government mule team, to private parties, and had in general conducted the agency solely for his own pecuniary benefit. As evidence he included an affidavit from George Segmiller, a Moapa Indian living on the reservation. Segmiller declared:

"I know WR Bradfute he had been our Agent many years. He does not like Indian. . . . He did not let the indians use team, plow, shovels hoes or other tools. He took away the bellows because the indians wanted to use the blacksmith tools. He did not allow indians to use the grindstone without pay. it belonged to the government we did not pay him but ground our axes in his absence."

All the same, government authorities decided not to prefer charges against Bradfute following his dismissal, for Welton had already urged that he "should be shown some lenity for having had to live so long in such a place." In accordance with Atkins's general plan, the Indians would be left to sustain themselves upon their reservation without supervision. Welton expressed the hopeful, if somewhat naive opinion, that the cattlemen would not encroach upon Indian rights.

As for Bradfute's accuser, Welton found "the general character and reputation of A. J. Longstreet to be (in the main) as represented by Farmer Bradfute . . . but am unable to obtain any evidence upon which a reasonable probability of his conviction could be based. and as he has now left the State, being last heard from in San Bernardino Co. Cala, I would recommend no further action in his case." Longstreet had indeed made himself scarce, but it is doubtful that he had found it necessary to withdraw as far as San Bernardino. One of the affidavits Welton forwarded to his superiors attesting that Bradfute was "habitually fond of intoxicating drinks and was often drunk" came from E. B. Kiel, notorious for sheltering outlaws at his Las Vegas ranch, and suspected of even worse;¹⁷ it is amusing to reflect that Kiel may have been fully cognizant of Longstreet's whereabouts—perhaps at his own table—at the very time that he gave his testimony to Welton.

The exact date of Longstreet's return is uncertain, but it is clear that he had been losing interest in his ranch on the Moapa for some time. He had evidently returned by September, 1888, when the *Pioche Record* listed him as a precinct judge in Overton. Candidates in the approaching election obviously believed that his influence was considerable and did not hesitate to remind him of past favors. John C. Kelley, for example, dispatched a letter to Longstreet on October 9: "Having shown my willingness to befriend you when you were here on trial for beating Colonel Bradfute, I now appeal to

you for assistance at the coming election as I am on the Democratic ticket for the Clerkship. . . .”¹⁸ While Longstreet’s sympathies were known to lie with Kelley’s party, few Democratic candidates succeeded in withstanding the Republican landslide that swept the state in 1888.

By now Longstreet owed the county more than six hundred dollars in taxes on the ranch. On September 28 he sold the two-hundred-forty acre spread of the best land in the valley for twelve hundred dollars to Hiram Wiser, whose name it afterward bore on the maps.¹⁹ Longstreet moved on to further adventures, far beyond the pale, in the wild country that suited him best. As an old man, he would briefly return to testify in the Muddy River water rights litigation nearly thirty years later, when he was believed to be the last survivor of the early settlers in the Moapa. Unfortunately his testimony has not been preserved.

From the perspective of the century that has now passed, it can be argued that the controversy at the Moapa produced no grand result. One corrupt reservation authority was dismissed, regrettably soon to be succeeded by an equally corrupt trustee. By defending Indian interests in the white world, Longstreet had assumed the role that historians have found was typically played by “squaw men” at the Indian agencies throughout the West during the frontier period.²⁰ There is a certain rightness in the circumstance that this challenge to the abuse of official power at Moapa Reservation came not from one of the religious reformers so prominent in Indian affairs at that time, nor from a rival for Bradfute’s office, but from the archaic figure of an outlaw-frontiersman, lacking articulate ideas on Indian policy, yet possessed of a deep affinity for his adopted people and a firm sense of justice.

NOTES

¹ Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (Bishop: Chalfant Press, Inc., 1969, reproduction of 1883 original), 86; also see 87-136.

² *Pioche Record*, 14 Oct. 1882. Sources on the history of the area include: G.W. Ingalls, “Indians of Nevada,” in Sam P. Davis, ed., *History of Nevada*, v. I (Reno: Elms Publishing Company, 1913), 20-117; Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 17-23; Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi: A Southern Paiute History* (University of Utah Printing Service, 1976), esp. 92-108; Pearson S. Corbett, “Settling the Muddy River Valley” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 18 (1968); and Arabell L. Hafner, *100 Years on the Muddy* (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishers, 1967).

³ Ingalls, “Indians of Nevada,” 113.

⁴ Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi*, 92-108; Edward E. Hill, *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880* (New York: Clearwater Publishing Company, 1979), 108-110.

⁵ *Pioche Record*, 16 Aug. 1884.

⁶ *Pioche Record*, 4 June 1887.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ W.R. Bradfute to W.D. Gibson, Nevada Indian Agent, 11 June 1887, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁹ A.J. Longstreet to Secretary of the Interior, 26 June 1887, National Archives; also see Longstreet to Gibson, 20 June 1887 at the same source.

¹⁰ Bradfute to Gibson, 11 June 1887.

¹¹ Gibson to J.D.C. Atkins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 27 June 1887, National Archives.

¹² Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Secretary of the Interior, 13 July 1887, National Archives.

¹³ Gregory C. Thompson, "John D.C. Atkins, 1885-88," in Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola, eds., *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 181-88.

¹⁴ Acting Secretary of the Interior to Commissioner, 21 September 1887; Atkins to Special Indian Agent Henry S. Welton, 20 September 1887, 24 September 1887; Acting Commissioner to Welton, 24 October 1887, all in the National Archives. Also see Thompson, *Commissioners*.

¹⁵ Welton to Commissioner, 2 November 1887, National Archives.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Welton to Commissioner, 28 December 1887 (with enclosed depositions by E.B. Kiel [December 8, 1887] and George Segmiller [December 12, 1887]). Also see his November 2 letter, all in the National Archives.

¹⁸ Maryellen v. Sadovich, "James Bernard Wilson—Forgotten Pioneer," *The West* 9 (October 1968): 65; another candidate's letter to Longstreet has been preserved in the James B. Wilson manuscript collection, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

¹⁹ Items relating to Longstreet's worsening tax situation and the sale of his ranch to Wisner appear in the *Pioche Record*, 6 Aug. 1887; 22 Sept. 1888; and 1 Dec. 1888.

²⁰ On the role of "squaw men" at the Indian agencies, see Colin G. Calloway, "Neither White nor Red: White Renegades on the American Indian Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* 27 (January 1986): 46-52, and James W. Schultz, *My Life as an Indian* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1964), 201-203; religious reformers at the agencies are described in Robert W. Mardock, *The Reformers and the American Indian* (University of Missouri Press, 1971), esp. ch. 12.