

Courthouse Controversy

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Prescript: 1861 was the year that the County of Lake separated from Napa to form a new county. Naturally a courthouse was needed for the county seat, and the good folks of Lakeport, Kelseyville, and Lower Lake were all eager to gain this prestigious advantage. To that end, an election was held in 1861 where it was duly awarded to Lakeport. Not satisfied with this outcome, the advocates for Lower Lake demanded and eventually got another election. This 1864 election also went to Lakeport despite much opposition. The fierce rivalry continued, very heated at times, and yet another election was called for April 2, 1867. But fate intervened just about 6 weeks before the vote. Our scene opens on the smoking ruins of the newly built courthouse in Lakeport. The time is, March, 1867

Constable AB Musik:

Will you look at that?! I can't believe it! It's a crime, I'll tell you! Just got that courthouse building finished, everything set up just right, and now this! What could have happened? The whole thing is mighty fishy. Ready for another vote in just a few weeks, and somebody does something like this! We have to put a stop to it.

Sheriff Bill Manlove:

I agree with you Constable. There's just no way that wasn't the work of some no good, lowdown varmint. Why those folks in Lower Lake just don't know when to quit!

Lucas Willey:

Hey there Sheriff-I think you should think about what you're sayin' here. I trust you ain't accusing somebody of deliberately setting this building on fire now.

Ed Musik:

All I know is we was sittin' vigil with Doc Downes after that incident yesterday.

Constable:

The doc was giving me a hand taking a couple rowdy prisoners in. Had my gun on 'em and the dang thing misfired. Accidentally got the doc instead. It was an accident.

Musik:

Mebbe so. It was bad enough we was on a death watch. Few friends were staying with him through the night when we looked over and saw this fire! Coulda sworn there was some

commotion around the area just as it was going up. Not sure what we saw but mighta been guys running away.

Jim Jamieson:

Here now!. Are you accusing somebody from out of town doing this to get that vote changed? I think you should watch yourselves here now. That's absurd!

Sheriff:

What's absurd? You know we been through this whole mess twice already. Lakeport has won both times, fair and square.

Willey:

I'm not so sure about fair and square! I swear you got that whole thing rigged here in Lakeport! Why, Lower Lake deserves the honor. I heard there was hired men come in just to cast a ballot.

Sheriff:

That's absolute hogwash, and you know it! Those people are just sore losers. We got the votes, and the courthouse! At least we did, until some idiot burned it down.

Constable:

Those boys that doc and I were hauling off to jail were a couple of hotheads. They sure kicked up a fuss! Pretty sure they were from somewhere down towards Lower Lake. Didn't recognize them from around here.

Lucas:

Maybe they know something, and maybe not. All I know is Lower Lake would make a fine county seat. We deserve it! You'll never prove that this whole thing is some scheme they dreamed up to get it.

Musik:

The courthouse needs to stay here. There's no better place for it. This town is booming!

Jamieson

There still is another vote coming up come April. Gonna have to house whatever you can salvage from the fire in Lower Lake, I guess. Seems like the question of where the courthouse will be is halfway decided!

Sheriff:

Hold your horses, buster. We'll see about that. That vote will still go on, and the courthouse will be here in Lakeport! And we're gonna hunt down the good for nothin skunk who committed this crime!

Postscript: And so, despite questionable results of vote #3, Lakeport did win out. However, there was continued acrimony and a fourth and final vote was held in 1870. This gave the ultimate prize to Lakeport. The courthouse there was rebuilt on the site of the former building (now the Lake County Museum), but this time, taking no chances, they built it of brick.