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Ten Years After: an Appraisal of L. Bradford Prince

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TEN YEARS AFTER

PRINCE, LE BARON BRADFORD (July 3, 1840—December 8, 1922), statesman, author, historian, jurist, orator, antiquarian, is rightfully claimed by two commonwealths, New York and New Mexico. The former gave him birth, schooling, and his first experience in politics and as a legislator, and there he died and was buried. Of the latter he was a citizen and to it he gave his mature years, impressing upon its laws and development his dominant personality during a plastic period of transition. Prince was born at Flushing on Long Island, New York, where he also died. He was the son of William R. and Charlotte G. Collins Prince, who bestowed upon him pride of ancestry and scholarly tastes. His mother, a lineal descendant of Governor William Bradford of Plymouth of Mayflower fame, was the granddaughter of Governor Bradford and daughter of Governor Collins of Rhode Island. On his father's side, the Prince family had taken prominent part in Queens County affairs, an interest which the son maintained throughout life. He was only eighteen when he founded the Flushing Library, he was thirty when he organized the Flushing St. George Brotherhood, he was forty-six when he conceived the Flushing Civic Association, and it was to Flushing he went frequently from Santa Fe until his last visit which was there terminated by death. His first published work was "The Agricultural History of Queens County" (1863).

It was while a student at Columbia University Law School that he wrote "E Pluribus Unum or American Nationality," published by G. P. Putnam & Son in 1867, a year after Prince received his LL.B. degree. It was this book which immediately gave him a place among Republican leaders of New York who clung to the conservative, traditional interpretation of the Nation's fundamental law. Colorado College and Kenyon in later years conferred on him the Doctorate of Law. Delegate to New York Repub-

lican state conventions for twelve years up to 1878, he was a delegate also to the National convention which nominated Grant for the Presidency and served on the State Republican committee during the campaign. Elected to the State Assembly in 1870 from what was then a Democratic bailiwick, he was re-elected successively until in 1875 he was sent to the State Senate by large majority. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee he conducted the impeachment trial of two judges and formally presented the charge of high crimes and misdemeanors against Judge Barnard at the bar of the State Senate. He was father of the amendments of 1874 to the New York state constitution and many years later succeeded in embodying features of New York's constitution and laws in New Mexico's statutes and the rejected constitution formulated during his term as governor of the territory. Sent to the Republican National Convention of 1876, he broke with Roscoe Conkling, a breach which was the determining factor in the acceptance in 1879 by Prince of the chief justiceship of New Mexico which was tendered him by President Hayes although Prince had previously declined the governorship of the territory of Idaho.

Although chief justice, his duties included those of district judge of the First Judicial District covering six counties of the territory, in area comparable with the State of New York. It was the day before railroads and paved highways, a day when juries were still Spanish-speaking and the business of the courts was conducted through interpreters. Riding the circuit involved hardships and privations which were novel to the scholar and jurist from exclusive Long Island social circles, experiences to which Prince adjusted and adapted himself quickly until his love for his adopted commonwealth became a ruling passion for almost half a century. He soon was known as the hardest working judge that the New Mexico bench had known, sitting from eight in the morning until eleven at night with only an hour's recess each for noon and evening meals.

Still, he found time to prepare and publish a much needed compilation of New Mexico statutes, until then a conglomerate accretion from the days of the Kearny Code and including the fragments of the civil law remainders of Spanish and Mexican sovereignty and a hodge-podge of legislative enactments in two languages in quaint phraseology of primitive irrigation, mining and community customs and rights. This compilation became the basis for future legislative enactments and compilations.

In 1882 Prince resigned from the Bench. Defeated for Congress in 1884, he devoted himself to the practice of law, historical research, civic development, church government, public speaking, writing for the press and the authorship of books, fruit raising, mining and financial operations, the wonder being that among his multitudinous activities he maintained a high degree of scholarship and even profundity. He collected assiduously Americana of archaeological and historical interest and became the owner of a fine collection of autographs of world celebrities. He gave generously of his time and effort to movements for the attainment of statehood by New Mexico. When this was finally granted New Mexico, he wrote and published *Struggle for Statehood*, the authoritative volume on the subject. He found time to conceive and supervise a magnificent historical pageant in 1883, a Tertio-Centennial celebration, at Santa Fe, New Mexico's capital. That year he was elected president of the New Mexico Historical Society, a place he held until his death, and which brought him the vice-presidency of the National Historical Society, honorary memberships in the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society, the Missouri, the Kansas, the Wisconsin Historical Societies, corresponding memberships in the Texas and the Minnesota Historical Societies, trusteeship of the Church Historical Society, and connection with other associations which he prized highly.

In the spring of 1889, President Harrison, persuaded by the promptings of financial and important railroad inter-

ests, but over the protests of many New Mexico Republican leaders, appointed Prince governor of the territory. During the first year of the administration, a constitutional convention formulated a fundamental law submitted to Congress for ratification but rejected by overwhelming majority at the polls. The legislative assembly at his suggestion passed the first comprehensive public school law. The University of New Mexico and other state educational institutions, of all of which Governor Prince was an ex-officio member of the board of regents, were founded and fostered. Politically, the Prince administration of four years was stormy, socially it was brilliant, Governor and Mrs. Prince making the historic Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, which they occupied, a replica socially of the White House at the National Capital, entertaining lavishly many famous visitors from afar, at the same time making it a treasure house of archaeological and historical material and a salon where gathered officials, politicians, artists, writers and other celebrities of various nationalities and including even Indians.

After his retirement as governor, in 1893, Governor Prince gave much of his time to the furtherance of western movements, his vigorous advocacy of the free coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1, putting him out of alignment with the stalwart leaders of his party. He presided repeatedly over the Trans-Mississippi Congress, the International Mining Congress, the National Irrigation Congress, the American Apple Congress, his orchard in the Española valley north of Santa Fe being famed for the choice fruit he grew. He represented New Mexico effectively at the Chicago, the Omaha and the St. Louis Expositions. He founded and presided over the New Mexico Horticultural Society and the Society for the Preservation of Spanish Antiquities. In 1909 he was elected to the territorial council and presided over the first Republican state convention although denied membership in the constitutional convention. President of the Spanish-American Normal School from 1909 to

1912, he also had been president of the Board of Regents of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts for five years.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church, Prince was a lay reader and diligent member of the Church of the Holy Faith in Santa Fe. He attended the general convocations of his church and was credited with originating in 1880, the American Church Building Fund. He was chancellor of the New Mexico diocese, president of the Association of Church Chancellors and first president of the Laymen's League.

As an orator on anniversary occasions and keynoter at political conventions, Prince enjoyed considerable vogue and some popularity although his addresses as a rule were erudite. He made the Tercentenary Mayflower address at Plymouth, Mass., on Novemebr 20, 1920. In Masonry he was deputy grand master in New York, was a member of the Society of Cincinnati, of the Mayflower Descendants, of the Colonial Wars, of the Sons of the American Revolution, of the War of 1812, and of various scientific, historical and civic associations, in all of which he took more than nominal interest and with officers and members of which he was in active correspondence.

Prince was married twice. Hattie E. Childs became his first wife on December 1, 1879, and died within three months. On November 17, 1881, he married Mary C. Beardsley of Oswego, N. Y., like himself of Mayflower and Revolutionary descent. She died on Christmas day, 1925. A son, William R., is the sole survivor of the couple.

Prince had a talent for expressing himself in writing. He wrote a small but legible hand with plenty of space, as a rule, between the lines to permit interlineations for he would revise his manuscript carefully and even after the dawn of the age of stenographers and typewriters preferred to put down his thoughts in long hand. He sent many communications on various topics to newspapers in New Mexico and New York, occasionally wrote for magazines; but it is

Spanish Mission Churches of New Mexico, first published in 1915, which has had the greatest vogue and which has gone into a second edition. His *A Concise History of New Mexico* also had two editions. Besides the books already mentioned a Prince bibliography includes: *Historical Sketches of New Mexico*, 1883; "A Nation or a League," 1884; "The American Church and Its Name," 1886; "The Money Problem," 1896; "Stone Lions of Cochiti," 1903; "Old Fort Marcy," 1911; *Students' History of New Mexico*, 1915; "Abraham Lincoln, the Man," 1917.

Governor Prince was of fine appearance, goodly stature, wore a full beard, was genial, hospitable, an entertaining conversationalist, tenacious in his views, and, although often involved in acrimonious controversies, was even-tempered, self-controlled in debate, and skillful in overcoming open or under-cover opposition.

PAUL A. F. WALTER.

Sources: Twitchell, Ralph E., *Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, II, 502-509; L. Bradford Prince, *A Concise History of New Mexico*, 207-209; *Who's Who in America*, xii, 2529-2530; Memorial Address by Frank W. Clancy before the Historical Society of New Mexico, April 23, 1923; newspaper files in the Historical Society of New Mexico Library, and a personal acquaintanceship extending over almost a quarter of a century.