

While Bullock tended to his duties, many Lawrence County citizens fumed over the governor's choices for county officials. They not only perceived the appointees as outsiders, but worse, they feared that politicians in Yankton, known as the "Yankton ring," manipulated the imposed officers for their own benefit. As well, the issue of a permanent county seat had to be resolved. While the people in Deadwood had convinced the commissioners to meet in their city, neighboring towns hoped to lure them away. Some Deadwood residents wanted these issues settled, and during the summer of 1877, they circulated a petition demanding that the commissioners hold a special election.¹

Other Deadwood residents took a different point of view, circulating a petition against a special election on the grounds that it would be illegal and against the wishes of the governor. These people, who included Sol Star, maintained that the appointments should stand until the next scheduled election in November 1878. Bullock did not sign this petition, probably because of his position as sheriff, but he obviously supported it. In part, he must have been conscious that not enough time had passed since his appointment for him to prove his ability and disassociate himself from Governor Pennington and the Yankton ring. He surely recognized, as well, that his association with the Republican party hurt his chances among the Democrat majority in Lawrence County. In other words, he feared he would lose a special election. The county commissioners agreed with this second petition and refused to call an election on the grounds that it would be illegal, might cause civil disorder, and would bring expensive litigation.²

Those who wanted the special election then took their case to the district federal judge, Granville Bennett. He ruled on 12 October 1877 that, although the governor may have wanted his appointees to serve until the next scheduled election, territorial law stated that the commissioners were obligated to call a special election. The decision mandated a vote during the first week of November, starting a flurry of political activity. The Democrats promptly organized a slate of candidates. The Republicans responded, but to compensate for their minority status, they nominated Democrats for a few offices and renamed themselves the "People's Party."³ The sheriff's race, with Bullock running on the People's ticket, rapidly became the principal contest.

The prominence of the sheriff's office and Bullock's role as party spokesman caused his supporters and detractors alike to weigh in. Bullock's critics blasted him for

dereliction of duty and incompetence, stemming from his failure to capture Blackburn and Wall and from his absence at the start of the recent Indian scare. They also claimed that he was dishonest, spending too much money on the construction of the county jail. The editor of the *Black Hills Daily Times* finessed the Crook City debacle by pointing to the wounding of the outlaws and stated that official business had kept Bullock away when the Indian problems arose.⁴ The paper then highlighted his accomplishments, arguing that chaos prevailed before Bullock became sheriff and claiming that he brought “a security for life and property that, at his inauguration, seemed impossible to obtain. He has rid the country of bunko men, confidence operators, thieves, cut-throats and criminals generally.”⁵

On 6 November, the voters chose Deadwood as the permanent county seat, but Bullock and most of the People’s party candidates lost their bids for office. Certainly the Democratic majority hurt Bullock, as did his association with Governor Pennington, but his defeat could also be attributed to the background and personality of his opponent, John Manning. Like Bullock, Manning had once served as sheriff in Montana, and when he got to the northern Black Hills, he became involved in a variety of civic functions, such as the fire department. Beyond his qualifications, Manning also had the advantage of owning a saloon in Deadwood. At his establishment, he got to know the voters, and, as the *Times* reported with horror, he kept “a certain class of individuals full of liquor . . . to build up a reputation for generosity.”⁶

Beyond experience and liberality, Manning had another advantage over Bullock. On a personal level, Bullock came across as detached and aloof. He did not relate well with the working class, who readily recognized that Bullock was not a laboring man. Vote totals reinforce this perception. Bullock lost in the towns with a majority of miners: Central City, Gayville, and Lead City. But he carried those locations with a more middle-class population dominated by merchants and where he had spent most of his time: Deadwood and Crook City.⁷

Like many frontier elections, this one probably had its share of fraud and “repeaters,” but most likely the two sides canceled each other out. Some Black Hills historians, however, point to this election as especially corrupt, with Bullock leading the abuses. They claim that he arranged for soldiers from Fort Meade to dress in civilian

clothes and vote repeatedly in Sturgis. Unfortunately for this story, Fort Meade and Sturgis were not established until 1878. Bullock was certainly not above trying to manipulate an election, but in 1877, he did not use soldiers to do his bidding.⁸

As soon as the election results were released, another dispute arose. The newly elected officials wanted to take their offices immediately, but the outgoing people refused to resign or vacate the county building. After one unsuccessful attempt to occupy the facilities, sheriff-elect Manning and a few others returned with a table and chairs and managed to occupy one of the building's rooms, proclaiming themselves the county's legal authority. The outgoing officeholders, however, denied it. They resisted the change in administration, not because they were angry, but because they thought their terms lasted until the first Monday in January 1878. Through November and December 1877, Deadwood had two county governments, including two sheriffs. They operated simultaneously, with each ignoring the other's decisions. During this period, Bullock retained the sheriff's records and control of the jail. In the meantime, Judge Bennett ruled locally in favor of the newly elected people, but Bullock and other defeated officeholders appealed the decision to the territorial Supreme Court. The court quickly reviewed the case and agreed with Bennett. With this decision, Bullock turned the jail and the sheriff's records over to Manning, ending his nine and a half months as Lawrence County's first sheriff on 28 December, one week before he planned.⁹