*The county scene*

Sun Aug 7, 1983

# Counties face liabilities in improper plate sales

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

County assessor who sell vehicle licenses to residents outside of their counties may find it necessary to refund the sales to the proper county.

Boyd L. Cripps

The issue has arisen currently because many Bonneville residents have been going to nearby Jefferson or other counties to buy their plates to avoid the long waiting lines at the Bonneville assessor office.

Bonneville Assessor Boyd L. Cripps says he is trying to alleviate the situation. A six-member committee under the chairmanship of Boyd Wecker, appointed by the county commissioners is studying the problem. This committee has made several recommendations to Cripps that are intended to improve efficiency at the licensing bureau where waiting times can average 30 minutes and be as long as two hours.

Over in nearby Jefferson County where there are few or no lines, Assessor David Kinghorn acknowledges his office has accepted license sales from owners with Bonneville addresses but does not known how many.

* * *

**The assessors, however, must heed a law contained in Section 49-109 Idaho Code which specifically states that every owner of vehicle must apply to the assessor in the county the owner resides.**

Cripps said he has reciprocity agreement in such matters, mentioning that some vehicle owners have property in both counties. In such cases, he said, owners may go to either county. However, the law is clear on this, and Cripps, Kinghorn or any other assessor have no latitude in such sales. They are to sell licenses plates only to residents of their own counties, make no mistake about that.

The affected Bonneville officials, County Commission Chairman Clyde R. Burtenshaw, County Prosecuting Attorney Kimball Mason and Cripps take a somewhat passive view.

Burtenshaw and Cripps say they don't have money now to hire extra license bureau clerks, adding it is a question of priorities because money is more badly needed for other county operations. Mason said he would investigate the matter.

Perhaps this is one end result of cutting down government at the expense of essential services to the people.

They all say they are seeking to to investigate the matter and to shorten the lines by such means as providing extra window and more desk space. However, they showed less than burning interest in strict law enforcement.

Kinghorn said "it's Bonneville's problem to gets its own house in order" but the fact he has sold plates to Bonneville residents doesn't absolve him.

* * *

**This problem arose in 1949-50 when the late T. Harold Lee, then Jefferson County prosecuting attorney, forced the Bonneville assessor to repay about $5,000 in license plate fees he had collected from Jefferson vehicle owners.**

It appeared many Jefferson residents who came to Idaho Falls as their market center bought their licenses at the Bonneville Courthouse during the course of their shopping.

The claim is well remembered by then Bonneville Assessor George L. Jensen, now retired in Salt Lake City, and then Jefferson Assessor Vearl Crysal, now a Rigby rancher and state legislator.

The refund covered several years and didn't exactly create a friendly feeling between the two counties at the time. The shoe is now on the other foot with Jefferson liable for claims, however small.

* * *

**The situation is not a matter of convenience; it also means loss of revenue for counties which can't accommodate their vehicle owners.**

Ten percent of the licenses sales are retained by the counties. But more than that, the allocation of state highway funds to counties is based on the number of vehicles licensed in the county, plus mileage of road. This could amount to hundreds and perhaps thousands of dollars.

In 1949-50, passenger vehicle plates were only $5 each. Truck plates were not much more. Car plates now sell as high as $43 for a new car with lesser amounts for older models. Pickup truck plates require as high as $45 with less for older models but the commercial truck plates cost many times that, based on weight and year. This could amount to considerable money.

**Perhaps the Bonneville officials may not be interested in pursuing the matter but any taxpayer has the right to demand redress on the grounds the county is unlawfully losing revenue. It's obvious, at least, the nefarious practice must cease.**