

**Bacon Vs. Walker**

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**Court :** US Supreme Court

**Decided On :** Feb-04-1907

**Appeal No. :** 204 U.S. 311

**Appellant :** Bacon

**Respondent :** Walker

**Judgement :**

Bacon v. Walker - 204 U.S. 311 (1907)

U.S. Supreme Court Bacon v. Walker, 204 U.S. 311 (1907)

**Bacon v. Walker**

**No. 147**

**Argued January 10, 1907**

**Decided February 4, 1907**

**204 U.S. 311**

*ERROR TO THE SUPREME COURT*

*OF THE STATE OF IDAHO*

## **SYLLABUS**

The police power of a state embraces regulations designed to promote the public convenience or the general prosperity as well as those to promote public health, morals or safety; it is not confined to the suppression of what is offensive, disorderly or unsanitary, but extends to what is for the greatest welfare of the state.

Page 204 U. S. 312

Fixing in a police regulation, otherwise valid, the distance from habitations within which an occupation cannot be carried on is a legislative act with which the courts can only interfere in a case clearly of abuse of power.

A classification in grazing countries of sheep, as distinguished from other cattle, is not unreasonable and arbitrary in a regulation regarding the use of public lands within the meaning of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Sections 1210, 1211, Revised Statutes of Idaho, prohibiting the herding and grazing of sheep on or within two miles of land or processory claims of persons other than the owner of the sheep, having been construed by the highest court of that state as not affecting the right of the owner of sheep to graze them on his own lands but only on the public domain, is not unconstitutional as depriving the owner of sheep of his property without due process of law because he cannot pasture them on public domain, or as an arbitrary and unreasonable discrimination against the owners of sheep, as distinguished from other cattle, and is a proper and reasonable exercise of the police power of the state.

81 P. 155 affirmed.

The facts are stated in the opinion.

Page 204 U. S. 313

MR. JUSTICE Mc KENNA delivered the opinion of the Court.

This action involves the validity, under the Constitution

Page 204 U. S. 314

of the United States, of the following sections of the Revised Statutes of the State of Idaho:

"SEC. 1210. It is not lawful for any person owning or having charge of sheep to herd the same, or permit them to be herded, on the land or possessory claims of other persons, or to herd the same or permit them to graze within two miles of the dwelling house of the owner or owners of said possessory claim."

"SEC. 1211. The owner or the agents of such owner of sheep violating the provisions of the last section, on complaint of the party or parties injured, before any justice of the peace for the precinct where either of the interested parties may reside, is liable to the party injured for all damages sustained, and, if the trespass be repeated, is liable to the party injured for the second and every subsequent offense in double the amount of damages sustained."

Defendants in error, under the provisions of those sections, brought this action in the justice's court of Little Camas Precinct, Elmore County, State of Idaho, for the recovery of \$100 damages, alleged to have accrued to them by the violation by plaintiff in error of the statutes, and obtained judgment for that sum. The judgment was successively affirmed by the District Court for the County of Elmore, and the supreme court of the state. 81 P. 155. The case was then brought here.

It was alleged in the complaint of defendants in error, who were plaintiffs in the trial court, that plaintiff in error caused his sheep, about three thousand in number, to be herded upon the public lands within two miles of the dwelling house of defendants in error. The answer set up that the complaint did "not state a cause of action other than the violation of sections 1210 and 1211 of the Revised Statutes of the State of Idaho," and that said sections were in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The specifications of the

grounds of the unconstitutionality of those sections were in the courts below, and are,

Page 204 U. S. 315

in this Court (1) that plaintiff in error has an equal right to pasture with other citizens upon the public domain, and that, by imposing damages on him for exercising that right, he is deprived of his property without due process of law; (2) that a discrimination is arbitrarily and unlawfully made by the statutes between citizens engaged in sheep grazing on the public domain and citizens engaged in grazing other classes of stock.

These grounds do not entirely depend upon the same considerations. The first denies to the state any power to limit or regulate the right of pasture asserted to exist; the other concedes such power, and attacks it only as it discriminates against the grazers of sheep. We speak only of the right to pasture, because plaintiff in error does not show that he is the owner of the land upon which his sheep grazed, and what rights owners of land may have to attack the statute we put out of consideration. *Hatch v. Reardon*, ante, p. [204 U. S. 152](#) . But we may remark that the Supreme Court of Idaho said in *Sweet v. Ballentyne*, 8 Idaho, 431, 440:

"These statutes [sections 1210, 1211, quoted above] were not intended to prevent owners from grazing sheep upon their own lands, although situated within two miles of the dwelling of another."

Is it true, therefore, even if it be conceded that there is right or license to pasture upon the public domain, that the state may not limit or regulate the right or license? Defendants in error have an equal right with plaintiff in error, and the state has an interest in the accommodation of those rights. It may even have an interest above such accommodation. The laws and policy of a state may be framed and shaped to suit its conditions of climate and soil. Illustrations of this power are afforded by recent decisions of this Court. In *Clark v. Nash*, [198 U. S. 361](#) , a use of property was declared to be public which, independent of the conditions

existing in the state, might otherwise have been considered as private. So also in *Strickley v. Highland Boy Gold Mining Company*, [200 U. S. 527](#) . In the first case, there was a recognition of the power of the state to deal with and accommodate its laws to the

Page 204 U. S. 316

conditions of an arid country and the necessity of irrigation to its development. The second was the recognition of the power of the state to work out from the conditions existing in a mining region the largest welfare of its inhabitants. And again, in *Offield v. New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company*, [203 U. S. 372](#) , the principle of those cases was affirmed and applied to conditions entirely dissimilar, and it was declared that it was competent for a state to provide for the compulsory transfer of shares of stock in a corporation, the ownership of which stood in the way of the increase of means of transportation, and the public benefit which would result from that. Of pertinent significance is the case of *Ohio Oil Company v. Indiana*, [177 U. S. 190](#) . There, a statute of the State of Indiana was attacked which regulated the sinking, maintenance, use, and operation of natural gas and oil wells. The object of the statute was to prevent the waste of gas. The defendants in the action asserted against the statute the ownership of the soil and the familiar principle that such ownership carried with it the right to the minerals beneath and the consequent privilege of mining to extract them. The principle was conceded, but it was declared inapplicable as ignoring the peculiar character of the substances -- oil and gas -- with which the statute was concerned. It was pointed out that those substances, though situated beneath the surface, had no fixed situs, but had the power of self-transmission. No one owner, it was therefore said, could exercise his right to extract from the common reservoir in which the supply was held without to an extent diminishing the source of supply to which all the other owners of the surface had to exercise their rights. The waste of one owner, it was further said, caused by a reckless enjoyment of his right, operated upon the other surface owners. The statute was sustained as a constitutional exercise of the power of the state, on account of the peculiar nature of the right and the objects upon which it was exerted, for the purpose of

protecting all of the collective owners.

Page 204 U. S. 317

These cases make it unnecessary to consider the argument of counsel based upon what they deem to be the limits of the police power of a state, and their contention that the statute of Idaho transcends those limits. It is enough to say that they have fallen into the error exposed in *Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railway Company v. Illinois*, [200 U. S. 561](#) , [200 U. S. 592](#) . In that case, we rejected the view that the police power cannot be exercised for the general wellbeing of the community. That power, we said, embraces regulations designed to promote the public convenience or the general prosperity, as well as regulations designed to promote the public health, the public morals, or the public safety. We do not enter therefore into the discussion whether the sheep industry is legitimate and not offensive. Nor need we make extended comment on the two-mile limit. The selection of some limit is a legislative power, and it is only against the abuse of the power, if at all, that the courts may interpose. But the abuse must be shown. It is not shown by quoting the provision which expresses the limit. The mere distance expressed shows nothing. It does not display the necessities of a settler upon the public lands. It does not display what protection is needed not from one sheep or a few sheep, but from large flocks of sheep, or the relation of the sheep industry to other industries. These may be the considerations that induced the statutes, and we cannot pronounce them insufficient on surmise or on the barren letter of the statute. We may refer to *Sifers v. Johnson*, 7 Idaho 798, and *Sweet v. Ballentyne*, 8 Idaho 431, for a statement of the practical problem which confronted the legislature and upon what considerations it was solved. We think, therefore, that the statutes of Idaho are not open to the objection that they take the property of plaintiff in error without due process of law, and pass to the consideration of the charge that they make an unconstitutional discrimination against the sheep industry.

Counsel extend to this contention the conception of the police power which we have just declared to be erroneous, and

enumerating the classes discriminated in favor of as cattle, horses, hogs, and even poultry puts to question whether, in herding or grazing sheep, "there is more danger to the public *health, comfort, security, order, or morality*' than the classes of animals and fowls above enumerated." "What," counsel asks,

"are the dangers to the public growing out of this industry that do not apply with equal force to the others? Does the herding or grazing of sheep necessarily, and because of its unwarrantable character, work an injury to the public? And, if dangerous in any degree whatever, are the other classes which are omitted and in effect excepted entirely free from such danger, or do such exceptions tend to reduce the general danger?"

Contemplating the law in the aspect expressed in these questions, counsel are unable to see in it anything but unreasonable and arbitrary discrimination. This view of the power of the state, however, is too narrow. That power is not confined, as we have said, to the suppression of what is offensive, disorderly, or unsanitary. It extends to so dealing with the conditions which exist in the state as to bring out of them the greatest welfare of its people. This is the principle of the cases which we have cited.

But the statutes have justification on the grounds which plaintiff in error urges as determinative, and on those grounds they were sustained by the supreme court of the state. They were deliberate enactments, made necessary by and addressed to the conditions which existed. They first (1875) had application only to three counties, while Idaho was a territory. They were subsequently extended to two other counties, and were made general in 1887. They were continued in force by the state constitution. *Sweet v. Ballentyne, supra*. The court said in the latter case:

"It is a matter of public history in this state that conflicts between sheep owners and cattle men and settlers were of frequent occurrence, resulting in violent breaches of the peace. It is also a matter of public history of the state that sheep

are not only able to hold their own on the public ranges with other

Page 204 U. S. 319

livestock, but will in the end drive other stock off the range, and that the herding of sheep upon certain territory is an appropriation of it almost as fully as if it was actually enclosed by fences, and this is especially true with reference to cattle. The legislature did not deem it necessary to prohibit the running at large of sheep altogether, recognizing the fact that there are in the state large areas of land uninhabited, where sheep can range without interfering with the health or subsistence of settlers or interrupting the public peace. The fact was also recognized by the legislature that, in order to make the settlement of our small isolated valleys possible, it was necessary to provide some protection to the settler against the innumerable bands of sheep grazing in this state."

And the court pointed out that it was not the purpose or effect of the statutes to make discriminations between sheep owners and owners of other kinds of stock, but to secure equality of enjoyment and use of the public domain to settlers and cattle owners with sheep owners. To defeat the beneficent objects of the statutes, it was said, by holding their provisions unconstitutional would make of the lands of the state "one immense sheep pasture." And further:

"The owners of sheep do not permit them to roam at will, but they are under the immediate control of herders, who have shepherd dogs with them, and wherever they graze, they take full possession of the range as effectually as if the lands were fenced. . . . It is a matter of common observation and experience that sheep eat the herbage closer to the ground than cattle or horses do, and, their hoofs being sharp, they devastate and kill the growing vegetation wherever they graze for any considerable time. In the language of one of the witnesses in this case: 'Just as soon as a band of sheep passes over, everything disappears, the same as if fire passing over it.' It is a part of the public history of this state that the industry of raising cattle has been largely destroyed by the encroachments of innumerable bands of sheep. Cattle will not graze, and will not thrive, upon lands where sheep are grazed to any great extent."

These remarks require no addition. They exhibit the conditions which existed in the state, the cause and purpose of the statutes which are assailed, and vindicate them from the accusation of being an arbitrary and unreasonable discrimination against the sheep industry.

*Judgment affirmed.*

MR. JUSTICE BREWER and MR. JUSTICE PECKHAM dissent. dissent.

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