

# Oregon Politicians and Newspaper Editors of the Territorial Period

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The Oregon Country consisted of the land north of 42° N latitude, south of 54°40'N latitude, and west of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. In the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 it was agreed that the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel would mark the boundary between Canada and the United States from Lake of the Woods in Minnesota to the Rocky Mountains. The two countries agreed to joint occupation of the land west of the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean.

The region was mostly occupied by British and French Canadian fur traders from the 1810s, but more and more Americans – Protestant and Catholic missionaries as well as settlers – started to arrive there from the mid-1830s. The settlement of Oregon began in earnest only with the Great Migration overland from the east in 1843. Oregon City was established as the first incorporated city west of the Rocky Mountains in 1844. By 1846 it had a population of five hundred.<sup>1</sup> It became evident to the leading pioneers of the community that the interests of the young settlement would be greatly promoted by a press. In 1845 they organized the Oregon Printing Association to establish the *Oregon Spectator*, the first newspaper published west of the Missouri river. According to George S. Turnbull the Association was “more or less the outgrowth of the Pioneer Lyceum and Literary Club founded in 1843.”<sup>2</sup> The printing press, type, and materials were owned by the Printing Association whose officers were W. G. T’Vault, president; J. W. Nesmith, vice president; John P. Brooks, secretary; George Abernethy, treasurer; Robert Newell, John E. Long, and John R. Couch, directors.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Couch, the members of the Printing Association held important posts in the Provisional Government.<sup>4</sup> Still, they decided to put a strict ban on the discussion of political issues in the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> *Oregon Spectator* (from now on OS), 19 February 1846. The pages of the *Oregon Spectator* were not numbered, but it was a four-page paper and the citations I used generally occurred on the front or the second page.

<sup>2</sup> G. S. Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, Portland OR 1939, 25.

<sup>3</sup> OS, 5 February 1846.

<sup>4</sup> George Abernethy was the provisional governor of Oregon, Long was the secretary, Couch the treasurer of the Provisional Government, T’ Vault was the prosecuting at-

The *Oregon Spectator* intended to provide the settlers of Oregon City and its vicinity with local, national, and foreign news as well. In the beginning – to help homeseekers and builders, and attract would be immigrants – it tried to give as much information as possible about the location of the country, the climate, soil, and productions of Oregon. The policy and attitude of the paper, politically, was regulated by the 8th article of the constitution of the Printing Association: “The press owned by or in connection with this association shall never be used by any party for the purpose of propagating sectarian principles or doctrines, nor for the discussion of exclusive party politics.”<sup>5</sup> The fact that provision was made for amending all articles of the constitution except the eighth indicates the determination of the publishers to have a neutral paper.

The salutary of the first editor of the *Spectator*, William T’Vault, set for the same principle. His main reason for advocating and publishing a politically neutral organ was the nebulous and uncertain situation of the region, which required the cooperation and consensus of the inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

The *Oregon Spectator* was published from February 1846 to March 1855. During this period the joint British-American occupation of Oregon ended, it officially became American Territory and it was gradually connected to the economic, social, and political life of the United States. From an agricultural community, content with the production of its own primary necessities, Oregon was transformed into an ambitious and enterprising society whose interest was growing in political organization as well. The *Spectator* reflected this transition from the Provisional Government to the Territorial, from the local and isolated situation to the expansive and the national.

In my paper I would like to examine this process with a special emphasis on the editors of the *Oregon Spectator* and their relationship to politics and politicians.

### *The Oregon Spectator – “Westward the Star of Empire Takes its Way”*

The *Oregon Spectator* had been published under all difficulties of the frontier. Mail communication and newspaper exchange had various obstacles, so the editors had to be versatile and resourceful. The *Spectator* had four pages, originally with

torney, Nesmith a circuit court judge, while Newell served on different legislative committees. W. J. Brier, “Political Censorship in the *Oregon Spectator*,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 31:3 (1970), 235.

<sup>5</sup> OS, 5 February 1846.

<sup>6</sup> “... it is to be presumed that a portion of the citizens of Oregon have brought with them their views of policy, entertained while residing in the United States. It might also be expected that the *Oregon Spectator* would be a political paper; but reason and good sense argue differently. Situated as we are – remote from the civilized settlements of the United States, and at this time having no protection but that which is afforded us by the Provisional Government of Oregon and having but one interest to represent and that interest the welfare of Oregon and the citizens unanimously ... it would be bad policy to break open old wounds and in doing so create new ones, to discuss politics in the columns of the *Spectator* ...,” OS, 5 February 1846.

four, later with six columns to the page, and it was issued semimonthly. The paper contained miscellaneous information and news reports: acts that regulated the territory, presidential messages, congressional speeches, information about the immigration and the establishment of the economic and social foundations of the settlements, literary and scientific productions, and various advertisements.

The *Spectator* reflected the challenges and difficulties Oregonians had to face during the early development of the region, but its overall tone suggested the optimism of Manifest Destiny. It revealed a great deal about the settlers' hopes and aspirations. The healthy climate and rich soil invited hundreds of immigrants for whom the rivers and the Pacific Ocean offered the facilities of commerce. Their rhetoric, and the justification of their enterprise had a striking resemblance to that of the Puritans who arrived in America two hundred years before them. John Winthrop and his followers intended to set up "a city upon a hill." The nineteenth-century settlers also held that "the responsibilities that rest upon the people of Oregon are mighty." They thought that "if we succeed in setting an example worthy the imitation of the civilized world, we shall never repent of that."<sup>7</sup>

A news item emphasized that Oregon's social, political, and moral state was virtually the same as any other part of the United States, and stressed that "although gathered from the various portions of the Union, the Americans in Oregon are one people."<sup>8</sup> This argument - in the June 11, 1846 issue - served to justify the American right to the territory.

The treaty making Oregon a part of the United States was signed on June 15 1846, but it was not known in Oregon until November 12. President Polk signed the bill that created Oregon Territory in August, 1848. The settlers, however, decided to commemorate the anniversary of American Independence already in 1846. This was probably the first time when July 4th was celebrated on the West Coast, and the occasion contributed to the development of patriotic sentiments and hope.

The optimistic feeling of the settlers and their belief in Manifest Destiny was expressed in the motto of the *Oregon Spectator* as well. From February 5 1846 to March 2 1852 it was "Westward the Star of Empire Takes its Way."

During this time the *Spectator* had several editors.<sup>9</sup> The first one was William G. T'Vault, a lawyer who also had some experience in editing. He arrived in Oregon in 1845 and became the postmaster general of the Provisional Government.<sup>10</sup> The Printing Association originally wanted to employ Henry Lee as the editor of the *Oregon Spectator* who asked for 600 dollars. T'Vault was willing to do the job for half as much, so finally it was him who started the paper. His salutatory was ambiguous. On the one hand, he was against publishing a "political paper." On the other hand, he also declared that he was "a Democrat of the Jeffersonian

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<sup>7</sup> OS, 27 July 1848.

<sup>8</sup> OS, 11 June 1846.

<sup>9</sup> The main source of biographical information about the editors is Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, and Brier, "Political Censorship," 235-240.

<sup>10</sup> T'Vault's signature as Postmaster General can be found under the "Instructions to Postmasters relative to their duties" published in the *Oregon Spectator*, 5 March 1846.

school."<sup>11</sup> He intended to keep to the 8th article of the constitution of the Printing Association, but as we learn from his valedictory, he could not accept that the "junto of aristocrats ... think that they have the right to manage matters as best suit their views."<sup>12</sup> The Association was also discontented with an editor who opposed their influence, and finally replaced T'Vault by Henry A. G. Lee on April 16 1846.

He came from Virginia in 1843. According to Turnbull, he was "a man of more ability and strength than he ever used in the conduct of the *Spectator*."<sup>13</sup> In his first editorial he used the same argument as T'Vault against "fermenting partyism" in the infant settlement, and invited "all" to promote the interests of Oregon: "Politics, as we understand the term, means the science of government and not the effervescence of fermenting partyism, the noisy froth of spouting demagogues."<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that even though 1846 was an election year he not only published a non-partisan paper, but the *Spectator* also lacked any kind of specific information about the candidates and their platforms.<sup>15</sup> It is true that in that early development of Oregon there were no definite party-lines, yet the candidates probably had certain affiliations and programs. When the paper published the result of the election, however, it only contained a list of the representatives' names and their counties.<sup>16</sup> The fact that Lee left the editorial chair after nine issues to become a successful negotiator of Indian affairs might suggest his real interests.

The lack of political organization in Oregon, however, did not mean that there was no unity within the American community in opposing the remaining British interests in the region.<sup>17</sup> From August 6 1846, the printer, John Fleming edited the *Oregon Spectator*, and his remarks in the next issue reflected not only the uncertainty about the future of the paper, but also this attitude: "let it sink or swim, the columns of the *Spectator* shall be open for the publication of all matter that shall have for its object the advocating of American interests in this country and their right to the soil, in preference to any other nation of the globe - even to John Bull himself."<sup>18</sup>

George L. Curry arrived in Oregon City at the end of August, and became the editor of the *Spectator* from October 1 1846 to January 28 1848. He intended to keep the paper neutral laying emphasis only on a "consistent American tone." In his salutatory he promised to avoid "sectism and exclusive party politics" by

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<sup>11</sup> OS, 5 February 1846.

<sup>12</sup> OS, 2 April 1846.

<sup>13</sup> Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> OS, 16 April 1846.

<sup>15</sup> The candidates were introduced in small, advertisement-like pieces of news: "please to insert the name of ... as a candidate for representative of ... county, at the ensuing election who will receive the support of MANY VOTERS" OS, 14, 28 May 1846.

<sup>16</sup> OS, 15 June 1846.

<sup>17</sup> W. C. Woodward, *The Rise and Early History of Political Parties in Oregon*. BiblioLife 2009, 30, 33.

<sup>18</sup> OS, 20 August.

"exercising his right of supervision."<sup>19</sup> The Printing Association, however, became jealous of the editorial control of the paper. Like before, they wanted to exercise their censorship, but he would not let them. When Mr. Curry was "expelled" after 15 months, he explained to the readers that it had happened "for no other reason ... than having always endeavored to tell the truth and keep above petty factions and insignificant cliques."<sup>20</sup>

The next editor, Aaron E. Wait, was a lawyer, who arrived in Oregon in September, 1847. He conducted the *Spectator* for one year from February, 1848. It seems that he could get along with the Printing Association quite well, and managed to follow its rules. Yet, there was a different kind of problem that prevented his success. Gold was discovered in California, and its news reached Oregon City in August, 1848. It was not only many settlers who left for the mines, but the printer also went with them. Consequently, the publication of the *Oregon Spectator* was suspended from September 7 to October 12 1848, and after February 22 1849 again, for more than half a year.

Although the gold rush diverted a lot of immigrants, and many of the Oregonians left their homes to seek their fortune in California, the creation of Oregon Territory in 1848 meant that its situation in the United States was stabilizing. The Oregon Trail continued to be followed by parties of settlers looking for fertile farm lands, or different possibilities of enterprise. They soon realized that California offered a good market for their products. The *Oregon Spectator* was still in the front to encourage immigration. True to its mission as a tireless promoter of Oregon's boundless potential, it predicted that once California's gold had been exhausted, "it will be found that Oregon contains the elements of more wealth than any other portion of the earth of the same magnitude."<sup>21</sup> People were stimulated to organize agricultural and industrial production on a new and better basis.

The Reverend Wilson Blain, a United Presbyterian clergyman, took "the arduous and responsible duties of the editorial chair" in October, 1849, and asked for the readers' "charitable forbearance" in view of his inexperience. He referred to the limited supply of exchanges of other newspapers and the irregularity of mails that made the publication of the *Spectator* difficult. Nevertheless, his salutatory was optimistic, and reflected the hope of Manifest Destiny when he commended himself and his paper to the "magnanimous support of the whole community" of Oregon that was "laying the foundations of a mighty republic."<sup>22</sup>

During Blain's editorship, Robert Moore, then proprietor of Linn City became owner of the paper,<sup>23</sup> but Blain remained the editor until September 5, 1850 when D. J. Schnebly started to edit it weekly. I found no details or explanation about

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<sup>19</sup> OS, 1 October 1846.

<sup>20</sup> OS, 25 December 1847.

<sup>21</sup> OS, 24 August 1848.

<sup>22</sup> OS, 4 October 1849.

<sup>23</sup> OS, 18 April 1850.

why the Printing Association gave up its ownership. The fact, however, that it was an individual who conducted the paper led to considerable changes.

*"Our Paper Will Be Decidedly Whig in Politics, But Decently So"*

In September, 1851, D. J. Schnebly became owner of the *Spectator*.<sup>24</sup> He tried to remain neutral as long as it was possible. There were two important factors, however, that gradually altered the tone of the paper. One of them was the end of the Printing Association's censorship. As owner and editor of the *Spectator*, Schnebly could exercise full control of its content. The other factor was the stabilization of the Territorial Government in Oregon, which contributed to the extension of the principles and activities of the national political parties over the Pacific Northwest. While during the period of the Provisional Government the political issues and elections were mainly based on local interests, by the early 1850s, the pioneers gradually returned to their old party affiliations and attempted to adapt them to their new environment.

The *Oregon Spectator* rejected the organization of parties in the Territory for a long time. One of the reasons was the isolated situation and limited population of Oregon. The editor did not want its "welfare to be lost sight in the heat of excited political contest."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, he was concerned about the reputation and development of the region. He was afraid that the conflicts, party struggles, and divisions would discourage immigration. The editorials of the *Spectator* several times warned against using the formulation of party lines as a cover under which to attack public officers and political creeds. "It can hardly be expected that the law abiding and law loving citizens of the Eastern States will voluntarily emigrate to any country where its public officers ... are openly accused of corruption, and where ... no security can be expected for the protection of their rights, or preservation of their property."<sup>26</sup>

When the Democratic party started to become stronger and increasingly influential in the Territory, however, Schnebly could not remain "an idle observer of political events." Even if he still held that it was against the interests of Oregonians to excite party organizations, the *Oregon Spectator* became a Whig organ, although – as he explained – this change was "forced upon us in self-defense."<sup>27</sup>

It was mainly the Democrats and their organ, the *Oregon Statesman*, against which the *Spectator* had to defend itself. The *Statesman* was edited by Asahel Bush in Salem from March 28, 1851. It was decidedly partisan from its first issue.<sup>28</sup>

The Democratic party was the first to organize in Oregon mainly because the territory had been established under the administration of a Democratic president, James K. Polk, who appointed Democratic officers. The other reason could be that most of the immigrants arrived from the Mississippi Valley bringing with

<sup>24</sup> OS, 9 September 1851.

<sup>25</sup> OS, 18 November 1851.

<sup>26</sup> OS, 23 December 1851.

<sup>27</sup> OS, 3 February 1852.

<sup>28</sup> M. Clark, Jr., *Eden Seekers*, Boston 1981, 245–246.

them the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition. The explanation for the attempted neutrality of the *Spectator*, and the publication of the *Statesman* as a Democratic newspaper cannot only be the fact that the settlers were overwhelmingly Democratic and Schnebly wanted to avoid confrontations. From December 4 1850, a characteristically Whig paper, the *Oregonian* was published in Portland to "sustain the present (at that time Whig) administration and advocate all the principles of the great Whig party."<sup>29</sup> The *Oregon Spectator*, on the other hand, tried to remain faithful to its original objectives to avoid conflicts, seek consensus, and promote the region, the agricultural and commercial interests of Oregon.

When the *Statesman* started to attack the *Oregonian* and the *Spectator*, Schnebly was really "forced" to react and reveal his sentiments. He was called "a stupid editor", "bullethead", and "blockhead" by the *Statesman* and the printers of the *Spectator* were called "rats" in October 1851,<sup>30</sup> but he tried to keep out controversies with the Democratic journal. The events in the winter of 1851-1852, however, accelerated the organization of parties in the Territory, and had a considerable impact on the *Oregon Spectator* as well.

When President Taylor came to office in 1849, he removed the Democratic governor of Oregon, Joseph Lane, and appointed John Gaines in his place. He was, however, "pompous, aristocratic in manners, [and] disdainful of frontier crudities,"<sup>31</sup> and what is more, a Whig in a territory of Democratic majority. The Legislative Assembly of 1850 not only refused to cooperate with him, but also tried to obstruct his work as much as it could. One of the most important issues of the Assembly was the location of the public buildings in Oregon. It was rather a sectarian question than political, but as the Democrats needed a local issue to unite their forces, they made it "the touchstone of party regularity."<sup>32</sup> According to the Organic Laws accepted under the Provisional Government Oregon City was the capital of the Territory, and Governor Gaines saw no reason to change it. The Legislative Assembly, however, decided to place the seat of government in Salem, the penitentiary in Portland, and the university in Marysville (Corvallis). The location of the three public buildings was established in a single act. John Gaines immediately stated that the law was null and void, because the Organic Acts provided that each territorial statute shall embrace a single object. The question was suspended, and both sides were trying to gain supporters to their views before the opening session of the territorial Supreme Court and the legislative Assembly were to meet in December 1851. While the governor was backed by Attorney general John J. Crittenden and President Taylor, the Democrats attacked him "for disregard of the popular will."<sup>33</sup>

The *Statesman*, the *Oregonian*, and the *Spectator* dealt with the question in great length, published several opinions on the issue including those of three judges of

<sup>29</sup> *Oregonian*, 4 December 1850.

<sup>30</sup> OS, 7 October 1851.

<sup>31</sup> G. N. Belknap, ed., *William Lysander Adams, A Melodrame Entitled 'Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils.'* Hamden CT 1968, 4.

<sup>32</sup> J. E. Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon.* New Haven 1967, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Belknap, *William Lysander Adams*, 6.

the Supreme Court.<sup>34</sup> Two of them were Whigs and intended to stay in Oregon City, the third one, Orville C. Pratt, a Democrat, was ready to go to Salem. Finally, it was only five out of the thirty-one members of the Legislative Assembly, and the two Whig judges who stayed in Oregon City. What is more, Pratt found a loophole, and stated that the Organic Act did not say that a law *cannot* embrace *more than one* object, and thereby the statute determining the location of public buildings was valid and binding.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, it was the Congress that had to settle the legal question. In May, 1852, the Location Law was ratified by unanimous vote of both houses.<sup>36</sup> One might wonder how a seemingly simple question could lead to such a complicated situation. I think that the Location Question can serve as an example for the development of political attitudes in Oregon. The whole debate, just like the ones about the appointment of a public printer, or a territorial librarian and the location of the library, or the issue of statehood, indicates the shift in the attitudes to politics from consensus to partisanship.

The controversy also gave rise to a campaign of journalistic invective in Oregon that soon gave its press a national reputation for vigorous and personal abuse. Turnbull described it as the "glorious period of personal journalism."<sup>37</sup> According to Belknap the style was common in American newspapers of the time, but "it may have reached its highest point of development in Oregon."<sup>38</sup>

What became known as the "Oregon style," was a rhetorical technique expressing contempt and sometimes anger in a satirical, biting tone. Asahel Bush, the editor of the *Oregon Statesman* had one of the sharpest pens. He used it with wit against the Whigs in Oregon. I have taken some examples from the *Statesman*, the *Oregonian*, and the *Oregon Spectator* to illustrate the "Oregon style."

In April 1851 in a reply to the charge of the *Oregonian* that the *Statesman* "has made a war against the *Spectator*, ... *Oregonian*, ... Gov. Gaines," Bush described the *Oregonian* as "devoted ... to the grossest personal abuse, the most foul mouthed slander, grovelling scurrility, falsehood and ribald blackguardianism; so much that it has long since ceased to sustain any but a pot-house reputation, or to receive the countenance and respect of any party or community. ... The gentleman (ie. the editor of the *Oregonian*), ... makes himself ... the laughing-stock of the public."<sup>39</sup>

As the session of the Legislative Assembly was approaching, and the controversy deepening, the tone of the *Statesman* got sharper. At the end of October, 1851 it said about the editor of the *Oregonian*:

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<sup>34</sup> OS, 9, 23 December 1851, 4, 13 January 1852; *Statesman*, 9 December 1851, 6 January 1852.

<sup>35</sup> Pratt's opinion in OS, 4 January 1852, *Statesman*, 6 January 1852.

<sup>36</sup> C. H. Carey, *A General History of Oregon Prior to 1861*. Portland OR 1936, 2: 472.

<sup>37</sup> Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Belknap, *William Lysander Adams*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> *Statesman*, 4 April 1851.



"You are too narrow-minded for liberal and generous writing, a barren source of suggestion, ... and a dangerous calumniator. The essential constituents necessary to make the editor, a portion of which are a deliberate judgement, candor, frankness, truth and fairness ... are ... foreign to your idea of the office of an editor ... you should try and excel the common re-tailer of misrepresentations and falsehood."<sup>40</sup>

In January, 1852 – during the session of the legislative Assembly – Bush published an article from the *Providence Post* that directly attacked the Whigs:

"The best thing the Whig party can do ... is to go into bankruptcy ... we claim no part of what little it may have to divide ... If it owes the country anything on broken promises, the country will be very glad to forgive the debt, if it will not come to the market again."<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly (and ironically) enough, the Oregonian Democrats did not have to wait long for the Whigs to "settle their debts." In February and March, 1852 over the signature of "Breakspear," the *Oregonian* published a series of articles entitled "Treason, Stratagems and Spoils." It was a five-act "melodrama" which ridiculed Democratic leaders without mercy and became the sensation of the day. Its writer, William Lysander Adams, was originally a teacher who arrived in Oregon in 1848. Then he went to California and found gold, and on returning he bought a farm for himself. In 1851 he started to write articles for the *Oregonian*.

"Treason, Stratagems and Spoils" concentrated his satirical attack on the so called 'Salem Clique'. According to Malcolm Clark's 'definition' it was "a disciplined little band of freebooters which, with Asahel Bush as a brigand-in-chief, would tyrannize Oregon democracy and effectively govern territory and state for a decade."<sup>42</sup>

George N. Belknap's introduction to the "melodrama" which is based on a thorough research of the historical background of the plot gives a full account of the characters behind the pseudonyms in the play. Judge Pratt is pictured as the conductor of events, helped by Bush, J. Quinn Thornton (a lawyer in Oregon City), Matthew P. Deady, A. L. Lovejoy, Frederick Waymire, Samuel Parker (members of the Council in the 1851-1852 Legislative Assembly), and other Democrats. They are involved in a conspiracy against Whig officials in Oregon. These Democrats not only plan to take over in the territory, but also intend to declare independence of the United States. They are supported by several logrollers, and threats in Bush' newspaper prepare the way for the Whigs' merciless destruction. The Clique's efforts, however, "drown into wine."

According to Belknap, the plot of "Treason, Stratagems and Spoils" paralleled the chronology of the 1851-1852 Assembly, but putting Pratt in the center distorted the actual relationships in the inner circle of the party. There is no doubt about the Judge's political ambitions which started to bother even the Clique after the

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<sup>40</sup> *Statesman*, 28 October 1851.

<sup>41</sup> *Statesman*, 13 January 1852.

<sup>42</sup> Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 244.

Assembly. Before that, however, the *Statesman* worked on building up his reputation as a brilliant judge, and tried to use his view on the Location Question to influence public opinion in Oregon. I think that we can treat this rearrangement of power relations in the play as a literary device, the manifestation of the writer's freedom, which certainly served his purpose.

Adams dedicated his "melodrame" to the "Association of Gentlemen" who printed a Democratic weekly paper during the Legislative Assembly of 1851-1852. The *Vox Populi* attacked the Whig officials who remained in Oregon City. In a sense, the play was the Whig's answer to these attacks. It effectively illustrated the Clique's methods. They acted under "spiritual influence" of "the Bacchus-distilling juice of corn."<sup>43</sup> "The power of [their] hook lies in the bait" compounded of "lie and honey," "mixed, by the laws of chemistry political."<sup>44</sup> Pratt imagines how "coming times ... shall show the world how well, with whip and spur, I'll ride in a state, their [i.e., the Legislative Assembly's] wretched, abortive, sickly bantling, as hobby to the goal of my desire."<sup>45</sup> Bush characterizes his "genius" of "low-flung, blustering lying blackguard ribaldry."<sup>46</sup> The "business" of the "secret league,"<sup>47</sup> however, ends in drunkenness, some conspirators "mounting on a pile of bacon," others stumbling, leaving "in a snore." Finally everybody falls asleep, lamp goes out, Judge is left alone "in this dark hole" "surrounded by spirits in hell" and exits.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the series published in the *Oregonian*, "Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils" had two pamphlet editions before the end of April, which were illustrated by woodcuts.<sup>49</sup>

There was no notice of Adams' triumph in the *Statesman*, Bush did not even mention the play in his paper. Instead, he invested his energy into the organization of the Democratic party. They united their forces and had an overwhelming success in the June election.<sup>50</sup> The news about the decision of the Congress that affirmed the proceedings of the legislation in Salem and recognized the town as territorial capital made their victory complete.

The *Oregon Spectator* did not comment on the "Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils." Although Schnebly revealed his Whig sentiments four days before the *Oregonian* started to publish the "melodrame,"<sup>51</sup> he did not and could not really support his colleague. The *Spectator* was suspended a month later, before the last acts of the play were published. During that month Schnebly's paper was beginning to show the characteristics of the "Oregon style," but in a much milder way than

<sup>43</sup> "Treason, Stratagems and Spoils" (henceforth TS&S), 69, Act II, lines 7, 13.

<sup>44</sup> TS&S, 64, Act I, lines 276, 283, 285.

<sup>45</sup> TS&S, 58, Act I, lines 38-43.

<sup>46</sup> TS&S, 91, Act III, lines 105-106.

<sup>47</sup> TS&S, 73, Act II, lines 143-144.

<sup>48</sup> TS&S, 146-148, Act V, lines 569, 618, 648-649.

<sup>49</sup> Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 254.

<sup>50</sup> Carey, *A General History of Oregon*, 493.

<sup>51</sup> Schnebly declared his Whig sentiments in the 3 February 1852 issue of the *Spectator*, the *Oregonian* published the series in its 7, 14, 21 February, and 6, 13 March 1852 issues.

either the *Statesman* or the *Oregonian* did. Belknap says that contemporary slang and colloquialisms were more common in Democratic press, and "Whig editors deplored such vulgarity but were forced to compete."<sup>52</sup> A good example could be when the *Statesman* claimed "great powers of mind for Judge Pratt," and Schnebly declared that "our service shall be rendered very willingly to the putting down of all such humbuggers of people's rights and opinions."<sup>53</sup> In the same issue the *Spectator* called the members of the Legislative Assembly "coarse personalities" who were "more becoming an enraged and riotous populace than a legislative body."<sup>54</sup>

The publication of the *Spectator* was suspended after March 2 1852, for more than a year. It is not clear whether the long break was due to the shortage of paper or money, censorship, or the absence of the editor or the printer as in some other cases. It was Schnebly who started to edit it again in August, 1853. Instead of giving an explanation, he changed the motto of the paper. It had a more personal tone (and local reference) than the old one, but suggested the same optimism: "Our Hope is in the Future, and Success our Firm Determination." He reinforced that the *Spectator* would be "decidedly Whig in politics." At the same time, however, he also found it important to state that it would be "decently so," and added that "we have no affection for popular clap-traps or demagogic humbugs."<sup>55</sup>

The content of the paper did not change much, and it certainly was not very vitriolic. There were only a few editorials that were written in the "Oregon style." Analyzing the caucus system of the Democratic party, for example, Schnebly held that their method was "more apt to place in power the trickster and shrewd maneuverer than honest highminded and worthy men."<sup>56</sup>

By the end of 1853, significant changes occurred in the political life of Oregon, and the *Spectator* commented on the weakening of the Democrats. "The agonies of the *Statesman* clique are deep-rooted ... even salt will not save them."<sup>57</sup> According to a news report in the *Spectator*, the "corrupt and factitious" Democrats' nominations for the legislative elections were accompanied by "anarchy and confusion" while the Whigs' choice of men of "integrity, experience, and Whig fidelity" was characterized by "unanimity."<sup>58</sup> This was obviously an exaggeration, and contradicted Schnebly's earlier remarks in the salutatory that "honesty is best

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<sup>52</sup> Belknap, *William Lysander Adams*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> OS, February 24 1852.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> OS, 19 August 1853.

<sup>56</sup> Schnebly described their method: "A few men in one instance got together and called themselves the democratic party [...] Among themselves they portioned out the best offices. After this was gone through with they called themselves an organized body [...] Every person who failed to join the band [sic] were from that time decried and all sorts of epithets employed to bring them into disrepute." OS, 12 November 1853.

<sup>57</sup> OS, 3 November 1853.

<sup>58</sup> OS, 10 December 1853.

policy.”<sup>59</sup> Yet, it shows how significant the influence of the general political climate was becoming in Oregon. The territory was increasingly linked to national politics. The immigrants were never indifferent to the changes in the country, and the newspapers tried to serve their broadening interests. The shift, the increasing involvement in politics was reflected in the *Oregon Spectator* already under Schnebly, and even more when it was taken over by C. L. Goodrich in March 1854. Its motto was changed to express the readiness to take part in politics: “Agitation of Thought is the Beginning of Wisdom!”<sup>60</sup>

“*America For ever!*”

The new editor had to deal with three major issues. Two of them were political in nature while the third one determined the fate of the paper.

As political activity was increasing in the territory, people started to propose to change the status of Oregon in the United States, and make it a state. It was not really a new idea. Democrats under the administration of a Whig president were seeking to find a solution to their situation by initiating statehood in early 1852. With the election of Franklin Pierce, however, who replaced the Whig officials with Democrats, they did not really need statehood to achieve influence in Oregon. There was, however, a strong tradition of self-government in the territory which was already reflected in the formation of the Provisional Government in 1843. In contrast to that, the territorial system meant a close Congressional control. Furthermore, the executive and judicial branches of government were filled by the president’s appointees. After passing a nebulous territorial status, political parties started to organize in the territory, and their increasing activity enlivened the movement for statehood. It was again the Democratic party that advocated the formulation of a state at the beginning of 1854. Even though the president was a Democrat, the Salem Clique did not like his appointees, and memorialized Congress for permission to draft a state constitution.<sup>61</sup>

The *Spectator* opened a discussion on the subject<sup>62</sup> and most of the Whig correspondents argued against statehood. Their strongest objection was that “it would cost too much.”<sup>63</sup> There were different calculations in the paper about how much more tax should be paid to support a state government.<sup>64</sup> A lot of people argued that the population of Oregon was growing steadily and business was improving considerably, and the change of government would have no real influence on its prosperity.<sup>65</sup> Others urged to “take the matters in our own hands,” otherwise “we will have no Territory to make a state of” as Congress already created Washing-

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<sup>59</sup> OS, 19 August 1853.

<sup>60</sup> OS, 4 March 1854.

<sup>61</sup> Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon*, 94.

<sup>62</sup> OS, 24 March 1854.

<sup>63</sup> OS, 21 April 1854.

<sup>64</sup> OS, 21 April, 4 May 1854.

<sup>65</sup> “We possess every necessary element for success [...] If Oregon cannot prosper now, she never can.” OS, 19 May 1854.

ton Territory out of Oregon in 1853.<sup>66</sup> In the end, people voted on the issue in June 1854, and the measure was defeated.<sup>67</sup> Oregonians decided to "wait awhile and mature in strength."<sup>68</sup>

Besides the movement for statehood, there was another issue that linked Oregon to national politics. The Democratic and Whig parties went through a kind of reorganization in the early 1850s, and the process offered an opportunity to gain popular support for other movements. In July 1854, the *Oregon Spectator* published an article from the *New York Herald* about "the newest political movement of the day." It described the "total defeat" of the Whig party in 1852, and the dissolution of the Democratic party under Pierce, and told about two emerging movements. One of them was the temperance movement that wanted to prohibit the manufacture and sale of any intoxicating liquor. Attempts to enforce such regulations found considerable support in Oregon, but also incited riots, and political parties were profoundly affected as well. The issue was addressed by the other new movement, the Know-Nothing party, too, as many prohibitionists joined them.

The Know-Nothings proposed to exclude Roman Catholics and foreigners from the suffrage and any public office. According to Malcolm Clark its predecessor was the Supreme Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, which was founded in 1849. They promised to vote only for native-born Protestants, and to work for a twenty-one-year probationary period before naturalization of immigrants. Their principles were adapted by the American party that was founded in 1852.<sup>69</sup> John Mulkern writing about *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts* - where it had the greatest influence - found that there were historians who pointed out that the movement advocated not only nativism, but also antimonopoly reforms and anti-slavery.<sup>70</sup>

The American party started to organize in California in May 1854, and reached Oregon City in August, 1855.<sup>71</sup>

The news report about the native movement that the *Oregon Spectator* borrowed from the *New York Herald* in July, 1854 was a kind of introductory one. It gave an account on the main principles of Americanism, explained the "mysterious manner" of its "silent operation."<sup>72</sup> As opposed to the Whig and Democratic parties characterized by division, corruption, and demoralization, the next news item taken from the *New York Herald* described the "unparalleled progress" of the Know-Nothing movement.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting that the same article was published again in the September 2 issue of the *Spectator* together with one from the *Type of the Times* that reported on the Know-Nothing triumph in Philadelphia and with

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<sup>66</sup> OS, 19 May 1854.

<sup>67</sup> Carey, *A General History of Oregon*, 504.

<sup>68</sup> OS, 24 March 1854.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 271.

<sup>70</sup> J. R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*. Boston 1990, 187.

<sup>71</sup> Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 272.

<sup>72</sup> OS, 21 July 1854.

<sup>73</sup> OS, 11 August 1854.

another one from the *Baltimore Patriot* about the aims of the movement. The *Spectator* simply borrowed these articles but did not comment on them. What is more, in a response to Bush's attack on the Native movement, Goodrich stated that "the idea" that the Know-Nothings "act in concert with the Whigs" was "all malicious falsehood."<sup>74</sup> Two weeks later, however, a long editorial in the *Spectator* was already justifying Americanism and warned against foreign influence. Even the motto of the paper was changed to "America Forever! Our own Dear Native Land! For the Distant West Echoes back the Gladsome South!"<sup>75</sup> In the next issue the editor dealt with Roman Catholics and said that the movement was not against their religion, only against their involvement in politics.<sup>76</sup> Then on October 7 1854, Goodrich informed the readers that "hereafter the *Spectator* will endeavor to promulgate the doctrines of true Americanism." The motto was changed again to emphasize "Freedom from All Foreign Influence in this our own Native Land!"<sup>77</sup>

Although the editor of the *Oregon Spectator* dedicated himself to the advancement of American interests in the territory, he did not give up his Whig sentiments either. He was a member of the Whig Committee of Clackamas County and also an advocate of the Know-Nothing party. This offered a good opportunity for the Democrats to identify Americanism with Whiggery. Goodrich, however, called it "a ridiculous idea,"<sup>78</sup> and argued that the movement was composed of men of all classes without regard to political or religious opinion. He revived the 'Oregon style' to answer the charge of a new Democratic paper, the *Standard*, and stated that its editor was "the most accomplished liar, ... a lunatic, ... laboring under a temporary fit of morbid insanity."<sup>79</sup>

It was Goodrich who was closer to the truth. As I referred to it earlier, the American movement tried to unite various interests: Whigs, prohibitionists, and dissident Democrats as well. Like in other parts of the United States, the Know-Nothings of Oregon opposed not only foreigners, but also the Democratic party. Their success, however, was short-lived. Bush and the Salem Clique tried to combat them in two important ways. The *Statesman* published the names of the leading figures of Americanism, revealed its code, aim, signs, and rituals.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the Democrats initiated the so called "*viva voce* bill" which required that votes in the territorial elections should be given openly, not by ballot. The bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly in December, 1854. It had a considerable impact on the elections of 1855. On the one hand, it discouraged Know-Nothings, on the other hand, it kept back several Democrats who were thinking about leav-

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<sup>74</sup> OS, 2 September 1854.

<sup>75</sup> OS, 16 September 1854.

<sup>76</sup> OS, 23 September 1854.

<sup>77</sup> OS, 7 October 1854.

<sup>78</sup> OS, 21 October 1854.

<sup>79</sup> OS, 18 November, 21 October 1854.

<sup>80</sup> *Statesman*, November 1, 1854.

ing the party. Seven of nine council and twenty-eight of thirty assembly seats were gained by Democrats, which restored their control in the Territory.<sup>81</sup>

The *Oregon Spectator* could not report on the elections, because it was suspended in March, 1855. In his valedictory, Goodrich reinforced his Whig position, but admitted that he had "a special respect for American-born white men and women."<sup>82</sup> He also explained why he had to say "Adieu!" In a bitter and rather harsh tone, he described the financial difficulties the paper had to face which finally made him suspend its publication. There were two main problems: the scarcity of paper and the failure of the subscribers to pay for the newspaper. In August, 1854, there was a deduction in the price of the *Oregon Spectator*,<sup>83</sup> and from September on the editor repeatedly asked the subscribers to pay up their debts to the *Spectator*.<sup>84</sup> Goodrich's financial problems were not unique in the territory. He reported in November that many publishers were becoming alarmed because of the scarcity of paper and its consequent increase in price. Even though he could assure the readers of the *Spectator* that he had received a new supply for several months, he had to ask them that "perhaps before that is gone [they] will pay up so that we can get a year's supply at one purchase."<sup>85</sup> The situation, however, did not really change. The editor had to try a more effective way to get his money. In December he announced in the paper that "on the first day of March 1855 we shall send bills ... to all those persons who shall have paid nothing on subscription to the *Oregon Spectator* for a year and a half [sic] previous to that date."<sup>86</sup> The warning was repeated in several issues of the paper,<sup>87</sup> but it seems that it did not help. It was in February 1855, when Goodrich attempted to make a last desperate request, and said that thereafter the paper would only be sent to those who paid its costs. He added that "we know of many respectable men who would hate to have their names to appear on a supplementary list as not having paid us."<sup>88</sup>

Finally, he was forced to give up, and with the March 10 1855, issue he permanently suspended the publication of the *Oregon Spectator*. His farewell was bitter, and he himself quite disappointed, but he also made it clear that "with regard to the course we have pursued ... we have no regrets to make ... nothing to swallow." His closing remark echoed the main purpose of the first editors of the paper: "we have been the 'tool' of no person, factions or cliques."<sup>89</sup>

George S. Turnbull in the *History of Oregon Newspapers* devotes a few pages to the biographies of the first editors of the *Oregon Spectator*, but he says nothing about the life of D. J. Schnebly and C. L. Goodrich. He writes about the latter, for

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<sup>81</sup> Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 276.

<sup>82</sup> OS, 10 March 1855.

<sup>83</sup> OS, 26 August 1854.

<sup>84</sup> OS, 23 September, 7 October 1854.

<sup>85</sup> OS, 18 November 1854.

<sup>86</sup> OS, 9 December 1854.

<sup>87</sup> OS, 16, 23 December, 17 January.

<sup>88</sup> OS, 3 February 1855.

<sup>89</sup> OS, 10 March 1855.

example, that "Goodrich is remembered chiefly for having suspended the paper permanently."<sup>90</sup> I find his approach as well as his statement that "politically the *Spectator* was never influential"<sup>91</sup> a little bit simplifying and misleading.

In my paper I tried to trace and illustrate the gradual transformation of the *Oregon Spectator*. It was started during the early, nebulous state of Oregon when its inhabitants were relatively non-partisan. Then as the Territory was established and it was increasingly attached to the economic and political life of the United States, the sense of isolation was removed, and people came to a new realization of their relationship to the rest of the country. What they referred to as "the States" in the beginning – suggesting their remoteness and the local characteristics of their experience – started to have greater and greater influence on their lives. This development was reflected in the *Oregon Spectator*. In a sense, the attention Turnbull devoted to the editors' biographies can indicate this shift. He spent some time discussing the careers of the first editors, because in most of the cases, editing the *Spectator* was only a short episode in their lives. They endeavored it to serve the community, but then either got into conflict with censorship, or soon decided to pursue a different career. It is not to say, of course, that what they did for starting the first newspaper on the West coast, keeping it not only alive, but also devoting it to the promotion of the interests of Oregon, was an easy enterprise. It is possible, however, that Turnbull did not discuss the last two editors' career, because theirs was more closely linked to the *Spectator*. He did not have to speak about their biographies, because their paper told about their attitudes. When Schnebly and Goodrich edited the *Oregon Spectator*, the newspaper was under their full control. Influenced by the changes it dealt with the legal and political controversies that characterized the opening years of Territorial Government in Oregon. They were – though only slightly – even influenced by the "Oregon style."

I think that the mottoes of the *Oregon Spectator* well illustrate the transformation that occurred in Oregon during its publication. As the situation of the territory was becoming stabilized, the emphasis shifted from promotion of local interests to representing the objectives of a national party.

It is difficult to tell how influential the *Oregon Spectator* actually was. It was probably read by a lot more people than its circulation – 155 subscribers in 1846<sup>92</sup> and between two and three hundred in 1855<sup>93</sup> – suggests. The subscribers could share the paper with their neighbors and friends. It was a very important mediator of information to the settlers of Oregon City and its vicinity especially when it was the only paper in the territory. Although news-gathering and exchange had various obstacles, the editors tried to provide their readers with as much information as they could.

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<sup>90</sup> Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 47.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> OS, 16 April 1846.

<sup>93</sup> OS, 3 February 1855.



The *Oregon Spectator* indicated, was stimulated by, and served the interests of Oregon's growing population. It expressed the settlers' motivations, expectations, and experience. Its neutral tone was gradually changed due to the emergence of partisanship, but it never stopped to promote the "greatness"<sup>94</sup> of the territory. The editors' changing relationship to politics reflected the developments and transformation that took place in Oregon from the mid-1840s to the mid-1850s.

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<sup>94</sup> OS, 5 May 1854.