Oregon Spectator

OREGON SPECTATOR.

Vol. 5. Oregon City, (O. T.,) Tuesday, July 22, 1851. No. 46.

The Oregon Spectator was the first newspaper published in the Oregon Territory in 1846, preceding newspapers in California and other western outposts. It was more than a journalistic enterprise. In the words of historian George Turnbull, "The *Oregon Spectator* was not the creature of some early journalist looking for a location; it was rather the project of a distinguished group of pioneers who saw the need for official publication of the corporate acts of the new American territory."

The paper's publishers were among the prominent leaders of the new Oregon Territory, and W.G. T'Vault, a lawyer, was named editor. The four-page broadsheet—published biweekly in Oregon City—primarily contained official notices, texts of laws, and some modest advertising. The bulk of the advertising was for "patent medicines," purported to cure everything from ulcers to erysipelas. The small amount of news and current affairs included accounts of meetings and reports from travelers. Anonymous sources (often called "respectable gentlemen") were regularly quoted.

In addition to its journalism, the *Spectator* provided the new territory with a hand press, a scarcity in frontier times, that was used to turn out materials such as the territory's first spelling book. The *Spectator* changed to a weekly publication in 1850, and it survived until March 1855. It was never a powerful political organ in the manner of the early *Oregonian* and *Oregon Statesman*, but it recorded the region's first official steps to statehood.

The original press, a Washington Handpress manufactured in New York and brought to Oregon by ship, is currently owned by the University of Oregon's journalism school.

Written by Floyd J. McKay

Further Reading:

Lyman, Horace S. *History of Oregon: The Growth of an American State*, vol. 4. New York: North Pacific Publishing Society, 1903.

Turnbull, George. *History of Oregon Newspapers.* Portland: Binfords & Mort, 1939.

Copyright © 2008-2013 Portland State University