

# Oregon Spectator

By Floyd J. McKay

Established in 1846, the *Oregon Spectator* was the first newspaper published in the Oregon Territory, preceding newspapers in California and other western outposts. It was more than a journalistic enterprise. "The *Oregon Spectator* was not the creature of some early journalist looking for a location," historian George Turnbull wrote, but "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 newspaper's publishers were 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 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 *Oregonian* and the *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 owned by the University of Oregon's journalism school.

## Sources

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.

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