

# Politics Basis for Early Paper

Bush, Democrat, Wielded Great Influence in Early Days; "Petty Village Puffery" Had No Place; Editor Wanted Paper State-Wide in Scope; Partisanship Brought Fervid Writing

## THE FOUNDER

THE OREGON STATESMAN was conceived and born in politics; and throughout its history has been an active influence in the political development of the territory, state and nation. It was founded as the organ of the Democratic party in the territory. The governor, John P. Gaines, was a Whig, appointed by President Zachary Taylor. The prevailing sentiment in Oregon was democratic. The Statesman was the first organ of its party and consequently under the able editorship of A. Bush, immediately attained a position of great power. It was essentially in those early years a political newspaper. It ignored local news.

Bush ran it as a sort of official gazette, which it was, as the official paper of the territory and the spokesman of the dominant party.

Thus when The Statesman moved back to Salem from Corvallis, Bush published the following editorial in reply to criticism that he had not been a town "booster":

"We have never been in the interest of any town, proprietor, speculator or property-holder, and never intend to be. If there is anything in journalism that we despise utterly it is the petty village puffery—the habitual announcement that Mr. So-and-So has hung a gate, put a new fence in front of his residence, or repaired an old one in rear of it; that Mr. Such-a-one has painted his barn, laid down a plank in front of his store, hoisted a new sign upon his shop, built a chicken house, smoke house or some other house of equally importance. We have never published a local paper—an Oregon City, Salem or Corvallis paper—and never expect to. The Statesman has been pre-eminently an Oregon journal, and will continue to be such. We publish the news of interest from every part, and know that the body of our readers care no more for the ordinary local transactions of one than another."—Statesman, Dec. 18, 1855.

### Bush's Printer Office Early Brought Attack

It was an age of bitter style in expression of editorial opinion; and one with the personality and vigor of the editor of The Statesman was certain to be a shining mark for his editorial opponents, the old established Spectator and the slightly senior Oregonian edited by T. J. Dryer, and the Star. The fact that Bush was made public printer, which office was a lucrative one, drew hot fire from his competitors. The journalistic warfare began with the first issue of The Statesman, and in his second issue Bush replied to Dryer of the Oregonian in the following language:

"Complaints of this kind come with a special grace from a paper devoted from its first to its last number almost exclusively to the grossest personal abuse, the most foul-mouthed slander, grovelling scurrility, falsehood and ribald blackguardism; inasmuch 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. Nothing that incurred the editor's displeasure has escaped. Business concerns, personal difficulties, public and private matters have all alike been drawn through the slime and slander of his columns. And now he complains, and without reason too, of our employment of personalities and whines over the matter like a whipped Spaniel."

H. S. Lyman in his "History of Oregon" describes this period of newspaper history as follows:

"... a non-political newspaper was no longer desired, and while the old order was passing new spirits were already planning a new democratic paper. This was the Statesman.

"With this began a decided era in Oregon journalism, the names of Asahel Bush, W. L. Adams and D. W. Craig with other, appearing in our journalism. In this era also was formed what became known as The Oregon Style, a species of storm and stress composition, strong chiefly in invective, and availing itself of the condition of the times—in a community when everyone's private affairs and personal name were known to every inhabitant—to coin amusing or even offensive titles for opponents."

Bush was skilled in this style, and has been characterized as "a witty, pungent, and rather brilliant writer, having a peculiar cutting, abrupt and sometimes harsh style, but one which was very effective in molding public opinion. . . He is said to have largely controlled the politics of Oregon Territory."

H. H. Bancroft wrote of The Statesman and Bush in his "History of Oregon":

"As a party paper it was conducted with greater ability than any journal on the Pacific coast for a period of about a dozen years, Bush was assisted at various times by men of talent. . . During the first eight years of its existence it was the ruling power in Oregon, wielding an influence that made and unmade officials at its pleasure."

### General Lane Gained Paper's Strong Support

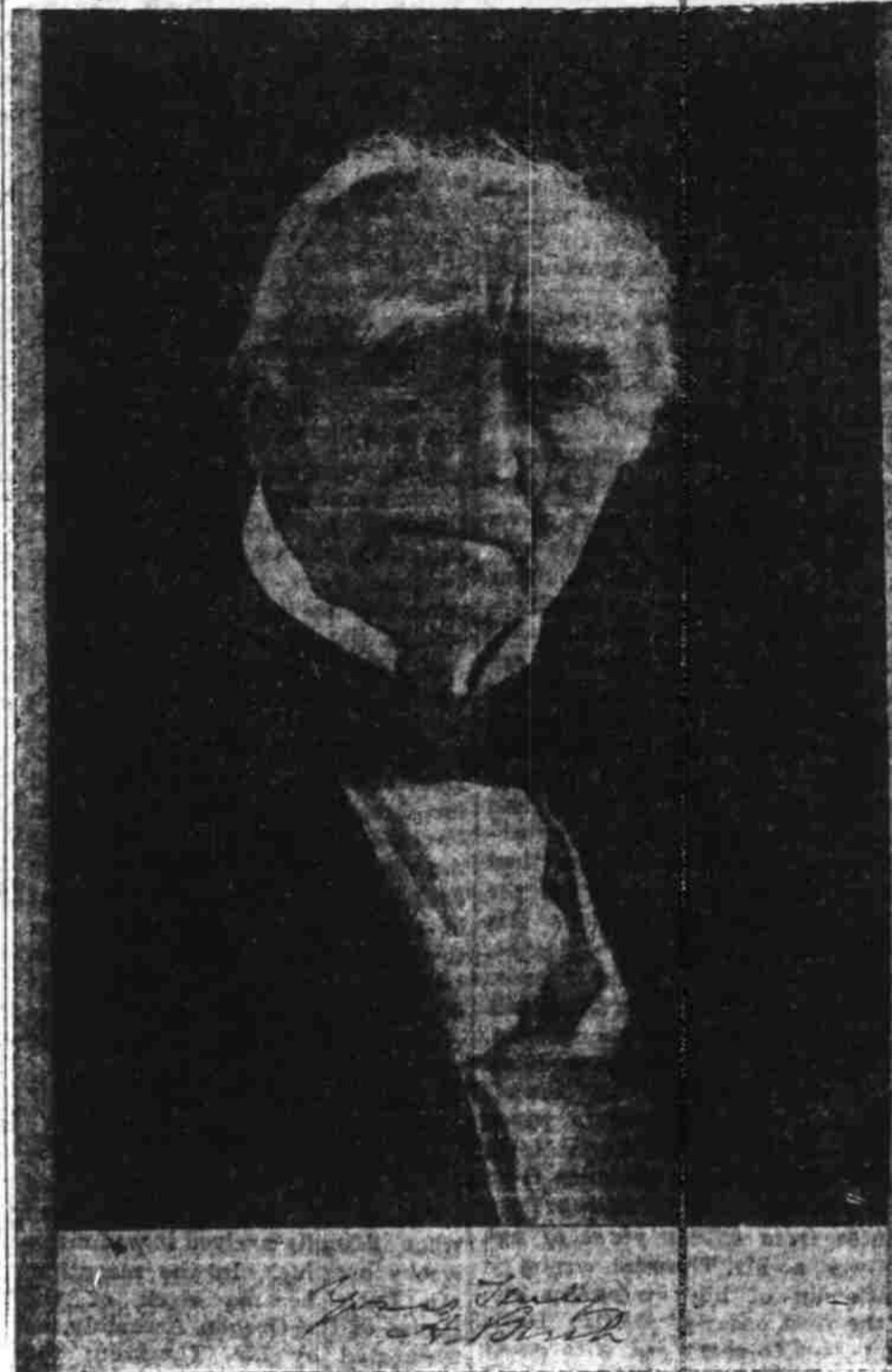
About the first controversy was between the territorial officials who were federal appointees and whigs, and the democrats. The location of the state capital became an issue, the democrats favoring Salem, and Gov. Gaines and the "federalists" holding to Oregon City. The Statesman early raised the banner of Gen. Joseph Lane, who after winning distinction in the Mexican war had been appointed governor of Oregon by President Polk. The Statesman supported him consistently for delegate to congress and fought Lane's battles with sweeping editorial broadsides.

Bush fought the "know-nothings," the anti-foreign, anti-Catholic party of pre-Civil War days. He fought the "Maine-law" or prohibition party. He fought sectarianism and bigotry; but staunch partisan that he was he tolerated no defection from the democratic faith, such as the "National Democratic party" of the late '50's. One of his bitter fights was with J. C. Avery of Corvallis, which grew out of the strife over the seat of government and the burning of the capitol.

During the first decade, when the democrats were most powerful and regularly carried the elections over the whigs and the "know-nothings" the ruling hierarchy, headed by Bush, was called the Salem clique. C. H. Carey in his "History of the Constitution of Oregon" has this to say about the clique:

**Salem Clique was Powerful in Politics**

"Gradually under the guidance of Mr. Bush, a group of democrats gained great influence in that par-



## Bush Started as Printer At 15 as Father Died

Asahel Bush, founder of The Oregon Statesman, was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, on June 4, 1824. He went to school at the Westfield Academy, but when he was 15 years old the death of his father compelled him to give up school and go to work to support himself. He learned the printing trade in Westfield. In 1843, on his way to Cleveland, he left Albany on a line boat (a signal boat) and was one week reaching Buffalo. He continued the journey by boat to Cleveland, where he lived about a year working at his trade. From there he went to Saratoga and remained in Saratoga for two and a half years. Here he cast his first vote for President, voting for Cass, at the same time he voted for Silas Wright for Governor of New York.

In 1846 he moved to Albany, N. Y., and was employed in the state printer's office. Later in 1846 he returned to Westfield, and until 1850 resided there. While there he

studied law and was admitted to the bar in the state of Massachusetts. From April 24, 1849, to July 3, 1850, he was editor of the Westfield Standard. Shortly after July 4, 1850, he left Westfield for Oregon, going by the way of Panama. He arrived in Oregon September 30, 1850.

He established the Statesman in 1851 and was its editor until he sold it in 1863. He then retired from active business until 1868, when, with Mr. W. S. Ladd, he established the banking house of Ladd & Bush. He continued to come to the bank almost daily until a few days before his death, which occurred December 23, 1913.

(From biography in Ladd & Bush quarterly, Apr. 1914.)

### First Editor Weekly At Westfield, Mass.

In Salem on October 12, 1854, he married Eugenia Zieber, who died September 11, 1863.

He established the Statesman in 1851 and was its editor until he sold it in 1863. He then retired from active business until 1868, when, with Mr. W. S. Ladd, he established the banking house of Ladd & Bush. He continued to come to the bank almost daily until a few days before his death, which occurred December 23, 1913.

(From biography in Ladd & Bush quarterly, Apr. 1914.)

Umpqua county; George L. Curry of Clackamas county; William Tichenor of Coos county, and Delazon Smith of Lane county."

Such strength inevitably bred opposition, and the increasingly desperate plight of the democratic party in meeting the slavery issue hastened the divisions. In the split Bush turned against Gen. Lane and against Senator Delazon Smith who was upholding Lane. Bush's opposition to Lane was based on the latter's failure to push through the Oregon statehood bill in congress in 1858; but was doubtless

increased by the apparent effort of Lane to run Oregon's political affairs with a high hand, making the new state his political appanage in his ambitions for presidential honors.

### Bush Denounced Free State Movement

In most of the issues prior to 1860 slavery was given scant notice. Local issues took most attention. Washington was far away; slavery here had been barred by popular vote in adopting the new constitution, and all negroes were barred from the state as well. The rising free state movement was denounced by Bush as abolitionism and black republicanism.

Here was an editorial in The Statesman of Sept. 2, 1856, during the Buchanan campaign:

"The Presidential contest is now at its heat throughout the States. The hydra of black republicanism is already unmasked, and the flag of treason, with sixteen stars, representing the sixteen free states, is unfurled and flung to the wind in the infected districts of the north.

"Fanatics of all shades, from Fred Douglass to Lloyd Garrison, are upon the stump, with venomous fangs gnashing at the Goddess of Liberty, and spurring on the masses, blinded by their sophistries, to turn the mad batteries of sectionalism on the sacred temples of the Constitution.

"The issue is already made up—can the Constitution and the Union be maintained?"

"If democracy triumphs—as triumph it will—it will be the triumph of the Constitution; if defeated, our national flag may be trailed in the dust by those whose protection it has been, and our noble Union be fractured into discordant states."

### Bush Stood Squarely Behind Douglas

When the slavery question finally did demand a definite stand, Bush placed The Statesman squarely behind Stephen A. Douglas and followed him through the presidential campaign of 1860. With Douglas The Statesman stood for the Union when secession threatened. Bush and his group combined with the republicans in the 1860 legislature to defeat the Joe Lane-Delazon Smith combination and elected J. W. Nesmith and E. D. Baker United States senators.

The Civil War broke out, and The Statesman vigorously supported the cause of the union. The fusion of democrats and republicans produced the Union party in Oregon which finally emerged as the republican party. Bush sold out in 1863, but when S. A. Clarke gave rebirth to The Statesman he made it a republican organ; and its subsequent affiliation has been with that party.

Clarke was fearless as a writer on political questions. Unfortunately the files of that period are not available, so a study of his editorials cannot be made.

### JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

"Our column rules always separate the reading matter from the advertisements, and as to editorial puffs of business men, we would prefer to make the proclamation, viva voce, along the street with handbell accompaniment."—Statesman, March 10, 1862.

### FIRST POWER PRESS

"Some time in April a new printing establishment will be received from New York, and the Statesman will be issued from an Adams New-Patent Power Press and printed upon new material throughout."—Statesman, 1859.