

Salem Frontiersmen Gave Noisy Welcome to Territorial Governor

By Ben Maxwell

When Chester N. Terry, clerk for the previous year, called the Oregon territorial council to order at 10 o'clock Monday morning, December 5, 1853, he counted nine members representing 11 different counties. The house, soon to elect C. Z. Bishop as speaker, consisted of 26 members.

Territorial Oregon's fifth legislative session of 94 years ago did not convene in any capitol structure for the simple reason that none was then in existence. Rooms in the Rector building on the west side of Commercial street between Ferry and Trade were occupied by the council or senate. Later this barnlike structure of 1851 deteriorated into a Chinese wash house and burned with great brilliance, June 3, 1885. The Nesmith-Wilson building, then located where the S. P. depot now stands, accommodated the house.

On December 6, the governor was informed that the legislative session was now organized and Gov. John W. Davis read his communication to the house. Asahel Bush, Statesman editor whose printery was in the same building, applauded the message as a harbinger of a new era ending the conflict of authorities.

Hoosier Was Governor

Governor Davis of Indiana, an appointee of President Pierce, was received in Salem December 2, with all the boisterous fanfare a community of 500 frontiersmen could develop. Nor should it be forgotten that Governor Davis fetched along \$40,000 in federal funds for construction of buildings essential for territorial government. And \$40,000 in this lean and hungry community of 94 years ago promised to go a long way in making the right sort of persons happy. Governor Davis, incidentally, became disgusted and left Oregon in August, 1854, even before the \$40,000 had been entirely squandered.

When the sidewheeler Willamette with the governor's party aboard bucked and conquered Chitwood rapids below Salem, there was still plenty of steam left for three great blasts from her mighty whistle. Oregon artillerymen, such as could be rounded up for the occasion, dashed to the river's bank and shot off their muzzle loaders. Others, without guns but in festive mood, went to the banks of the Willamette and whooped it up.

Scarcely were the Willamette's paddles stilled before the Hon. George H. Williams, speaker for the reception committee, scrambled aboard and headed for the gentlemen's cabin where Governor Davis awaited the receptionists, who escorted the governor ashore.

Where Governor Davis lodged history does not record, but it

may be presumed that he passed by the rough and tumble Holman house near the waterfront and headed for the fashionable Bennett house, then newly completed on a site now occupied by the Masonic building. Legislators numbering 37 probably had no trouble finding lodging. Salem had at least five hostels, though some were certainly more immaculate and desirable than others. Ben McCormick's restaurant offered board for \$7 a week; a single meal cost 75 cents and an extra meal one dollar.

Speaker Names Committees
C. Z. Bishop, speaker of the house, announced the following standing committees: judiciary, elections, education, claims, militia affairs, Indian affairs, roads and highways, engrossed bills, commerce, printing, corporations and counties. Senate committees were about the same. What this session of 94 years ago accomplished is not now so vital. Much of their time was devoted to discussion of military affairs and new roads for the territory. They did create four new counties: Columbia, Wasco, Coos and Tillamook. Also, they renewed discussion of that old question about a permanent site for the capitol.

And that discussion suggested a joint communication signed by four pioneers from Benton county: John E. Porter, Adam Holden, Richard Irwin and Isaac W. Winkle wrote Governor Davis a letter from Jennyopolis agreeing to give 200 acres of land, embracing rock of the best quality and a butte 100 feet high containing 10 acres upon which to set the statehouse if the legislature would locate the capitol upon the said 200 acres. This location, 10 miles south of Corvallis, is known all over Oregon as The Butte, now called Jennyopolis.

Jennyopolis, established with Richard Irwin as postmaster,

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March 24, 1852, has long since disappeared, but the butte, doubtless, remains as a monument to a pioneer promotion.

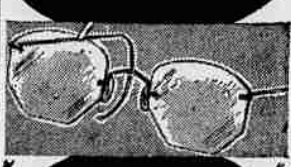
Salem in January, 1853, contained 10 general stores, all doing a very good business, according to the Reverend Ezra Fisher. Besides, there were mills, mechanics, lawyers and doctors. Five Methodist ministers were on hand to look after the spiritual welfare of legislators.

It was about this time that Job Powell, eccentric but popular Baptist circuit rider, was asked by mischievous legislators to open the day with prayer. They settled back with amusement, anticipating a long invocation against their sins. Old Job looked them over and prayed: "Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

If a legislator wanted a drink in 1853 he might buy it at the Nonpareil saloon. If he drank too much and acquired a hangover, May & Robb would sell him sarsaparilla, or, if his needs were more urgent, Rickey and Willson, near the steamboat landing, stocked Chologogue, really good for everything, and Ayer's Cherry Pectoral. Then, if he didn't feel better, H. B. F. Brogden, with a shaving salon adjacent to the Nonpareil, could make him look better with a haircut or a shampoo.

Supposing he developed a toothache, Dr. U. H. Dunning, with an office at Cooke's hotel, would pull the offending molar. And while there, why not let Denny Hendee, the Daguerrean artist, make your likeness at a price ranging from \$5 to \$25? Now, after a bit of drinking, getting worked over by Brogden the barber, your tooth pulled and your likeness made by Hendee — now suppose you are broke. No matter. If you hold

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warrants for goods or services supplied during the Cayuse Indian war, Chester N. Terry, after some discounting, will buy those warrants for cash with payment in gold.

Cold for Legislature

Legislators in attendance for the 1853 session got a cold reception. Snow fell to a depth of five inches and the temperature dropped to two degrees below zero during the night of January 19.

Adjournment sine die came to the fifth session of the territorial legislature at 1 o'clock in the morning, February 1, 1854. After all, says Asahel Bush in his Statesman, they did pretty well. They attended to a lot of business and passed the code. Emphatically it was a working session.

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