

ASAHEL BUSH, PARTY MASTER AND POLITICAL BOSS

IN OREGON 1850-1863

by

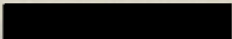
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## PREFACE

In this the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of the Oregon Statesman, it is altogether fitting that we open to view the life and activities of the man who served as the first editor of its columns for some thirteen years. Asahel Bush, of Massachusetts, came to Oregon in 1850 to write for the Democratic party. It was his intent to publish a newspaper that would support Democratic candidates, and further, it was his intent that these candidates be the choice of an organized and strong party.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the work of Asahel Bush in this respect and to weigh his importance as an influence in the growth of Oregon from 1850 to 1863. To accomplish this purpose, the writer has been led to the scattered and, sometimes, sparsely filled files of the Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon; the Archives of the Oregon State Library, Salem, Oregon; the Willamette University Library, Salem, Oregon; the personal collection of Dr. Dan B. Clark, History Department, University of Oregon; and the Special Collection of the University of Oregon Library, Eugene, Oregon. Many of the collections of letters are quite complete, particularly for the period 1850-1858, but a scarcity of letters from 1858 on is to be found in all of the above mentioned collections. This is due in part, no doubt, to Mr. Bush's aversion to anything

resembling a filing system, for either his personal or business papers. It is reported that he preferred to use his coat pocket as his office and his head for his filing cabinet, trusting to memory for his transactions.

To any scholar interested in the investigation of matters pertinent to Oregon history, this writer can enthusiastically recommend the staffs of the above named depositories of documents for the sincerity and purposeful helpfulness they exhibit to anyone in search of materials.

The writer has attempted to trace, in this paper, the coming of Asahel Bush to Oregon and the part he played in its growth as a territory and in its creation and further maturation as a state. Intermingled in the story are the activities of many of his friends and enemies. No attempt has been made to separate into a single tale the activities of Mr. Bush for his story is the story of the Oregon Democracy; any attempt to segregate a single portion would render such an attempt sterile.

## CHAPTER I

### A PRINTER COMES WEST TO WRITE FOR THE DEMOCRACY

That Asahel Bush ever became associated with Oregon and with the Oregon Statesman, that newspaper through which he was able to wield so much power in territorial Oregon, was one of those happenings that occur quite by chance. Asahel Bush was born June 4, 1834, of Asahel and Sally (Nobe) Bush at Westfield, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> The boy, Asahel, was forced to fend for himself at the age of fifteen when his father passed away. The youth hired himself out to learn the printing trade almost immediately on his separation from his family, and after having successfully learned the trade of printer set about to read law. After being admitted to the Massachusetts State Bar, he reentered the printing profession and was so engaged when the opportunity presented itself for him to go to the Oregon Country.<sup>2</sup> It was while he was engaged in the task of editing the Westfield, Massachusetts, Standard that his path crossed that of Samuel R. Thurston, and this meeting caused his departure for the Oregon Territory.

Samuel R. Thurston was the first Delegate to Congress elected by the newly established Territory of Oregon and after having served one term he attempted to obtain re-election by establishing a newspaper that would

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<sup>1</sup>Charles H. Carey, History of Oregon, Chicago and Portland: 1922, Vol. II, P. 40. See also Jenette E. Roberts, Asahel Bush, Pioneer Editor, Politician and Banker, Unpublished thesis, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Ladd and Bush Bankers, Magazine, issued on the 70th Anniversary of the Bank, 29 March 1939, at Salem, Oregon.



actively campaign for him in the Territory. In the first election, Thurston had been elected as the Delegate to Congress on a non-partisan basis. "He was a peculiar combination in those days --- a Methodist Democrat, for most of the Methodists were Whigs"<sup>1</sup>, and since the missionary vote had played a part in his election he felt no desire to alienate these supporters. However, he felt the need for the type of support a newspaper could give to him, and further intended that it be a Democratic organ which would foster the Democratic principles to which he adhered. He made many attempts to obtain a publisher-editor over a considerable period, as evidenced by entries in his diary, but to no avail.<sup>2</sup>

It was while on a visit to the home of his wife, in Westfield, during a Congressional recess that Thurston met the young (twenty-six year old) Asahel Bush and broached the subject of operating a Democratic newspaper in the Oregon Territory.<sup>3</sup> The two men reached an agreement and Thurston wrote letters of introduction to established and friendly business men in Oregon, asserting that "Mr. Bush is a gentleman of high order of talents, of integrity, worthy of your confidence ... I doubt not you will lend him your influence and further his design."<sup>4</sup> With this "He

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<sup>1</sup>George S. Turnbull, History of Oregon Newspapers (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1939) p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Oregon Historical Quarterly, "Diary of Samuel Royal Thurston", Vol. XV (September, 1914) pp. 153-205.

<sup>3</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Letter, Thurston to J. McBride, G. M. Walker, M. F. Deady and others, 27 July 1850. U. of O. Collection, hereafter noted as U. of O.

came to Salem in 1850 ... to start the Democratic newspaper that Thurston had become convinced his Territory needed."<sup>1</sup>

The land that received Asahel Bush in the Pacific Northwest was quite different from the settled and civilized Westfield, Massachusetts, he had left. Young though he was, Bush had been trained in the school of politics and newspaper editorialism and soon proved that he could hold his own with any editor in the Territory of Oregon. He had, in addition to editing the Westfield Standard, served as town clerk in Westfield<sup>2</sup> and kept alive an active interest in the political affairs of Massachusetts long after his removal from that place.<sup>3</sup>

On his arrival in Oregon City, Bush prepared to set up the venture, but troubles immediately beset the embryo newspaper, for there was a delay in the shipment of the press from the east. Bush, extremely anxious to commence operations, for some of his own money was tied up in the venture, wrote to Thurston to complain that "The enemies of the Statesman are constantly reporting that the paper is to be abandoned, and the lapse of time since it was promised gives the report credit."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ladd and Bush Bankers, op. cit., it should be noted that the Bank magazine places his point of operation at Salem, whereas the paper was established at Oregon City, the then seat of government for the Territory.

<sup>2</sup>Carey, op. cit., he edited the Standard from 24 January 1849 to 3 July 1850.

<sup>3</sup>In the Bush Collection in the Archives of the Oregon State Library in Salem, Oregon are numerous letters to and from old friends regarding political activities on the local and national scene. Reference to this collection will hereafter be noted by "Archives".

<sup>4</sup>Letter, Bush to Thurston, 20 December 1850, quoted in Furbull, op. cit., p. 78.

Then, as the first published number of the newly established Whig journal, the Oregonian, came from the press, Bush wrote: "I am all impatience to get that press. You don't know how we are losing ground. ... I'll have things ready to go to work (when the press arrives) and get out a number immediately ... there are some here who will spare no endeavor to get a Democratic paper to supersede it (the Statesman)."<sup>1</sup>

The time lapse between the arrival of Bush in the Oregon Territory and March 26, 1851, when the first number of the Statesman was taken from the press was not wasted, for Bush occupied himself in forming those acquaintances that were to make it possible for him to become the chief protagonist in the political activities of Oregon for a period of more than ten years. Not an active member of any religious group, Bush was well received by many churchmen and as one letter of introduction, which served the additional purpose of being a character reference, stated, Asahel Bush "is an attorney at Law. He purposes going to Oregon in pursuit of business. He goes out as a political man of the Democratic School. ... Mr. Bush is a well educated man and a man of talent and promise. ... Though not a professor of Religion himself, his family friends are Methodists" and I ask the courtesy "due to a Stranger in a Strange Land."<sup>2</sup> It is apparent that Bush never applied himself to any great show of faith. The topic of church attendance was one of good-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., quoted in Turnbull, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Letter by the Reverend A. F. Cox, Minister of the Methodist Emmanuel Church of Westfield, Mass. 30 July 1850. Bush Family Papers, Archives.



natured joshing between himself and his fiancée, Miss Eugenia Zieber, and it seems that the reticence of Bush caused Miss Zieber to assume the habit of non-attendance in matters of a religious nature.<sup>1</sup> This aversion to religion permitted Bush to devote himself on Sundays to the politically profitable functions of letter writing and conversations with those men who were destined to rise with and, in most cases, to far outshine him in politics; notably, J. W. Nesmith, M. P. Deady, B. F. Harding, O. C. Pratt, and a host of others.

After many months of postponements and delays the press arrived in time to issue the first number under the dateline of 26 March 1851,<sup>2</sup> nearly four months later than the Oregonian which was to be the major antagonist of Bush, and which he had hoped to beat in the race to begin publication. The friends that Bush had made while waiting for the arrival of the press became agents for him after he began publication and solicited subscriptions, since each new reader was a potential Democratic voter. These "agents" were nearly all prominent in the activities of the Democratic party, and what later became known as the Salem Clique, as well as in State and National politics.<sup>3</sup>

As Walter C. Woodward has expressed it, the Statesman, "Through its

<sup>1</sup>Throughout the letters of Eugenia Zieber to "Mr. Bush" and of those to her family after her marriage are references to the lack of religious zeal disclosed by Bush. She often chided him for it while succumbing herself. Eugenia Bush file, Archives.

<sup>2</sup>This is the dateline of the issue of the paper that I have seen. Turnbull, op. cit., p. 80, dates this issue of the paper as 28 March 1851.

<sup>3</sup>Interspersed throughout correspondence to Bush are references by these men to new subscribers and requests for additional copies or notations that accounts were collected. See also, Turnbull, op. cit., p. 80.



editor, Asahel Bush, cold, calculating, relentless, ... was to dominate Oregon politics for a decade, making and breaking politicians at will".<sup>1</sup> George S. Turnbull substantiates this appraisal of this powerful man who was able to control the political scene from the privacy of his office and home. Excepting one term as chief clerk in the House of Representatives in the session of 1850-1851, his position as Territorial and then State Printer from 1851-1863, and a term as Warden of the State Penitentiary, Bush did not personally engage in the holding of political offices, yet "There was no discounting Bush's political influence. It was very likely, stronger than that of any other editor of his immediate period."<sup>2</sup>

In a signed declaration of principle, Bush, in his first issue, announced the aims of the paper, although it is worthy of note that the avowal was adhered to only so long as it was politically expedient to so do:

In politics, the Statesman will be Democratic, --- devoted to the interests and adhering to the usages of that party, and defending its measures against the unmerited assaults of political opposition. ...

In Territorial politics, the Statesman will labor to secure and preserve the integrity and unity of the Democratic party, irrespective of local interests or personal aims; and we shall therefore refuse, on all occasions, to lend our columns to further the purposes of factions, cliques or individuals. To make the Statesman the true and faithful organ of

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Carleton Woodward, The Rise and Early History of Political Parties in Oregon, 1843-1863 (Portland: J. K. Gill Co., 1913) p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 84.

the whole Democracy of Oregon, will be the height of our ambition. ...<sup>1</sup>

Bush also pronounced, in this introductory statement, the aim of organizing, indeed, the need for organizing, a Democratic party in the Territory:

Whenever the Democracy shall organize, the Statesman will be the uncompromising advocate of regular nominations, fairly made; by which system only can a party give efficiency to its action and success to its principles. The experience of the past few years in the States, demonstrates that the benign principles and measures of Democracy can never triumph while the established usages of the party are wantonly disregarded; we shall therefore stand by and defend those usages in every emergency, let them be menaced or assailed by whom, or from what quarter they may.<sup>2</sup>

With this as fair warning to the Oregonian, as the standard-bearer for the Whigs, and the Spectator, which Bush little considered in view of its avowed basis of publication with no political bias, the Statesman launched into that form of diatribe which became known as the "Oregon Style" and which consisted of slanderous and vitriolic attacks on political and personal opponents.

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<sup>1</sup>Oregon Statesman 26 March 1851. Hereafter cited by its popular name, Statesman.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DEMOCRACY AND THE EARLY INFLUENCE OF THE SALEM CLIQUE

Bush was early in favor of organizing an official and publicly recognized Democratic party, but he was at first cautious of open avowal of such a plan in his paper for, in the spring of 1851, Joseph Lane announced himself a candidate for the delegateship in opposition to Samuel E. Thurston, who Lane knew to be a Democrat. Bush, transfixed on the horns of a dilemma, wrote: "You are aware of and can appreciate the embarrassment by which I am surrounded, or under which anyone publishing a democratic paper would labor during the Delegate election, ... I shall pursue an independent course and I shall endeavor to pursue a judicious one. I think I can do it. I intend to go for the party and its principles rather than its individual members."<sup>1</sup> The problem was not solved for Bush until Thurston's death, whereupon the Statesman came out with an editorial calling "For Delegate to Congress, GENERAL JOSEPH LANE" because of his "devotion to the principles, usages, and interests of the great Democratic party!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bush to Deady, 11 April 1851. In the microfilm letters of the Oregon Historical Society, hereafter cited as the "OHS".

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 9 May 1851. The week before, the Statesman had announced the death of Thurston while crossing the Isthmus of Panama, enroute to Oregon from Washington, D. C.



Publicly, Bush disavowed any connection with interested persons or cliques and castigated the Spectator and Oregonian and Star as fourth-rate Whig and Abolition papers<sup>1</sup> because they accused him of such activities. Privately, Bush wrote to Deady, Nesmith, and others requesting articles that he might publish which would stir opinion in favor of party organization, and suggested that positive steps be taken to prevent the loss to the Democrats of Thurston's following who might attempt to form a party of their own now that Thurston was gone. Much criticism of Lane was evident in this campaign as a result of his having attempted to undercut Thurston, and the situation was much too delicate to urge the voters actively to support only Democrats in the coming election. Bush explained his feelings regarding the situation to Deady, saying: "as we have no organization here would not such action [the waving of a party flag and demanding party discipline] drive your whig supporters away without conciliating the democrats who oppose you?" Then too, since many of the candidates who were Democrats had not shown their colors yet, such a move could cost the Democracy many seats in the Legislature.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the situation, Bush was forced to content himself with the expediency of letter-writing to various individuals and groups

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 25 April 1851, The Oregonian and Spectator were accused of being whig journals which was, generally speaking, true, and the Star of being a free-soil paper. The Star was published in Milwaukie, Oregon as the Western Star, and was active in the election campaign of 1851 as an exponent of Jeffersonian Democracy, it soon drew upon itself the wrath of Bush.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 17 May 1851, OHS. Bush was quite anxious that Lane's entry into the race for delegate not split the Democrats and urged Deady and others to get Lane to soothe the Thurston men so as not to lose them.

who were to be visited by the Democratic candidates out stumping the Territory. These letters were highly successful and Deady, for example, thanked Bush for his valuable assistance and promised never to forget the gesture, whether or not he was elected.<sup>1</sup>

Probably there would have been no such rapid growth of a Democratic party in the Oregon Territory had not the vast majority of the settlers brought with them the political beliefs to which they had adhered while in their earlier homes "in the states". The temper of Territorial settlers is noted for its individualism and certainly the Oregonians were no exceptions. They were, save the group known as the "Mission Group", in the main, supporters of Democratic principles. The main danger to Bush's plan for an organized party was that these men might split on local or personal issues. Thurston was clearly devoted to the idea of organizing a Democratic party in Oregon at the earliest possible moment,<sup>2</sup> thus his importation of Bush to edit the Statesman as a Democratic paper.

In the spring campaign of 1851, Lane, having replaced the recently deceased Thurston as nominee for the delegateship, wooed both Whigs and Democrats to the utter disgust of many of his Democratic brethren. Reuben P. Boise wrote Bush that "There is considerable feeling here [Portland] against Lane",<sup>3</sup> and Matthew P. Deady, campaigning for the circuit judgeship was embarrassed by Lane and wrote: "I wish Lane could

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<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, 23 May 1851, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>"Diary of Samuel Royal Thurston", op. cit., indicates his attempts to have Democrats appointed to positions in the Territorial government. See also his letters in the Archives at Salem.

<sup>3</sup>Boise to Bush, 1 May 1851, U. of O.

shake off these whig politicians from his skirts. If not, the day will come when he will regret it, and the democratic party also. He will be compelled to show his hand in Congress and then with some plausibility, they will cry treachery.<sup>1</sup> That this shrewd observation lacked only months to be consummated is borne out by Lane's letter to Bush in December of the same year from his office in Washington City: "The signs of the times justifies the open [assert] ion that Whig rule will soon terminate [and that] Oregon as [well] as every portion of the union will be benefited by the change."<sup>2</sup>

Following the successful election of Lane to the delegateship in June of 1851, Bush opened his campaign for the "Organization of the Democracy" by announcing:

... a convention of the Democrats of Marion County is to be holden at Salem on 4th of July, for the purpose of effecting a thorough and permanent organization of the party in that county. We also learn that there is a strong feeling in favor of an early organization among the Democrats of Yamhill, Polk and other counties, and, indeed throughout the territory. We are pleased to witness this movement, and hope that before another election shall take place, it will have extended to every county in the Territory, ensuring an indisputable victory, and ranking young Oregon with the Party of the People, of Progress and Popular Rights.<sup>3</sup>

In the same issue of the Statesman appeared an advertisement which

<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, 4 May 1851, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Lane to Bush, 5 December 1851, U. of O. This letter is in very poor condition with many tears and stains marring its contents; the above is as faithful a reproduction as could be made.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 13 June 1851.



called for this convention; curiously enough, the ad bears the date of 9 May 1850.

The Whigs, as personified in the Oregonian, opposed any such move to create parties in Oregon, for the federally appointed Territorial officers were Whigs and trouble enough was already afoot in the form of a violent clash between the Legislative Assembly, which was predominately Democratic as the result of the labors of Bush and his compatriots, and the Territorial officers, led by Governor Gaines over the location of the seat of government as established by an act of the preceding Legislature. This matter will be discussed later. Bush, taking full advantage of the "Oregon Style", called attention to this:

The Oregonian has turned another somerserset and is out against drawing party lines. If the weathercock course of that paper upon the question of party politics was not generally known, it might be interesting to make a few quotations from it to show how many times the editor has been upon all sides within the short space of six months. But his vacillation is as notorious as his general imbecility, and it is as much a work of superfluousness to point out one as the other.

It is idle to talk of "no-partyism". ... And it is equally idle to pretend that in Oregon men have no partizan feelings or party preferences.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly Bush could never be accused of "no-partyism" for he was earnestly soliciting articles for the paper that would urge the drawing up of party lines. It might be said that Bush planted the seed from which sprang the Democracy that was to rule Oregon, as a Territory and State, for over ten years. The seed was planted and was nurtured by the antagonism created in the hearts of the Oregonians by the Federal

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 27 June 1851.

appointees, especially when these appointees were "foreigners" placed there by a Whig administration. The Oregonians, like most westerners, had little use for outsiders who tried to tell them how to run their local affairs. The character of John F. Gaines, Territorial Governor from August 1850 to May 1853, for example, was such that he immediately rubbed the territorial populace the wrong way and the antagonism thereby created marks "the beginning of political parties in Oregon in the national sense"<sup>1</sup> of the term.

Even though political parties existed in Oregon from the advent of Gaines' appointment as Governor, no clear-cut division of principles was apparent to mark the difference between Whigs and Democrats. Nevertheless, the control and organization that is associated, as an integral part, with party politics, was well established before any public avowal of principles was made. Such an organization was possible, largely because Bush "maintained a constant correspondence with the captains over tens and fifties and more, all over the territory, and by this means, in conjunction with the columns of the Statesman, maintained an almost autocratic control over public affairs."<sup>2</sup>

Cautious inquiries were put forth by Bush to his newspaper agents and political kin in order to test popular opinion on the advisability of organizing the Democracy throughout the Territory. Already steps had been taken in many of the counties of the middle and southern

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Carey, op. cit., p. 54.



Willamette Valley, although caution was counselled from the northern towns and counties.<sup>1</sup> Then, following the successful elections of 1851, the Statesman began to carry in prominent positions the stories concerning the holding of conventions in many of the counties. The Democratic Convention at Salem, for example, announced that "we cordially recommend the Democracy of each and every County in the Territory to meet and organize upon a sure and firm foundation."<sup>2</sup> Augmenting this "reporting", Bush employed his editorial columns to urge that political parties were just as important in the Territories as in the States and lashed out at the Whigs for advocating "No Partyism", asserting that "Thomas H. Benton once said, 'Show me a man who belongs to no party, and I will show you one who either figures at the head or dangles at the tail of Federalism.'<sup>3</sup>

The Federal officers and their Whig supporters were condemned for having done all in their power to "disseminate and strengthen whiggery, and to weaken and destroy democracy" by advocating that no political

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<sup>1</sup>Boise to Bush, 27 March and 9 April 1851, U. of O. An interesting sidelight is noted in these letters with reference to Dr. McLoughlin, who had been elected mayor of Oregon City at about the same time. It is suggested to Bush, who lived there at that time, that "You should notify the Queen immediately of the success of her faithful servant, and we shall soon expect to hear the Oregon City boys shouting God Save the Queen. I wonder if Governor Gaines would think a charter from her Majesty would forever put the Capital at Oregon City and make the price of his lots secure."

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 8 July 1851.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 28 October 1851. Throughout the issues of July, August, September, and October of 1851 are found exhortations for Democratic organization and outcries against the "no partyism" of Dryer and the Federal officers of the Territory.

affiliations be incurred. Such pleas were made, said Bush, not because parties were evil but because these men find themselves in a minority in Oregon and suddenly have discovered that party organization may be deleterious and "wholly improper, except, perhaps, in elections for national officers."<sup>1</sup>

As these persistently blatant editorials and brief inserts in the columns of the Statesman continued to pour forth upon its readers real progress was being made in convincing men that party organization was necessary if Oregon was ever to be free from the odious supervision of federally appointed officials who smacked of Whiggery and what was worse, were foreign imports who had little permanent interests in the affairs of this rough and rugged Territory. It was with great satisfaction that Bush announced early in 1852 that "... prior to the late adjournment of the Legislative Assembly, the democratic members of that body took initiatory steps of a general organization of the party. Every member at the capital was present at the caucus, and all were agreed as one man to the propriety of, and necessity for, a thorough organization of the democracy throughout the Territory. And we trust the movement will be carried out with the enthusiasm and efficiency with which it was commenced ... . It is of the utmost moment to the people and the country no less than the democracy, that this work of organization is early and thoroughly accomplished."<sup>2</sup> His readers are urged to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 27 January 1852.

remain alert and active lest idleness and self-assurance because of their numbers bring about defeat. It would not be irrelevant to comment on the fact that Bush personally covered the meeting of the Legislative Assembly for his paper. It must be obvious that he exerted considerable influence on members of the legislature, not only because of his support of the Democratic members, but also because of his never-failing support of their meeting at Salem which they as a group held to be the legally constituted seat of government, although the Federal officers and the Whigs considered Oregon City to be the possessor of this honor.<sup>1</sup>

To further the movement for party organization the caucus just mentioned appointed a Central Committee of five men, two of whom were "Clique" men --- cohorts of Bush --- and one of whom was Committee Chairman, to work in conjunction with and to supervise the functions of three men from each county who were to begin the development of county organizations. This committee was to coordinate all county activities until a regular party organization could be established.<sup>2</sup>

Now that the plan for the organization of the Democracy had been made public and active agitation was under way, the popular General Joseph Lane expressed himself on the issue and openly declared for the Democrats in a letter to Bush.<sup>3</sup> Just prior to this, Bush had published a

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<sup>1</sup>The Location of the Capital Question will be handled in Chapter Three. The Statesman for 4 November 1851 recorded 19 Democrats and 3 Whigs in the House and 8 Democrats and 1 Whig in the Senate.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 27 January 1852. The two Clique men were James W. Nesmith as the Chairman and B. F. Harding. In the published list of party organizers, Bush is conspicuous by his absence.

<sup>3</sup>Lane to Bush, 21 March 1852, U. of O.



letter from Lane which had been written for publication, in answer to the assertion of the Whigs that Lane was opposed to the organization of parties, in which the General had said, "I am glad to witness your efforts to get a Democratic organization. Lose no time in urging the Democrats to organize and unite. All local and sectional issues should be dropped. With the organization and union of the Democracy all will be well in Oregon."<sup>1</sup>

Now, as if to further stimulate party organization, Asahel Bush gradually began to draw attention to the location of the Capital Question in the Statesman and succeeded in bringing down upon himself the wrath of the Whigs as personified in Dryer's Oregonian. Then too, the controversy over the seat of government and its attendant flavor of illegality caused some Democrats to transfer their loyalties to the Whigs. Notable among these men who were also dissatisfied with the high-handed control being exercised by the group known alternately as the "Salem Clique", the Durhamites, or the "hards", in opposition to "soft" Democrats, was James McBride, who had been a staunch Democrat as far back as his early days in Tennessee and Missouri.<sup>2</sup> The Oregonian chortled over the apparent schism: "If there is anything in this world more ridiculous than another it is the impudent assumption of Bush and his master [Judge O. G. Pratt]"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 24 February 1852.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>The Oregonian was convinced at this time that Pratt ran the Democratic party and called the turn for Bush.

to read out of the party such men as Lancaster, Wait, Buck, McBride, (etc, etc.)."<sup>1</sup> Bush vehemently answered this charge by denying that he had ever read anyone out of the party, however he served notice to all men that "when we find men acting with federalists, if we have occasion to speak of them, we shall not hesitate to rank them with federalists."<sup>2</sup>

The split, however, was not nearly so disastrous as Dyer had hoped even though it did cost the Democrats some votes as Nesmith told Lane following the elections in June: "I learned that the Whig and Federal officer's factions have carried Clackamas and Washington counties and elected two members in Yamhill. This was quite contrary to my expectations."<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, it might be said that the Democrats were quite successful, despite this break, in urging all to vote the straight Democratic ticket.

Still, the beginning of party organization did not see the end of party troubles, and it was to be an uphill fight all the way for Asabel Bush and those Democrats who worked closely with him to gain and retain the supremacy of political functions in Oregon.

It was largely the capital location question which forced the creation of a nucleus by a small group of determined men in order to administer the newly-born Democratic party. Secure and complete adhesion to the will of the group was never to be a fact, for various men, some of them members of the control group itself, rebelled and either joined the

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<sup>1</sup>Oregonian, 31 January 1852.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 3 February 1852.

<sup>3</sup>Nesmith to Lane, 12 June 1852, O.E.S.

enemy or created quasi-Democratic splinter parties in opposition to the rule by the group popularly known as the Salem Clique.

The name, Salem Clique, was given to this group, paradoxically, by one of its own members after he had become discontented and had struck off on his own to campaign against the "hards". This man was Judge O. C. Pratt who was angered and hurt by the appointment of George L. Curry to the governor's chair in 1853 when Lane resigned his appointment as the successor to the Whig Gaines, in order to re-assume the delegateship to Congress. The incident came about in the campaign of 1853 when Pratt fought against a Clique candidate, Judge Williams. Nesmith reported the story: "Pratt is very bitter against him [Williams], Currey [sic], Harding, Grover, Bush, McGracken [sic], and myself and others for opposing his pretensions and he calls us The Salem Clique. ... He will find that the 'Clique' will give him some trouble yet!"<sup>1</sup>

This Clique was earlier known as the "Durhamites" when Pratt's position in the group was ascendant, because of a business deal by Pratt in which he had purchased some cattle from a man named Durham and had, in selling them, termed them blooded "Durham" Stock. Regardless of the name, however, whether Durhamites, hards or the Salem Clique, the reference was always to Bush, Pratt, Deady, Nesmith, Harding, Grover, et. al., and this group through the widely read Statesman and through strategic legislative offices led, guided and forced legislation to its own advantage.

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<sup>1</sup>Nesmith to Lane, 19 October 1854, O.H.S.



The Statesman was opposed by an equally boistrous organ, the Oregonian, which served as spokesman for the Whigs, the Federal Clique [which denoted the federally appointed officers,] and those disaffected Democrats who became known as "softs" or "National Democrats".

As a means of gaining territorial control the Democrats campaigned vigorously for party organization and Bush declared to the entire Territory as reached by the pages of his newspaper that opposition to party lines was pure whiggery. He constantly beat the drums for party organization, always holding fast to the shibboleth of "Democracy", and he hammered weekly at the Oregonian's editor as the personification of all Whigs:

It strikes us that the height of political effrontery and hypocrisy was reached when official whiggery, of the bitterest, bluest dye, conceived the idea of opposing the organization of the Oregon democracy. ... Who took the initiatory steps in this matter -- who first roused the slumbering fires of party feeling in Oregon? Ask the party which has swarmed the Territory with whig officials, pledged and sworn to aid the schemes and to promote the interests of whiggery! Why was General Lans turned out from the office of Governor and the present incumbent turned in?<sup>1</sup>

With the Statesman's editorials to set the pace, county conventions were forthcoming in most of the Territory and a central committee was created during the Legislative Assembly of 1851-1852 which supervised county activities. This central committee worked so rapidly in organizing the democracy that in the June election of 1852 the party lost only two counties, Clackamas and Washington.<sup>2</sup> It was proposed that a general

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 25 November, 1851.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 50.

convention be held in April, 1853, "for the purpose of nominating a suitable candidate for the delegate to Congress and to recommend [sic] to the Executive of the United States suitable persons to fill the various federal offices in this territory, and to transact such other business as may be deemed expedient."<sup>1</sup>

The election results highly pleased Bush, who, with pardonable pride, pointed out:

The propriety of our recent organization, though hastily and imperfectly got up, and the necessity and expediency of keeping it up in all future contests, will scarcely hereafter be questioned by any reflecting democrat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, March 1853, O.H.S.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 15 June 1853.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE DEMOCRACY LOCATES A CAPITAL AND DEVOTES ITSELF TO THE SPOILS SYSTEM

Bush and his comrades, who were the forerunners of an organized Democratic party in Oregon, quickly became identified in the clash over the famous "Seat of Government" question which came up in the legislative session of 2 December 1850. The two principals involved were Salem and Oregon City (which was the site of the legislative meeting), for each was represented by a faction that demanded that the capital be located in their particular city. Bush's paper did not appear until March of the following year, but he was active in support of the Democratic-Salem faction from the beginning, even though his paper was established at Oregon City.

Bush denied that the democratic party was organizing on the basis of the location squabble and wrote that: "The drummers for the federal officers are constantly charging that an attempt is being made to organize the democratic party on the location question, hoping by these means to deter democratic men who do not favor the locations selected, from entering into the organization, and expecting that they will thus fall into the hands of the no-party-federal-party, which is to constitute the opposition."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 9 March 1852.

A year after the controversial bill, which placed the capital at Salem, the penitentiary at Portland and the University at Marysville,<sup>1</sup> was enacted, the issue was still being hotly debated in the columns of the Oregonian and the Statesman. Thomas J. Dyer, editor of the Oregonian, devoted a great deal of his weekly's space to it and noted that only one member of the council and three members of the assembly had met at Oregon City on the day set for the re-opening of the Legislature in 1851. "The rest had gone to Salem, claiming that to be the seat of government."<sup>2</sup>

Whig sentiments are clearly expressed by Dyer who rehearsed the political problem editorially. In the course of conducting territorial business "It became necessary that a seat of government should be located -- the erection of a penitentiary secured, and a university established, by the legislature last winter, under the provisions of the organic law of Congress. It so happened that the governor, who was by the organic law recognized as a party to discharge these trusts, was a whig, and therefore must, (judging from their acts), be treated with disrespect by the self-constituted leaders of the party having the power in the legislative assembly of the territory. The legislature, without consultation with, and without the knowledge of the governor, proceeded to pass a law, fixing the seat of government at Salem -- author-

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<sup>1</sup>"An Act, to provide for the selection of places for location and erection of Public Buildings of the Territory of Oregon." Section 1, in General Laws, Vol. II, 1850-1851.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 6 December 1851.

izing the erection of the penitentiary at Portland, and locating the university at Marysville ... all in the same bill . . . Governor Gaines, in a respectful and gentlemanly manner, called their attention to the absolute and positive requirements of the organic law passed by Congress," [which required that "every law shall embrace but one object"],<sup>1</sup> the governor told them that he would acquiesce in their laws if they would "separate the objects ... and thereby conform to the requirements of the general government."<sup>2</sup>

The legislature ignored the governor, and incensed at this "gratuitous interference with the legislative part of the government",<sup>3</sup> passed the bill 16 to 11.<sup>4</sup> Dryer commented: "The supreme court ha[s] adjudicated the pronounced judgement against the law -- and yet these consistent gentlemen, with all their boasted love of law and order, refuse to recognize now, what they so eagerly approved a short time ago. . . . So far as we have heard expressions from the people, upon the conduct of those men now assembled at Salem as legislators, they have been condemnatory. . . . the question is whether the good of the people or that of party

<sup>1</sup>General Laws, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 40, Section six of the Organic Act of the United States Congress.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 13 December 1851. Woodward, op. cit., p. 40 notes that Governor Gaines sent a special message criticizing the bill while it was before the legislature.

<sup>3</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon (San Francisco: The History Co., 1886) Vol. II, p. 146. The vote was 6 to 3 in the council and 10 to 8 in the house.

shall constitute the duty of the legislators."<sup>1</sup>

Deady in a letter to Bush, which was offered as a contribution to be published and bore the signature "Lafayette", remarked that this controversy over "the law of the territorial legislature of February 1850, locating the seat of government at Salem, is beginning to excite considerable interest. This is as it should be; and so far as public sentiment is concerned, all will admit that a proper understanding of the question, unbiased by clouds of local interest, or personal faction is highly important. ... Members of the legislature can neither individually nor collectively furnish the legal evidence of the constitutionality or the unconstitutionality of the law by assembling at this or that place."<sup>2</sup> Deady appealed to one and all to withhold judgment on the location act, for the Supreme Court could be the only body capable of deciding upon the legality of the act. All would be well and good if this body were to act in accordance with its ordained duty, as it was "created for the purpose" under the authority of the "Constitution of the United States through Congress by the force of the organic law of August 14th 1848".<sup>3</sup> Such was not the case, however, for "a majority of the district judges, constituting, when assembled in pursuance of law, a majority of the supreme court, in anticipation of what the judgment of

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<sup>1</sup>Oregonian, 13 December 1851.

<sup>2</sup>Deady to Bush, Addressed to the Oregon Statesman and signed "Lafayette", dated September 1851. Deady admits his authorship in a letter to Bush 8 October 1851. U. of O.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



the court will be, intend to disregard the statute and meet at Oregon City instead of Salem."<sup>1</sup>

With the responsibility resting upon the justices of the supreme court, it is interesting to turn to the decisions rendered by them as they decided the case. Dedy's account appears to be quite accurate, for the two Whig justices went to Oregon City and ruled on the legality of the law. Their opinions were reported in the Oregonian in a feature article. Chief Justice Thomas Nelson and Justice William Strong each ruled that the location act was void because it violated section six of the Organic act; "It is my opinion", said Strong, "that Oregon City is at this time the legal seat of government, and the only place where the supreme court can legally convene, ..."<sup>2</sup>

Dedy in a letter to Bush<sup>3</sup> tells of talking to Justice Pratt, the only Democrat on the supreme court and the court's third member, about the act and evidently Pratt decided to go along with the Clique, for he read his decision to the assembly at Salem and spared no condemnatory remarks on his brother justices. Garey notes that those members of the legislature which met at Salem "were encouraged by the opinion of Judge O. G. Pratt, one of the supreme judges, who appeared before the legisla-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Dedy further castigates these justices for actions "in anticipation of and prior to the decision" of the court.

<sup>2</sup>Executive Document #104, 32d Congress, 1st Session.

<sup>3</sup>Dedy to Bush, 8 October 1851, U. of O.

ture and read a long and carefully prepared address, criticising his associates on the supreme bench, and arguing in favor of the legality of the enactment."<sup>1</sup> The split among the justices "emphasized the partisan nature of the contest"<sup>2</sup> and served notice to all that nothing was yet settled in this controversy.

A correspondent of the day recorded having been contacted by Chief Justice Nelson regarding what public opinion was with respect to the action of the legislative assembly. The correspondent noted: "The Chief Justice might have sided with Judge Pratt and the people without doing much violence to law ... but he did not know the temper of the masses." After talking to men from all over Yamhill, Folk, Linn, Lane, and Benton counties the correspondent informed Nelson that they all favored the legislature and consequently supported Judge Pratt.<sup>3</sup> Nelson had stood by the Whigs and the other federal appointees and thereby forfeited his opportunity for political advancement in Oregon.

Eventually, this state of affairs took the aspects of a farce, although the participants were deadly serious and the stakes in the game were high. Governor Gaines, obdurate in his stand, had appealed to the United States Attorney General for a ruling on the legality of the act, but was rewarded with a deft avoidance of the prime issue at stake, so

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Henry Carey, The Oregon Constitution and Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857, (Salem: State Printing Dept., 1926) p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Confidential source, Diary of a Clique member, entry for 3 January 1852, U. of O.

the Governor, the other Federal appointees, and the majority of the supreme court justices continued to regard Oregon City as the Capital, whereas the legislators convened at Salem as the proper Capital.

The Whig faction, supported by Dryer, held to Oregon City, but Joseph Lane, delegate to Congress, was undermining their position by requesting Congressional confirmation of the location act.

The legislature in Salem was also active to obtain Congressional approbation of the fait accompli and a resolution was offered by Deady in the council that "in view of the action of Nelson and Strong, a memorial be sent to congress on the subject".<sup>1</sup> "The memorial passed the assembly almost by acclamation, three members only voting against it",<sup>2</sup> and was forwarded to Lane to present to Congress. Lane acted on it and wrote in answer to a letter from Bush: "... In regard to the location of the seat of government and the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly at Salem, I will also state that some time since, I introduced a Joint Resolution approving and confirming the act of the Assembly locating the Seat of Government at Salem and also approving the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly at Salem. This Joint Resolution will, I have no doubt, pass and will, I hope, settle public opinion so far as the location of the Seat of Gov't. and the lawfulness of the proceedings of the

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<sup>1</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 165. The Memorialists requested a return to the privileges they enjoyed under the Provisional Government, i.e., self-government with the right to elect all of their own officers. Vox Populi, 18 December 1851.

assembly at their late session at Salem are concerned."<sup>1</sup>

The Whigs aimed a good deal of their attack at Bush, since he, through the Statesman, served as a policy-maker and leader of the Democrats. They recognized the position he held in the hierarchy of the Democratic party which was in the throes of formulation at this time, and Dryer attacked him in a scathing editorial entitled "The Seat of Government Question Again". "The 'Nullifiers' assembled at Salem, as a legislative body, are still endeavoring by the aid of sophistry and deception, to hoodwink the honest yeomanry of the country into the belief that the officers of the Government are desirous of trampling upon the rights of the people. The Statesman has lent all the aid that falsehood, deception and chicanery could render, to place this one idea in a conspicuous place before the people. ... The editor came here as a hireling, mortgaged and sold to a party of men who go in for the 'spoils', regardless of consequences. His selection has proven a judicious one for such a purpose. His efforts have been to traduce and vilify and slander every-body but his masters."<sup>2</sup>

As previously mentioned, Thurston was a Democrat, and yet he, ostensibly, had represented Oregon as a non-partisan in the Congress of the United States. Irrespective of his outward actions, he secretly approved of the establishment of a Democratic party in the territory and wrote to

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<sup>1</sup>Unsigned letter dated 31 March 1853, addressed to A. Bush, from Washington City; it appears to be from Lane by a comparison of the handwriting with signed letters. The author calls himself a Representative of the people of Oregon. U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 20 December 1851.



Bush, "... If during the next two years, we can get the party under drill in several counties, it will be a very auspicious time to make the grand rally at the commencement of the next administration [referring to 1851]."<sup>1</sup>

Thurston's plan was put into effect immediately after the territorial election of 1851, wherein Lane was elected Delegate to Congress, ostensibly as a non-partisan, by Bush issuing a call in the Statesman for the holding of a "democratic convention to be held July 4th at Salem for the purpose of effecting a permanent organization of the party in Marion county."<sup>2</sup> Now that the plan was brought into the open, active agitation was begun to create a party whose machinations would bring statehood to Oregon and thereby guarantee that the people might elect their own governmental officers.<sup>3</sup> Lane, sensing the trend in Washington, now felt himself able to openly declare for the Democrats and wrote Bush, pertinent to the formation of a Democratic organization in Oregon: "... as to the Organization of the Democratic party in Oregon. I am in favor of such an organization, Party is but another term for principles -- an organization, the more efficiently to act together for the dissemination of and success of certain defined principles."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Thurston to Bush, 3 September 1850 (Confidential) as quoted in Jenette Elizabeth Roberts, Asahel Bush -- Pioneer Editor, Politician and Banker, unpublished Master's Thesis, U. of O., 1939, pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Statesman, 13 June 1851.

<sup>3</sup> Statesman, 13 June and 15 July 1851.

<sup>4</sup> Lane to Bush, 21 March 1852, U. of O.

The work of organizing the party was begun and a Central Democratic Committee was created to which several of those men, who were later to be collectively called the "Salem Clique", were elected.<sup>1</sup> Now, as if to further stimulate party organization, Asahel Bush gradually began to draw attention to the location of the Capital question in the Statesman and succeeded in bringing down upon himself the wrath of the Whigs as personified in Dryer's Oregonian.

In the columns of the Statesman, Bush often repeated that: "There is nothing surer than that the Legislative Assembly is in session at Salem, notwithstanding the band of whig office holders who proclaim that they must meet elsewhere."<sup>2</sup> In this manner he kept the Whigs irritated and yet he as often counseled caution with respect to the location act and both publically and privately declared that the United States Supreme Court would be the body to settle the dispute. This alternately radical and conservative approach was designed so that "Capital for the future can be made against the Governor, Hollbrook, and all concerned in the affair."<sup>3</sup> Bush was sincere in his desire to see the courts settle the

<sup>1</sup>Hesmith to Deady, 6 February 1852, O.H.S., Woodward interprets this letter to mean that Hesmith was chairman of the Central Committee. The letter reads in part, "I found your letter of January 25th informing me of my appointment as one of the members of the Central Democratic Committee. I had received a previous intimation of this appointment on going down last week and found it fully confirmed on seeing Bush and other friends."

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 16 December, 1851.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 5 August 1851, O.H.S. Amory Hollbrook was the Territorial District Attorney and Bush felt he controlled the Federal Clique.

legality of Salem as Territorial Capital, but remarked that "I care as much about felling Hollbrook in this matter as I do Gaines, and even more, for I think he is more dangerous."<sup>1</sup> Bush was perfectly willing that legal means be used to determine the status of the so-called "Omnibus Bill" but he was not above accepting an easy victory should one become available, and he did actively work through his position as leader of the Clique to throw every possible legislative obstacle in the path of the federally-appointed officials.

Dryer editorialized: "The vice-president of the 'association of gentlemen' -- proprietor and principal editor of the late 'Vox Populi' -- ought to have a medal manufactured out of skunk's eyes, for his services in Oregon".<sup>2</sup>

It would be worth digressing a bit to remark on the Vox Populi,<sup>3</sup> which made its complete appearance in four issues during the 1851-1852 meeting of the Territorial legislature in Salem. It appears that Bush, Pratt, and Deady were its prime contributors and operators although none of these men ever admitted to the charge.

The Vox devoted its pages almost exclusively to the vilification of the Whig appointed federal officials in general ran a parallel course to that set by the Statesman. The first issue informed its readers, in

<sup>1</sup>Bush to Deady, 19 August 1851, "Confidential", O.H.S.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 14 February, 1852.

<sup>3</sup>Copies of Vox Populi are to be seen at the Oregon Historical Society where all save the second issue are available. See also Turnbull, op. cit., for technical information on its makeup.



a fine radical tone, that "Those Judges, who have assembled at Oregon City, have fulminated against us and our acts -- paper decrees, characterizing us as revolutionists, and disorganizers. We ... feel assured of one thing, that if the difficulties and embarrassments, which at present surround us, ever do reach the extreme, that they have intimated we now occupy -- that is revolution, -- the people of this Territory will be found on the one side, and they on the other."<sup>1</sup> The meeting at Oregon City by Judges Nelson and Strong was referred to as a "Judicial Coroners Inquest" and continued publication was promised because the "Executive and Judiciary arrayed against the popular will -- justifies the existence of an organ, through which that will may be expressed and known."<sup>2</sup>

Vox Populi was also an ardent agitator for statehood (as was the Statesman at this time) on the grounds that it would surely cost less to support such a government than the federal officers who engaged in "mis-applying" funds.<sup>3</sup> It was the fond hope of the Salem Clique that statehood might be reached in order that they could control the executive and judiciary as well as the legislative branch of the government. The Whigs were raked over the coals in general and Governor Gaines in particular was made the object of many phrases such as the following with which the fourth and last issue saluted him:

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<sup>1</sup> Vox Populi, 18 December 1851

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 9 January 1851.



A Roman emperor, once it is said  
 Of his favorite horse a Senator made;  
 But a wonder far greater has now come  
 to pass,  
 We've made a grave ---- out of an Ass.<sup>1</sup>

Following the December, 1851, session of the Territorial Legislature, in which as we have mentioned, the Whig minority of five members met at Oregon City while the rest met at Salem, President Fillmore was informed of the situation through the Treasury Department and the Attorney General, J.J. Crittenden, was called upon for an opinion. This opinion said, in part, after first reviewing the entire situation and having investigated all of the acts and documents pertinent to the situation "the act is too explicit to leave room for construction" and any funds to be expended for the erection of buildings on a site chosen for the seat of government

is to be applied 'by the governor or Legislative Assembly, at such place as they may select for the erection of a penitentiary'. By the force of this language the governor must have concurrent and equal power with the Assembly not only in the application of this money to the erection of the necessary buildings, but in the selection of the place where they are to be erected . . . .

My opinion, therefore, of the act in question is, that it is null and void in all its parts, and consequently can give no legal validity to anything done under color of its authority.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the Attorney General's opinion, the opinions of the territorial officials and the majority decision of the Oregon Supreme Court, the legislative assembly continued to sit at Salem,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 16 January 1852.

<sup>2</sup> Executive Document #104, 32d Congress, 1st Session, article #2, pp. 6-7. The letter is dated 23 April 1851.

whereas "that portion of the members of the Assembly which met here [Oregon City] adjourned today sine die, without having formed a quorum of either branch, upon information that the body now in session at Salem intend to remain there and to go on to enact laws!"<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary of Oregon, E. Hamilton, reported to the Federal Government that the legislature at Salem "claim that the organic law of the Territory, imposing the mode or manner of enacting laws is merely directory, and that the Assembly and not the court is competent to determine its infraction; that the Assembly is only responsible to the constituency for its violation, etc., etc."<sup>2</sup>

As the election drew near in 1852, Bush chose to let many Whig challenges go unanswered and seriously counselled Democrats who were running for territorial offices on the proper things to say. He advised Deady and Nesmith: "In that address of Nesmith's I would be careful not to smoke the location question, but simply the support of the laws and opposition to federal usurpation. And I would declare generally on the old issues in the States. ... I would hate to see that simple question of location made an issue, and I would hate to see our platform narrowed down to local issues of any or all kinds."<sup>3</sup> Thus Bush preferred arguments that had age-old appeal to constituents rather than to run the risk of losing party organization and control by harping on the location issue

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<sup>1</sup>E. Hamilton to E. Whittlesey, 17 December 1851, Executive Document #104, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 25 February 1852, C.E.S.

which had economic implications for too many voters. Bush also wrote Lane that Congressional ratification of the laws enacted by the Salem Legislative Assembly was vital for it was a party issue in Oregon, and that Lane had best obtain support from the Democrats in Congress for: "I had rather it would be made a party contest in Washington and then the speeches made on the question will do us good here."<sup>1</sup>

Bush worked hard now to soft-pedal the statehood cry, for he was certain that Pierce would be elected and that relief would be forthcoming. Then, too, he expressed the doubt that the party was strong enough yet to stand such a test.<sup>2</sup>

Democratic spirits were raised on high with the news that Lane had obtained a joint resolution from Congress on 4 May 1852, which ignored the rulings of the United States Attorney General and the Oregon Supreme Court and others of the "Federal Clique" by ratifying and approving the act of the legislature of the Oregon Territory by declaring the laws adopted by the Salem Assembly to be "in conformity with the provisions of the act" and "to have been held in conformity to the provisions of law."<sup>3</sup>

Lane advised Bush of the Congressional action "approving the location of the seat of Government at Salem, and the acts of the late assembly at that place, which will I hope give general satisfaction; and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Bush to Dady, "Confidential", 3 September and 6 October 1852, O.H.S.

<sup>3</sup> Carey, History of Oregon, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 501.



further, I hope will induce as it requires, the Government officers to locate in Salem, which place is and has been the legal and proper for them, ever since the passage of the act of the Assembly, locating the seat of the Government."<sup>1</sup> Bush in turn, gleefully announced this action to all of his readers in general and to the Whigs and Dryer in particular in the following manner:

Fear 'Supreme Court'! Alas! Alas!

The 'Supreme Court' is 'done for', laid out, kilt; or as our classical 'brother Dryer' would say, in the 'jargon of the country', cockshut, memloosed, halo! It was a feeble, rickety concern to begin with, and the rough usage it received from the legislative assembly and the people nearly knocked the breath of life from it, and finally Congress gave it the finishing kick, and it was no more forever. No one appeared to administer consolation in the agonies of death. Not a voice was raised, not a vote was given to succor and to save. Out of the three hundred members of Congress, more than one-third of them Whigs, not one was found to do it reverence. Its condemnation was decreed, every voice answering aye! and it passed to the tomb 'unknelled, unhonored and unsung'. It is a melancholy reflection, and we banish it, while grief yet leaves our utterance unchoked, and tears our eyes undimmed. Perhaps before leaving the subject we had better advertise for a few bottles of lavender water in which to preserve a copy of its 'decisions', and the record of its never-to-be-forgotten session.<sup>2</sup>

While the Democratic party accepted the Congressional joint resolution as approbation of their previous activities, the Whigs complained to President Fillmore, who answered Hollbrook, the Territorial District Attorney:

I did not scrutinize the resolution when presented to me for my approval, I supposed it was intended merely to legalize

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<sup>1</sup>Lane to Bush, 10 June 1852, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 29 June 1852.



the proceedings of the legislative assembly at Salem, but not to express opinion whether they were legal or illegal under the Organic Law. On this point the Attorney General had given his opinion in which I fully concurred then and do now, and the very fact that this joint resolution was passed was evidence, at least, that these proceedings were not considered as valid without being ratified by Congress. There may have been some artful design in the wording of the resolution, intending to give it a local effect in Oregon, of which I was wholly unaware. I regret, however, that anything should have transpired that should have led any one to suppose for a moment that I had changed my opinion in reference to the true construction of the organic law.<sup>1</sup>

The Oregonian, as spokesman for the Whigs, the Federal Clique [which denoted the federally-appointed officers], and those disaffected Democrats which became known as "softs" or "National Democrats" to differentiate themselves from the "hards" or the Salem Clique or "Durhamites" -- all three of the latter names referring to Bush, Pratt, Nesmith, Deady, et al in this period, caustically denounced the Salem group in an editorial which was specifically written for the campaign of 1852, but which is applicable to the entire situation preceding the removal of Governor Gaines. It follows, in part:

"Oregon as it is -- the Durham Platform etc. The people of Oregon are told that they MUST organize themselves into political parties, and the democrats therein are modestly reminded that unless they obey this order from the association of demagogues -- promulgating [sic] through the Statesman their new-fangled notions, about politics, religion and morality -- they will most certainly be consigned to oblivion, never to rise again in this territory. ...

The Durham democrats have organized though, on the follow-

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<sup>1</sup> Carey, Vol. I, p. 502, quoting Mrs. in Oregon Historical Society. Letter dated 26 July 1852.

<sup>2</sup> Dryer was at this time accusing Bush and Pratt of conspiring to set up a Mormon State in Oregon complete with polygamy.

platform:

1. That O. C. Pratt is an honest man. ...
2. That Salem is the seat of government of this territory and not Oregon City. ...
3. That John F. Gaines is a coward, and incapable of performing the duties of Governor of this territory. ... there never was, in the history of the United States, or any one of them, a party of men banded together with less principle, with less of everything that makes men honored or honorable, than this same Durham democratic party of Oregon Territory.<sup>1</sup>

With Franklin Pierce selected by the national election of 1852 for the Presidency, most of the Durhamite agitation for statehood, and extreme partisan domination over the Whigs, was tempered. The Whigs, too late, saw the benefits reaped by Democratic organization being gathered by the "hards" who controlled the legislature and who would soon control the executive. Judge Nelson resigned<sup>2</sup> and to insure their control over Territorial appointments, the first Democratic Territorial Convention was called to secure the delegateship and "to recommend to the executive of the United States suitable persons to fill the various federal offices in this territory."<sup>3</sup> This was, moreover, fairly assured in view of the fact that Lane was a personal friend of Pierce, for they had served together in the Army, and the advantage was all with the "hards".

True to expectations, Pierce appointed all save one official from among Oregon inhabitants, and Bush took care to point out "the Difference" between the previous and the present administrations, remarking

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<sup>1</sup>Oregonian, 27 March 1852.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady said: "Nelson has resigned. He is the worst beaten man you ever saw. Now write to old Joe and endeavor to prevent a confirmation of a successor by the Senate until the democratic administration comes into power, and thus we shall get the judiciary." O.E.S.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 22 January 1853.

that the only consolation which the Whigs might receive was in the failure of the Senate to ratify the appointment of Judge Pratt as chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court. On the other hand, local men would now receive the salaries which had been "gobbled up by a set of foreign mercenaries and taken out of the country."<sup>1</sup>

General Lane was appointed Governor to replace Gaines, but very shortly resigned to return to Washington to continue as Territorial Delegate, and George L. Curry was elevated from his position as Secretary to the Governor's chair.

The Salem Clique entered the field in the spring of 1853 with a sure heart and met with approval at the hands of their listeners as they stumped the Territory. As in the past, Asahel Bush preferred to remain at his editor's desk and to direct the campaign from this strategic position, for from here he could bring the powerful columns of the Statesman to bear on any target.

Deady reported from a stumping tour that: "I find public sentiment very fair ... and have the gratification to feel that I have made many friends this winter who had heretofore been estranged on the seat of government question. A great many young men who are whigs say publically that they will vote for me for delegate against any other man."<sup>2</sup> In answer, Bush promised to personally attend the convention and to do his best to see that Deady got the Delegateship if he really wanted it; how-

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 22 January 1853.

<sup>2</sup>Deady to Bush, 10 February 1853, U. of O.



ever, Bush advised against such action and suggested that Deady withdraw from the race. Pratt concurred in this advice and Bush informed Deady that he would be appointed one of the United States Judges, Boise and Ohlney being selected to be the other two.<sup>1</sup>

All of the reports to Bush were not so pleasant, however. B. F. Harding reported from Salem that a group of "softs" had stolen a march at the county convention in Marion and "had decidedly the better of us all the way through. They had been at work a month while our side had been idle ... . The democracy of Marion will rise up yet before the first Monday in June. ... Be assured that Marion will cast aside all such trash [the bolters] before June. We must go to work I mean we the Democrats of this County. Now may God help me. I am going to work and shall not cease until the self stiled [sic] Democracy of Marion are regenerated or untill the democratic party of the County is purged from such shallow filthy creatures ..."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the politically profitable jobs were passed out and dissenters were purged from the party. Such tactics paid big dividends, for although the Oregonian scathingly denounced Lane for having deceived the populace in the preceding election by posing as a non-partisan,<sup>3</sup> the Democrats swept the field, gaining the Delegate's seat, all the seats in the

<sup>1</sup> Bush to Deady, 4 April 1853, O.E.S.

<sup>2</sup> B. F. Harding to Bush, 5 April 1853, U. of O.

<sup>3</sup> Oregonian, 12 March 1853, See also issues of 26 March and 14 May 1853.



Council or upper chamber, and all save four of the seats in the lower house. Woodward gives the credit for this Democratic victory to Asahel Bush and feels that this election was the establishment of "his dictatorship in Oregon".<sup>1</sup> At any rate the election increased Bush's purse by five hundred dollars for he had wagered that sum on Lane's plurality,<sup>2</sup> and the money was soon to be put to good use for we find the shy note among the papers of his wife, reading in its entirety: "July 14, 1853. Engaged myself to Mr. Bush."<sup>3</sup>

Just prior to his engagement to Miss Eugenia Zieber, Bush moved his printing plant to Salem "for business and political reasons".<sup>4</sup> This action brought forth from his fiance the plaintive query: "What did you move to Salem for?"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 20 May 1853, O.H.S.

<sup>3</sup>Eugenia Zieber Papers, Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 18 June 1853, O.H.S.

<sup>5</sup>Eugenia Zieber Papers, 15 August 1853, Archives.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERNAL DISRUPTION WITHIN THE DEMOCRACY AND ANTI DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS

The Democracy was content for the time. Organization, shrewd leadership and the cause of democracy loudly proclaimed in the columns of the Statesman and led by the well-liked Jo Lane had accomplished their greatest triumph in the June elections of 1853.

Before the year was out, however, a very distressing and still inexplicable event caused distress and mortification to the Democracy in general and to the Salem Clique in particular. This was the replacement of Matthew P. Deady as an Associate Justice, ostensibly because his commission was made out in the name of Nordecai P. Deady. This, when coupled with the failure of Judge O. C. Pratt to be confirmed by the U. S. Senate as Territorial Chief Justice,<sup>1</sup> gave heart to the opposition.

The clique let their Washington Delegate know that things were far from right and indeed the Territory was upset, for Deady was not only very competent but very popular. Nesmith wrote Lane that the replacement for Deady, O. B. McFadden, "is loafing about town here in place of going out south to hold the fall terms of the court as he should do. He is quite a pet among the Whigs, and appears shy of the Durhams. The people

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., Senator Douglas defeated Pratt's confirmation on personal grounds, p. 55.

south are raising the Devil about Deady's removal & the neglect of his successor to hold the courts. McFadden looks as sage as an owl, while Bush is beginning to stir him up with a long pole. That removal of Deady was a most damnable outrage, not only on him but on the party here, and your friends all look to you to see the matter rectified."<sup>1</sup>

Bush was in correspondence with Deady over the matter, also, and a petition was circulated among all the influential Democrats demanding the restoration of Deady to the judgeship.<sup>2</sup>

McFadden's life was generally made miserable by repeated articles and editorials in the pages of the Statesman condemning him for dereliction of duty and for undercutting a fellow Democrat. Meantime Bush mentioned the possibility of getting another judgeship for Deady which was refused. Deady, however, told Bush in confidence that "I am becoming more and more convinced that Lane has been cognisant of the treatment that I have received at the hands of the administration from the Munder in the name to the removal, that he has procured it to be done, or passively assented to it, and will continue so to do unless he sees such decided manifestations of feeling upon the part of the Democracy of this Territory as to induce him to think it wise for his own interests to act otherwise. ... although this is conjecture, of one thing I am certain, that the election of Lane under the circumstances last summer was a misfortune to the party from which it will not soon recover. ... before his depart-

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<sup>1</sup>Wesnith to Lane, 22 November 1853, O.H.S.

<sup>2</sup>Deady to Bush, 4 November 1853, U. of O.



ure for Washington he done more to strengthen the hands of the Softs and the Whigs than anything that has happened since they have had a name."<sup>1</sup>

This assertion was substantiated by a report from Portland, the Whig camp which warned: "The coalition of the 'softs' and 'Encarnacionists' grows stronger and daily assumes a more threatening appearance, not that any fears may be entertained for their success, provided our friends are on the alert, and keep themselves always posted up in regard to their movements. As I have said before they have gathered strength anew from the removal of Deady, and the ill success of Pratt &c, &c, and they have tried and succeeded somewhat in making capital out of the slow progress of the Public Buildings, particularly the Penitentiary."<sup>2</sup>

The pressure of the Clique through letters, petitions and the newspaper articles brought about the reinstatement of Deady in March of 1854 and McFadden was sent to the Washington Territory.<sup>3</sup>

That Lane deliberately cut Deady out and then, upon seeing the furor his actions caused, had him restored has never been proved; but this action, when added to other unfavorable doings by Lane, brought forth a definite split between Lane and the Clique in 1859, certainly Bush, Nesmith, and Deady thought the action was deliberate.

As mentioned previously, the Whigs made political capital of the Democrats' discomfort and began the organization of a party that could be disciplined. They tried to throw in their lot with a newly developed

<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, 27 November 1853, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Greenville D. E. Boyd to Bush, 4 November 1853, U. of O. Boyd was "Keeper of the Convicts" and a "hard" Democrat.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 28 March 1854.



group which cut across party lines, the Oregon Territory Temperance Association which was a product of the famous Maine prohibitory liquor law of 1851. Temperance meetings had been held in Oregon as early as May 1852<sup>1</sup> and by the fall of 1853 they had gained many advocates.

The Whigs attempted to work through this temperance group in recruiting dissident Democrats and with some success.<sup>2</sup> Bush ridiculed the Whig efforts. "The Sewer man [Dryer] is in favor of organizing the Whig party. Greeley of the New York Tribune says that the Whig party is dead in the states. But like all animals of the reptile order, it dies in the extremities last; and him of the Sewer is the last agonizing knot of the tail."<sup>3</sup>

General Whig organization followed rapidly on the heels of the Oregonian's call of 11 March 1854 and it generally opposed the Statesman's oft-repeated call for a statehood convention on the grounds that statehood meant an unbearable financial burden<sup>4</sup> and Dryer accused the Democrats of desiring to obtain even more offices should statehood be granted.<sup>5</sup>

A degree of truth is present in the charges of the Oregonian for it

<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 18 May 1852.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 18 June 1853. The call for Whig organization was made in the first issue following the election of 1853.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 4 July 1853.

<sup>4</sup>Oregonian, 1 April 1854.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 15 April 1854.

was general dissatisfaction with President Pierce's Territorial appointments that prompted Bush to renew the campaign for a statehood convention to be held in June of 1854. Governor Curry had been replaced in December by John W. Davis of Indiana, a Democrat, but an imported one, and then, when coupled with the other insults to the Clique, i.e., the removal of Deady and the non-confirmation of Pratt, led to insistence on a course which would guarantee their personal supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

Bush planned, in December of 1853, to take a trip to the east coast to purchase a new printing press, and Lafayette Grover, a clique member and the law partner of B. F. Harding, another member of the clique, was left in charge of the paper.<sup>2</sup>

Bush counselled Deady: "A damn sight depends upon getting the right men nominated in the several counties [for the next legislature] so stir yourself while I am gone."<sup>3</sup>

The paper ran well under the editorial guidance of Grover although some of the verve is lacking in its editorials for the eight months Bush remained in the east. Eugenia Zieber wrote her fiance that her sister, Occa, "is very desirous you should return and take charge of your paper. She don't like Mr. Grover at all."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statesman, 21 February 1854, 7 March 1854, 14 March 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Bush to Deady, 29 December 1853, O.H.S.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Eugenia Bush to Asahel Bush, 11 June 1854, Archives.

In order to combat the threatening Whigs the Statesman now carried on an unending attack against "Isms" of all kinds, "Maine-law-ism," "Free soil-ism," "Know Nothing-ism," and "Whigism". The Maine liquor law was opposed "merrally and politically", while Democratic nominees and statehood were just as constantly touted.<sup>1</sup> Bush from his vantage point in the nation's capital reported that "General Lane has introduced a bill providing for the organization of a State government in Oregon, and paying the expenses of such organization." Encouragingly he added, "It will, doubtless, pass."<sup>2</sup>

Conditions in New York state were brought to the Territorial voter's attention by Bush who reported that the New York governor had vetoed a Maine law as unconstitutional<sup>3</sup> and ammunition for the campaign was found in the attempts of the Whigs to pick up votes by coalescing with Maine law men in three major counties.<sup>4</sup>

The statehood convention plan was defeated, but the Democrats were victorious in gaining most of the offices in the Territory. However, a definite loss of strength was noticeable in Marion and Benton counties and in many southern counties the cry for separation from the northern counties was heard,<sup>5</sup> but this whig plan lacked strength and failed in

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<sup>1</sup>See issues of the Statesman, 11 April 1854, 25 April 1854, 2 May 1854, 9 May 1854, 16 May 1854, 23 May 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 6 June 1854.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 23 May 1854.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. The counties were Marion, Yamhill, and Polk, all Democratic strongholds; Bush was from Marion, Deady from Yamhill, and Nesmith from Polk.

<sup>5</sup>Statesman, 20 June 1854, before the final results of the election were known, Bush announced in favor of "A State Convention in 1855."



a few months.<sup>1</sup>

Now, as if it was a blacksmiths fire in which the steel of the Clique was to be tempered, a new and ominous party arose in Oregon, about as rapidly as it did elsewhere, to threaten the very life of the Clique. Bush fought it as hard as he had ever fought any political force, and succeeded in bringing it to its knees, just as he did anything or anyone who stood in his way during the dozen or so years that he ruled the Oregon Democracy. This hated and feared creation found its basis in the warped hatreds and political opportunism of the Whigs in Oregon as well as elsewhere; although it gained Democratic adherents (only briefly in Oregon) in many places. It was known alternately as the Supreme Order of the Star Spangled Banner, the Native Americans, and the Know-Nothings.

Essentially an off shoot of anti-Catholicism in America<sup>2</sup> the Know-Nothings exhibited little anti-Catholicism in their Oregon activities, as they did in many regions where it was politically inexpedient to do so. "Their rituals and oaths in Oregon, have nothing to say about Catholicism, and only proscribe foreigners", Bush reported as part of his expose of their activities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 29 August 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860, New York, Macmillan Co., 1938, Chap. XV. This work is an excellent investigation into the intricacies of anti-Popery and the Know-Nothing movement throughout the states. It is weak to the point of useless in an investigation of their activities in the Territories.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 2 January 1855.



Bush was alert to their activities in the states, and as early as July, 1854, he wrote from the east to the Statesman that Know-Nothing groups were springing up in various eastern cities. His report was condemnatory of them.<sup>1</sup> Evidently he foresaw for Oregon a similar creation to the alliance of Whig and Know-Nothings as in Philadelphia in the summer of 1854, for in another letter to his newspaper he vehemently denounced this coalition.<sup>2</sup> Such proved to be the case and the worst fears of Bush were realized, for Know-Nothing-ism caught on like wildfire in Oregon. Its secrecy and elaborate ritual, plus its success in the states, made its acceptance a sure thing in Oregon. It seems to have been embraced, largely, by people dissatisfied with the rule of the Salem Clique and this included the various opposition parties; Whig, Maine law or Temperance, Free-soilers, and of course those soft Democrats who recently began to cast their lot with the Whigs. Mere opposition did not particularly upset Bush, for he could always come to grips with the tangible features of its makeup. Know-Nothingism, however, was completely different, he could accuse no one nor could he combat its furtiveness. Intangible and with near irresistibility, it threatened the existence of the Clique; who could know if his next door neighbor or trusted friend was a member?

In September of 1854 Bush returned to Salem from his trip east and, with seeming calm, reassured his readers that although iam parties and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 25 July 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8 August 1854.

Know-Nothings were in Oregon they would all burn out soon, leaving purely Democratic victories in 1855 and 1856.<sup>1</sup> This was the attitude of Bush as exposed to public view, actually he was girding himself to do battle with these groups and showed considerable alarm over the situation in his private correspondence.

After some three months investigation, during which Whig papers chided that we "know-nothing" of any such party or movement,<sup>2</sup> Bush was prepared to challenge the Know-Nothings. Editorializing on the Supreme Order of the Star Spangled Banner, he asserted that he possessed a "full and complete exposure of the whole organization" including passwords, ritual, grip, and a list of members in Salem. Bush was pleased to see that most of the members were Whigs. Further, he named some Salem men as Know-Nothings and promised further exposures.<sup>3</sup> The result was electrifying, far more effective than the attack on Nativism by Bush some two years earlier<sup>4</sup> which excited little comment.

The Oregonian and Spectator sprang to the defense of the movement as being in the best traditions of our ancestors and quoted Madison,

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<sup>1</sup> Statesman, 5 September 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Oregonian, 26 August 1854 and others, Spectator, 11 August 1854, the Know-Nothing organization "seems a volunteer police in aid of public morality. It recognizes no Federal division -- contends for no political system. It seems actuated alone by a determination to maintain the institutions of the country, and to commit its offices to none but citizens of unimpeachable integrity."

<sup>3</sup> Statesman, 21 November 1854.

<sup>4</sup> Statesman, 30 March 1852.

Jefferson, Calhoun, Webster, Clay, and others, as warning against aliens and foreign intrusion.<sup>1</sup> Actually it was an excellent opportunity to split and perhaps smash the solidity of Clique rule. By and large, the Whigs benevolently accepted any organization which threatened the rule and power of the Clique.

Because of the nature of their organization it is impossible to know how strong the movement became in Oregon, but Woodward quotes a personal conversation with an ex-member and reports that "there were numerous Know-Nothing wigwags throughout the Territory" by the end of 1854.<sup>2</sup> Delazon Smith after conversing with a self-confessed member of a Portland wigwam informed Bush in the spring of 1855 that the Know-Nothings had nearly all of the native born citizens of Multnomah County as members; that every man who was appointed to office in that county by the 1854 winter session of the legislature was a Know-Nothing; and that before the June election of 1855 they expected to have some 5,000 members in the Territory.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever their total strength in the Territory, they posed such a threat to the rule by the Clique that desperate measures had to be taken in order to insure their quick demise. Bush began to list any Whig

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<sup>1</sup>Spectator, 11 August, 16 September, 23 September, 10 October 1854, contain many articles "proving" that the foreign element is dangerous and evil.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Smith to Bush, 18 March 1855, Archives.



candidate mentioned in his paper as a "Whig-Know-Nothing" and used this label on all who drew his wrath. Threatening letters were sent to Bush and his life and his printing establishment were both threatened if he continued in his course of exposing Know-Nothing secrets,<sup>1</sup> but the intrepid editor continued his attack on the movement because it was intended "to proscribe men because of their birth place".<sup>2</sup>

This anxiety on the part of Bush, over the movement was not completely a fear of losing political power, for Asahel Bush always, as long as he owned the paper, devoted his columns to a defense of immigrants and religious creed. Bigotry and intolerance always were targets for his venomous shafts.

Some Democrats also joined the movement and to these men Bush thundered: "Beware! There is not a man of prominence or influence belonging to this damning conspiracy in Oregon, whose connection with it will not be known in less than six months."<sup>3</sup> Those Democrats that he knew to be members, he plainly sentenced to political oblivion, and it is reported that George H. Williams, armed, escorted Bush around town for a week or more following the exposures of Know-Nothing members.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 28 November 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., the foreign vote was gained for the Democrats by the attack on Know-Nothings, Geo. L. Curry to Bush, 20 March 1855, U. of C.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 12 December 1854.

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 67, from a personal conversation with George H. Williams Woodward states: "Democrats were inclined to take the imperious editor at his word. It was a venturesome man in Oregon politics at this period who would dare the displeasure of Bush."



The exposures and threats did slow the incipient bolt of ambitious but proud Democrats. However, so long as Know-Nothings remained, with their cloak of secrecy, they were a threat to the Democracy and with this fact before them the Clique members in the legislature accomplished a coup d'etat at the opening of the Legislative Assembly in December of 1854. Delazon Smith was intrusted with its management and the famous Viva Voce Ballot law was passed over the violent protests of the eight opposition members present in the lower chamber.<sup>1</sup> Bush freely admitted, indeed, boasted, that the bill was intended to proscribe Know-Nothings and he also called upon "the friends of Daylight Deeds" in the council to pass the bill. This exhibition of pure obedience to authority galled even some Democrats and although the bill passed 5 to 3 in the council some Democrats opposed it.<sup>2</sup>

That a storm of protest resulted from the act is obvious from the statements Bush felt called upon to make in the following weeks in its defense. He defended the "recent act of the Assembly prescribing the viva voce mode of voting in place of the ballot as the form long used in the Southwestern States" and a form not at all disagreeable to anyone with a clear conscience.<sup>3</sup> The law provided that all ballots cast be either cast orally in a loud clear voice to the election judge who would duly record it -- or if cast in writing be read aloud to any assembled

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 19 December 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 30 December 1854.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 2 January 1854.

listeners by the judge as it was recorded.

Dryer opened up with a full scale attack and screamed: "Do these political Ishmaelites suppose that free men are such craven cowards that they dare not vote as they please for fear of those who ordained Delazon Smith the high priest of the party to whom voters are held accountable for the discharge of a blood-bought privilege?"<sup>1</sup> But Bush, content that a weapon of no small dimensions had been forged, ignored the rantings of Dryer and proceeded in his methodical expose of Know-Nothings. His inquiries and his informant<sup>2</sup> gave him the glad news that the Sons of Temperance were associated with the Know-Nothings, indeed used the same meeting place, and this information enabled him to denounce two of his opponents in the same breath, all of which took up five complete columns of one issue of his paper.<sup>3</sup>

As the Democrats moved into the pre-election campaign of 1855 they found themselves opposed by the softs, the Whigs, the Know-Nothings, and the Temperance groups, and nowhere in all this opposition could a clear cut distinction be made, nor were they in complete agreement and association. Thus, various counties put forth Whig-Know-Nothing tickets or Whig-Temperance tickets or just Whig or Maine law tickets and their very lack of unity was to cost them the election. Hard Clique discipline plus

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<sup>1</sup>Oregonian, 23 December 1854.

<sup>2</sup>The informant may have been his printer, a man named Beebe; see Woodward, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 2 January 1855.

the powerful viva voce ballot took too great a toll of wavering voters or those who had not the courage to declare their convictions before their fellows and the Democrats were very successful.

In addition to this array of opponents the Democrats were informed by Judge O. C. Pratt that his hat was in the arena for the delegateship in opposition to Joseph Lane, the Clique's candidate. The stir this raised in the enemy camp can be imagined. Dryer was sure it spelled the doom of Clique rule and the Democratic Standard, edited by Alonzo Leland,<sup>1</sup> backed Pratt against Lane who was, of course, supported by the Salem Clique and the Statesman. In the face of Whig jibes, the Democrats pursued a calm and cautious course at first. When they were convinced of Pratt's intentions they leveled all the invective at their command to crush his insurgent bolt from the rule of the Clique.

Pratt's chances in the campaign appeared to be quite good. Bush wrote Deady: "I understand the original softs here [Oregon City] are all for Pratt" and it appeared that Pratt had more friends around Portland and Milwaukie than had Lane in the Democratic circles.<sup>2</sup> This<sup>is</sup> not too surprising, however, when it is considered that Pratt maintained his residence in Oregon City for many years and had many personal friends in the region.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Democratic Standard, printed in Portland, was constantly accused of "isacriotism" by Bush because it ran an untrue line according to the Democratic principles of Bush.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 21 January 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>3</sup>Eugenia Zieber papers, Archives.



Pratt was now characterized by the term "Little Means", an appellation he earned by complaining of his small income, but the energy he exerted in the campaign was by no means little. He stumped most of the counties and denounced, publicly and privately, Bush, Lane, Curry, Harding, etc. "Pratt not only denounces all the officials at Salem, but ... he bids them defiance! He is evidently determined not only to triumph without them but in spite of them ... that same spirit, ... is the spirit of dictation of rebellion! It is that spirit of desperation which prefers to 'rule in hell rather than serve in heaven!' If it cannot rule it will seek to ruin!"<sup>1</sup> Thus Delazon Smith summarized the intent of Pratt.

The Pratt split occasioned some humor among the members of the Clique, once they felt fairly sure he could do no damage to the Democracy and Bush chided Deady for not supporting the Judge in view of the many meals Mrs. "Little Means" had served him. Bush, however, noted that the refusal of Clique men to follow Pratt indicated to the public that Pratt was not the one to call the turn.<sup>2</sup>

As the campaign progressed the Whigs made plans to replace Bush with

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<sup>1</sup>Delazon Smith to Bush, 1 March 1855, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 17 March 1855, O. H. S.



Leland as Territorial Printer and John F. Gaines was chosen as their candidate for Delegate.<sup>1</sup> Bush, noting the formation of a Whig central committee accused four of its five members of being Know-Nothings,<sup>2</sup> and continued in his pursuit of Know-Nothings throughout the Territory. He called to public attention the fact that two members of Salem Wigwan No. 7 had recanted and withdrawn. With evident satisfaction he also noted that both were Democrats.<sup>3</sup>

Reports from the counties to Bush from his loyal friends foretold general obedience to the demands of the Statesman which insisted that Lane be returned as Delegate. The Democratic Convention swept Lane in and Pratt out, 53 to 6.<sup>4</sup> Bush, calmly and without malice remarked: "It is finished ... Little Means has got justice. It appears that he is slaughtered and permanently disgraced".<sup>5</sup> The defeat was such a blow to Pratt that he was actually taken ill and forced to his bed.<sup>6</sup> This was the end of the Durham leader, now there could no longer be the slightest doubt about the position of supremacy enjoyed by Bush.

Now that Bush no longer needed to divide his attentions and invective between the Whig-Know-Nothings and Pratt, he renewed, with a

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<sup>1</sup>Bush to Deady, 21 June 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 9 January 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 16 January 1855.

<sup>4</sup>Hesmith to Deady, April 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>5</sup>Bush to Deady, 29 March 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>6</sup>Bush to Deady, 21 April 1855, O.H.S. Pratt then left the territory and settled in California.

vengeance, his attacks upon the Whig Candidate, General Gaines and the Know-Nothings.

Bush taunted the Salem Know-Nothings for trying to smoke out his informant and reported to his fascinated audience: "They suspended one who we imagine could not be hired to furnish us reports, and twenty who can be purchased for a hundred dollars."<sup>1</sup> To further weaken this movement he now began to publish an expose of the Albany Know-Nothings as it was furnished to him by Delazon Smith. It was at this juncture that he accused John P. Gaines of having been president of Wigwag 7 and further condemned him as a swindler, liar and coward.<sup>2</sup> When Dryer tried to stir up trouble between the Standard and the Statesman by reporting that "Bush says Leland is a liar," Bush retorted that he had said no such thing but he "has said, and reiterates, that you are an habitual and reclinless liar. ... You lie from nature and from habit ... and if you didn't lie you wouldn't be Dryer, and your paper wouldn't be the Oregonian."<sup>3</sup> Turning his attention once more to Gaines, he mused that the Whigs were likely to surrender without trying, just as Gaines had done

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 13 March 1855.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 28 April, 5 May, 12 May, 19 May 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 27 March 1855.

in the Mexican war at Encarnacion.<sup>1</sup> Bush then went on to quote a conversation with General Taylor about the conduct of Gaines: "When Taylor was told that Gaines had surrendered his command at Encarnacion, he asked how long they fought. There was no fighting was the reply. 'By God,' said Gen. Taylor, 'I would have fought a little anyhow!'"<sup>2</sup> Privately, Bush opined: "The Know-Nothings and Whigs pretend to be confident of electing old Gaines but I don't believe they have much hope. The damned old fool himself thinks he is going to be elected."<sup>3</sup>

Then, as if to add more trouble to the burden of responsibilities he bore, Bush found it necessary, in view of an act by the 1854-1855 Legislature relocating the capital at Corvallis, to move his plant to that town. He liked it not one bit and bitterly complained to his friend Deady: "Coddamn this moving, it will break me up. And this is a damn mean town to move to ... taken as a whole it is the most tickvase

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<sup>1</sup>In the campaign of 1852 Bush had ridiculed Gaines on his war record and returned to that tack in 1855. Bush reported the exploits of Gaines as follows:

Major Gaines at the head of about one hundred men was surprised at a place called Encarnacion, by a small body of Mexican troops ... commanded by General Minon, a full blooded negro, originally from Hayti, it is said. A surrender was demanded and a consultation of the American officers was holden... They did surrender without firing a gun, to a band of 'groasers' headed by a negro. Statesman 2 March 1853.

Gaines, while governor, had accested Bush, shortly after this was printed, with a cane and attempted to thrash him, but Bush drew a pistol from his clothing and Gaines withdrew contenting himself "with the harmless amusement of flourishing his tongue and cane." Statesman, 27 January 1853.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 12 May 1855. Bush accused Gaines of swindling funds while governor. He had paid himself ten dollars a day for being private secretary to the Governor. No refutation of this charge was forthcoming. Statesman, 5 May 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 21 April 1855, O.E.S.



pickayune place."<sup>1</sup> At this point the location of the capital once more assumed the aspects of a choice political plum to be had by the group with the greatest number of votes in the Legislative Assembly. Its permanency of location was not to be secure for some time to come. The move considerably upset the Whigs who feared more Democratic gains and Whig losses.<sup>2</sup>

As a final threat at Know-Nothingism before the elections were held, Bush editorialized:

Among the thousand evil results of know-nothingism, is one which has come under the observation of all who have been familiar with its members. It is filling the land with distrust, hypocrisy, deception and falsehood. The history of the world records nothing that so blunts the moral sense, and blasts truth and honor, as this damning blight of know-nothingism. ...

The know-nothing whig convention adopted no platform, determined to be committed to nothing. Their game is to be on all sides of all questions, as suits localities and persons.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the campaign, Bush had appealed for a statehood convention, for this item also was to appear on the ballot. This issue lost by 415 votes, the move for statehood was lost by 869 votes in 1854, but the Whig-Know-Nothing ticket elected only two members to the House and one to the Council.<sup>4</sup> Bush was exuberant in his victory and boomed "Jo Lane for President of the United States in 1856". Viva Voce voting was the weapon forged and wielded by the Democrats to the near decimation of all of their opponents. "We are for a State government at the earliest moment it can

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 21 April 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Dady, 21 January 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 16 June, 30 June 1855.

be obtained," declared the Statesman and continued throughout the year to keep this issue before the people.<sup>1</sup>

The United States Congress refused to appropriate funds for building a capital at Corvallis and Bush, wearily, declared his desire to see the location question settled once and for all.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the year the legislative assembly had removed the seat of government back to Salem<sup>3</sup> and on December 30, 1855, two weeks after the Capital was established in Salem, the Statehouse burned down. Also lost, according to the Statesman, were the Territorial Library, the laws, papers and archives of the Territory.<sup>4</sup>

Popular opinion held that Corvallis incendiaries were responsible,<sup>5</sup> Bush implied that it might well have been Knownothings.<sup>6</sup> The Oregonian smugly opined: "At all events the democracy are solely responsible for the loss." Bush exploded!

Knowing that a new press was on the way for his printing plant, Bush delighted in tormenting the Oregonian and on the basis of a rumored move by the Oregonian he suggested that, "somebody ought to get the Oregonian

<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 11 August 1855, and succeeding issues of the paper.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 14 July 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 18 December 1855.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 1 January 1856. A miscellaneous collection of territorial papers is in the O.H.S.

<sup>5</sup>Wt. E. Lane, Sr. to Bush, 5 January 1856, U. of O., Deady to Bush, 21 January 1856, U. of O.

<sup>6</sup>Statesman, 15 September 1855.

a new dress. It is beginning to look about as dinky as it used to when it issued from the old ramage that Dryer found in a dairy in California.<sup>1</sup> Dryer returned a blast that nearly reeked Bush over:

Sing - the Ore-a-go-ni-an lying-ing-ing-g,  
Dinky-inky-gy sheet; Es-m-amage-gs; ... Dryer  
ryer-yer-er-r-r-r, Liar - ... Sing you rascals,  
sing louder, LOUDER, LOUDER, hoop, yell, SCREAM!!!  
'tis the order of Ass-a-hell Bush, you party choristers.<sup>2</sup>

Bush, although taken back, managed to remark: "It is unmistakable that Dryer is crazy, and the Territory will have him to support as an insane pauper from Multnomah county."<sup>3</sup> The attack on Dryer increased in intensity because of lingering Know-Nothing Whig activities and Portland was a hot bed of them. It was reported that their activities were increasing once more in the northern counties. Then too, Governor Curry had made some poor appointments and Bush publicly insisted that these Know-Nothings be replaced by good Democrats.<sup>4</sup>

General Lane, reporting from Washington, informed Bush that things looked bad on the national scene, for the Know-Nothings and Black Republicans controlled the House, further, that the newly selected Speaker of the House, Banks, was a Black-Republican Know-Nothing.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 15 September 1855.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 19 September 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 29 September 1855.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 17 November, 24 November 1855. Petitions were circulated throughout the counties, at the insistence of Bush, to demand the ouster of Know-Nothings.

<sup>5</sup>Lane to Bush, 22 January, 2 February 1856, U. of O.



With the situation dark on the stateside scene, Bush determined to realign the party in Oregon. Indeed, Deady had heartily recommended "a Cathartic and high toned tonic" for the party. It had been well purged in the "location stampede of 1852 and 3", but had picked up too many "inert and infected members". Reminding Bush that "political amputation is your forte" he recommended immediate remedial techniques be applied.<sup>1</sup>

A J. F. Gazley was singled out for the first blast, probably because of his extreme vulnerability. He was a Democrat but had been feckhardy enough to defy the Clique and had opposed the Viva Voce law in the Assembly of 1854-55. His past made the thrusts exceedingly rare and when he ran to the Oregonian for aid Bush began to salute the "Wingo Chief" in his column. According to Deady, Gazley had:

sometime in '52 ... had carnal knowledge of a squaw against her will near the Canyon. Mr. Knott [unidentified] and other white men, who were living near at the time, were appealed to by the said 'injured female', they visited Gazley and give him the alternative of either giving the Squaw a pair of blankets or taking a whipping. He squirmed a little and forked over the blankets.<sup>2</sup>

As previously mentioned, Governor Curry was called to task by newspaper articles and petitions, signed by faithful Democrats, which read:

To His Excellency: The undersigned, Democratic and anti-Know-Nothing voters of Oregon, earnestly petition your excellency to cause to be displaced all members of the Know-Nothing party or supporters of that party holding public station,

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<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, 14 May 1856, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Deady to Bush, 20 March 1855, U. of O.

directly or indirectly under you, and that their places be filled by competent Democrats.<sup>1</sup>

The actions of the Democrats in this instance have been severely criticised, for, by and large, these non-Democratic appointees were military appointees engaged in fighting an Indian outbreak in southern Oregon.<sup>2</sup> It was also demanded of Lane that Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, and a Mr. Gardiner, Surveyor General, be replaced by faithful Clique-ites. Lane had promised time after time to see to their removal<sup>3</sup> but Bush privately remarked, "I have been disappointed too many times to have entire confidence in old Joe."<sup>4</sup>

This failure of Lane, on many occasions, to heed Clique demands respecting political appointments had long been a sore spot among the members of the Clique, particularly so with the triumvirate,<sup>5</sup> Bush, Deady and Nesmith. The irritant had been at work since Deady's removal from the judgeship. Then too, Nesmith was replaced without cause as

<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 17 November 1855. Issue of 24 November 1855 reports that Curry will correct his faulty appointments and remove the Know-Nothings from office.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 82 is disgusted by the smallness of the Clique in this matter. See also Oregonian, 8 December, 15 December 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 30 September 1855, O.H.S., Bush to Deady 17 April 1854, O.H.S., Bush to Deady, 23 February 1856, O.H.S., Lane to Bush, 1 June 1854, U. of O.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 23 February 1856, O.H.S.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Henry Overmeyer, The Oregon Justinian, A Life of Matthew Deady, unpublished Master's thesis, U. of O., 1935, pp. 102-103.

Marshal.<sup>1</sup> Bush had often taken Lane to task and received avid protestations of good faith; Lane often using the excuse that Whig or Black Republicanism foiled his attempts. Disgusted at the lack of action, Bush demanded a showdown, "I shall have a free talk with Lane ... I'll be d----d if I am not going to know what screw is loose in the surveyor general matter."<sup>2</sup>

Lane met Bush at his office in Corvallis and promised to have both Gardiner and Palmer removed.<sup>3</sup> Not until March of 1856 was Lane able to announce the removal of Gardiner as Surveyor General and the appointment of John Zieber, Bush's father-in-law, as the new Surveyor General.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this appointment sheds some light on the impatience of Bush to have Gardiner removed. Democratic appetites were whetted on the fruits of the office of Surveyor General. "Zieber turned all the clerks all out but one the day he went in. The one will be retained only a short time."<sup>5</sup>

This success failed to assuage the discontent the Clique felt in regard to Lane, however, and when Lane failed to gain an appropriation in Congress to pay Bush for Territorial printing, explaining that "Black Republicans prevented him", Bush remarked, "Likely!" and privately remark-

<sup>1</sup>Lane to Bush, 3 December 1854, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 12 September 1855, O. H. S.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 3 September 1855, O. H. S.

<sup>4</sup>Lane to Bush, 17 March 1856, U. of O.

<sup>5</sup>Bush to Deady, 4 May 1856, O. H. S.



ed that Lane evidently planned to hold this over him as a checkrein.<sup>1</sup> Lane told Bush that: "I am surprised and mortified to find, extensive grumbling and complaining from many persons in different portions of the Territory about the appointments which have been lately made."<sup>2</sup> Bush's opinion was short and gruff: "Goddamn old Jo's appointments!"<sup>3</sup> and these sentiments were echoed by Deady, Hensmith, McCracken and others.

Lane must have realized that the situation demanded swift and overpowering action on his part to soothe the disgruntled Clique. His personal following was surely great, and he was idolized by the public as Oregon's greatest figure.

Bush felt this adulation had given Lane delusions of grandeur and caused him to try to establish a personal "Lane party". At any event, Lane returned to Oregon for the campaign of 1857, renewed in vigor and fairly exuding cooperativeness and charm. Sceptically, Bush watched and then remarked: "I think we got old Joe square on the platform this time, and got him where he can't play good Lord and devil in the same breath. He is helping the local organization some this time, a thing he has never done before."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bush to Deady, 11 October 1856, O.H.S.

<sup>2</sup>Lane to Bush, 3 February 1855, U. of O.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 21 April 1855, O.H.S.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 19 May 1857, O.H.S.

Having successfully met and subdued threatened insurrection at the top level of the Democratic organization, Bush was in no mood to tolerate small bolters in the party, his patience was at an end and the lash fell in rapid succession upon recalcitrant or flighty Democrats.<sup>1</sup> The efforts of Bush and the Clique were not unrewarded for the successes of the 1857 election were the greatest ever achieved by the Democrats. The victory was the result of accepting the Clique produced Territorial platform and candidates who had vigorously stumped the Territory defending it. Lane's majority was the greatest yet<sup>2</sup> and finally the Democrats had secured a majority, a 5,513 plurality, in favor of a statehood convention.<sup>3</sup>

The Democrats looked forward to the statehood of Oregon with considerable enthusiasm. Too, Clique members were now largely in control of lucrative and powerful Territorial positions; Nesmith had been appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs,<sup>4</sup> Zeiber was Surveyor General, and others of the faithful retained influential positions in the government. The obedience to Bush and rigid Clique control may be clearly indicated by quoting a resolution passed in Lane county in 1856:

Resolved: That we will not make any party issues on men but will stand on principles, and we consider they who oppose

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 24 March 1857, 5 May 1857, 12 May 1857.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 16 June 1857.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 30 June 1857. Charles E. Carey, The Oregon Constitution, op. cit., p. 21, quoting the same issue of the Statesman gives the plurality as 5,938.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 31 May 1857.

the Democratic party because they happen not to like Bush, Delazon Smith, or other members thereof, as disorganizers and enemies of Democratic principles.<sup>1</sup>

As evidence of his generous nature and broad mindedness, in a fit of forgiving, Bush offered:

We earnestly invite every Democrat who has been lured from his party by corrupt and designing factionists, to come up out of Babylon -- shake off the vile fetters which have bound him, wash his hands of corruption, abjure his fanaticism, renew his alliance to the party, and stand forth in the bright sunshine of God, a man and a Democrat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 27 May 1856.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 10 June 1856.



## CHAPTER V

### THE REACTION IN OREGON TO NATIONAL AFFAIRS; THE NEGRO QUESTION DESTROYS THE CLIQUE

From the earliest times, Oregon had maintained a neutral attitude toward Negroes. Inhabited as it was by men from all portions of the United States, it had maintained an aloofness to any connection with Negroes and in its Provisional and Territorial phases slavery was refused admittance to the territory by the Organic act; even free colored men were discouraged from entering or settling in the Territory. Woodward reports that a special act by the legislature of 1852-53 was required so that a favored colored man, one George Washington, might reside in the Territory.<sup>1</sup>

The attempt was made to avoid any involvement in the problem of Negroes, free or slave. Oregon preferred to have none at all.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had insured Oregon as a free territory and discussion, pro or con, on slavery in Oregon was conspicuous by its absence until 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska bill created an alarm in Oregon that scattered to the winds the comparative equanimity which had marked politics in the territory. New alignments were created, old

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 89. See also Helen Jean Foulton, The Attitude Of Oregon Toward Slavery And Secession 1843-1865, unpublished Master's Thesis, U. of O., 1946.

friendships were destroyed and, as in the Nation, new parties were created that changed the fate of all those involved.

Opinion in Oregon was definite on the issue of popular sovereignty, as expounded in the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and Whig conventions passed resolutions condemning the principle, while Democratic conventions espoused the principle but reading into it the right to exercise self-government, an end to all federally appointed officials.<sup>1</sup>

Bush had early been outspoken in praise of Stephen A. Douglas and had met him while on his trip to the east in 1854.<sup>2</sup> Complimentary editorials, from time to time, commented on the attributes of Douglas and his activities on the national scene. Bush now undertook to support popular sovereignty. He editorialized on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill as a "Measure for African Freedom", insisting there was no tendency to plant slavery in Oregon contained in the bill, that slavery could not exist in Oregon since nature had already excluded it, and that now the south should feel relieved over the expungement of the hated line, 36° 30', and would likely begin a process of gradual emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

Generally speaking, the Salem Clique held to the support of the principles embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and Delazon Smith strong-

<sup>1</sup>Woodward, *op. cit.* Chapter VI is an excellent analysis of the impact of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill on Oregon. It goes into more detail on the subject than does this paper intend to do.

<sup>2</sup>A letter of introduction George H. Williams to Douglas is in the Bush Collection, U. of O.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 22 August 1854.

ly defended them in the territorial legislature of 1854-1855. The fight against free-soilers has been mentioned in Chapter IV, and was fought in conjunction with the battle against the temperance group and the Know-Nothings. Thus the fight was carried through 1855. The Statesman took every opportunity to aim cutting remarks at Dryer who now found himself without a party. The Whigs were dying and a Republican party had sprung up in Oregon in September of 1856 with the Argus, edited by W. L. Adams, as its official organ.

To Bush, the Republicans were merely another front for the organization his Democracy had always fought and Black Republicanism was just the new face for the old opposition that had lately been marked as No Party, Whig, Temperance, or Know-Nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Dryer only gradually made the swing to Republicanism, but he immediately supported the Argus in anti-slavery articles. His support was so active that Bush angrily denounced him for favoring "Nigger Suffrage",<sup>2</sup> although this was not the case. Privately, Bush favored the pro-slave Lecompton constitution for Kansas and informed Deady that if he had been a member of the Congress he would have voted in favor of it. His opinion of Douglas was favorable, he believed him to be completely sincere and "correct in principle".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 19 September 1856.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 6 May 1856.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 12 February 1858, O.H.S.



The Sumner-Brooks affair in Congress was reported to Bush by Lane<sup>1</sup> and when Lane served as Brook's second in a duel, his support of the pro-slavery faction was publicly proclaimed. The Oregonian violently objected to this display as prejudicial to Oregon's chances for statehood.<sup>2</sup>

The pressure exerted on Oregon's political parties by the question of slavery undoubtedly gave the impetus to movement for a statehood convention and brought forth the great majority in favor of a Constitutional Convention for 1857. It further seems likely that fear of a recurrence in Oregon of the Kansas civil war must be prevented, and early statehood posed the solution.

Throughout 1856 Bush had maintained at his paper's masthead Buchanan as the Democratic nominee for the Presidency. In mid-July Lane had expressed doubt that the northern states would support Buchanan and further felt that his election would definitely divide the union of the states.<sup>3</sup> It was with great jubilation that Bush announced Buchanan's victory and his election to the Presidency.<sup>4</sup>

The support, by Bush, of this pro-slavery candidate plus the affiliation between Bush and Lane, since the latter had exhibited his feelings in the Sumner-Brooks episode, caused quite a degree of dissatisfaction among many Democrats with free soil tendencies. Because of this a

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<sup>1</sup>Lane to Bush, 29 May 1856, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian, 20 September 1856.

<sup>3</sup>Lane to Bush, 18 July 1856, U. of O.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 16 December 1856.

number of bolters from the Democratic party made clear their intentions early in 1857 and, from January to March, Bush kept up a constant stream of abuse against them in the columns of his newspaper. He was particularly abusive against those bolters who had failed to vote properly in the various county conventions and he accused them of "lying and fraud".<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, Bush's proscriptions against the bolters drew counter-charges from the Oregonian and the Argus (which Bush usually lampooned as the Aircoose) of overbearance and Clique rule.<sup>2</sup> The Statesman denied this, saying that "any man can belong to the Democratic party, organized as it is, or not, just as he pleases," however it was added that if the majority chose a candidate the minority should acquiesce.<sup>3</sup>

Meantime the Clique had once more settled upon Lane as its candidate for Delegate because of his popular appeal, although it would have preferred Nesmith, Delazon Smith or Deady.

Bush evidently felt that he had the bolters under control, for he informed Deady that "Everything is going well at this end of the Clique's government. How is it with your 'Cow Counties'?"<sup>4</sup> The more serious problem of supporting the pro-slave forces in the party was also discussed. Jo Lane had informed Bush that the pro-slavers had planned to buy up the Standard and to openly publish a pro-slavery newspaper unless the Statesman began to support them. Paradoxically, Bush remarked: "Jo believes it, but I think it is all bosh." Still he asked that Deady

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 24 March 1857.

<sup>2</sup>Oregonian and Argus issues for March and April 1857.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 28 April 1857.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 10 March 1857, O. H. S.

submit letters for publication "in favor of a slave state", and urged, "Hurry them up, or rather hurry up the first of the series. Write several of them. Don't fail in this."<sup>1</sup>

Here we are faced with the problem of determining Bush's own opinions on the question of slavery. It seems likely that he personally cared little either way, he had many friends who were at opposite ends of the argument and yet he retained them all. Judging from his letters and editorials it would appear that he was agreeable to slavery as an institution, certainly he defended it as an institution guaranteed by the Constitution, but he must have felt that it would be far better for Oregon if any and all reference to negroes was prohibited. Deady was an open exponent of slavery and campaigned throughout the Territory proclaiming it. It was felt that Deady's "run on niggers would run him into the ground,"<sup>2</sup> but such was not the case, for he was elected president of the Constitutional Convention.

In order to clarify the stand of the Democrats on slavery, Bush published an editorial which must have contained much of his own personal belief:

The democratic party has been called the pro-slavery party. As a National organization professing to stand on ground as broad as the Union, it has been charged with leaning to the South whenever the North presented a political issue.

The democracy accept and defend the Constitution as it is. They recognize African servitude as one of the institutions of our country, which, in common with others the Constitution was ordained to protect. They declare the extension or non-extension of domestic slavery to be wholly within the control

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Richard H. Dearborn to Bush, 24 August 1857, Archives.



of those whom it directly interests, and are ready everywhere to protect its rights and to secure its constitutional privileges in those States where it lawfully exists.

Under the Constitution the democracy assert that the north cannot interfere with slavery in the south, nor deny its extension to the Territories, and that the south cannot extend slavery to the north nor to the Territories.<sup>1</sup>

Aware of the importance placed upon the attitude of Oregon by the Congress, for the statehood bill was pending, Bush asserted the independence of the Oregon Democracy.

Democratic and National papers in the Northern States, in commenting upon the vote of Oregon, should bear in mind that a majority of the electors of this Territory have been born and bred in the Southern States . . . . Let not black republicanism lay the flattering unction to its soul that we are free soilish here. We are as far from that as is California, or Virginia. And we will send a democratic delegation to the National Congress of the California and Virginia stamp<sup>2</sup>

Oregon turned to the business of electing its territorial officers with an uneasiness bred of the slavery problem and the threatened disunion on the national scene, but with a determination to bring forth a Constitution that would guide Oregon when she gained her much-sought-after position among the other United States.

The aforementioned majority in favor of a statehood convention was no sooner tabulated than work was begun on a Constitution. Meeting in the Salem courthouse 17 August 1857, the delegates elected Judge Matthew P. Deady as president and he and Delazon Smith dominated the discussion in the writing of the Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 17 November 1857.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Carey, The Oregon Constitution, op. cit., p. 27.

Bush had, for many years, spoken in favor of statehood and his paper continued to ask that the Constitution be accepted in order that Oregon might, the sooner, become a state.<sup>1</sup>

With the members of the Clique at the helm a Constitution completely acceptable to the Democracy was assured. The Constitution contained a Bill of Rights which was based generally upon the National Bill of Rights, but with some interesting exceptions. Article number thirty-one provided that "White foreigners who are, or may hereafter become residents of this State shall enjoy the same rights ... as native born citizens. And the Legislative Assembly shall have the power to restrain, and regulate the immigration to this State of persons not qualified to become Citizens of the United States."<sup>2</sup> Thus the future state might prevent the entry of Negroes and Negroes, Chinamen, and mulattos were specifically denied the right of suffrage.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the partisanship exhibited in many of the debates during the creation of the Constitution, Bush felt called upon to editorialize over the freedom of the Democratic members in the convention. That the Clique ruled is obvious despite the protestations of Bush, who also served warning to those Democrats that might be tempted to desert the party.

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 29 September 1857 carried the proposed Constitution and urged its acceptance.

<sup>2</sup>The Constitution of Oregon, see Carey, op. cit., p. 403.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 405.

In the late constitutional convention were democrats from all parts of the Territory. Most of them for the last six years read and listened to the opposition slang-whang about 'party', 'Caucus', 'lash', 'Salem Clique', &c, &c. ... Well, they heard this same thing over again, day after day, in the convention. And they had a chance to see how much 'caucusing', 'cliquing', and 'lashing' there was. And there was as much as there ever was ... . Members found here no 'clique' or persons seeking, or desiring to control their action, or their votes ... . None ever existed here. The only 'Salem Clique' that now exists or ever existed, consists of the regular, hard democratic organization and party. It extends all over the Territory, has members in every section ... It is an extensive and powerful clique -- this democratic party is. Grumblers, carpers, softs, soreheads and falsifiers had better get off its track before they are run over and washed.<sup>1</sup>

That there was no excessive grumbling among Democratic members of the Convention is a tribute to the efficiency of the well-oiled machinery of the Clique and its ability to gain its ends without sacrificing party unity.

The Constitution was placed before the people and voted on 9 November 1857. Interesting enough, the ballots were arranged so that a voter cast his ballot not only for or against the constitution, but for or against slavery in the State and for or against free Negroes in the state. The Oregon attitude of "leave Negroes alone" as previously mentioned was remarkably borne out by the results of the election. The Constitution was accepted 7,195 to 3,215, a favorable majority of 3,980 votes. Slavery was denied 7,727 to 2,645, or by a majority of 5,082. Free Negroes were also proscribed, 8,640 to 1,081; ruled out by a majority of 7,559.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 6 October 1857.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 23 December 1857.



This aversion to Negroes of any status is remarkable, and yet it was the reason for the lapse of two years before Oregon was to gain statehood for the Southern Senators in Congress held up action on it despite the pro-slavery tendencies of the Territorial Delegate Joseph Lane.<sup>1</sup>

In the same issue of the Statesman, that announced the official tabulation of the vote on the Constitution, appeared a call for a State Convention over the signatures of the Democratic Central Committee, which included Bush, Nesmith, Delazon Smith, and Chadwick.<sup>2</sup> Candidates were needed who would support the Democracy, and to assure Democratic control in the expected admission to statehood aggressive attention to detail and organization was the order of the day.

To answer the challenges made by the Oregonian (Dryer was a member of the Constitutional Convention) and other opposition papers, Bush issued a justification of the Democracy that also seemed to call to the voters attention the blessings of Democratic rule.

We have heard a continual hullabalee in Oregon on the part of the opposition -- press and party -- about the conduct of the democracy, or the 'Salem Clique'. They have been unceasingly charged with every species of mismanagement and wrong. But ever since the organization of the Territory -- from 1849<sup>3</sup> -- its affairs have been under the exclusive control of this democratic party, or 'Salem Clique'. The success of that party or 'Clique', which mean one and the

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<sup>1</sup>The constitutional and legal arguments on the Oregon Constitution are able presented in Carey, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 22 December 1857.

<sup>3</sup>The Oregon Territory was created 13 August 1848, see Dan E. Clark, The West in American History, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1937, p. 491.

same thing, has been unbroken. The confidence reposed in them by the people has never been shaken. That is something at least, of which the 'Salem Clique', alias the democratic party, can justly point to with pride. They can also, after a seven or eight years administration, point to a Territory out of debt, with money in her Treasury. ... Financially, no Territory or State in the Union is in a more prosperous condition than is Democratic -- 'Salem-Clique' governed Oregon. Surely, there must be some mistake in the representations and howlings against the party in power. Their agents, as public officers have certainly acted honestly, prudently, with judgement, and for the best interests of the people. And the people, in turn, have wisely committed the government to them, and passed, unheeded, the croakings of disaffection and speckled falsehoods of all the piebald opposition. And, as it has been, will it continue to be.<sup>1</sup>

With these tender musings, Bush opened the New Year and wished to one and all the Season's Greetings.

Evidently there was considerable feeling contrary to the proclamation of Bush, for in April of 1858 a group of Democrats met at Eugene, termed themselves "National Democrats" and intended to nominate opposition candidates to the men chosen by the Salem Clique. Some of these men had once basked in the light and enjoyed the blessings of the Clique, but for one reason or another had since lost favor. Nine of these men called the meeting and represented most of the Territorial counties: Wm. M. King, Multnomah; J. E. Slater, Benton; Nathaniel Ford, Polk and Tillamook; Thomas Scott, Yamhill and Clatsop; F. A. Collard, George Rees, and S. F. Gilliland, Clackamas; William Allen and A. Shuck, Yamhill.<sup>2</sup>

This movement presaged the greatest and most dangerous split that the Clique had been forced to face. In the group were some pro-slavery

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 5 January 1858.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 128.

men but, Bush, facing a serious threat to the Democracy declared:

A few of the 'Nationals' are secretly and privately endeavoring to work upon extreme pro-slavery men, by telling them that this 'national' is really a pro-slavery movement ... . This double dealing is a cheat and a fraud. ... We warn pro-slavery democrats not to be deluded by these sugar-coated lies ... it is an abolition party!<sup>1</sup>

A dangerous situation called for strong measures and the Eugene movement received another hate-laden charge from the pages of the Statesman:

There are a dozen, or so, scoundrels perambulating the county, endeavoring to spread disaffection, and lure democrats, with one lie or another, from their party. They offer offices in order to gain support and tell men that they haven't been appreciated; that the Salem Clique has kept them down. Look about you, over the Territory, and you will find every single scoundrel, big and little, who has joined, or is expected to join, the Eugene faction in the endeavor to disorganize and defeat the democratic party, is a disappointed office-seeker. ... Had not the democrats turned out Amory Holbrook and Joe Meek, does anybody suppose they would have joined the Eugene 'national' faction? ... If the democrats had not removed Col. King from office for drunkenness, does anybody imagine he would have joined them? ... Not a bit of it! If the 'Salem Clique' had placed and kept them in office, they would now have been shouting, 'Great is the Salem Clique!'.<sup>2</sup>

More than a grain of truth is embraced by this editorial, and Bush kept up a running fight with this group throughout the campaign of 1858.<sup>3</sup> Because of the inherent danger in the situation, the Clique was again

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 9 March 1858.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 16 March 1858.

<sup>3</sup>Bush ridiculed the "Nationals" at every turn. They chose Colonel James K. Kelly, an opponent of the Viva Vece Bill and a bolter as their candidate for Congress and slated to run against Lafayette Grover, the choice of the Salem Clique. Statesman, 30 April 1858.



forced to settle upon Joseph Lane as their candidate for Senator when the first Democratic convention for the nomination of state officers met. To the chagrin of the Clique the Eugene faction also settled upon Lane as their candidate for the Senate and this fact, in part, accounts for Bush's fear that Lane was well under way in the creation of a personal party which would follow him in any election.

Be that as it may, a more pressing and threatening danger faced Bush and the Clique when the candidates chosen by the Republicans, who were warmly supported by the Argus, and somewhat more hesitantly supported by the Oregonian, withdrew from the elections, en masse, the month before the elections.<sup>1</sup> This unexpected action placed the contest between the hards and softs and it was realized that the Whig-Republicans would align themselves with the softs at the polls to defeat Clique rule. "Republican organization had for the time largely disintegrated in the face of the general desire to help overthrow Bush and the Salem Clique."<sup>2</sup>

The fortress held, nor could the combined forces of softs and republicans shake down the throne of Bush. On 6 July, the Statesman carried the official returns, the hards had elected 12 state senators to 4 "black republicans" and 27 members to the House while the "black republicans" managed to place only 7 men there. Also the State ticket had been swept into office and included Bush as State Printer although his majority was

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 136, see also Argus, 23 May 1858.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 137.

won by a scant 400 votes.<sup>1</sup>

The Statesman of 22 June 1858 was the last issue to carry the identifying masthead, "Salem, Oregon Territory"; beginning with 29 July 1858 it read "Salem, Oregon". This was based on a reprinted article in this issue quoting the New York Herald which erroneously reported that Oregon had been admitted to the Union on 18 May 1858.

This point of statehood for Oregon, as mentioned earlier, had been a prized desire of Bush and the inability of Lane to obtain the measure granting statehood was the ground on which Bush finally broke with Lane. The Clique, notably the triumvirate of Bush, Deady, and Nesmith, had long been dissatisfied with the appointments secured by Lane and had been particularly incensed by the treatment they had personally received at the hands of Lane. Their dissatisfaction with Lane had been the occasion of some bantering between themselves and during the campaign of 1857 Deady had written:

You seem to be up to your ears in the old fight. Killing somebody off that Lane may be nominated; and as soon as that is accomplished the latter turns around and affiliates with the vanquished and leaves the Statesman to bear the enmity and heart burnings of the contest. Well possibly it will not always be so.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 6 July 1858. A Democratic friend, Butler P. Anderson of Washington Territory wrote: "Accept my most sincere congratulations upon your triumph over the whole opposition ticket, for they all ran against you." Butler P. Anderson to Bush, 13 July 1858, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Deady to Bush, 27 March 1857, U. of O.

When Lane informed Bush that he had failed to obtain a favorable report through Congressional Committees in order to pay Bush for public printing, and then went on to alibi his inability to obtain the passage of the statehood bill because of a last minute press of business,<sup>1</sup> Bush oiled his guns, checked the priming and swung them to bear on the pride of Oregon, Old Jo Lane.

The battle promised to be a fierce one and the enmities created here did not pass off until the participants were old men and far removed from the field of politics.

Bush began his attack by commenting on why Oregon had failed so often to gain statehood. It appeared to that observer that in each case it had failed because of the Delegate's failure to push it in Congress. The Statesman indicated a medium amount of unhappiness over this dereliction of duty and failure to meet the trust imposed by the people.<sup>2</sup>

From this mild beginning Bush advanced through a series of progressively more vehement attacks in which he charged that Lane deliberately failed to obtain statehood so that he could draw mileage as a Senator and as a Delegate. Bush charged that Lane drew over \$20,000 for mileage that he had never traveled. "The General does not deign to meet the facts," said Bush, "but falls back upon the assumed hold upon the people of Oregon. This is a fatal mistake."<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime Congress had acted upon the statehood bill and Oregon

<sup>1</sup>Lane to Bush, 18 June 1858, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 29 December 1858.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 15 March 1859.



had formally been admitted to the Union on 14 February 1859. The elected Senators, Lane and Delazon Smith, and the Representative Lafayette Grover, had previously gone to Washington City and from their close proximity to Lane, the latter two swung to support him against the charges of Bush. Grover offered to obtain an appointment as ambassador to Bolivia for Bush should he desire it<sup>1</sup> but Smith was not so subtle. He warned that Bush's attacks against Lane were unfounded and were hurting Oregon's chances for statehood<sup>2</sup> and further explained that he felt obliged to "act upon my knowledge rather than your belief!" in respect to the integrity and ability of Lane.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, as far as Bush was concerned this merely increased the number of his opponents by one and one half (for he never seriously felt that Grover was a challenge). Support for Bush was not slow in coming and George H. Williams asked: "What do you think of Smith's letter -- He seems to be tickled to death with the idea of being Senator. The general talk here [Portland] is that he has 'turned off' on the 'Salem Clique' and you [and gone] in with Lane." Williams, further, urged Bush to write articles opposing Lane, and cited his ability to ruin Pratt without encountering any trouble.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Grover to Bush, 18 January 1859, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Smith to Bush, 2 February 1859, written prior to the admission.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>George H. Williams to Bush, 8 February 1859, U. of O. Williams had been the man to introduce Bush to Stephen A. Douglas on his trip east in 1854.

Trouble was in store, however, for it was reported to Bush that Linn County (Smith's home county) was up in arms over the Statesman's attacks on Lane. "They say Linn County will never consent to give up Delazon, that if Marion and Polk [counties] throw off on Delazon, Linn will throw off on Grover and Rush!"<sup>1</sup>

In place of soft-peddling or ceasing his attack, Bush laid on with a vengeance and openly accused Lane of attempting to build a personal party in Oregon.

He viciously turned on the softs who had shown themselves in the recent legislative assembly and cried: "The whole conduct of the Lane party in the last Territorial Legislature was tyrannous and intolerant". He explained that this group had overthrown Grover and chosen Lansing Stout<sup>2</sup> for candidate for Representative to Congress. Bush continued, ominously, "and bitterly will Gen. Lane and his friends regret the day when they offered the Hon. L. F. Grover as a victim upon the altar of their one-man party."<sup>3</sup> Delazon Smith came in for his share of the glory, too, and was bitterly denounced for the part he had played in betraying the Democracy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Joseph W. Drew to Bush, 15 February 1859, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Hesmith to Deady, 25 April 1859, O.E.S. "You have doubtless heard of the damnable outrage perpetrated by Lane and Smith's friends in our mis-called Democratic Convention. Grover was sold out to gain votes for Smith and I boldly denounced the dirty bargain in the Convention ... and exposed Stout's Know-Nothingism ...".

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 26 April 1859.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 8 May 1859.

The split in the hitherto secure ring of the Clique enabled Stout to win the election by a bare majority and Bush, furious at this loss of his power, caustically condemned Lane for destroying the Democratic party and sacrificing the unity and good of Oregon in order to gratify his own personal desires.<sup>1</sup> Bush had desperately wanted Nesmith to enter the fray against Lane as a Candidate for Senator and Deady was in agreement. The election of Nesmith "would be a decided triumph .. over the Lane interest"<sup>2</sup> but this was also incapable of accomplishment in the poisoned strife between the Bush and Lane factions.

Even though Bush had opened an all out fight against Lane, had "proved" that Lane had threatened Smith with his hostility if Linn County failed to vote against Grover,<sup>3</sup> and had smeared the private lives of Smith and Lane in the columns of his paper,<sup>4</sup> the strong appeal that Lane held for the public was too great and Asahel Bush suffered his first major political defeat.

The fight between the Bush and Lane factions had been so severe that in caucus, the Democrats after three days of successive balloting and pressuring had not been able to reach an agreement on the renomination of a man to fill Delazon Smith's term in the Senate. The two groups were

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 12 July 1859.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 12 April 1859, C.H.S.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 7 June 1859.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 21 June 1859.



nearly equal and although Grover held a slight edge over Smith, no decision was reached and Oregon sent no one to pair with Lane in the Senate in 1859,<sup>1</sup> preferring to leave the seat open until the 1860 session of the Legislature.

The rift<sup>2</sup> and the victory of Lane cost Bush some subscribers to the Statesman. His lieutenants in the counties were given the names of these people who were withdrawing and joining the softs.<sup>3</sup> The situation became worse and so many men, taking courage in the defeat of the Clique by the Lane faction, withdrew their support from the Clique and the Statesman that a Portland member of the inner circle was moved to ask, "What in hell is going to become of the Democratic party?"<sup>4</sup>

The Republican party had been growing in organization throughout the Territory and State and when Dryer finally gave it the full support of the Oregonian,<sup>5</sup> an organization was completed that lacked only an able candidate to give it at least a portion of the state offices. Such a man was found in Colonel E. D. Baker from California who was imported to

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<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 31 May 1859. See also Bancroft, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 444.

<sup>2</sup>George L. Curry to Bush, 21 February 1859, U. of O., is a pathetic letter, Lane asked Curry to pay all of his debts to Bush. Curry obviously feels quite awkward in his position as a go-between.

<sup>3</sup>Shubrich Norris to Bush, 29 June 1859, Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Shubrich Norris to Bush, 4 July 1859, Archives.

<sup>5</sup>The Oregonian had made mild overtures toward the Republicans during 1859, but in February of the next year he gave full support to this party.

perform this function.<sup>1</sup> Asahel Bush had mildly taken notice of Republican growth but had not unleashed any attacks upon them, for his targets were primarily the Lane-Smith group and the newly established Oregon Democrat, of Albany, which Smith had begun in August, 1859, in order to have a paper with which to answer Bush.<sup>2</sup> The Standard had become defunct in January of 1859 and Bush, with evident delight carried a notice of its demise in his paper.<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the inherent power in the growing Republican party, Bush in following the line of a Douglas Democrat pulled closer and closer to the line of the Republicans. The effort to control and guide the Douglas Democratic faction against the pro-slave Lane or National Democratic group was an all consuming task, and the hatred between both Democratic groups was greater than the dislike either felt for the Republicans.

As evidence of this trend, Bush viewed the Dred Scott decision in a decidedly un-Democratic view. He concluded:

The only decision made by the Court was that a Negro could not bring a suit in a United States Court. The several opinions in addition comprising certain dicta, not possessed of the binding force of Law.<sup>4</sup>

Offerings such as this may have been slanted to catch the eye of the Republicans if such was the plan of Bush, although no supporting evidence

<sup>1</sup>T. W. Davenport, "Slavery Question in Oregon", Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. IX, Number 4, pp. 338-341.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 3 August 1859.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 11 January 1859.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 10 April 1859.

can be found to prove it. Surely Bush realized that the Republicans held the balance of power between the two Democratic factions and previously the softs had allied with the Whigs and Republicans in an effort to break the ironclad rule of the Salem Clique.

Baker, it would seem, took the initiative for the rapprochement. He spoke to the Marion County Republican delegation, who had met to nominate candidates for the legislature, and "counseled against making nominations and in favor of voting the Bush ticket."<sup>1</sup> It was decided that the only way for a Republican to gain a seat in the legislature, for Marion, was through an alliance with the Salem Clique.

In order to feel out the Salem Clique, T. W. Davenport approached Benjamin F. Harding and an agreement was reached after further consultations. Later, a spokesman for the Lane faction, after learning of the meeting asked:

'Did you sell out to the Bushites?'

'Surely we did not.'

'Well, what did you do?'

'We bought in.'<sup>2</sup>

Similar agreements were reached between the Douglas Democrats and the Republicans in the other counties. The "Beetle Heads," as Bush termed the exponents of Lane,<sup>3</sup> were in an extreme state of anxiety at

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<sup>1</sup>Davenport, *op. cit.*, p. 348. Davenport was present at this discussion and, as we shall see, was the go-between for the negotiations in Marion County.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 349-351.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 347.



this change of events and Judge George H. Williams went into Smith's own Linn County to 'heard the lion in his den'.<sup>1</sup> The two men canvassed the county together, sharing the same bedroll at night, but while this was going on, a secret caucus of Democrats and Republicans determined to run one Barton Crul, "a rabid Democrat" with demagogic appeal, since it was determined that he alone could demand and obtain enough support to defeat any Lane-Smith man in Linn County.<sup>2</sup>

The agreement made in the caucus guaranteed that if their men were elected to the legislature, they were to vote for "Col. Baker and some Douglas Democrat for United States Senators."<sup>3</sup> Of the four members to be elected, one was a Lane-Smith man, and he was by only a four vote majority.<sup>4</sup>

Bush was delirious in his joy and gleefully announced that the Albany Democrat was politically dead.<sup>5</sup> Smith, whom Bush now called "Delusion", served up an answer which shows that his close association with Bush had not been in vain.

Asahell Bush who runs the Salem smut machine, the club-footed loafer Beggs and Nesmith, the vilest and most loathsome creature that wears the human form on the Pacific Coast,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 352. Williams address is reported to be in the Oregon Historical Quarterly, 1907, March number, p. 22, but is unavailable. See also Woodward, op. cit., pp. 171-172, who conversed with Judge Williams.

<sup>2</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Statesman, 1 July 1860.

are asserting that We are politically dead! Dead!! Never! Never!! NO, Never!!! let these cut-throats, assassins, murderers and their bastard vagabond allies in this county, pub that in their pipes and smoke it!!!!<sup>1</sup>

The rantings of Smith were contrary to fact, however, and from as far away as San Francisco it was apparent that the bolters were not to sweep the field as they had nearly done the year before. A friend of Bush wrote, "Alas for the Lane Society -- they have flickered." He also told of hearing that Lane, in Washington, had tried his best to injure Nesmith by having his accounts [as Indian Agent] suspended, but that he had been unable to do so. "Lane was told in Washington that his treatment of a man like Nesmith would not do him any good."<sup>2</sup>

By confining his efforts to the campaign over the State Legislature, rather than entering the Statesman into the arguments for or against candidates for national offices, Bush, in conjunction with Col. Baker, was able to thwart the aims of Lane and Smith. The "Bushites" or Douglas Democrats won 18 seats in the legislature and the Republicans gained 13; thus, the 19 seats won by the Lane Democrats left them in an unenviable position.

When the legislature met on 10 September the test was on. It will be recalled that no one had been elected to fill Oregon's second Senatorial seat when Smith's short term expired in 1859. Now, all attention was settled upon the Senatorial contest, and the bargain struck between the Clique and the Republican group paid big dividends although it, in

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., quoting an Argus, 21 July 1850, reprint of the Democrat's assertion.

<sup>2</sup>W. S. Barnhart to Bush, 6 March 1850, O.H.S.

conjunction with the tremendous emotional and philosophical conflict encountered with the outbreak of the War between the States, was to break the Democratic party and cause the downfall of Asahel Bush as the party master and political boss of Oregon!

Bush, already deeply concerned over the growing tension and tendency toward conflict, had urged that in order to maintain a calm government on the national front Oregon select two "non-intervention" Senators to the Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Although Bush was accused of treason, and worse,<sup>2</sup> the Lane group lost the organization of the Assembly when R. F. Harding was elected Speaker of the House. In an attempt to prevent further success on the part of the coalition, six State Senators left the meeting and hid out to prevent a quorum and thereby to forestall the election of any "non-intervention" Senators from Oregon. Even though warrants were issued for their arrest<sup>3</sup> they could not be found and returned to the Assembly only after Governor Whiteaker issued an appeal to them.<sup>4</sup>

Fourteen ballots were required to settle upon United States Senators. The dominance of the Cliques in the coalition is evident and Nesmith was

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<sup>1</sup> Statesman, 4 September 1860.

<sup>2</sup> Woodward, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Davenport, op. cit., p. 353.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



elected for the long term, Baker for the short.<sup>1</sup> Bush defended the actions of the Clique by showing that in order to elect Nesmith it was necessary to support either Baker or Smith; the choice was obvious and in addition, Baker was actually a non-interventionist too.<sup>2</sup>

Bush had been able to thwart the Lane-Smith faction and to halt Lane's attempts to create a personal party,<sup>3</sup> but at what a cost! The Oregon Democracy crumbled and fell under the impact of disunion on the national scene, but the break had been made in its walls by the Clique-Republican coalition which broke Lane's ambitions.

As the presidential election approached Bush adhered to his old love, Stephen A. Douglas and rather ignored the Republican Lincoln in his desire to strike at the sectionalist, Breckenridge.<sup>4</sup> Bush was doubly determined to fight the pro-slave group because Lane had been selected as the vice-presidential candidate and running mate to Breckenridge.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 183. 26 votes were necessary to win. On the 14 ballot Nesmith had 27, Deady 22 (both Clique members) and for the short term, Baker 26, Williams 20. Bancroft, op. cit., places the election of Nesmith and Baker on the 18th ballot.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 8 October 1860.

<sup>3</sup>See Bancroft, op. cit., pp. 455-456 on Lane's desire to create a Republic of the Pacific.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, October and November issues 1860.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed description of the national and state activities in this period, see Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948. Pages 262-263 gives a vivid description of the Clique-Lane fight in the Democratic Charleston convention.

In this contest a greater number of the state's Democratic papers supported Breckenridge than Douglas,<sup>1</sup> there being six for the former and four for the latter.

The implications of practicality made themselves felt in the Clique however, and as it became more obvious that one could either vote for Lincoln and Union or Breckenridge and disunion. The Salem Clique, as represented in the Douglas Democratic faction, allied once more with the Republicans in the legislature to eliminate the Viva Voce ballot law in order that a Democrat might cast his ballot for Lincoln without openly declaring to erst-while friends and fellow-Democrats his action and intent. This attempt was not agreed to by Bush, however, and he avidly opposed the repeal of the Viva Voce law.<sup>2</sup> To the humiliation of the Douglas men, although the vote in the House was 18 to 12 to repeal the law, the Senate failed to pass it as the result of a tie vote.<sup>3</sup>

Lincoln won the election in Oregon by 270 votes over his nearest competitor, he received 5,344 votes; Breckenridge, 5,074; and Douglas, 4,131;<sup>4</sup> and Oregon faced the civil war, ostensibly a Union State.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, op. cit., p. 186, pro-Breckenridge papers, Union, Oregon Democrat, Jacksonville Sentinel, Eugene Herald, Roseburg Express, and Portland Daily News; Pro-Douglas, Statesman, Portland Times, Portland Advertiser, and The Dalles Mountaineer.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 5 November 1860.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman, 19 November 1860.

<sup>4</sup>Statesman, 3 December 1860.

<sup>5</sup>See Bancroft, op. cit., Chapter 18 and Davenport, op. cit., for a complete discussion of "rebel" activities in Oregon. Also Foulton, op. cit.

When the news of hostilities reached Oregon in April, 1861, Asahel Bush actively and constantly supported the Union, but he took issue with Lincoln over his seeming interference with his generals,<sup>1</sup> although he had earlier remarked:

Mr. Lincoln alone, of the great actors in the drama, is without any incentive to ordinary ambition.<sup>2</sup>

The war, with all its rancor, failed to injure the great friendship and high regard that Bush and Deady held for each other and they continued to correspond throughout the war and after, with all the joviality and profanity of old. Deady's pro-slavery tendencies caused him to be elected a delegate to the Charleston Convention in support of Lane and Breckenridge.<sup>3</sup> But even this perfidy seems not to have strained the feeling each man had for the other, perhaps because Deady did not attend the convention.

When the news reached Bush of Joseph Lane's attempt at personal aggrandizement, to create a Republic of the Pacific, he wrote Deady: "I always knew Jo was intensely selfish and penurious. But he is a more dishonest and a meaner creature than I ever supposed him to be. He is a liar and a knave both."<sup>4</sup> Thus Bush finished with Lane until late in the 1870's when he gave him money to help him run for the state senate.

<sup>1</sup>Statesman, 29 September 1862.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 21 October 1861.

<sup>3</sup>Overmeyer, op. cit., pp. 122-124.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 3 January 1862, O.H.S. For a discussion of the Republic of the Pacific see Bancroft, op. cit., Vol. I, Dorothy Hull in Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 17, Sept. 1916, and Joseph Ellison, Vol. 3, December 1930.



Throughout the period, 1860 to 1863, Mrs. Eugenia Bush was ailing and her illness preoccupied the mind of Bush almost to the exclusion of any other matters.<sup>1</sup> She died 11 September 1863 and left Bush to care for the four children, Estelle, Asahel Weasith, Sally, and Eugenia.

In order to care for his brood and since the Democratic party was now in disrepute, Bush left Oregon in November of 1863 for San Francisco. The unhealthy and foggy weather led him to fear for the health of his children, however, and he left for Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> He kept in touch with the political scene, and in February of 1864 informed Deady he was sure General Grant would enter the political ring against Lincoln as an "opposition candidate".<sup>3</sup>

Earlier, Bush remarked to Deady that, "You will see the change in the Statesman. Of course I still own it and may occasionally write a little for it. I wanted to be rid of the drudgery."<sup>4</sup> Action in the political arena had lost its flavor for Bush, the degradation and disruption of the Oregon Democracy when coupled to the heavy load of worry over his wife's condition were more than even the zestful heart of Bush could bear. He sold the Statesman in November 1863 and retired from active

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<sup>1</sup>The correspondence of Bush in this period contains reference to little else and even when concerned with other matters always makes some reference to her condition.

<sup>2</sup>Bush to Deady, 15 December 1863.

<sup>3</sup>Bush to Deady, 20 February 1864.

<sup>4</sup>Bush to Deady, 12 March 1863.

political participation.

The tremendous organization that he had piloted through tortuous years of opposition, internal and external, this organization with himself at the helm which had controlled Oregon as a Territory and a State, he had seen tremble and then crash under the impacts it received from the jar that shook the entire United States as it tripped over the issue of slavery.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Men of the ilk of Asahel Bush, pass, or rather push, through the stream of life all too infrequently. As an influence upon the lives of others, his worth is high incalculable. Thus far this paper has concerned itself only with the inseparable political and newspaper activities of Asahel Bush.

Some five years after he sold the Statesman, he entered the banking business with W. L. Ladd at Salem and the bank exists today, although part of a chain now, and is known still as the Ladd and Bush Bank, even though Ladd sold out to Bush in 1883.

A person with the imagination and enthusiasm exhibited by Bush could hardly help but leave his mark upon society and that the drive of this man quickened the maturation process in Oregon cannot be doubted. The organization he created was recognized by all of his opponents as a fearful thing. They strove desperately for a dozen years to breach its walls; but these walls stood until the chaos that rent the very nation asunder pulled them down too.

He showed the way in creating from a young and inexperienced wilderness territory a state that was politically, economically, and socially prepared to assume its place among the United States long years before it did and it is here, perhaps, that his greatest value lies. It is not the intent of this paper to depreciate his contributions to society as a



banker and philanthropist; these too, are important, but their impact was felt upon a state already born and well matured. His greatest worth is in the molding and creation of this state. He stood near while it was delivered from its Territorial status to that of Statehood and must have gazed with pride at the strong lusty creature he had helped create. The influence he was able to wield through the now heavy-throated, now silver-tongued Statesman was the mortar that bonded together the bulky stones of a state's structure.

He valiantly took the side of the oppressed and was deeply concerned over the Know-Nothing movement. In only one instance do we find any inconsistency in this temperament. This pertains to his attitude toward Negroes. In 1889, long after the conflict was over he wrote:

I never sympathized with the negro question in any form. I had no reason to expect that Lincoln would omit any opportunity offered by the war to strike at slavery, but when the trend in that direction towards giving him the ballot was manifest, my ardor cooled. I considered then and now that act was a crime against civilization and I have no quarrel with any act of the southern people to prevent the domination to the politics by that vote. I do not think the negro should be admitted to the suffrage north or south. If the white people can not properly govern without the assistance of the negro they had better abdicate and let the negro try it.<sup>1</sup>

These sentiments were not the result of hindsight or dissatisfaction with Radical Reconstruction rule, for he expressed identical ideas in the columns of the Statesman on 8 December 1863. Here he explained that he, Bush, "wouldn't destroy the government either to enslave or liberate niggers; he believes it to be a government of white men ...".

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<sup>1</sup>Bush to Doady, 29 April 1889, O.H.S.

As an ardent Douglas Democrat he placed himself alongside many, many others in America who saw in Douglas the personification of an American ideal. Many times Deady and others tried to sway Bush from this stand, feeling that Douglas had lost himself and the party, but to no avail.

A fragment of a letter written by Deady to Bush in 1856 serves well to express the feeling of Clique members for Bush. Wherever met the Legislative Assembly, there was Bush.

I suppose you are exclusively engaged in piloting the Clique of State through the shoals, hidden rocks and whirlpools of a session of the assembly. Certainly the invention of Parliament is an admirable contrivance to cover the measures of government with a popular sanction, but, it must be confessed that it is an instrument easily thrown out of tune, and when so, almost impossible 'to tinker up'.

Deady concluded that Bush had done a masterful job "During the six years that you have 'printed' and managed the concern."<sup>1</sup>

Although a rabid partisan in the 1852-53 controversy surrounding the seat of government question, Bush became first amused, then angry, and finally disgusted as it continued to float from one Oregon city to another. In reviewing the Capitol controversy he dryly remarked:

We would recommend that the next Capital building of Oregon, be set on wheels or erected on a wharf-boat ... so that when the caprice of our wise Legislators annually moves them to move the Seat of Government, they may move the building with them.<sup>2</sup>

He could chide, abuse, laugh, threaten, and defy in the columns of

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<sup>1</sup>Deady to Bush, 18 December 1856, U. of O.

<sup>2</sup>Statesman, 1 July 1856.

of his paper. All these he did and more too. His following was admittedly the largest in the Territory and he often shaped public opinion before the people were aware they had an opinion.

In his later years he heavily influenced the growth and development in Marion County and, indeed, the whole Willamette Valley through the financial machinations of his great bank. His influence on the state of business can be imagined as his financial dealings flowed out to all manner of business and commercial ventures. The charter of "Willamette University" drawn up in the legislative act of January 11 and 12, 1853, declares Asahel Bush a Trustee of that Institution<sup>1</sup> and either he or his family has been directly concerned with the operation and wellbeing of Willamette University for many years.

In 1884 he took one last fling at politics and was a member of the National Democratic Convention which nominated Grover Cleveland for the Presidency. He also served, in 1888, as chairman of the State Democratic Central Committee, but it seems that he made no effort to reopen the long closed traditions of the Cliques.

With his death on 23 December 1913, Oregon lost a man who had associated sixty-three years of his adult life with her political and economic growth and development.

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<sup>1</sup>Provisional Government papers, 1853, O.H.S.



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