

JAMES ROBBINS JEWELL

AGENTS *of* EMPIRE

The FIRST OREGON CAVALRY
and the Opening of the
Interior Pacific Northwest
— *during the* —
CIVIL WAR

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*The First Oregon Cavalry and the
Opening of the Interior Pacific
Northwest during the Civil War*

JAMES ROBBINS JEWELL

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For my parents,
the late (Charles) Lee
and
Susan E. (Robbins) Jewell,
who instilled in me the family tradition of a love of history and
encouraged an endless curiosity

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My association with the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment began more than twenty years ago as a doctoral student at West Virginia University. Since that first seminar paper on the Union military's command in the Far West, I have written a dissertation, several articles, and one previous book in part or entirely focused on the Oregon Cavalry. As I bring that active association nearly to an end, I will do my best to acknowledge those who have assisted me on this specific project over the past four years. Should I unintentionally omit someone, I apologize.

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One final thought: I wish my dad was still here to spend a summer traveling into the regions ridden through by the Oregon Cavalry. It was the sort of thing that he was still ready to do into his late seventies. I would have enjoyed one more season wandering around the wilderness with him, when he always taught me something new.

Sitting here on my back deck and thinking about the next topic to investigate, I realize some things that I could not have anticipated in life became like oxygen, for better and worse.

INTRODUCTION

John Drake did not like this change in plans at all. He felt it was a mistake, “the very worst thing that could have been done,” even. The idea itself was not entirely new. When he led his roughly 150 troopers out of Fort Dalles three weeks earlier, on April 20, 1864, he knew he would never find it “advisable,” as the district commander Brig. Gen. Benjamin Alvord had weakly suggested “at some juncture for your command and Captain Currey’s to unite.” Drake instead focused on the portion of the orders that informed him, “The selection of the route of travel and site of your wagon depot, is left entirely to your judgment.”¹ Alvord soon realized that merely suggesting a merger of the two large expeditions would never suffice. So on May 6 he ordered both Capt. George B. Currey and Drake to join their commands somewhere near Harney Lake in southeastern Oregon.² Drake’s feared loss of independence had been realized.

On May 11, the day after receiving that unwanted order, Drake began moving toward the lake, venting his frustration into his journal: “Why could the Gen. not have left each free to govern himself. . . . What a blunder?”³ Drake, who possessed a keen mind for frontier service, was right to question the wisdom of concentrating the two large commands. His sentiments also reflected an acute desire to lead his own expedition, with full responsibility for the decisions he made—and the successes his actions might bring. Drake knew that as a senior captain, Currey would assume command during their joint operations and therefore get the largest

share of any credit their operations might garner. Of course, should they fail, criticism would fall hardest on Currey's shoulders.

Capt. George B. Currey, the most experienced of the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment's officers, never recorded his thoughts on Gen. Benjamin Alvord's changes. Even if he had, it is doubtful he would have been as critical as Drake. Alvord made his trust in Currey clear when he issued him broad orders for the next six months that sounded very similar to those given to Captain Drake. There was one important exception: if Drake and Currey's commands ever met, Alvord told Currey, "You must of course command."⁴ John Drake was educated, with a sharp, often biting wit, whereas Currey, who was also educated, was pragmatic and no nonsense. They both craved action—or in Currey's case, more of it. By the third year of their service, both understood they would never be sent east to fight in the great battles of the Civil War and instead would battle the Indians that whites simply called Snakes (an appellation that included Northern Paiutes, Bannocks, and Northern Shoshones). Rather than worry about the wisdom of Alvord's changes, Currey saw the 1864 campaign in simple terms. The "Snake Indians being [his] objective point," he determined to find and engage the Northern Paiutes of eastern Oregon.⁵ He did not care if he led the two-plus companies of his own expedition or one combined with Drake's force; the goal was the same. Despite chaffing at the idea of losing his independence, Drake, who harbored no ill will toward Currey, agreed with his colleague about the objective of their operations.

Their joint operations lasted only a month, after which Drake and Currey resumed their separate expeditions in August. By the end of the campaigning season, both had failed to bring on the defining clash with the Paiute raiders they sought. The third prong of the 1864 campaign, commanded by Lt. Col. Charles Drew, also failed in its primary objective. That does not, however, mean that the 1864 summer campaigns had been entirely unsuccessful. Each explored over a thousand miles of largely frontier lands, recording what they saw in official reports and, in Drew's case, publishing it in a local newspaper. At the same time, the

troopers wrote dozens of anonymous letters for regional newspapers, describing the suitability of those lands for white development. Furthermore, Drew's column protected white travelers who wedded themselves to his command for protection as his column rode to Fort Boise.

This was their war; making the District of Oregon safe for white migration and exploring the district's eastern frontier regions was how the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment contributed to the Union cause during the Civil War. Unlike service in the East, where cavalry regiments generally functioned as part of mounted brigades and even divisions, that was not possible for the Oregon Cavalry; no other mounted forces were stationed in the entire District of Oregon during the war. There would be no national coverage of romanticized raids as there was for Confederates like Jeb Stuart or Union leaders like Benjamin Grierson. Serving in the Pacific Northwest was different than service elsewhere during the Civil War. Structurally, the Oregon Cavalry functioned much more like the antebellum forces stationed in the West. The regiment never concentrated in one place. Like the prewar army forces on the western frontier, the Oregon Cavalry's companies were split up and stationed throughout a vast district at forts and camps from north-central Oregon and southeastern Washington Territory down to southern Idaho Territory. Such a distribution meant the company was the most important administrative and tactical level of command. Therefore, the story of the Oregon Cavalry's contribution to the Union cause must be told primarily from the perspective of its company-level officers and the cavalrymen in the ranks.

The Oregon Cavalry never reached the agreed-upon minimum strength of ten full companies—by comparison, the First California Cavalry Regiment had thirteen companies, the second had twelve. It was, however, allowed to claim regimental status with just six companies—the seventh was recruited in 1863. With those commands spread throughout the district, junior officers had an unusual level of autonomy. Therefore, it is through their thoughts, decisions, and actions that the history of the regiment unfolds. The most important of those men were the ones who did not just serve

the longest but were most active during the regiment's life span. While most company officers joined during the initial recruiting period in late 1861 or early 1862, two men stand out above the others, Captains Currey and Drake. Both were there at the regiment's organization, and both led their companies on weeks or, more often, monthslong expeditions across thousands of miles of mostly underexplored lands between 1862 and 1864. In recognition of their abilities, the two were transferred out of the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment and assigned to serve as regimental officers in command of the new First Oregon Volunteer Infantry Regiment at the end of 1864. Most of the time, Currey and Drake operated independently, leading not just their own companies but sometimes others' as well, which was the case in 1864. They exercised more independence and made more command decisions than many cavalry brigade commanders fighting the Confederacy.

As important as Currey and Drake are to properly understand the service of the Oregon Cavalry, they did not serve alone. Ten others also served as company commanders at some time during the regiment's service. Similarly, a number of subalterns played important roles in the regiment between 1861 and 1866. Capts. William Kelly, Richard S. Caldwell, and William V. Rinehart were among the former, while Lts. James Waymire, William Hand, John F. Noble, and John T. Apperson represent the latter group. The reality was that District of Oregon commanders, especially Brig. Gen. Benjamin Alvord, who held that post from July 1862 to March 1865, crafted the operational goals and general strategy prior to the start of each campaigning season. Then the two men who served as regimental commanders of the Oregon Cavalry sometimes led, but more often ordered, their subordinates into the field to achieve the goals. Finally, it was the company-level officers and the troopers who put the plans into action in the field, riding all over Oregon as well as parts of Idaho Territory, even into Nevada, sometimes through mountain snow and at other times across parched and desolate scrublands under the inescapable sun.

Like soldiers throughout history, military service forged a close camaraderie among the Oregon cavalrymen. Surviving information,

including correspondence and diaries, indicates this was particularly true for junior officers, even though some of them interacted only intermittently with each other. Despite Oregon's small population, it appears only a few of them knew each other prior to their service. Thus, the friendships formed during the war originated through their shared experiences and hardships and, it must be said of many, their shared desire to eliminate what they saw as the Indian obstacle to development and opportunity—theirs and other whites'.

During the early years of their service, a number of the junior officers had something else in common. Several became smitten with the Gaines sisters, Amanda (twenty-one) and Jennie (eighteen), who arrived in Oregon with their family in 1845. The Gaines family lived in Oregon City in early 1862, where some of the recruiting took place. During those dreary winter and early spring months, the sisters first met some of the junior officers. Two years later, when the sisters married William V. Rinehart (October 1864) and George B. Currey (December 1864), respectively, it does not seem to have caused any rifts among the cadre of their cavalry suitors.⁶ Through their wives, Currey and Rinehart remained connected. John Drake, who rarely spared anyone from his sharp criticisms, enjoyed the company of Lts. William Hand and James Waymire. Lt. John Apperson, more than anyone else, bound the officer corps together during the war, even more so than the Gaines sisters. The scattered collections of Apperson's letters at repositories around the Pacific Northwest show that he maintained frequent and friendly correspondence with many of his fellow officers. Apperson, John M. McCall, Rinehart, Waymire, and others shared gossip about their friends and poked fun at their efforts to win Amanda's and Jennie's affection. He even served as his friend William V. Rinehart's proxy while Rinehart was in the field in 1864, attesting to his friend's character, as Rinehart tried to win the hand of Amanda Gaines, the younger of the two popular sisters, via their correspondence.⁷

The Oregon cavalrymen were not the only ones whose decisions and actions influenced the regiment's experience. Whites eager to open eastern Oregon for development worried most about the

omnipresent Snake Indians. They generally felt they were the most dangerous and hostile Indians living within the military's District of Oregon. Currey, using descriptors common among whites, felt those particular Indians were "formidable as assassins and troublesome as thieves."⁸ The Snake Indians were a white creation; there was no such tribe. Both civilians and the military applied the term rather indiscriminately. In 1863 the Oregon superintendent of Indian Affairs expressed his rather broad view that the "various bands of Snakes" were composed of "Klamaths, Modocs, Shoshones, Bannocks, Winnas, and probably other tribes," which numbered four to five thousand.⁹ More commonly, whites applied the term to bands from three tribes: Northern Paiutes, Bannocks, and Northern Shoshones. The combined ancestral homelands of those three tribes, each broken down into many bands, covered most of central and eastern Oregon, down into Nevada and California (Northern Paiutes), southwestern Idaho (Bannocks and Shoshones), and across to the area near Fort Hall (mostly Shoshones but some Bannocks).

Following the 1878 Bannock "War," the few remaining Bannock people, whose name is Panati, moved onto the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in southeastern Idaho. Today, they have mostly been incorporated with the Northern Shoshone people into the federally recognized Shoshone-Bannocks, living on the Fort Hall Reservation. However, they were originally members of the Northern Paiute tribe. Living in south-central and southeastern Idaho, in close proximity to the Northern Shoshones, led to the Shoshonean influence. Like many of the Shoshone bands, the Bannocks shared some traits with the Great Plains people due to their acquisition of horses. By 1861 there were few Bannocks left; victims of disease and white encroachment onto their lands and the devastation to plants, such as the foundational food camas wrought by the white migrants' livestock, it is estimated they numbered between five hundred and six hundred. Fighting for their existence, the mobile bands attacked both emigrant trains and miners entering their homelands. When the Oregon Cavalry rode from Fort Walla Walla to the outskirts of Fort Hall in 1863, their primary objective

was protecting those emigrant trains from both the Bannocks and Shoshones. Lt. Col. Reuben Maury did not distinguish between the two tribes, simply calling them all Snakes during his operations that extended to southeastern Idaho Territory. As much as the Bannocks had aggressively attacked the growing number of whites entering their lands, they factored very little into Oregon Cavalry activities after 1863.¹⁰ This was the result of the cavalry contracting its operational areas.

There were four large divisions of Shoshonean people (Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern), whose lands stretched from Idaho south into Utah and east to the western edge of Wyoming. As the Northern Shoshones lived primarily within the boundaries of the military District of Oregon, they were the focus of the Oregon Cavalry's 1863 operations. Whites recognized four subgroups of the Northern Shoshone people: Western, Mountain, Northwestern, and Pohogwe. During its 1863 operations, the Oregon Cavalry either encountered or anticipated contacting Western, Northwestern, and possibly Pohogwe bands. Boise and Bruneau groups of the Western band lived in the Boise basin, while bands of Pohogwes lived on the extreme eastern fringe of the cavalry's 1863 operational area, around Fort Hall. After California volunteers massacred between two hundred and three hundred Northwestern Shoshones at Bear River in Idaho on January 29, 1863, bands in Utah and southern Idaho signed a series of treaties. By then, the Oregon Cavalry had contracted its area of operations so that Fort Boise was at the eastern edge of its responsibility. From that point on they had less interaction with Shoshone groups for the remainder of the regiment's existence. Though some bands had attacked the steadily increasing numbers of white migrants over the years, the attacks, as one official noted, were due to "the scarcity of game in these Territories, and the occupation of the most fertile portions thereof by our settlements, have reduced these Indians to a state of extreme destitution," which had "literally compelled [them] to resort to plunder in order to obtain the necessities of life."¹¹ While the Shoshones and Bannocks were spared some white hostility, whites showed no sense of understanding

about the precarious existence facing the other group they called Snakes, the Northern Paiutes.

While the Bannocks and Northern Shoshones had long been referred to as Snakes by whites, the Oregon Cavalry used the name more often on Northern Paiutes. There were over twenty bands of Northern Paiutes living in Oregon east of the Cascade Range. Their lands stretched from the headwaters of the John Day River, south across the Nevada border, and east to the southwestern corner of Idaho Territory. The bands were often named after their primary food source, such as Koaagaitokas (salmon eaters) and Moakokados (wild onion eaters).¹² Among those bands were the Wadateka'a (or Wada-Tika), the seed eaters, who lived in southeastern Oregon between Harney and Malheur Lakes, a region they called Heweh Ma Be Neen.¹³ The Walpapi lived to the north of the Wadateka'a in the region that stretched from the Crooked River valley to the headwaters of the John Day River. This band had a number of violent encounters with the Oregon Cavalry during the war years. They were led by Panaina, the most despised and feared Indian leader in the District of Oregon; whites called him Chief Paulina or sometimes Polini.¹⁴ The Tagotokas band of Northern Paiutes lived along the southeastern Oregon–southwestern Idaho Territory border.¹⁵ Many, but not all, Northern Paiute bands raided emigrant trains and stole livestock from ranchers and express depots before and during the war years. Attacks were often motivated by starvation as much as a hopeless effort to defend their lands from encroachment. The most aggressive were the Walpapi, who were blamed for attacks on travelers and miners along Canyon City Road and near the Owyhee mines.

Even though the three tribes that whites called Snakes greatly influenced the experience and history of the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, Chief Paulina was the most important individual Indian person in the regiment's history. His prominence even exceeded the regiment's first commander, Col. Thomas R. Cornelius, a well-known Oregon pioneer. Chief Paulina frightened eastern Oregon civilians in the dark corners of their stereotyping imaginations. The Oregon troops' failure to force a confrontation

with his band exacerbated their sense of frustration. The press, which gave his band credit for more attacks against white miners, farmers, and travelers in eastern Oregon than any other single Paiute leader, enhanced the legend of the Northern Paiute leader. Scared settlers put pressure on politicians, who in turn pressed for a military solution, creating the Oregon Cavalry's archnemesis as a result. Lacking any Confederates against which to demonstrate their patriotism, the Paiute leader became the military district's Robert E. Lee, without the respect Lee engendered among his enemies. As such, Chief Paulina is a key figure in the history of the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment. In truth, though denigrated by whites, he achieved more permanent (if largely mysterious) recognition than any of the Oregon cavalymen who pursued him during the mid-1860s.¹⁶ Today, his name is attached to several geographic locations and waterways.

The land and the climate influenced the experiences and the work done by the Oregon Cavalry just as much as the Indian people with whom they came in contact. This was clear early on when in 1862, the heaviest rains and snowfall in a generation limited recruiting.¹⁷ Each year, weather dictated when the various companies began their operations (midspring) and when those operations ended (midfall). Just as weather influenced the Oregon Cavalry's activity, the terrain presented another challenge.

While the Oregon Cavalry companies did not cross over the summits of the ten-thousand-foot peaks, they did traverse through some narrow mountain passes that exceeded five thousand feet. Doing so left an impression on the Oregon troopers, some of whom wrote about enduring blizzards as early as the start of September and as late as mid-June. They lost riding days to such storms. Days were also lost to the heat. During the summer months, the high plains desert sun was inescapable and dangerous for the men and their mounts—one trooper recorded a temperature of 108 degrees during a summer campaign.¹⁸ Some animals fell to their deaths from steep mountain trails, while others had to be abandoned because they gave out under the broiling sun. As much as Chief Paulina and his Walpapi band frustrated the

Oregon cavalrymen, they had even less control over the weather or the environment.

Efforts to kill Chief Paulina and brutally subdue the Paiutes so whites could colonize their lands captured the public's attention. However, that was just one aspect of how the Oregon Cavalry helped open the Oregon interior to white development while serving the Union cause. Despite appearances, the regiment was initially raised to address fears about the presence of Southern sympathizers among the state's small populace and not to protect whites against what the politicians described as menacing and violent Indians. The Oregon cavalrymen were also deployed to deter any Southern sympathizers from aiding the Confederacy from afar, including attempts to revive the old Pacific Republic scheme or to initiate paramilitary operations. When supposed Southern sympathizers murdered California volunteers and attempted to steal a ship to attack gold shipments out of San Francisco Bay, those concerns gained legitimacy. At the same time, state and federal officials recognized that the Oregon troopers could be used for other purposes on the frontier, starting with providing protection for several years of inbound emigrants. Through exploring, mapping, and assessing the suitability of the lands they traversed for farming and mining possibilities, the Oregon Cavalry provided its most enduring contribution to the development of the interior Pacific Northwest.¹⁹

By putting the experiences of individual troopers and particularly the decision-making junior officers within the context of the responsibilities placed upon the entire regiment, how they simultaneously contributed to the Union cause and helped open eastern Oregon and western Idaho becomes clear. To achieve that goal, this study is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter reviews the divisions in Oregon Territory, and later the state, over the question of slavery. The contentious 1860 presidential election, in which no candidate won a majority of the Oregon votes, revealed deep divisions among the state's population. A year later those divisions, some governmental officials feared, might be exploited

by Southern sympathizers to aid the Confederate cause. That concern was just one of the many threatening the people and military in the District of Oregon as the government withdrew Regular Army commands for service elsewhere. The challenges of recruiting a regiment more than a thousand miles from the seat of war are covered in chapter 2. In chapter 3 the volunteers' demographic and background information is reviewed. The next five chapters cover the Oregon Cavalry's service in the field: 1862 (chapter 4); 1863 (chapter 5), its first full year of service; 1864 (chapters 6 and 7), the last year that all seven companies remained; and finally, the last year and a half of the regiment's service (chapter 8), when few Oregon troopers remained in the ranks due to the expiration of most of their enlistments. Chapter 9 assesses the regiment's service and follows the troopers for the rest of their lives, watching as they contributed to their communities wherever they lived after the war, from the Pacific Northwest to the Deep South.

Almost no studies of the Civil War mention the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, not surprisingly focusing on the units that served from Missouri eastward. Though recruited during the war by the same Union government confronting Confederate forces like the Army of Northern Virginia, the Oregon Cavalry never left the Pacific Northwest and never encountered a Southern enemy. Instead, it acted as a powerful instrument of the federal government's effort to accelerate white expansion into and the economic development of eastern Oregon and the new territory of Idaho. It did so at the expense of the Indian tribes living within its operational area. Historically speaking, the Civil War era in the Pacific Northwest, until being addressed by recent regional studies, has been a historical void. This study seeks to examine the intersection of Civil War, Pacific Northwest, and westward migration history by assessing the important role the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment played in opening the Pacific Northwest interior during the Civil War.

A final note about identifying Native peoples and groups: throughout this work, every effort has been made to properly identify the

many Indians who shared much of the Oregon Cavalry's experiences. This has been challenging because whites, including the military, rarely attempted to identify the Indian people they encountered in the region, and when they did, they were rarely very specific. The military only made genuine efforts to identify Indian groups during treaty negotiations, when it identified the participants by tribal name and sometimes by band name (particularly noted during negotiations with the Nez Perce people). They almost never identified the small groups they attacked without provocation, or which attacked them. Almost all Indians who engaged the Oregon troopers in prolonged firefights were simply called Snakes, especially if the cavalymen suffered any casualties, because whites took it as a point of fact that the so-called Snakes were violent and a threat. When writing about the military's perspective, and if unable to confidently identify a tribe, I have used the military's term. Given the difficult challenges of being certain with limited information, I have most often not hypothesized about which band but have used the tribal names as the identifier. This is an imperfect approach that does not always give the Indian people the full identity they deserve, but it is the best method I have found to avoid speculation and the potential resulting misidentification.

AGENTS OF EMPIRE

Divisions and Dangers

Oregon would never become a slave state because, according to conventional wisdom, its geography and climate were not conducive to the expansion of slavery. In 1859 it joined the Union as a free state. A year later Abraham Lincoln won the state presidential election. Oregon, from a distant view, therefore, appeared to be a solidly Union state as the secession crisis exploded in 1860 and 1861. The region also appeared to have seen the last of the conflicts between whites and the regional Indian tribes. Oregon and the Pacific Northwest did not expect to require a great deal of federal attention as internal strife gripped the nation. That view quickly proved false. Soon federal officials began to worry that forces within Oregon might push for secession. At the same time, increasing white emigration into eastern Oregon and that part of Washington Territory that soon became Idaho Territory created a flashpoint for a return of conflicts with Native people living there. The combined threat of secessionist activity and a resumption of white-Indian conflict led to the decision to recruit a volunteer cavalry regiment to serve in the Pacific Northwest in late 1861.

The role slavery played in the struggle over Oregon's identity during the statehood debate presaged the battles that divided the state's electorate during the 1860 election, and both of those political battles caused deep concerns about the region as secession gripped the nation. Even though Oregon joined the Union as a

free state in February 1859, the proslavery element was well organized and influential. After the state constitutional convention finished its work, it put the document before the voters. The vote was not simply whether to approve the proposed constitution but whether the state would allow slavery, or even free African Americans within its borders, as part of that constitution. The vote in favor of the constitution and the prohibition of slavery won support by wide margins; however, the vote stating “No free Negro, or Mulatto, not residing in this state at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall come, reside, or be within this state” won by an eight to one margin, the widest of the three votes.¹ This was not surprising, since the small population of whites who voted on Oregon Territory’s original Organic laws in 1843 chose to prohibit slavery in the territory. That rule was amended the following year, allowing slave owners up to three years to divest themselves of their slaves. That amendment, pushed through by the head of the territorial council, former slave owner Peter Burnett, also gave freed slaves or “any free negro or mulatto” a timeline to leave the territory (two years for men and three for women). If they refused to leave they were to be publicly whipped until they agreed to leave.² African Americans, whether free or enslaved, posed a potential economic challenge, or so believed white Oregonians.

The Oregonian opposition to slavery and freedmen was influenced by the perception of potential economic competition and racial bias. Joseph Lane, then Oregon’s territorial delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives, penned an editorial, calling all who opposed the exclusion clause “negro worshipers.”³ John R. McBride, a Missouri-born member of the constitutional convention, explained why Oregonians voted against slavery and for exclusion: “It was clear that while the new state had no relish for the ‘peculiar institution’ it had equally no desire to furnish a refuge for the colored man in any condition.” Furthermore, he believed the message was that “the mingling of the races in any form in this state was objectionable, and the vote was an emphatic expression of public sentiment.”⁴

The divisions reflected in the three votes and the subsequent establishment of a government made up almost entirely of

Southerners continued during the 1860 election cycle. Avowed slavery supporters held all the major political posts, including Oregon's entire federal congressional delegation. Senators Joseph Lane and Delazon Smith, Representative Lansing Stout, and top state political leaders like Gov. John Whiteaker and Oregon's Speaker of the House, William G. T'Vault, were vocal supporters of slavery. Tennessee-born and -raised Judge Paine P. Prim, an original member of the state supreme court, had argued against allowing free African Americans (as well as Chinese immigrants) into the state during the constitutional convention.⁵ These leaders wielded significant influence during the 1860 presidential election.

Oregon's proslavery politicians gave the Southern Democratic candidate, John C. Breckinridge, reason to be hopeful during the 1860 campaign. Having Oregon senator Joseph Lane on the ticket bolstered his chances of taking one of the two far western states. However, Abraham Lincoln had prominent supporters in the state as well. A number of influential Lincoln friends from Illinois—including Dr. Anson Henry, David Logan, Edward Baker, and the Francis brothers (Simeon and Allen)—had moved to Oregon in the 1850s. Henry and Logan engaged in local-level politics, while Baker was eventually appointed one of Oregon's U.S. senators. All three used their positions to actively promote Lincoln's candidacy. Simeon Francis, a newspaper editor in Illinois before he relocated to Oregon in 1859, provided an important voice for Lincoln when he became the first editor of Portland's *Morning Oregonian* newspaper.⁶ T. J. Dryer, the editor of the *Weekly Oregonian*, also supported Lincoln's candidacy through his editorial comments.⁷ While Oregon was the only state in the Pacific Northwest and therefore controlled the only electoral votes in the region, people in Washington Territory were just as passionate about the election.

North in Washington Territory, slavery had been prohibited, but unlike in Oregon, free African Americans could live there, though few did—just thirty according to the 1860 census.⁸ Given the small number of African Americans in the territory, Washingtonians may have feared racial mingling less than Oregonians. The 1857 Dred Scott decision permitted the expansion of slavery into the

territories, yet there is only one documented case of a slave living in Washington Territory in 1860.⁹ Despite the absence of slavery in Washington Territory, there was considerable support for the South's right to own slaves, especially among the 12 percent of the population who were born in slave states. Washingtonians, however, did not want to compete with slave labor.¹⁰ Like in Oregon, key politicians in Washington were proslavery. Washington Territory congressional delegate Isaac Stevens served as treasurer of the Breckinridge campaign. William Winlock Miller, a friend of Stevens serving in the territorial legislature, also supported Breckinridge.¹¹ Even as the sectional controversy caused rifts among the small farm population and the more transient miners, without any presidential electors at stake, the tension in Washington Territory did not garner anywhere near the same level of attention as it did in Oregon.

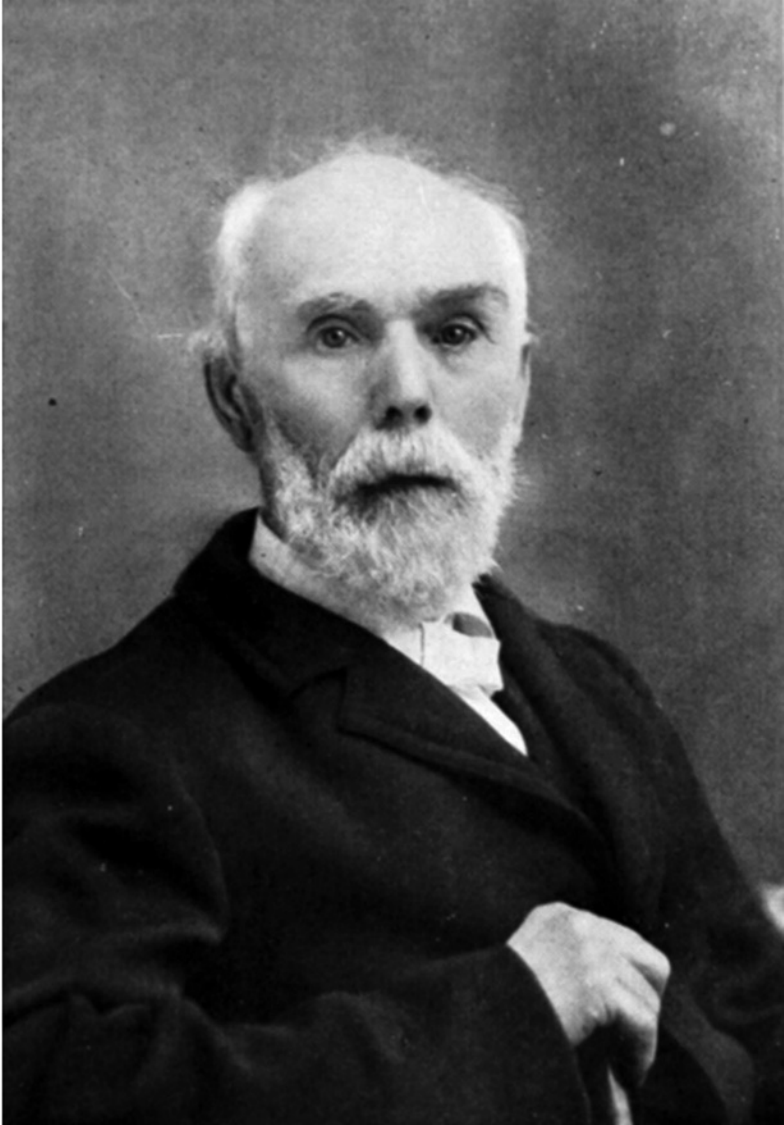
"We have," declared the article, "held our paper back for the stage from the South. It arrived an hour ago, with returns from Jackson and Douglas [counties], which we give below. Lincoln has undoubtedly carried the state by [a] 250 [vote] majority!" The news left the *Oregon Argus* staff unable to collect themselves: "Our feelings will not permit us to write with composure." Indeed, the article headline expressed their excitement: "Hooraw! Oregon for Lincoln!"¹² Lincoln had actually carried the state by a 270-vote plurality over proslavery candidate John C. Breckinridge; he earned 1,214 more votes than popular sovereignty candidate Senator Stephen A. Douglas. Constitutional Union candidate John Bell received just over 200 votes. There was also a sense of relief in the *Argus* article; Lincoln won Oregon by a much closer margin than his national victory (Lincoln defeated his closest national opponent, Douglas, by ten percentage points; in Oregon, the margin over Breckinridge was only 1.8 percent). Lincoln's slim victory suggested that antebellum Oregon was contested ground.

As the only state in the region, events in Oregon were a bellwether for the entire Pacific Northwest. Although Lincoln only won 36 percent of the vote to Breckinridge's 34 percent, the state

overwhelmingly refuted the proslavery platform. Combined, Lincoln and third-place finisher Douglas received 64 percent of the presidential vote. Lincoln may not have been especially popular in the Pacific Northwest, but support for a proslavery president was even less so.

A shift in Oregon's congressional delegation in 1860 indicated that the proslavery faction was not as strong as Breckinridge's showing against Lincoln suggested. Southern sympathizing Democratic senator Delazon Smith was replaced by Republican Edward Baker, a friend of the president-elect. The other senator, Joseph Lane, remained, but after his failed run as the proslavery vice presidential candidate on the Breckinridge ticket and the subsequent press attacks, his time in office soon ended. Lane was replaced in March 1861 by James Nesmith, a Union-supporting Democrat. Oregon's lone congressman, Lansing Stout, who had already cut his ties with Senator Lane's proslavery Democrats, also left office in March 1861. John Whiteaker, the outspoken Southern-sympathizing governor, remained and would play a key role in the creation of the First Oregon Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, albeit not in the way he anticipated. The political divisions in Oregon were not as strong as they appeared during the statehood struggle or the 1860 election. Still, the federal government could not afford to take anything for granted as the growing secession crisis engulfed the nation.

The political landscape looked similar in Washington Territory following the election. Isaac Stevens made the wrong political bet when he supported Breckinridge's proslavery candidacy. Though he eventually joined and died for the Union cause, Stevens's support for Breckinridge ruined his political career in the territory. In the wake of the election, the editorial writer at Olympia's *Washington Standard* condemned Stevens (and Oregon's Joe Lane) for engaging "in movements sustaining slavery propagandism, at the hazard of our national Union."¹³ Facing considerable opposition and amid growing concern over Southern secession,



P1. Gov. John Whiteaker. "John Whiteaker," Wikimedia Commons, last modified August 4, 2022, http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMNBBX_FIRST_Governor_of_Oregon_John_W_Whiteaker.