



Jesse A. Applegate, ca. 1880s

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Jesse A. Applegate (1811-1888)

Jesse Applegate came to Oregon in 1848 as leader of the first major covered wagon train on the Oregon Trail. He was an organizer and a member of the Provisional Government.¹ He is best known for establishing the Applegate Cut-off, the alternate southern wagon trail that ran along the Humboldt River in northern Nevada, diverting into the north-eastern corner of California and on into Southern Oregon. The Applegate Cut-off was used by Oregon settlers between 1846 and 1860. This trail was not as heavily traveled as the Oregon Trail that led to Oregon City, but it became instrumental in settling the Rogue Valley in the 1850s.²

Applegate was born in Kentucky, grew up in St. Louis, Missouri and in school studied surveying. In 1843 he settled in Polk County, Oregon where he farmed, operated a mill and worked as a surveyor. He surveyed many of the land claims in Southern Oregon.³ Applegate was a member of the Assembly that organized Oregon's Provisional Government. In 1855-1856, Applegate served as a guide to Major Kearney during the Rogue River Wars in Southern Oregon.⁴

In 1857 Applegate was a delegate to the Oregon Constitutional Convention. He attended Republican State Conventions in 1862 and 1864. Applegate nominated Samuel E. May as Secretary of State; however, May was indicted in 1871 for embezzlement during his terms in office. As Applegate was a bond signer for May, Applegate lost a substantial part of his wealth as he became responsible for court costs and penalties.⁵ In 1872 Applegate moved to California and after recouping his losses, came back to Yoncalla where he became a Justice of the Peace, postmaster and the first school teacher in Yoncalla.

Letters to Bush from 1851 to 1863

Applegate wrote opinion pieces for the *Oregon Statesman*, using pseudonyms "An Old Oregonian," and "Pierre Piout," regarding Oregon statehood, land disputes, Oregon self-governance, and opposition to slavery. Applegate predicted that "Douglas Democrats would not be in the South in 1860."

¹ Philip Cogswell, Jr., *Capitol Names: Individuals Woven into Oregon's History* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1977), 51.

² Jeff Lalande, "Applegate Trail," Oregon Encyclopedia. https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/applegate_trail/#.WJLBf_krJPY/ (accessed 2/1/17).

³ Janice Marschner, *Oregon 1859: A Snapshot in Time* (Portland: Timber Press, Portland, 2008), 219.

⁴ *Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1903), 1415.

⁵ Susan Badger Doyle, "Jesse Applegate," Oregon Encyclopedia. https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/applegate_jesse_1811_1888_/#.WJY-NPkrJPY/ (accessed 2/4/17).