



c.1849

Oregon State Library

Samuel R. Thurston (1815-1851)

Samuel R. Thurston was from Monmouth, Maine. He attended Maine Wesleyan Seminary and Bowdoin College, graduating with honors in 1843. He became a member of the Maine Bar in 1844 and edited the *Burlington, Iowa Gazette*. Thurston emigrated to Oregon via the Oregon Trail and settled in Hillsboro, Oregon in 1847 where he practiced law. When the United States gained jurisdiction over the Oregon Territory in 1849, Thurston became the first delegate to Congress. Thurston helped pass the Donation Land Law and measures to cancel tribal titles to the lands west of the Cascades.

Thurston worked tirelessly pursuing the interests of his constituents in the Oregon Territory in Washington, D.C. It is believed that exhaustion led to his early death from fever in Mexico, while on the steamer *California*. Thurston was buried in Acapulco, Mexico in 1851, but in 1853 his remains were returned to Oregon and reburied in Salem Pioneer Cemetery. Many prominent citizens attended the funeral and were pallbearers, one of which was Benjamin F. Harding. Many fraternal organizations were represented, and four ministers presided over the funeral, one being Rev. Delazon Smith.¹

Letters to Bush from 1850-1851

Thurston's letters begin with an introduction of Bush to several men, including Matthew Deady. He urged Bush to quickly meet with the editor of the *Oregon Spectator*. Thurston informed Bush about newspaper subscriptions and when the printing press will arrive in Oregon. He wrote Bush about organizing the Democrats and to make observations of men at meetings and their conversations and inform Thurston. Other topics include the printing of presidential speeches, slavery and the secession activities of several states. In October 1850 the *Oregon Statesman's* printing press was damaged in shipping and Thurston instructed Bush to have it repaired in Astoria. Thurston would become a correspondent and write articles for the *Oregon Statesman* but he wanted to remain anonymous. In December 1850 Henry Russell transferred rights, title and interest in the *Oregon Statesman* to Bush. Thurston wrote about finances and gave Bush free reign of what was published in the newspaper.

Thurston kept Bush informed about several legislative bills and what is happening during the legislative session in Washington, D.C. In February 1851 Thurston wrote Bush about the Donation Land Claim Act.

In March 1851 Wilson Blain, editor of *Oregon Spectator* wrote Bush about the mail service and newspaper subscriptions. He made note of how popular Thurston is in Oregon City and the “Thurston Party.” The remainder of the letters in this series, beginning in July 1851, are to various individuals regarding the death of Samuel Thurston in Acapulco in April 1851

¹ http://www.salempioneercemetery.com/records/display_record.php?id=191 (accessed 6/13/17).