

Letter to the Editor, Difficulties in Oregon

By John Beeson

John Beeson was a humanitarian activist who spent much of his life trying to protect Indian rights. He wrote this letter to the *New York Tribune* shortly after being forced to leave his home in southwestern Oregon's Rogue River Valley because of his controversial opinions on the war between whites and the Rogue River Indians.

Born in England in 1803, John Beeson came to the United States in 1828, settling in Illinois. He moved to the Rogue Valley in the fall of 1853, a tumultuous time in the history of southwestern Oregon. That year saw a flare up in the conflict between whites and Indians in the region, temporarily stemmed by the Table Rock Treaty of September 1853.

The peace created by the treaty did not last long, however, and war came to the Rogue Valley once again in 1855. Beeson, a devout Methodist, was one of the only whites to denounce the miners and settlers who started the war, many of whom advocated the complete extermination of Native people. Beeson considered Indians to be the equal of whites, and well within their rights to defend themselves and their homeland against the often brutal invaders. His views were highly unpopular, however, and, as he describes in this article, he fled Oregon rather than face assassination.

Beeson, a strong believer in the brotherhood of men, spent many years as an advocate for Indian rights, writing articles and books, giving lectures, and publishing a humanitarian newspaper. He eventually returned to Oregon, where his wife was buried and his son still lived. He died in 1889 and was buried in Talent, Oregon, with the epitaph "A Pioneer and a Man of Peace."

Further Reading: Norwood, Frederick A. "Two Contrasting Views of the Indians: Methodist Involvement in the Indian Troubles in Oregon and Washington." In *Religion and Society in the American West: Historical Essays*, edited by Carl Guarneri, et al. Lanham, Md., 1987.

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