

General Joseph Lane

By Joseph Buchtel

Joseph Lane was Oregon's first territorial governor and one of the state's leading citizens from the 1850s until his death in 1881. A politician, soldier, and farmer, Lane exerted a formative influence on the state of Oregon.

Born in North Carolina in 1801, Joseph Lane grew up in Kentucky, moving to Indiana as a young man. He served in the Indiana state legislature from 1822 until the Mexican War. In 1847, Lane left Indiana to fight in the war, where he was promoted to the rank of Brevet General for his service.

Shortly after the end of the war in 1848, President James Polk, a Democrat, appointed Lane governor of the newly organized territory of Oregon. Over the course of the next eleven years, Lane would serve as territorial delegate to Congress and as the state's first U.S. senator. Lane also ran unsuccessfully for president in 1852 and for vice-president in 1860. During the 1860s, his pro-slavery, secessionist sympathies limited his political appeal in Oregon, which was predominantly Republican.

Not long after his arrival in Oregon, Lane successfully persuaded the Cayuse Indians to give up some of the men involved in the 1847 deaths of missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. In 1853, Lane led U.S. forces against the Rogue River Indians, who he had forced to sign a peace treaty three years earlier. He was severely wounded at the Battle of Evans Creek, but still helped to negotiate a treaty at Table Rock to temporarily end the conflict.

Like many ambitious men of his day, Lane used his dealings with Indians to improve his own political future, hoping some day to be elected president. He never realized his dream, however. After leaving the Senate in 1861, Lane removed to his homestead near Roseburg, where he lived the rest of his days.

Further Reading: Douthit, Nathan. "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations across a Cultural Divide." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 95, 1994-95: 472-515.

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