

News Article, The Cincinnatus of Oregon

By Weekly Oregonian

This newspaper article was published in the *Weekly Oregonian* on July 15, 1898. It offers a detailed account of the life and personality of Theodore T. Geer, Oregon's tenth governor.

Theodore Thurston Geer was born on March 12, 1851, on his parents' farm in the Waldo Hills near Silverton. At the age of fourteen he moved to Salem, where he attended the Central School and, later, Willamette University.

In 1866, Geer's father moved to the Grande Ronde Valley after being appointed deputy sheriff by his brother Isaiah, the first sheriff of newly formed Union County. Geer soon followed his father and uncle to northeastern Oregon, where he spent ten formative years. It was during this time that he developed an abiding interest in politics. The presidential campaign of 1868 motivated young Theodore to become active in the Republican Party, though Democrats far outnumbered Republicans in the town of Cove, where Geer's father, who was also a Republican, had established a homestead. Geer got his start in politics by writing letters to the local newspapers, a practice he continued for the rest of his life.

In 1877 Geer moved back to the Waldo Hills and bought a 320-acre farm, described in the article reproduced above. He maintained his interest in politics, though, and in 1880 he was elected to the state legislature. He was reelected to the legislature in 1888, 1890, and again in 1892.

Geer was a vigorous supporter of Republican William McKinley during the presidential campaign of 1896. The Republican Party repaid Geer's loyalty by selecting him as their candidate for the governor's seat, which he won in 1898. He was known as a fair-minded governor who was loyal to his convictions and uninterested in self-aggrandizement. The most notable development during his administration was the establishment of the initiative and referendum system in Oregon, which Geer supported.

The Republican Party nominated Geer as their candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1901, but the legislature appointed C.W. Fulton, though Geer had won the popular vote, which at the time was not binding. After leaving the governor's office, Geer became editor of the Salem *Statesman's Journal* for a brief period. He later bought a partnership in the Pendleton *Tribune*, which he helped publish until 1908, after which he moved to Portland, where he lived until his death on February 21, 1924.

Further Reading: Geer, T.T. *Fifty Years in Oregon: Experiences, Observations, and Commentaries upon Men, Measures, and Customs in Pioneer Days and Later Times*. New York, N.Y., 1912.

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