

Early colleges in Oregon. Excerpt from this web address,

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Part 2 of 30: *The Birth of Corvallis College* by George Edmonston Jr. and Tom Bennett

Importance of education known to early Oregonians

Early travelers along the Oregon Trail to the Willamette Valley brought with them more than the tools and farming skills they would need to prosper in their new home.

They also knew the importance of schools to the future.

Those who framed Oregon's provisional constitution in 1848 stole almost verbatim from Nathan Dane's 1787 political tome, Ordinance for the Government of the Northwest, that portion that reads, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged." Joseph Lane, the new territory's first governor, wasted little time in acting on Dane's words.

In 1849, Lane used his administration to pass the first school law of the territory to provide tax money for public school support. Though it would be several decades before Oregonians would build and fund public high schools, the seeds for education in Oregon had been sown.

Over the next two decades (1850-1870), this early planting would give rise to numerous institutions of learning in the population centers of the Willamette Valley. Although the word "college" appears in most of the names of these early schools, they were usually anything but.

Few opportunities for preparatory work were available to school-aged children in the state, so the majority of these early "colleges" funded and staffed "preparatory departments" to help bring the younger enrollees up to speed. Student body photos from these early institutions show a mix of ages represented, from five all the way to 20.

The names included: Willamette University in Salem, whose founding has been listed as early as 1847 and as late as 1853; Albany College in Albany; Bethel College in Polk County, southeast of Amity near McCoy; Philomath College in Philomath; Pacific Academy in Forest Grove; **Sublimity College, east of Salem, which had as its first teacher one Milton Wright, father of historic aviators Orville and Wilbur Wright**; and La Creole Academy and Dallas College in Dallas, to name a few.

In addition, by 1860, towns such as Sheridan, Lebanon, Eugene, McMinnville and Soda Springs were operating religiously affiliated schools with growing enrollments.

Corvallis attempted to join the mix as early as 1856. By 1860, the small river town of the central valley had a school of its own, a small pioneer academy named appropriately enough, Corvallis College.

Ten decades later, it would become Oregon State University.