

# Historical Reports on OSU Building Names

## Joseph C. Avery and Avery Lodge

### Research Coordination and Introduction

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**Oregon State**  
University

In August 2017, the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup began the process of generating historical reports on four OSU campus buildings and their namesakes under consideration. These buildings/namesakes were Arnold Dining Center (Benjamin Lee Arnold), Avery Lodge (Joseph C. Avery), Benton Hall and Annex (Thomas Hart Benton), and Gill Coliseum (Amory T. “Slats” Gill). The purpose of these reports was to gather and analyze historical evidence to explore, reveal, and contextualize the lives and viewpoints of the namesakes, and the histories of the buildings.

## Research Team

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Dr. Stacey L. Smith (OSU history department) assembled a research team made up of scholars from OSU and the broader Oregon community and coordinated the research with the OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC). The research team scholars were chosen for their extensive professional credentials in history or related disciplines, their strong record of high quality research and publication, and their expertise on the eras in which the building namesakes lived or the controversies surrounding them.

The research team included:

**Dr. Thomas Bahde** (Arnold Dining Center): Thomas Bahde earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, with an emphasis in the 19th-century United States and comparative slavery. He teaches in the Honors College at Oregon State University and is the author of *The Life and Death of Gus Reed: A Story of Race and Justice in Illinois During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Ohio University Press, 2014).

**Dr. Stephen Dow Beckham** (Benton Hall): Stephen Dow Beckham is the Pamplin Professor of History, Emeritus, Lewis & Clark College. A graduate of the University of Oregon (B.A.) and UCLA (Ph.D.), Beckham taught for 42 years. His courses covered U.S. History, the American West, Native Americans, and seminars in research methods. He is a former “Oregon Professor of the Year” and recipient of the Asher Distinguished Teaching Award, American Historical Association. He is the author of numerous books, articles, monographs, expert witness reports, and has served as the writer of museums exhibits and master plans from the Library of Congress to the Hong Kong Museum of History. Beckham and his wife reside in Lake Oswego. They are heavily involved in the Beckham Estate Vineyard growing and producing Pinot noir wines.

**Dr. Marisa Chappell** (Gill Coliseum): Marisa Chappell earned her Ph.D. in history from Northwestern University in 2002 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her expertise is in post-1945 U.S. history with an emphasis on politics, social policy, and the political economy of race and gender. She has published *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and co-authored *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents* (Routledge, 2009). She is currently working on a book about the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which organized low- and moderate-income Americans in the last third of the twentieth century.

**Dr. Dwaine Plaza** (Gill Coliseum): Dwaine Plaza earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from York University, Canada, in 1996. He is a professor of sociology at OSU and Associate Dean of the OSU College of Liberal Arts. His research expertise is on migration in the English-speaking Caribbean, and he has also conducted and published extensive research on immigrant communities in Oregon and the history of race and athletics at Oregon State University. He has received research grants from the Canadian International Development Research Grant and the Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigrants and Settlement. He is also the winner of the Oregon Innovators in Education Award (2000) and the OSU College of Liberal Arts Bill Wilkins Teaching Award (1999).

**Dr. Stacey L. Smith** (Avery Lodge): Stacey L. Smith earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2008 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her scholarship focuses on connecting the history of the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction with the history of the North American West. She is the author of *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), which won the inaugural David Montgomery Prize in U.S. labor history from the Organization of American Historians. She has also published articles in the *Pacific Historical Review*, the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, and the *Journal of the Civil War Era*. She is currently working on a book on African American abolitionists and civil rights activists in the Pacific West.

## Methods and Approaches

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There is a great deal of information and misinformation circulating about each of these OSU buildings and their namesakes. For this reason, the researchers agreed to adhere to rigorous research standards. Whenever possible, they documented their claims with primary sources, first-hand accounts of historical events, including newspaper articles, oral histories, census records, diaries, letters, and official institutional or government documents. They drew extensively on primary sources in the holdings of OSU SCARC. Archivists Larry Landis and Natalia Fernandez, and graduate student assistant Michael Dicianna, provided invaluable help in locating these sources. Dwaine Plaza and Marisa Chappell also reached out to longtime OSU and Corvallis community members to collect oral histories about Amory T. “Slats” Gill. Susan Hayes, a Corvallis community member, donated her time, expertise, and research materials to help the research team reconstruct the history of the Benton County citizens’ fundraising campaign to build Benton Hall.

The research team also relied on secondary sources, accounts written by historians. They avoided non-scholarly secondary sources such as anonymous or crowd-sourced websites, blogs, or non-scholarly history books without thorough citations. They depended, instead, on scholarly books with extensive citations. The researchers also tried to address apocryphal or unsubstantiated information circulating about each namesake. Finally, the research team extensively documented their own research with detailed footnotes. The team strongly encourages readers to examine the footnotes carefully for more information about the historical sources on which the reports are based.

## Historical Interpretation, Contextualization, and Conclusions

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History is an interpretative discipline. Historians gather as many primary and secondary sources as they can about a given topic. They then analyze these sources and read them against each other to construct interpretations of what happened in the past. For some topics, primary source evidence simply does not exist or it is very incomplete. For other topics, primary sources are abundant. Primary sources that survive from the past often have problems: they can be biased, one-sided, filled with inaccuracies, or silent on important issues. Some primary sources may directly contradict other primary sources. For this reason, historical research is not aimed at uncovering incontrovertible truths about the past; instead, the historian's job is to make well-reasoned conclusions based on a limited and often problematic pool of available primary sources. Historians evaluate which kinds of sources are likely to be more reliable than others. They make informed speculations, educated guesses, based on the quality and quantity of primary source evidence that they find.

The types of interpretations historians make, and the kinds of primary sources they look at, also depend on the time period in which they conduct their research. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, during the height of Jim Crow, few professional historians examined primary sources produced by African Americans or accorded African Americans much role in U.S. history. This changed during the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. Scholars began to seek out accounts by African Americans and to argue that black civil rights activists were critical to remaking national politics. All historical scholarship is, then, a product of its time. Our interpretations of historical figures change over time as community values and ideals change. Historical scholarship is generally not aimed at evaluating whether a historical figure was mostly "good" or mostly "bad." Rather, historians seek to contextualize individuals' lives, to determine what views they held, why they held them, where they fit in the broader societies in which they lived, and what repercussions these views had for their communities (past and present). In seeking to contextualize the views and actions of historic building namesakes, the historical researchers attempted to address the following questions identified by the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup:

- 1) Actions taken vs. viewpoints held: Do the historical figure's actions differ from expressed viewpoints? Are these differences significant and meaningful?
- 2) Public vs. private persona: Did the figure express or act on exclusionary or racist views in public life? Or, did such acts or views primarily shape their private life?
- 3) The progression of an individual's viewpoints and life as a whole: Did the figure's actions or views change substantially over time? Did the person recant or attempt to rectify past behavior later in life?
- 4) Broader social/institutional context: Historical figures are shaped by the cultural values of the time in which they lived. Can you comment on whether the person's views or actions aligned or did not align with the mission of OSU or the broader society of the period? It might help to consider whether the person's views were widely held by other Americans, Oregonians, or OSU community members during their lifetime, or whether they were an outlier in their community. Comparison with other important or well-known figures of the period may be helpful.

The historical reports on OSU building namesakes show that people who lived in the past were complex. In some cases, it may not be easy to make cut and dry conclusions about whether these building namesakes held or acted on exclusionary views. The lack of primary sources, disagreement among sources, and contradictions in individuals' own behaviors, result in many “grey areas” where the evidence is inconclusive.

The research team members refrained from making recommendations about building names. It will be up to the OSU community—faculty, students, staff, administrators, and Corvallis residents—to discuss and debate the legacies of these historical figures. It is our hope that the historical reports will generate an honest, open dialogue about the past, and about OSU's present mission and values.

# Joseph C. Avery and Avery Lodge

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Oct. 16, 2017



**Oregon State**  
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## Introduction

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This report examines the political career of Joseph C. Avery and his role in the history of Oregon, the Corvallis community, and Oregon State University. It uses primary sources from the era, as well as secondary books and articles written by professional historians, to evaluate claims that Avery was a proslavery Democrat who advocated racist and exclusionary causes. The report focuses primarily on Avery's career in the Oregon Democratic Party in the 1850s and early 1860s and his association with three controversial Corvallis newspapers: *The Occidental Messenger*, the *Democratic Crisis*, and the *Oregon Union*. It concludes by examining the naming of Avery Lodge on the OSU campus and controversies over the Avery name in the broader Corvallis community.

## Joseph C. Avery, Corvallis, and the Origins of Oregon State University

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Joseph Conant Avery was born in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, in 1817. He moved to Illinois in 1834 where he had a brief career as a surveyor before marrying his wife, Martha Marsh, and establishing a farm. In 1845, Avery migrated across the continent to Oregon where he filed a 640-acre land claim at the confluence of the Marys and Willamette Rivers. His family later joined him. Avery built a store on his claim and by 1849 he surveyed the site of a new town, Marysville, which he later renamed Corvallis. Avery was largely responsible for the white settlement and the early growth of Corvallis. He sold town lots to newly arrived Anglo American emigrants, built several commercial buildings, and established Corvallis's first post office.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Avery was also an important figure in the early history of what is now Oregon State University. Between 1858 and 1860, Avery served on the Board of Trustees that chartered Corvallis College and raised funds for the construction of a school building. In 1868, the Oregon legislature selected Corvallis College to become the state's new agricultural college under the provisions of the 1862 federal Morrill Land Grant Act. Legislators appointed Avery to the Board of Commissioners for the new agricultural college. Avery and his fellow commissioners were responsible for selecting the federal lands that would be sold to fund the agricultural college and for organizing the college on a permanent basis. The Morrill Act also required each land grant college to establish a farm of at least thirty-five acres for experimental agriculture. Avery served on the Board of Trustees that selected and bought the farmland for the college ("the College Farm") on which some of the campus now stands. He also donated \$200 of his personal funds to the \$4,500 purchase price.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Co., 1903), 869-70; Rev. H.K. Hines, *An Illustrated History of the State of Oregon* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1893), 458 – 59; *History of the Pacific Northwest: Oregon and Washington*, vol. 2 (Portland: North Pacific History Co., 1889), 198 - 99.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Smith, *Corvallis College* (Corvallis: n.p., 1953), 1 – 13. A copy of this publication is available in folder 47.3, "Corvallis College--History," box 47, Memorabilia Collection, Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Ore. (hereafter OSU SCARC).

## Joseph C. Avery and the Democratic Party of Oregon

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Joseph Avery was an ambitious politician and he rose to prominence in Oregon's Democratic Party in the 1850s. He represented Benton County as a Democrat in the 1848-49 session of the Oregon provisional legislature, as well as in the Oregon territorial legislature from 1850 – 1853 and from 1856 – 57.<sup>3</sup> He also served as the federal postal agent for the territory from 1854 – 55.<sup>4</sup>

The Democratic Party was the dominant political entity in Oregon during the 1850s. While Oregon Democrats jockeyed for power against shifting groups of “anti-Democrats”— including Whigs, Know Nothings, and Republicans—the bitterest political rivalries emerged within the party itself. Avery was central to these intra-party fractures among Oregon Democrats and understanding these divisions is critical to understanding his political views.

The Democratic Party of Oregon was a complex entity with several factions and ideologies competing for supremacy. Oregon Democrats, like their colleagues across the nation, were divided over the institution of slavery and its westward expansion. Southern-born Democrats demanded strong federal protections for slaveholders' property rights in slaves, including the right to bring enslaved people into new federal territories in the West. Some northern-born Democrats challenged slaveholding interests by advocating “free soil,” the notion that new western territories should be open only to free white settlers and forever closed to slavery. The rest of the party's membership attempted to hold together these feuding factions by taking a middle path. They advocated strong constitutional protections for slavery in states where it already existed, but also supported “popular sovereignty,” the principle that the people of the territories should determine for themselves whether they would adopt pro- or antislavery constitutions.<sup>5</sup>

Loyalties to particular groups of politicians compounded the divisions within the Democratic Party of Oregon. The early 1850s saw the rise of the “Salem Clique,” a group of ambitious young Democrats who drew their support from the mid-Willamette Valley. The members of the Clique constructed a powerful Democratic political machine, they monopolized federal patronage positions, and they engineered the relocation of the territorial capital from Oregon City to Salem. Asahel Bush, the Clique's leader, kept the party faithful in line with his newspaper, the *Oregon Statesman*. Bush's *Statesman* published blistering attacks against any Democrats who disagreed with the Clique or challenged its power. He viciously denounced opposition Democrats as “softs” and “soreheads” (in contrast to the “hard” Democrats who steadfastly supported the Clique). All the while, Bush, who personally opposed the extension of slavery into the Oregon territory, tried to conciliate the party's proslavery members by condemning abolitionists, “black Republicans,” and anyone who questioned the morality of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The Oregon Archives: Including the Journals, Governors' Messages, and Public Papers of Oregon* (Salem: A. Bush, 1853), 279 – 80; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon*, 2nd session (1850 – 51), 3; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon*, 3rd session (1851 – 52), 3; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon*, 4th session (1852 – 53), 3; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon*, 8th sess. (1856 – 7), 4.

<sup>4</sup> James E. Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon: Machine Politics and the Sectional Crisis, 1849 – 1861* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 91.

<sup>5</sup> David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840 – 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 63 – 64.

<sup>6</sup> On the rise of the Salem Clique, see Barbara S. Mahoney, *The Salem Clique: Oregon's Founding Brothers* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2017); and Johnson, *Founding the Far West*, 55 – 64.



Joseph C. Avery emerged as an opposition or “soft” Democrat who challenged the Salem Clique’s stranglehold over the territorial party organization. Avery’s break with the Clique happened in 1855 when he convinced opposition Democrats in the territorial legislature to move the territorial capital from Salem to Corvallis. <sup>7</sup> Asahel Bush then accused Avery of betraying the Democratic Party so that he could promote his own economic interests in Corvallis. The Salem Clique rallied the votes to move the capital back to Salem in 1856. <sup>8</sup> From then on, Bush tirelessly attacked Avery in the pages of the *Statesman*. Meanwhile, Avery and other dissenting Democrats coalesced into the National Democratic Party, a new organization that supported the national Democratic Party’s platform but ran its own candidates in local elections against the Salem Clique’s nominees. <sup>9</sup> It is in this context that Avery became associated with a series of Corvallis Democratic newspapers.

## Joseph Avery’s Connection to the *Occidental Messenger* and its Successors

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Most of the controversy surrounding Joseph C. Avery stems from allegations that he ran an extreme proslavery newspaper called the *Occidental Messenger*. This Corvallis newspaper, published from June 1857 to July 1858, may have been the predecessor of two other controversial Democratic newspapers: the *Democratic Crisis* (1859) and the *Oregon Union* (1859 - 1863). During the 1860s, the *Oregon Union* expressed sympathy for the Confederacy and loudly criticized the administration of Abraham Lincoln, the conduct of the Civil War, and emancipation. The federal government suppressed its publication in March 1863 by prohibiting its circulation via the U.S. mail. <sup>10</sup>

This section will investigate three central questions: 1) To what extent was Joseph Avery actually involved with the editing and publication of the *Occidental Messenger*? 2) What were the views of the *Occidental Messenger* and did these views reflect the personal views of Joseph Avery? 3) What involvement, if any, did Avery have with the *Democratic Crisis* and the suppressed *Oregon Union*?

### 1) To what extent was Joseph Avery actually involved with the editing and publication of the *Occidental Messenger*?

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Joseph Avery’s relationship to the *Occidental Messenger* is confusing because his name never appeared on the newspaper as editor or publisher. Only five issues of the *Messenger* have survived and most list L.P. Hall and/or S.E. Gillis as the newspaper’s publishers, with L.P. Hall as the editor. These men were Lovick Pierce “Long Primer” Hall and Stephen E. Gillis, two journalists both recently arrived from California. Joseph Avery’s name only appears in an advertisement for his Corvallis dry goods store. <sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon*, 126 – 27. For the Clique’s view of Avery’s betrayal, see *Oregon Statesman* (Salem), July 14, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon*, 7th session (1855-56), 15 – 17.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon*, 69 – 70; Mahoney, *The Salem Clique*, 124, 126; Johnson, *Founding the Far West*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Mahoney, *The Salem Clique*, 157 – 58; Robert J. Chandler, “Crushing Dissent: The Pacific Coast Tests Lincoln’s Policy of Suppression, 1862,” *Civil War History* 30, no. 3 (Sept. 1984), 242 – 43; George S. Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers* (Portland: Binford and Mort, 1939), 102 – 3, 226, 290 – 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Occidental Messenger* (Corvallis), October 17, 1857, p. 4. On the identities of Hall and Gillis, see the memoir by Stephen Gillis’s brother: William R. Gillis, *Gold Rush Days with Mark Twain* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1930), 35 – 40.

Despite Avery's seeming absence from the *Messenger's* pages, several contemporary sources identified him as a central force behind its publication. A Corvallis correspondent to Bush's *Statesman* asserted that Avery held the mortgage on the *Messenger* printing press, and a local historian writing just nine years after Avery's death stated outright that Avery owned the press and the type.<sup>12</sup> Avery's rivals in the Salem Clique also charged that Avery bankrolled the newspaper and recruited and employed its editor, L.P. Hall. It was not unusual for politicians to hire editors or fund newspapers to promote their interests, but Avery's enemies insisted that Hall was little more than a puppet or figurehead. They claimed that Avery determined the newspaper's arguments and content from behind the scenes. Amidst these swirling rumors, Asahel Bush took to calling the *Occidental Messenger* "Avery's Ox" (a play on the newspaper's name).<sup>13</sup> Bush was not alone in connecting Avery with the *Messenger*. The editors of the *Weekly Oregonian* (Portland), the *Democratic Standard* (Portland), and the *Oregon Argus* (Oregon City) also identified Avery as the primary force behind the newspaper.<sup>14</sup> Professional historians who have read extensively in these 1850s newspapers concur with this conclusion. Several histories of early Oregon assign Avery a major role in the publication of the *Messenger*, either as a very active patron or as an owner, editor, or publisher.<sup>15</sup>

A pair of historical reminiscences also link Avery to the *Occidental Messenger*. In 1905, Tony Noltner, a prominent journalist, visited Corvallis and spoke to a reporter for the *Corvallis Times* about his youthful employment with the *Occidental Messenger*. Noltner had once worked as the *Occidental Messenger's* "printer's devil" (apprentice). The 1905 *Corvallis Times* article asserted, perhaps based on an interview with Noltner, that the *Messenger* "plant was owned by the late J.C. Avery." This possible reminiscence by a former employee supports the claim that Avery owned the printing equipment ("the plant") used to produce the *Messenger*.<sup>16</sup> In the 1920s, William R. Gillis, the brother of the *Occidental Messenger's* publisher, Stephen E. Gillis, remembered that "Mr. Avery preceded Steve [Gillis] as publisher" of the newspaper and that Avery and Benton County Democrats supported the enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

The preponderance of the primary and secondary historical evidence suggests that, at the very least, Joseph Avery owned the *Occidental Messenger* printing press and played a role in the newspaper's formation. This does not mean that he absolutely controlled the newspaper content, as his enemies charged, but there is a strong likelihood that he had some kind of editorial input.

12 *Oregon Statesman*, June 23, 1857, p. 2; David D. Fagan, *History of Benton County, Oregon* (Portland: A.G. Walling, 1885), 439 – 40.

13 *Oregon Statesman*, June 23, 1857, p. 2; June 30, 1857, p. 2; July 14, 1857, p. 2; Aug. 11, 1857, p. 2; Oct. 27, 1857, p. 2; Jan. 12, 1858, p. 2; June 1, 1858, p. 1.

14 *Weekly Oregonian* (Portland), Aug. 15, 1857, p. 2; *Democratic Standard* (Portland), June 18, 1857, p. 2; *Oregon Argus* (Portland), June 27, 1857, p. 2.

15 Historians who link Avery to the *Occidental Messenger* include Robert W. Johannsen, *Frontier Politics and the Sectional Conflict: The Pacific Northwest on the Eve of the Civil War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), 45 – 46; Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 102 – 3, 226; Tom Marsh, *To the Promised Land: A History of Government and Politics in Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2012), 41; Malcolm Clark, Jr., *Eden Seekers: The Settlement of Oregon, 1818 – 1862* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 289, 291; and Hendrickson, *Joe Lane of Oregon*, 141.

16 *Corvallis Times*, Dec. 12, 1905, p. 3; Fagan, *History of Benton County*, 439 – 40.

17 Gillis, *Gold Rush Days with Mark Twain*, 35 – 40. William Gillis attributed the hiring of editor L.P. Hall to Stephen Gillis, not to Avery himself.

## 2) What were the views of the *Occidental Messenger* and did these views reflect the personal views of Joseph Avery?

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If we conclude that Joseph Avery had at least some editorial influence over the *Occidental Messenger*, the next step is to analyze the content of the *Messenger* and to consider whether this content reflected the views of Avery himself. Most historians have identified the *Occidental Messenger* as an extreme proslavery newspaper that unabashedly advocated extending slavery into Oregon. This portrait is oversimplified. The *Messenger* did, indeed, express profoundly proslavery views for part of its existence, but advocating the proslavery cause was not its central purpose. It was, above all else, an “opposition” Democratic newspaper and its primary aim was to attack the Salem Clique and to unite opposition Democrats against it. This is evident in the radical change in the newspaper’s content over time. The first two extant issues of the *Messenger* from 1857 were deeply proslavery. By 1858, however, the content shifted. The newspaper mainly assailed the Salem Clique and said little about slavery.<sup>18</sup>

Why the shift over time? The only evidence that helps answer this question comes from Avery’s chief enemy and rival, Asahel Bush of the *Oregon Statesman*. Bush and the anti-Avery correspondents who wrote into his newspaper repeatedly claimed that Avery did not actually hold proslavery views. One anonymous writer from Corvallis remarked in June 1857 that “[e]very man who knows J.C. Avery knows that he is not at heart proslavery, and that in this movement he is only influenced by a hope of furthering his town ‘intrusts.’” A month later, the same man wrote of the *Occidental Messenger*: “[a]s for the proslavery doctrine promulgated in that paper, he [Avery] cares no more about it, than the Devil does about holy water.”<sup>19</sup> Asahel Bush echoed this claim the following year, observing that “the man who could be made to believe that Avery was really a pro-slavery man, could be made to believe the moon was made of green cheese.”<sup>20</sup>

In the views of his enemies, the only reason that Avery published proslavery screeds in the *Occidental Messenger*, despite his own personal beliefs, was because he wanted to rile up proslavery Democrats in Oregon and win them away from the Salem Clique alliance. Avery hoped to convince proslavery men that the Salem Clique was not vocal enough in defending slaveholding rights and that they should instead support the National Democrats. Asahel Bush put it bluntly: “Avery set the thing agoing, thinking that he could, through it, use pro-slavery democrats to break up the democratic party.” The *Occidental Messenger*’s “only mission was to prostitute the slavery feeling and interest to the support of Avery’s scheme of breaking up the democratic party, and locating the seat of government in the ‘seat of his breeches.’” In short, Avery was merely a provocateur who temporarily mobilized proslavery rhetoric to win a political following and to get enough votes to move the territorial capital back to Corvallis.<sup>21</sup>

18 See footnote 15 above for secondary sources that describe the *Occidental Messenger*. The shift in the content is analyzed below.

19 *Oregon Statesman*, June 23, 1857, p. 2; July 14, 1857, p. 2.

20 *Oregon Statesman*, March 9, 1858, p. 2.

21 *Oregon Statesman*, Oct. 27, 1857, p. 2. A similar claim appears in the *Statesman* on Aug. 11, 1857, p. 2.

Regardless of Avery's real views or intentions, the *Occidental Messenger* did, indeed, carry proslavery editorials during 1857. The timing of these editorials was significant. Oregonians were voting on whether to adopt a state constitution and apply for statehood. Rather than trying to resolve the status of slavery and African Americans in Oregon, the convention delegates who drafted the new constitution left this thorny matter up to the voters themselves. Voters weighed on whether they wanted to allow slavery in Oregon and whether they believed "free negroes" should be allowed to live in the new state.<sup>22</sup> Since the Salem Clique generally supported the new constitution, and many Salem Clique allies opposed slavery in Oregon, the *Occidental Messenger* may have been trying to convince proslavery Democrats to vote against the new constitution and/or to vote for slavery.<sup>23</sup> An early editorial in the *Occidental Messenger* declared that "[u]pon the subject of domestic slavery, now agitating the public mind of Oregon from one extent of the territory to the other, we cordially and frankly avow ourselves in favor of the institution." Slavery was not only "right in principle," but the "prosperity of this portion of the Pacific coast depends, in a great degree, upon its adoption here in our embryo state."<sup>24</sup> A later article expanded on these ideas, noting that there were few places in the United States "so well adapted to slave labor as Oregon." Slavery would enable white Oregonians to cultivate wheat, hemp, flax, and sugar cane on a large scale. Emigrants from the slave states would flock to the territory and bolster Oregon's population. A "liberal constitution," one that allowed slavery and preserved states' rights, would unleash "a magic wand of improvement" across the new state.<sup>25</sup>

The *Occidental Messenger's* proslavery articles also depicted African Americans as uncivilized, barbarous, and beast-like. In September 1857, the *Messenger* published a letter from an anonymous proslavery subscriber in Jacksonville, Oregon, who described Africans as people with only "a few degrees more of intellect" than animals. The same writer claimed that "[i]n Africa they are barbarous, and cannot be Christianized to any extent." Only when subjected to supervised labor would the African yield "benefit to himself as well as his master." Another letter to the editor by J.W. Mack, a proslavery Oregon legislator, referred to African Americans as "n-----s" and declared that both the Christian Bible and Jesus Christ condoned their enslavement.<sup>27</sup>

The depictions of African Americans that appeared in the *Occidental Messenger* were relatively typical for the period. Most Democratic newspapers, and even most free soil Republican publications, declared whites' racial superiority to people of African descent. In its proslavery views, particularly its assertions that Oregon should adopt slavery, the *Messenger* was an extreme outlier in the Pacific

22 On the adoption of the state constitution and the issue of slavery, see Johnson, *Founding the Far West*, 65 – 70, 139 – 88, 278 – 79.

23 *Oregon Statesman*, Oct. 20, 1857, p. 2. Asahel Bush claimed that Avery opposed the new constitution because it established the state capital permanently in Salem.

24 *Weekly Oregonian*, July 4, 1857, p.2. While the issue of the *Occidental Messenger* that carried this editorial no longer exists, the *Weekly Oregonian* reprinted the editorial and commented on it.

25 *Occidental Messenger*, Sept. 26, 1857, p.2.

26 *Occidental Messenger*, Sept. 26, 1857, p. 2.

27 *Occidental Messenger*, Oct. 17, 1857, p. 1. The *Messenger* also published editorials denouncing American Indians in Southern Oregon as "demons in human shape" and "savage demons." See the issue of April 24, 1858, p. 2.

Northwest. Only one other territorial newspaper, the Jacksonville *Sentinel*, came out in favor of slavery in Oregon as boldly as the *Messenger*.<sup>28</sup> Most either condemned the expansion of slavery into the territory or argued that the issue should be left up to the territory's voters.

In November 1857, Oregonians voted to accept the proposed constitution and to prohibit both slavery and African Americans from the new state. The *Oregon Argus* predicted that once Avery had neither the constitution nor the slavery issue to latch onto, the *Occidental Messenger* would be consigned "to the tomb."<sup>29</sup> While the newspaper survived for several more months, it retreated from its initial proslavery stance and L.P. Hall announced that he was stepping down as editor.<sup>30</sup> Bush of the *Oregon Statesman* speculated that Hall was still editing the newspaper behind the scenes. Avery had removed Hall's name from the newspaper, and told Hall to abandon his proslavery editorials, because Avery now sought to draw antislavery men into the National Democratic Party.<sup>31</sup> If this was truly Avery's aim, he was probably not successful. The *Occidental Messenger* ceased publication on July 31, 1858.<sup>32</sup>

### 3) What involvement, if any, did Avery have with the *Democratic Crisis* and the suppressed *Oregon Union*?

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The evidence linking Avery to the pro-Confederate *Oregon Union* is ambiguous. The Democratic Crisis, which eventually became the *Oregon Union*, started up in February 1859 under the editorship of T.B. Odeneal. Both the *Oregon Statesman* and the *Oregon Argus* charged that the *Crisis* was merely a continuation of the *Occidental Messenger* under a new name with a new editor. Asahel Bush speculated that L.P. Hall was still editing the newspaper behind the scenes and that Avery's supporters planned to use the *Crisis* (as its name implied) to "manufacture a new crisis in the democratic party. The softs and soreheads have annually had a crisis in our ranks for the last seven years." The *Argus* noticed that the *Democratic Crisis* appeared to be printed on the same press as the *Messenger*.<sup>33</sup> *Crisis* editor T.B. Odeneal strenuously denied these claims. Still, he advocated the cause of the National Democrats, Joseph Avery's chosen party.<sup>34</sup>

The *Democratic Crisis* lasted for only a month before Odeneal gave his printing press to James Slater in exchange for Slater's bookstore. Slater renamed the newspaper the *Oregon Union*.<sup>35</sup> Like the *Messenger* and the *Crisis* before it, the *Union* advocated the cause of the National Democratic Party and opposed the Salem Clique. Although the *Union* aligned exactly with Joseph Avery's politics, it

<sup>28</sup> A number of scholars identify the *Occidental Messenger* as a radical outlier in its proslavery views. These include Marsh, *To the Promised Land*, 41; Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 289; and Turnball, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 102-03.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Founding the Far West*, 278; *Oregon Argus*, Oct. 24, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> For this shift, see the last three extant issues of the *Occidental Messenger* from March 27, 1858; April 24, 1858; and June 5, 1858. For Hall's departure, see *Oregon Statesman*, April 27, 1858, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, June 29, 1858, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Oregon Argus*, August 7, 1858, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, Feb. 1, 1859, p. 2; *Oregon Argus*, Feb. 12, 1859, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Democratic Crisis* (Corvallis), Feb. 16, 1859, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Turnball, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 226; *Democratic Crisis*, March 5, 1859, p. 2. At this point, Slater had taken over editing duties, but had not yet changed the name. The first official issue of the *Oregon Union* appeared on March 12, 1859.



is unclear how much, if any, economic stake or editorial control he had in it. Asahel Bush insisted that Slater was “Avery’s tool,” that he peddled Avery’s political ticket in Benton County, and that he was on Avery’s payroll.<sup>36</sup> By September 1860, however, the *Dalles Mountaineer* claimed that James Slater had a new boss. Nathaniel Hart Lane, son of the popular Oregon proslavery politician, Joseph Lane, allegedly purchased the newspaper to advance the career of his father. The Lanes purportedly tasked Slater with whipping up “disunionists” in favor of John C. Breckenridge, the 1860 proslavery Democratic presidential candidate who chose Joseph Lane as his running mate.<sup>37</sup> If this is true, then it is possible that Avery severed any relationship that he might have had with the *Union* by 1860.

James Slater left the *Oregon Union* in September 1861, in the midst of the U.S. Civil War, and editorial duties passed to Patrick Malone.<sup>38</sup> Malone was an Irish immigrant and “a strong southern sympathizer.” He published editorials that were sympathetic to the Confederacy and intensely critical of the U.S. war effort, Abraham Lincoln, the Republicans, and emancipation. He summed up his views in the *Union*’s 1863 masthead: “THE UNION AS IT WAS—THE CONSTITUTION AS IT IS, AND THE NEGROES WHERE THEY ARE.”<sup>39</sup> Malone simultaneously edited two other pro-Confederate newspapers, the Albany *Oregon Democrat* and the Albany *Inquirer*. The federal government suppressed both of these publications in 1862, leaving Malone with only the *Union* as a vehicle for his pro-Confederate and antiwar views.<sup>40</sup>

Joseph Avery was no longer a prominent politician at the state level by this time, but his enemies still insinuated that he was involved with Malone’s enterprise. As late as 1862, Bush charged “Avery, Slater, and the ‘toad spotted traitor’ [Malone]” with disseminating secessionist propaganda in the *Union*’s columns.<sup>41</sup> Bush also claimed that Avery deliberately aided the federal government in suppressing Malone’s previous newspaper, the Albany *Oregon Democrat*, because he did not want it competing with the *Oregon Union*.<sup>42</sup> These kinds of accusations against Avery tapered off across 1862 and 1863. By the time the federal government finally suppressed the *Oregon Union* in March 1863, it appears that none of Avery’s contemporaries were explicitly associating him with the newspaper. For these reasons, it is not possible to reach a solid conclusion about whether Joseph Avery allied himself with Malone, the *Oregon Union*, or the Confederacy. There is not enough evidence to support the idea that Avery played a major role in secessionist or pro-Confederate activities in Oregon.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, May 8, 1860, p. 2; June 5, 1860, p. 2; Sept. 11, 1860, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Undated article in the *Dalles Mountaineer*, reprinted in *Oregon Statesman*, Sept. 11, 1860, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Oregon Weekly Union*, Sept. 9, 1861, p. 2. Slater eventually became a U.S. Senator from Oregon.

<sup>39</sup> Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 226, 290 – 91; *Oregon Union*, Feb. 28, 1863, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Turnbull, *History of Oregon Newspapers*, 290 – 91; Chandler, “Crushing Dissent,” 237 – 38, 242 - 43.

<sup>41</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, Jan. 20, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, March 3, 1862, p. 2. For other editorials linking Avery to Malone, see *Oregon Statesman*, May 26, 1862, p. 2; and June 2, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> During the 2004 controversy over the naming of a new Corvallis middle school after Avery, rumors emerged that Avery was a member of a secessionist organization called the Knights of the Golden Circle. While the Knights of Golden Circle was a real organization that existed in the United States, evidence that there were actually active chapters in Oregon is inconclusive and incomplete, and mainly comes from second-hand accounts written long after the fact. On this point, see Scott McArthur, *The Enemy Never Came: The Civil War in the Pacific Northwest* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2012), 78 – 85. I was unable to find any evidence linking Avery to the Knights of the Golden Circle.

## OSU's Avery Lodge and the Avery Naming Controversy in Corvallis

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In 1966, Oregon State University honored Joseph C. Avery and his Corvallis co-founder, William F. Dixon, by naming two new student cooperative living houses after them. The new buildings were Avery House and Dixon House, later known as Avery Lodge and Dixon Lodge. OSU President James Herbert Jensen explained to the Oregon State Board of Higher Education that he chose the names because he wanted to continue “the policy of naming such buildings after community pioneers as was done in the naming of Reed and Heckart Lodges.”<sup>44</sup> This statement suggests that the buildings were named after Joseph C. Avery and William F. Dixon because they were the founders of Corvallis, and not because OSU administrators wanted to commemorate their service to the university. President Jensen also misinterpreted the reasoning behind the naming of the previous cooperative houses, Reed Lodge and Heckart Lodge. When these buildings opened in the 1950s, the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* reported that their namesakes were not selected because they were “community pioneers,” but rather because they were “two long-time Corvallis residents, each of whom was closely associated with Oregon State college and its students for nearly 40 years.” E.T. Reed served as the college’s editor for several decades and wrote most of its official publications. Zelia Heckart was affectionately known as a “campus mother” to hundreds of Oregon State College students who lived in her Corvallis boarding house over the years.<sup>45</sup> Both of these previous namesakes, then, had a long history of service to the college. Joseph C. Avery was indeed critical to the early history of the college, but the naming of Avery Lodge appears to have been a tribute to a “pioneer” founder of Corvallis.

Avery Lodge continued as a cooperative living house until 2015 when Oregon State University discontinued all of the on-campus housing cooperatives. The University substantially remodeled the building in 2016 and reopened it for a new purpose. It currently contains administrative offices for University Housing and Dining Services, the Family Resource Center, and the Human Services Resource Center. This last office provides a food pantry, emergency housing aid, textbook lending, and other living assistance to OSU students.<sup>46</sup>

While the Avery name has persisted on the OSU campus, other Corvallis entities have decided that Joseph C. Avery is not an appropriate namesake for public buildings. In 2004, the members of the Corvallis School Board voted to name a new middle school after Joseph C. and Martha Avery.<sup>47</sup> The School Board vote soon erupted into a major community controversy over the political record of Joseph C. Avery. The Corvallis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) wrote an email to the School Board protesting the decision to name the school after

44 *Oregon State Board of Higher Education Meeting Minutes*, #329 – 33 (1964, pt. 2), p.333, OSU SCARC.

45 *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, Jan. 27, 1954, clipping in folder 46.2, “Co-op Houses,” box 46, Memorabilia Collection, OSU SCARC.

46 James Day, “OSU Shutting Down its Four Housing Co-ops,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, June 12, 2013, [http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/osu-shutting-down-its-four-housing-co-ops/article\\_76c11bec-d2f9-11e2-b8f3-001a4bcf887a.html](http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/osu-shutting-down-its-four-housing-co-ops/article_76c11bec-d2f9-11e2-b8f3-001a4bcf887a.html); Division of Finance and Administration, “Student Community Center Azalea House and Avery Lodge Renovation Project,” Oregon State University, <http://fa.oregonstate.edu/construction/current-projects/major-construction-projects/student-community-center-azalea-house-and>, accessed Oct. 5, 2017; Office of Student Life, “Human Services Resource Center,” Oregon State University, <http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/hsrc>, accessed Sept. 27, 2017.

47 Becky Waldrop, “School to be Named for Averys,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, Jan. 13, 2004, [http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/school-to-be-named-for-averys/article\\_b58fbef5-6674-564d-9fd1-83460d38c7cd.html](http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/school-to-be-named-for-averys/article_b58fbef5-6674-564d-9fd1-83460d38c7cd.html)

a “notorious racist” and advocate of slavery. Several historians and researchers—including William Robbins and Thomas McClintock of OSU’s History Department, Mary Gallagher of the Benton County Historical Society, Richard Engeman of the Oregon Historical Society, and independent writer Roy Bennett—shared the NAACP’s concerns. William Robbins and Mary Gallagher also conducted research on Avery and presented their findings before a meeting of the Corvallis School Board on January 26, 2004.<sup>48</sup> In the wake of these meetings, the School Board reversed its original decision and chose to name the middle school after Linus Pauling.

## Summary and Conclusion

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As a founder of Corvallis and an early supporter of Corvallis College, Joseph C. Avery made important contributions to the early history of Oregon State University. At the same time, a large body of historical evidence points to Avery’s involvement with the *Occidental Messenger* and its extreme proslavery and anti-black content. There is evidence that Avery did not personally hold proslavery views; even his worst enemies testify that he did not. But if we conclude from the evidence that he had some kind of controlling interest in the *Messenger*, either as an owner, publisher, patron, or secret editor, then we must also conclude that he condoned the publication of these extremist views. Even if Avery did not genuinely believe in promoting slavery in Oregon, he was still willing to disseminate radical proslavery arguments for political or economic gain. There is, however, little hard evidence linking Avery to the suppressed *Oregon Union*, and so it is difficult to make any conclusions about whether he was a secessionist or pro-Confederate ideologue during the Civil War.

Thirteen years ago, there was enough doubt about Avery’s politics, and enough community anger and concern over his record, that the Corvallis School Board decided to reject Avery’s name for a new middle school building. This incident indicates that there is already precedent in the Corvallis community for questioning Joseph Avery’s historical legacy and the appropriateness of naming public buildings after him.

48 Rukmini Callimachi, “Family’s Past Sparks School-Name Debate,” *Register-Guard* (Eugene, OR), January 16, 2004, clipping in folder 14.5, “Avery, Joseph Conant,” box 14, Memorabilia Collection, OSU SCARC; “Minutes of the Work Session of the Board of Directors, Corvallis School District 509,” January 26, 2004, [accessed via Ancestry.com, Aug. 15, 2017] <https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/57664786/person/42045174848/media/c5f758a7-6aac-4a81-aeca-b0dcac954616>; Becky Waldrop, “Board Hears from Historians,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, Jan. 27, 2004, [http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/board-hears-from-historians/article\\_45ebd1f2-dc94-5fbf-b365-a95a28a674ea.html](http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/local/board-hears-from-historians/article_45ebd1f2-dc94-5fbf-b365-a95a28a674ea.html)