



TO THE WORLD!!

JAMES W. NESMITH,

The nineteenth-century Oregon style in politics and rhetoric was born on June 7, 1847 when James W. Nesmith fired his broadside *To the World!!* in a final but unsuccessful effort, on election day, to sink J. Quinn Thornton, supreme judge of the provisional government of Oregon. Though efforts in the style proliferated with brilliance in the newspapers of the 1850s and 1860s, the passionate vigor of *To The World!!* was never surpassed. The politics involved were purely local; national political parties had not yet been organized in Oregon.

The feud between Nesmith and Thornton that produced the broadside had nothing immediately to do with the election canvass. It all began with a battle of letters in the *Oregon Spectator* between Thornton and David Goff, Nesmith's father-in-law, on the merits of the southern immigration route (the Applegate Trail). Thornton called the trail a road of starvation. Goff replied with a bitter personal attack. Thornton claimed that Goff was illiterate, and that Nesmith was the real author of his letter. Nesmith challenged Thornton to a duel, the challenge was refused, and Nesmith published *To the World!!* But the question of the southern route had itself a political dimension. The northern route channeled immigrants through Oregon City and was an important factor in the prosperity of the lower Willamette Valley; the southern route would have bypassed Oregon City and brought settlers directly into southern Oregon.

Though Nesmith lost this political battle, he became a major political power in the 1850s as one of the leaders of the Salem Clique that dominated the Oregon Democratic Party, and in the 1860s served a term as United States Senator from Oregon. Thornton, on the other hand, though politically ambitious, never really made it in the Democratic Party—perhaps in part because Nesmith and his friends never forgot the 1847 feud.

Only two copies of *To the World!!* are known to exist—the University of Oregon Library copy, acquired as a gift from the late George Harding of Portland, Oregon, in 1958, and a copy in the Yale University Library, purchased in 1967. Yet the broadside is by far the most widely known piece of early Oregon printing, though it owes its fame largely to reprints and reprints of reprints. A reprint produced some time between 1905 and 1910 in Walla Walla, Washington has been confused with the original, though it is easily distinguished by its sans-serif type; reproductions in Harvey Scott's *History of the Oregon Country* and in a 1964 issue of the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* are from the Walla Walla printing. There was also a late printing on cloth from De Vinne type.

A facsimile of the original broadside appeared in Douglas McMurtrie's *Oregon Imprints 1847-1870*, published by the University of Oregon in 1950, and on an advertising piece for the book. This facsimile achieved its widest circulation when it attracted the attention of Bennet Cerf and was reproduced in his "Trade Winds" column in the May 13, 1950 *Saturday*

Review of Literature. In 1959 the cut from the McMurtrie book was again used, for a facsimile edition of six copies on contemporary paper. A full account of this reprint was published in the *Papers* of the Bibliographic Society of America in 1969.

George N. Belknap

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historical vignettes*

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TO THE WORLD!!

J. Quinn Thornton,

Having resorted to low, cowardly and dishonorable means, for the purpose of injuring my character and standing, and having refused honorable satisfaction, which I have demanded; I avail myself of this opportunity of publishing him to the world as a reclaimless liar, an infamous scoundrel, a black hearted villain, an arrant coward, a worthless vagabond and an imported miscreant, a disgrace to the profession and a dishonor to his country,

JAMES W. NESMITH.

OREGON CITY, JUNE, 7, 1847.