

# Press Release

September 10, 2012

THE OREGON ENCYCLOPEDIA



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A partnership of Portland State University, the Oregon Historical Society, and The Oregon Council of Teachers of English

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## The OE History Night at the Mission in October

The Oregon Encyclopedia (The OE) continues its monthly series of History Nights at McMenamins pubs with programs at the Mission Theater in partnership with the *Northwest Examiner*. At each History Night, The OE will look back at the people and events that have shaped our communities. Visit [www.oregonencyclopedia.org](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org) for History Night locations and more details.

**“Oregon Democracy: Asahel Bush, Slavery, and the Statehood Debate”**

**Presented by Barbara Mahoney**

**Monday, October 1, 2012**

**7:00 p.m., doors open at 6:00 pm**

**McMenamins Mission Theater, 1624 NW Glisan Street, Portland**

**Free and open to the public**

Did you know that when the Oregon Constitution was ratified in 1859, it contained a constitutional ban against slavery, but also excluded African Americans from obtaining residency in the state? Asahel Bush, one of Oregon’s early newspaper editors and prominent businessmen played an active role in promoting these amendments to Oregon’s Constitution.

As the editor of the pioneer Salem newspaper, the *Oregon Statesman*, and a leader of the Democratic party, Asahel Bush shepherded the Oregon territory to statehood in the midst of the national controversy over slavery that led to the Civil War. As early as 1843, the people of the territory had rejected slavery. Opposed to slavery as unsuitable for Oregon, Bush used the *Statesman* to shape the debate, always portraying the issue as one of economics, not morality. After considerable and bitter argument, the drafters of the future state’s constitution specifically outlawed it. The dispute fractured the Democratic party, ending its decade-long dominance of Oregon politics. When the Civil War came, many in Oregon supported the Confederacy. Bush’s influence and his adamant loyalty to the United States led several contemporaries to conclude that he played the key role in keeping Oregon in the Union.

Barbara Mahoney is a historian and biographer. In 2003, she won an Oregon Book Award for *Dispatches and Dictators: Ralph Barnes for the Herald Tribune*, a biography of Oregon native Ralph Barnes, European correspondent for the New York *Herald Tribune* during the 1920s and 1930s.

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The OE is an online resource for information on the state’s significant people, places, events, institutions, and biota. Over 1000 entries and essays have been published online and new entries are added every day. For more information visit [www.oregonencyclopedia.org](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org).

The OE is a partnership between Portland State University, the Oregon Council of Teachers of English, and the Oregon Historical Society. The OE has received support from a collaborative of the state’s five cultural partners—the Oregon Arts Council, Oregon Council for the Humanities, Oregon Heritage Commission, Oregon Historical Society, and the State Historic Preservation Office—with funding from the Oregon Cultural Trust. The Oregon Council of Teachers of English, the Oregon State Library, the Oregon Heritage Commission, the Oregon University System, Willamette University, and private donors have provided additional support.