

Colonel T'Vault and the Dardanelles **By Dennis Powers**

William T'Vault was born in 1809 on a ship as his parents left France to sail for the United States. His family settled in Indiana, and he later received his legal training to practice law there. T'Vault, his wife, two daughters, and young son in 1845 were part of "66 wagons and 293 persons" that traveled the Oregon Trail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Oregon--a journey that took eight tough months. Settling in Oregon City, he established a law practice. With three associates, he formed the Oregon Printing Association, which was the first printing and publishing company west of the Rocky Mountains. This entity, in turn, established the *Oregon Spectator*, Oregon's first newspaper.

The early 1852 news of gold discovered at Rich Gulch in what is now Jacksonville brought miners and people from all over. Among them was Colonel William T'Vault (an honorary title), who settled on a 640-acre donation land claim on the Rogue River and built a log cabin with a post office inside. T'Vault's land was reportedly the first farm settled in the Valley. He named it Dardanelles with a view to creating a town. Although he had never traveled there, other than reading geography books, the name came from the strait that's between the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

T'Vault had been Oregon's first postmaster and first editor of Oregon's first newspaper before moving south to the Gold Hill area. One year later, he opened a grocery store. With more close discoveries of gold, his town developed more. He brought about the opening of a comfortable, small hotel named the Adams House and later called the Dardanelles House. When a steam-generated stamp mill was built and operated there, the town was on its way with several houses, a school, and blacksmith shop that joined the hotel and store. A nearby tributary creek called T-Vault Creek was later renamed to Kane Creek in honor of a Dr. Kane who had settled there.

In 1855, T'Vault went back into the newspaper business and started *The Table Rock Sentinel*, which he renamed in 1959 as the *Oregon Sentinel* and the first newspaper in Southern Oregon. The first edition appeared in Jacksonville in November, and his editorial policy was "being independent on all subjects, and devoted to the best interests of Southern Oregon."

Moving to Jacksonville in 1857, the Colonel restarted his law practice a year later, and in that year he was elected to the Oregon provisional legislature. In the 1859 session, he became speaker of the house. Tragically, T'Vault died in 1859, a victim of a smallpox epidemic that raged throughout the area. He and his wife are buried in Jacksonville Cemetery.

When he died, William T'Vault was the District Attorney of the 1st Judicial District. His obituary mourned, "It is painful to reflect that after a busy life and prominent services he should be struck down by so dreadful a malady that not a single mourner dared follow him to his grave."

With the discovery of gold in adjacent Gold Hill in 1860, people were attracted to and moved there, as the Dardanelles withered away. The town eventually lost its post office to its larger neighbor. When the railroad came through Gold Hill and chose it for its station, the small hamlets that were bypassed--from the Dardanelles to Rock Point on the Rogue's other side--became ghost towns.

Over time, some development occurred due to its proximity to the new Interstate that came through in the 1960s. However, the unincorporated area of the Dardanelles today is tiny. It starts with a gas station and small mini-market named the "Dardanelles Store & Gas," located one-quarter mile east and across the overpass from the Exit 40 turnoff to Gold Hill. As one continues towards Jacksonville on Old Stage Road past the mini-market, the Dardanelles RV Park and Laurel Hills Golf Course is on the left-hand side, residences and dirt roads leading to ranches are on the right.

A memorial to Colonel T'Vault is adjacent to the mini-market. A large headstone with a brass plaque, T'Vault's monument reads aptly: "Dardanelles, first Post Office in Jackson County established October 19, 1852, in the cabin of Col. William G. T'Vault (1806-1869). Col. T'Vault was the editor of Oregon's first newspaper, 'The Oregon Spectator.' He was Postmaster General of the Oregon Provisional Government. He died in Jacksonville during the smallpox epidemic of 1869."

He was the editor of the first Oregon newspapers and worked as a noted lawyer, politician, and even land agent. Other than this monument and a gravestone marker, nothing else remains to remind us about his pioneering life.

Sources: "Friends of Jacksonville Cemetery: Who's Buried in Jacksonville," at [T'Vault's Background](#); Buffy Pollock, "Monument to valley's first postmaster moves to new home," *Mail Tribune*, April 26, 2008, at [T'Vault and Dardanelles](#); *Mail Tribune*, "Fancy name lives on," March 18, 2008, at [More on the Dardanelles](#).