

Bush was considered one of the wealthiest members of the expedition and used his wealth to help several other families emigrate. The group spent seven months on the Oregon Trail before reaching their destination, a settlement on the south side of the Columbia River called The Dalles.



The home of George Bush (Backside).

But the freedom Bush was seeking eluded him in Oregon. The Provisional Government had recently passed anti-black laws that were as repressive as those he had left behind in Missouri. Gravely disappointed by what he found, Bush, his family and several others crossed the Columbia River into what would become the state of Washington and formed the first American community there. He settled in what was "Bush Prairie,"

which later became Thurston County. Bush was among many settlers trying to take advantage of the Homestead Act. The act stated that if an American citizen took possession of unsettled land and showed improvement on that land within four years, the land would legally belong to that person -- without putting out a cent of cash to purchase it. Because blacks were not American citizens, land ownership was still a dream for them. Bush's friend, a white man named Michael T. Simmons, helped Bush obtain ownership of his homestead. Bush had helped Simmons and his family immigrate to Washington several years earlier. One of the first acts of the Provisional Government in Olympia was to approve George Bush's petition to own his land.

In spite of his difficulty in obtaining ownership of land, Bush did very well in the Northwest. He was well known as an excellent farmer and was so prosperous that he purchased the first ship owned by the early settlers. This ship, "The Orbit," cost \$35,000 and was used to ship wood products to ports in California.



William Owen Bush