

Samuel Rothchild (1843-1930)

By Jack T. Sanders

Samuel Rothchild, a pioneer merchant in the development of eastern Oregon, was typical of the many pioneer Jewish merchants who played a major role in the settlement of the West. Born in Germany in 1843, he came with his family to America in 1852 and grew up in Kentucky. In 1872, he opened a general store in Baker City and relocated to Pendleton two years later.

His partnership in Pendleton with John E. Bean made the Rothchild & Bean label a mark of prestige in eastern Oregon. Through the store, Rothchild also ran a mining-supply operation for gold and silver miners in the Blue Mountains, made real-estate investments, and bought grain. He was also a stockholder in the East Oregonian Publishing Company, a stockholder in a bank, and the primary owner of a silver mine.

Rothchild was an energetic booster of settlement in Oregon. As a member of the state Board of Immigration, he sought, not always successfully, to entice relatives to move to eastern Oregon. After some tutelage in business practices from Rothchild, his brother-in-law William Wurzweiler became a sheep rancher in Crook County and eventually mayor of Prineville.

In July 1878, citizens of Pendleton felt threatened by Bannocks and Paiutes from Idaho and southern Oregon, who were starving due to government negligence and were acting out of desperation. Rothchild joined a group of volunteers that rode out to confront the invaders and was wounded in the battle.

Rothchild raised the money to buy Pendleton its first fire engine in the spring of 1880. When the town sought incorporation, he helped prepare the charter for the legislature and served on the city council from 1881 until 1889. He was chair of the Umatilla County Democratic Central Committee in 1884, was an active Mason, and chaired the committee that supervised the building of the local Masonic hall.

Rothchild and a partner sought to bring irrigation to the Pendleton area, but the depression of 1893 ended that endeavor. The depression, coupled with the murder of a business partner and the bankruptcy of the store, caused Rothchild to seek opportunities elsewhere. In 1895, he moved to Prescott, Arizona, then lived in Republic, Washington, and finally in San Francisco. He died in 1930.

Sources

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