Judge J. Quinn Thornton, who laid claim to having been the originator of the legislation that reserved Section 36 for the support of the public schools of the state, is referred to in a sketch written by Governor Grover as a "native of Virginia who took a course in the State University of Virginia, and spent a year in London at one of the inns of Court there.

He came to Oregon in 1846 and was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1847, and in 1848 was sent to Washington to aid in the framework and passage of the Oregon Territorial organization act. He was active and aggressive and of a combative temperament. During the session of 1847, J. W. Nesmith offered a resolution for the sending of a remonstrance of this House to the President of the United States against the appointment of J. Quinn Thornton to any office in this Territory. It was beaten by a close vote, but its introduction illustrates how bitter were the animosities of the territorial days. Governor Grover says that "few men were ever better prepared to come to the bar than he was. He had a great fund of legal knowledge. He was a good writer and was a fair and cogent speaker, but for some reason he never could make the most of himself." In spite of this estimate of Governor Grover, it must be admitted that he rendered the Territory some splendid service during his short sojourn in Washington. His claim of having secured the 36th section for our public schools brought him into controversy with Mrs. Frances Fuller Victor, author of "The River of the West". In 1846 a bill for the admission of Wisconsin as a state was introduced and reported favorably by Senator Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the Committee on Territories. It provided only for the reservation of section 16. Before being placed on its passage John A. Rockwell of Connecticut moved an amendment to include a reservation of section 36. This appeared to have been the first time such a reservation was ever proposed. When the Oregon bill was first introduced it contained a provision for the reservation of section 36. This was prior to Thornton's appearance in Washington. This matter is treated at considerable length by Mrs. Victor in volume I of the OREGON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY and seems to be conclusive. In a footnote she uses the following language: "Mr. J. Quinn Thornton *** has several times during his lifetime publicly asserted, in written articles and in addresses delivered before the Pioneer Association, that he was the author of the Douglas Bill. By comparing dates it will be seen that he could have had nothing to do with the bill which was introduced in the House December 23rd 1846, soon after the boundary treaty. It passed the House January 16, 1847, was sent to the Senate, amended and laid on the table March 3rd 1847. In 1848 Douglas was a senator and chairman of the committee on Territories. On the 10th of January the Oregon Bill came up, was referred to Douglas' committee, and reported, without amendments on February 7th. This was the identical bill over which senators wrangled in so dramatic a fashion until the last hours of the session in August 1848. A compromise bill was devised by the Southern members, by which Oregon could come in in company with New Mexico and California, but Congress would have none of it. There was no opportunity during Thornton's stay in Washington to alter or amend the Oregon Bill, which when it passed the
Senate, was in all essential features, including school lands, the
same bill which was published in the Oregon Spectator of September
16, 1847, more than a month before Thornton set sail for his desti-
nation. As the Spectator was the only newspaper in Oregon at that
time, and owned and controlled by the Governor, it is fair to pro-
sume that it was ready by the Governor's appointee. Notwithstanding
these adverse circumstances and conclusions, Mr. Thornton never
ceased to claim the authorship of the organic act of Oregon, nor to
congratulate himself upon having bestowed upon this and other new
states the priceless benefit of school lands. 'I will frankly admit,' he
says in his autobiography, 'that when to this section (the 16th)
of the public lands, the 36th was added by the passage of this bill,
the thought that Providence had made me the instrument by which so
great a boon was bestowed on posterity, filled my heart with emotions
as pure and deep as can be experienced by man,' and goes on to
anticipate being recognized as a benefactor of his race when his
toils and responsibilities should be over.'

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J. Quinn Thornton retracted authorship of the bill
creating Oregon Territory, which bill became a law August 14, 1848.
The provisional government of Oregon was represented in Washington by
Thornton, who was then the supreme judge of the provisional govern-
ment, and by Joseph L. Mank. Thornton was born in Mason County, West
Virginia, August 24, 1810. He came to Oregon in 1846. He represented
Benton County in the Oregon legislature in 1865. He rendered impor-
tant service toward creation of Oregon Territory. He wrote OREGON AND
CALIFORNIA IN 1848, two volumes, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1855.
He died at Salem February 5, 1888. For his controversy with Frances
Fuller Victor as to the Oregon land bill, The Oregonian, April 23, May
14, 1855; June 18, 1855. For his biography, ibid., February 7, 1886,
p. 1. For details of his controversy with Frances Fuller Victor over
McLoughlin's land claim at Oregon City, ibid., July 14, 1870, p. 1;
July 15, 1870, p. 1. For his letter detailing the grant of school
lands by Congress to the territory of Oregon, ibid., September 10, 1882.
His address on the migration of 1846 to Oregon appears in Transactions
of Oregon Pioneer Association, 1878, pp. 29-71; history of the
provisional government, ibid., 1874, pp. 43-95.