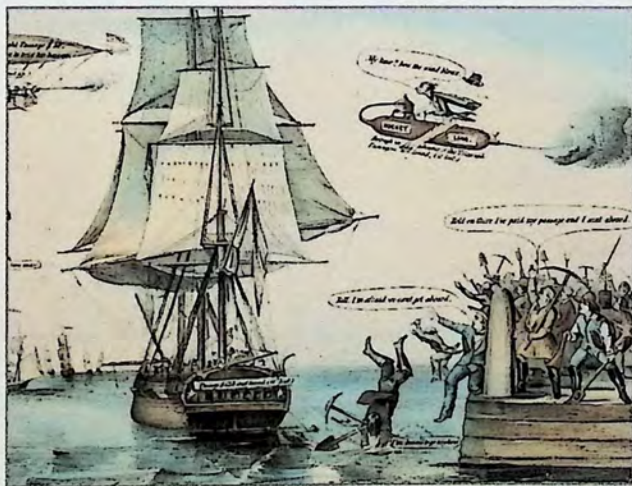
★ WINNER OF THE JAMES MICHENER PRIZE IN WRITING ★

A HISTORY OF US

REVISED THIRD EDITION

LIBERTY FOR ALL?

1820–1860



JOY HAKIM

This book is about America when there were mountain-men, whalers, farmers, railroad builders, and SLAVES. Slavery in the land of the free? Now that was something to question.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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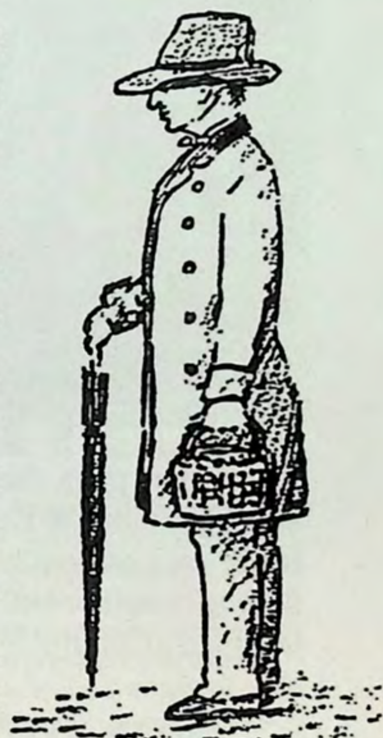
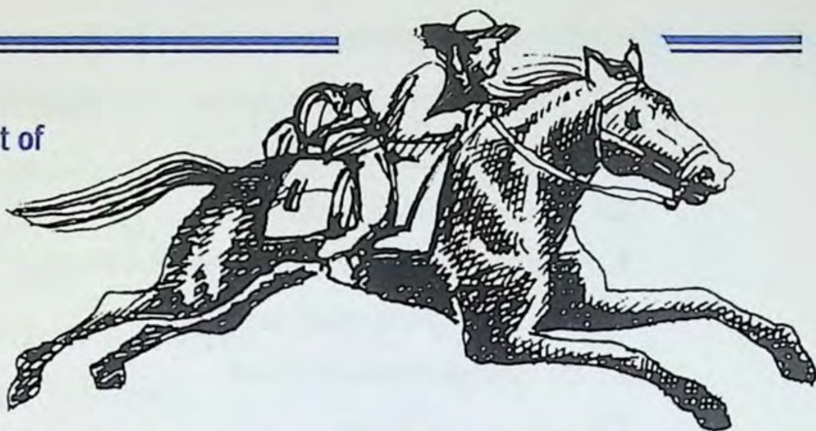


Henry David Thoreau



The pony rider was usually a little bit of a man, brimful of spirit and endurance....He rode a splendid horse that was born for a racer and fed and lodged like a gentleman; kept him at his utmost speed for ten miles, and then, as he came crashing up to the station where stood two men holding fast a fresh, impatient steed, the transfer of rider and mailbag was made in the twinkling of an eye, and away flew the eager pair and were out of sight before the spectator could hardly get the ghost of a look.

—MARK TWAIN, ROUGHING IT

Oh! isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die—
Oh! I cannot be a slave, I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty that I cannot be a slave.

—SONG OF THE LOWELL MILL GIRLS ON STRIKE IN 1836

No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck.

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS

PREFACE
Antebellum—Say *Aunty Belle* and Add *um*

In Latin, ante *means "before" and* bellum *means "war," and, since many 19th-century Americans knew Latin, they used that word,* antebellum *(say aunty-BELL-um), to describe the time before the Civil War—the terrible conflict that divided the nation and then brought it back together again. As you'll soon see, slavery was the most important issue in those days—and it was an ugly issue—but it wasn't the only thing on people's minds. There was gold, real gold, to be dug; there was land to be explored; there was war with Mexico and wars with the Native Americans; there were roads to be built; and industries to be started; and more, lots more.*

Andrew Jackson was a man of the people who brought a new kind of democracy to the presidency.

The subject of a debate at Harvard College in 1828 was: *Can one man be president of the United States when it is eventually settled from Atlantic to Pacific?* The answer of the winning team was *no*, which, of course, was the only sensible answer.

How could one person be president when there was no way for the president in Washington, D.C., to communicate with the West Coast, except perhaps by ship around Cape Horn? Only a few explorers had been across the country, and no one had even tried to make the trip with a wagon or coach. If they had tried they would have found it close to impossible.

In 1828 there were neither telegraphs nor telephones nor railroads nor highways. They were on their way. The 19th century would see changes—enormous and rapid changes—but in 1828 only the very farsighted had an inkling of what technology would bring.

That year of 1828 was an election year, and the turnout of vot-

When Andrew Jackson declared war on the Bank of the United States (you'll read about that on page 11), people who disagreed with him said the president just wanted glory for himself. This cartoon shows him on a mock bank bill (called a "shinplaster").

Elections (*above,* a county election) were rowdy affairs, but the 1828 presidential campaign was especially nasty. Jackson's men painted John Quincy Adams as an aristocrat who spent taxpayers' money on "gambling equipment" for the White House (actually a chess set and a billiard table).

Immoral **means "wicked." Borrowing money, traditionally, was a sign of trouble. In the old farming world, where money was scarce, to go into debt (especially if you didn't really have to) seemed immoral and irresponsible. But, in the new commercial world, borrowing was often necessary and reasonable if a business, or farm, was to grow.**

ers—to make Andrew Jackson president—was astounding. In 1824, only 356,038 Americans had bothered to vote in the presidential election. Four years later, partly because of new voting laws, 1,155,340 white men went to the polls—an increase of 224 percent.

Jackson took that word *democracy,* which scared some people, and glorified it. It became the essential word in American politics. Jackson called his presidency a revolution—as Jefferson had called his presidency—and they were both right. Each believed in democracy, but Jackson made it happen. He made our republic a people's government—a democracy.

Who were these Americans who had suddenly decided to go to the polls and take part in running their own government?

Back in 1800 there were 15 farmers for every person who lived in a city or town. By Andrew Jackson's time—28 years later—there were 10 farmers for every town dweller. The yeoman farmer—Jefferson's ideal American—was on his way to near extinction. But that wasn't clear to Andrew Jackson, or anyone else. What was clear was that this was a nation of optimistic and restless peoples. By 1840, one-third of our citizens had moved west of the Appalachian Mountains. Ohio had become the third-largest state in population, behind only Pennsylvania and New York. If there was opportunity, we Americans would move. And the West seemed to be beckoning.

Those self-sufficient yeoman farmers, who had hardly seen or needed money, were now growing wheat and cotton: cash crops. The farmers were using the money they got for their cotton and wheat to buy food for their families—and luxuries, too. America was developing a money economy, and that was causing all kinds of discussion. Should a farmer borrow money and go into debt to buy farm equipment? Was that immoral, or was it just smart?

Money was changing the United States (and England and other nations, too). The Industrial Revolution started it. It made capital—money—essential for business growth. New commercial interests (businesses and railroads and banks) were looking for money and demanding power and influence. The old guard (those who already had

money and influence) was trying to control and slow the rate of growth.

It was all confusing and terrifying to those who were attached to the new idea of self-government. John Calhoun wrote that "liberty was never in greater danger." Andrew Jackson was the common person's president. He thought the money interests were asking for special privileges from the government, and getting them. "If we cannot at once...make our government what it ought to be, we can at least take a stand against...the advancement of the few at the expense of the many."

Jackson took his stand when he killed the Bank of the United States. That helped set off a depression—but it was Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, who had to deal with it. Yet nothing was going to stop the drive for wealth and achievement. Not in a free nation.

Nor could anything stop people from getting angry about it. When the writer James Fenimore Cooper came home in 1833, after a

Unlike the cartoon of Jackson on page 9, this was a real shinplaster—an actual 50-cent bill put out by a local savings bank.

Andy Jackson: Big Bank Buster

The Bank of the United States was chartered by Congress, and the federal treasury was its biggest depositor. It helped regulate currency and the economy in general. The bank's charter had to be renewed regularly. Jackson picked on the Bank of the United States as a symbol of aristocratic privilege and influence; he was convinced that its directors stood against the idea of democratic self-government. (Actually, the bank had helped make the country economically sound, but—no question about it—it did favor older commercial interests over farmers and the new businesspeople.) Jackson called the bank a "monster" and a "hydra of corruption"; he made the bank *the* big issue when he ran for reelection. Then he set out to destroy the bank, and did. But he didn't replace it with anything, so small banks were free to do what they wished—and that led to monetary confusion and disorder. It was a mixed victory. The common people gained power, but America's money system was never again as sound as when the bank was in control.

Most Americans didn't understand the complex world of economics and banking. The bank battle was actually a fight between old, aristocratic leaders (who had money) and the new manufacturers, builders, and promoters (who needed money to invest and wanted as little restraint as possible). The old guard supported the bank, hated Jackson, and founded the anti-Jackson Whig Party. Politically, it was a hot and angry time.

To most voters, Jackson was the champion of ordinary people against the money kings.

Jefferson may have had Aristotle's idea about happiness in mind when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, thought happiness could be found in a thoughtful life.

For many Americans, happiness meant owning land. In the 19th century, wave after wave of settlers moved west, seeking land. (Of course, their quest often meant disaster for the first Americans—the Indians.)

long stay in Europe, he was horrified by an attitude that seemed to have taken hold in his country. "The desire to grow suddenly rich has seized on all classes," one character complained in Cooper's novel *Homeward Bound*. Were Americans losing their souls in a search for riches? Some thought so.

But that drive for individual riches had surprising consequences. It would make the whole nation rich. It provided better food, clothing, and shelter to more people than in any nation before. It spawned ideas, and poetry, and songs.

You see, this new nation had an unusual goal: it had been directed by its founders to pursue happiness. That was such a simple, logical goal—but no nation seemed to have thought of it before. Besides, what is happiness, and how do you pursue it?

There were lots of answers to that question. Some people said happiness was having land. Some said it was being rich. Some said it was going to school. Some said it was having a fine family. Some said it could be found in religion. Some said it was being free. Some said...well, you get the idea: different people have different ideas about what will make them happy.

This was a nation trying to find ways to let each citizen pursue his own goals—without hurting anyone else—which was a new thing for a nation to do, and not easy at all. Some people were clearly off the track. How can anyone pursue happiness if he or she is a slave, or is keeping others enslaved? How can anyone be happy if he is being lied to, or is thrown off his land?

This country was very young. We had a lot to learn. The antebellum time was a period of growth and experimentation. It was a time when gold seekers took up pickaxes and shovels, when preachers led big outdoor church gatherings, when abolitionists tried to right a terrible wrong, when some people were vile and others were virtuous. Whether it all seemed mostly good or mostly bad, or something in between, one thing was sure: it was not a time to be bored.

1 The Long Way West

After his Rocky Mountain expedition, the explorer Stephen Long's main claim to fame was surveying the route for the first U.S. railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio.

When President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, in 1803, a few people grumbled, but most Americans approved. Hardly anyone had liked the idea of France having land on the border of the United States, or of France controlling the port of New Orleans. Otherwise, nobody seemed to know what to do with the territory. It was a huge hunk of land that went from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. (Later it became 13 states.) But the Louisiana Purchase didn't include southern and western lands that ran from Texas to California and north to the edge of Wyoming (a region that would become all or part of eight more states). That land was all called California, and Spain owned it. And it didn't include a northern region known as the Oregon Country. Britain claimed Oregon—though there was some dispute about it.

Actually, it was mighty strange that France, Spain, England, and the United States were buying and selling the land, as it was inhabited, and presumably owned, by Indian nations that had lived there for thousands of years. But most Europeans and Americans talked of the Indians as

The states carved from Spanish holdings are: Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

The states from the Louisiana Purchase territory are: Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and parts of Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, and Wyoming.

The states from the Oregon Territory are Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

Until Long reached Council Bluffs in the ship *Western Engineer* (sketched above by one of the expedition's official artists, Titian Peale), no steamboat had gotten so far up the Missouri River. The expedition wintered at Council Bluffs and then went on by canoe up the Platte River to the Rockies. (What is a *bluff*? Yes, it has two meanings.)

It was 1839 when the first photographs were taken in America (by Samuel F. B. Morse, whom you'll hear more about in this book, and John W. Draper). The subject had to sit still for half an hour because that was how long it took to get a proper exposure.

"savages," and they usually acted as if those savages had no rights. Of course, the Indians believed they had rights. They weren't willing to give up their land. They would fight for it; but that came later, when railroad trains—called "iron horses"—thundered across the buffalo ranges, and an endless parade of men from the east killed the buffalo and the Indian's way of life, too.

Early in the 19th century, most people in the United States thought there was plenty of room for the Indians on the land to the west of the Mississippi. And, at first, the Indians were friendly toward the newcomers. Besides, few Americans seemed to have any desire to live in the Louisiana Territory. Mostly, they were just curious about it—the way we wonder about distant planets. Besides, if you believe you own something, it makes sense to find out exactly what it looks like, and—aside from what Lewis and Clark and a few other explorers had reported—no one knew much about the western lands.

So, in 1819, President Monroe's secretary of war, John C. Calhoun, decided to organize an exploring expedition to find out about that across-the-Mississippi region. He asked a U.S. army major, Stephen H. Long, to take charge. (Long had been an assistant professor of mathematics at West Point after graduating near the top of his class at Dartmouth College.) He set out on a two-year journey. Edwin James, who was a scientist and a surgeon, went with him; so did artists Titian Peale and Samuel Seymour. They were sent to draw pictures of the landscape, the animals, and the flowers. (Those were the days before photographers.) James wrote a two-volume account of the journey and made an atlas, too.

None of the members of the expedition seemed particularly impressed with what they found. This was what Long said about the plains that went from the edge of the Mississippi woodlands to the Rocky Mountains:

> *In regard to this extensive section of the country, I do not hesitate in giving the opinion, that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course, uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence.*

He called it the "haunt of bison and jackal," whose "sole monarch" was the prickly pear. On Edwin James's official map of the expedition, the Great Plains is labeled "The Great American Desert."

It was just as well, thought Major Long, that this land was unfit for human habitation (except by Indians, and most people didn't worry about them). It would, he said, *serve as a barrier to prevent too great an extension of our population westward.*

This was fertile land, but Easterners didn't know it. They were used to chopping down trees to make farmland. People listened to Long and, for the next 20 years, most travelers who ventured west agreed: the Great Plains was an uninhabitable desert. So, aside from the Native Americans who lived there, only a few traders, trappers, mountain men, and scientists headed for the Great Plains—or beyond, to the tall, snowcapped mountains.

The Sioux, the Pawnee, the Osage, the Arapaho, the Kiowa, the Comanche, and the Wichita were some of the Indian peoples living on the land explored by the Long expedition.

A ***prickly pear*** is a cactus with an egg-shaped, edible fruit.

Below: Long's company camped among Kiowa Indians. The expedition's flag shows a white and a brown hand, clasped, and the symbols of power and peace: a sword and a pipe.

The artists on Long's expedition brought home some of the first sketches of life west of the Mississippi since Lewis and Clark had returned 15 years earlier. Above, three Indians from different tribes, including an Arapaho on the right.

2 Mountain Men

TO

Enterprising Young Men.

THE subscriber wishes to engage ONE HUNDRED MEN, to ascend the river Missouri to its source, there to be employed for one, two or three years.—For particulars, enquire of Major Andrew Henry, near the Lead Mines, in the County of Washington, (who will ascend with, and command the party) or to the subscriber at St. Louis.

Wm. H. Ashley.

February 13 —98 tf

Ashley made a deal with the mountain men: he transported and outfitted them for a year; in return they gave him half the year's catch.

The ad in the St. Louis newspaper, in February 1822, called for men willing to try something new. Instead of buying furs from the Indians—as most American fur traders did—they were to live as the Indians lived and trap and hunt furs themselves. They were to go out into the unexplored West—to the Rocky Mountains and beyond—with a gun and a knife, some coffee and flour, to eat the game they shot and the berries they found, and to trap beaver for the fur market.

Rendezvous—say "RON-day-voo"—it means a meeting or get-together agreed on in advance.

William Ashley, who put the ad in the paper, would arrange a once-a-year riverside meeting—a month-long rendezvous—where they could all get together, sell their beaver, feast, race on horseback, wrestle, trade stories, and have a fine time. If they wanted to, they could stay away from civilization for years. They would live with grizzly bears, rattlesnakes, mountain lions, blizzards, floods, and drought. They would share the land with the Native Americans, who would sometimes teach them the ways of the mountains and—sometimes—kill them.

To show their fearlessness, the mountain men wore their hair long. It proved they were not afraid of being scalped.

Davy Crockett's Almanack told tall tales about mountain men and the frontier, excitingly illustrated. It had nothing to do with Crockett himself.

Some people like danger and adventure, some like to be free of civilization, and some like to live by their wits. It was those special people who headed west.

In the year 1832, a thousand men turned up for the rendezvous. Their skins were white, black, and copper, and they all got along, at what some say was the best party the West has ever seen.

If only Daniel Boone had been around—he died in 1820 at age 86—Boone would have loved being one of Ashley's Mountain Men. That was what they called themselves—"mountain men"—and they became a kind of brotherhood. Legends were told of them: of Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, James Beckwourth, Tom Fitzpatrick, and others.

A German fur trader (named Frederick Adolph Wislizenus) went to a rendezvous and wrote this of the mountain men:

> *In small parties they roam through all the mountain passes. No rock is too steep for them; no stream too swift. Withal, they are in constant danger from hostile Indians, whose delight it is to ambush such small parties, and plunder them, and scalp them. Such victims fall every year....But this daily danger seems to exercise a magic attraction over most of them. Only with reluctance does*

The mountain men set beaver traps in streams. They smeared the bait with *castor*, taken from a beaver's musk glands, and tied the trap to a pole. They drove the pole into the mud by the bank, near fresh prints that showed beaver were around.

For a time beaver hats were so fashionable that in 20 years beavers were almost extinct.

Jedediah Smith

a trapper abandon his dangerous craft; and a sort of serious homesickness seizes him when he retires from his mountain life to civilization. In manners and customs, the trappers have borrowed much from the Indians. Many of them, too, have taken Indian women as wives. Their dress is generally of leather. The hair of the head is usually allowed to grow long. In place of money they use beaver skins.

Jedediah Smith looked like the other mountain men; he wore the same buckskin clothes, fringed at the seams, with buffalo-hide moccasins on his feet. Indian clothes they were, and if you wanted to

EXPEDITIONS of Jedediah Smith 1824~1831

1. Smith sets out for "Fur Country."
2. Attacked by grizzly bear. Friend sews scalp and left ear back on.
3. Follows Crow directions and "discovers" the South Pass.
4. First trappers' rendezvous.
5. Back to St. Louis with boatload of furs.
6. Second rendezvous.
7. No food; lives on bugs and rodents.
8. Mohave Indians help party cross desert.
9. Attacked by Paiute Indians.
10. Trapped by deep snow.
11. Crosses the Great Basin in 32 days with little food or water.
12. Third rendezvous.
13. Smith returns; Mohave Indians kill 10 of party.
14. Sails to San Francisco.
15. Party jailed under suspicion of being American spies.
16. Jailed again. Escapes with 250 horses and mules.
17. All but two of the party massacred.
18. Smith retires.
19. Killed by Comanches on business trip to Santa Fe.

compliment a mountain man you could say you mistook him for an Indian.

But Jedediah Smith was different. He didn't drink, swear, or chew tobacco. His Bible was as important to him as his rifle. He carried it with him always and he knew most of its stories by heart. It was Smith who found the South Pass, a gap through the Rockies in the Wyoming region. He understood its importance. That pass (like the Cumberland Gap, where Daniel Boone cut a trail through the southern Appalachians) was a place settlers could use to get wagons through the mountains.

Jed Smith was guided by a feeling that what he was doing was important, that he was helping the nation grow. In a letter to his brother, he wrote:

> *It is, that I may be able to help those who stand in need, that I face every danger—it is for this that I traverse the mountains covered with eternal snow—it is for this that I pass over the sandy plains, in heat of summer, thirsting for water, and am well pleased if I can find a shade, instead of water, where I may cool my overheated body—it is for this that I go for days without eating, and am pretty well satisfied if I can gather a few roots, a few snails, or, much better satisfied if we can afford ourselves a piece of horse flesh, or a fine roasted dog.*

Jedediah was just getting started as a mountain man when he survived his first Indian massacre. Fifteen others didn't. A few years later, in 1826, Smith led a group of trappers across deserts and mountains toward California and the Pacific coast. There were two ways to get to California. You could go over the killer peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountains, or you could try the hot, parched, impossible desert. No white man had ever gone overland from the United States to California (which was then part of Mexico). When Mexican officials saw the bearded, wild-looking hunters (who had trekked across the desert), they didn't believe they'd come from the East; they didn't think anyone could make it. They decided they were spies and arrested them. Smith talked his way out of jail. He was told to leave the territory. He did. He headed back east. This time he went across the mountains; he got back in time to catch that year's rendezvous.

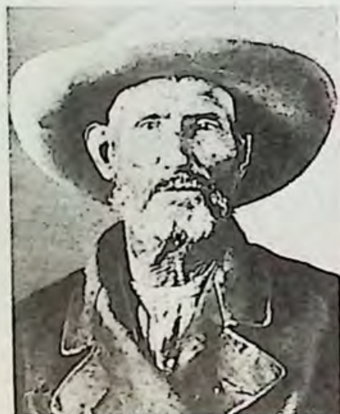
Before long he was ready to try for California again. When he did, Indians killed 10 of his men and captured all his horses. That

Samuel Woodhouse was a scientist who explored Indian territory in what is now Oklahoma. He and the mountain men endured the same hazards—Woodhouse lost the use of a hand from the bite of a rattlesnake *(below)*.

The South Pass had been found in 1812 by fur trappers—but it was then forgotten. Jed Smith rediscovered it in 1824.

Jim Beckwourth couldn't read, but his story got written down. It is called *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth.*

The biggest petrified forest is in Arizona; the most famous hot geyser, Old Faithful, is in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.



Later on, Jim Bridger guided settlers, explorers, and surveyors. He was, said a historian, "an atlas of the West."

didn't stop Jed Smith. He made it to California and went up the coast to Oregon. There, more Indians attacked; only Jed Smith and two others escaped.

Then there was the grizzly bear who tried to scalp Jedediah. Jed pulled his head out of the grizzly's mouth, but half his ear got ripped off. One of his men sewed the ear back and a few days later Smith was on the trail again. Finally, in New Mexico, in 1831, Jed Smith's luck ran out. Comanche Indians are said to have caught him. His body was never found.

The mountain men and the Indians—sometimes they were the best of friends. Often they were mortal enemies. Consider James Beckwourth: he had been a slave, and at 20 had run away and made it to the mountains. Beckwourth had an Indian wife, was adopted by the Crow, and became a chief. He learned to use a tomahawk as well as any Indian. But, like most of the mountain men, Beckwourth was restless. He didn't stay an Indian for long. He went off to California, where he discovered a pass through the Sierra Nevadas. That pass still bears his name.

Everyone who knew the mountain men had stories to tell of Jim Bridger; he was always getting in and out of scrapes. Actually, they didn't have to tell stories about Bridger; he told the best stories himself. He told of a petrified forest, where trees had turned to stone, and that story was true. Then he told of petrified birds who sang petrified songs and how he crossed over a petrified canyon without a bridge, because the law of gravity was petrified there. When he told of springs he had found whose water came out of the ground so hot it would cook your food—well, no one believed that, even though it was so. It was Bridger who discovered the Great Salt Lake; for a while, because it was salty and huge, he thought he'd found the Pacific Ocean.

Once, sitting around a campfire, an army officer told Bridger a story from Shakespeare. Bridger liked the story so much that when he learned there was a set of Shakespeare's plays on a wagon train, he bartered a pair of oxen for the books, although he had never learned to read. Then he hired a boy to read them to him. After that he told Shakespeare's stories in his own words.

But that was after 1840, when the rendezvous was finished and the beaver trade, too. In Paris they were wearing silk, not beaver, hats. Besides, the beaver were mostly gone, from overtrapping. The mountain men became guides, taking wagon trains of pioneers across the mountains and deserts whose trails only they and the Indians knew. Now they had to deal with people, instead of rattlesnakes and bears—some of the mountain men preferred rattlesnakes.

3 Riding the Trail to Santa Fe

Only seven years after he discovered Pikes Peak, Zebulon Pike died fighting the British in the War of 1812.

Back in 1806, a young army officer named Zebulon Montgomery Pike headed west from St. Louis on an exploring mission. It was the same year Lewis and Clark returned from their trip. They had gone northwest; Pike went southwest.

Traveling along the Arkansas River into Colorado, he came upon a towering mountain that loomed straight up from the level plain. Pike tried to climb it, failed, and wrote: *no human being could have ascended to its pinical.* (Which means: no one can climb that peak!)

Fourteen years later, three human beings from Stephen Long's expedition proved to be better climbers (and better spellers) than Zeb Pike. They ascended to the pinnacle. By that time Zebulon Pike was famous. That was because he had written about his adventures. People were fascinated with his account, especially with his description of an enchanting—and rich—little Spanish town named Santa Fe. The mountain Pike never climbed was named Pikes Peak in his honor—and traders began itching to get to Santa Fe, that rich Spanish town. After Long came back with his report, and the mountain men's stories got circulated, some traders headed for northern Mexico.

The first of them got thrown in jail. The Spanish-ruled Mexican territories didn't welcome outsiders. Santa Fe stayed isolated—and tempting.

In the meantime, Americans were moving west. In 1821, Missouri became a state. In September of that year, William Becknell led four men west from Old Franklin, Missouri, "for the purpose of trading

The trail—from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico—was about 800 miles. By the 1850s, wagon trains were making regular journeys. It took about eight weeks.

Julia Archibald Holmes climbed Pikes Peak in 1858. As far as we know, she was the first woman to do so. More on Julia Holmes in chapter 23.

"In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. This is what makes America what it is," wrote a 20th-century American writer named Gertrude Stein. Is that true today? Don't answer that question too quickly. Look at a map.

Josiah Gregg was a Santa Fe trader. In 1844 he published a book on the traders' life, *Commerce of the Prairies*. This picture of the "march of the caravan" was one of the illustrations.

for horses and mules and catching wild animals of every description." Becknell and his companions had goods loaded onto mule backs. They planned to trade with Indians. They weren't having much luck, when they met a group of Mexicans who urged them to go to Santa Fe. Mexico had just become independent of Spain; perhaps the new governor would let them into the territory.

Becknell reached Santa Fe in November, quickly sold everything he had for Spanish silver dollars, packed the coins in bulging rawhide bags, and was back in Missouri 48 days later. He brought a message from Governor Facundo Melagres of New Mexico. American traders were now welcome in Mexican territory, said the governor. That was all that merchants in the States had to hear. Their wagons were soon cutting deep ruts in a trail west. It was called the Santa Fe Trail.

We are caraing on a smart Trade with St. tefee, wrote another poor speller—a Missouri merchant—in 1824. Becknell went back that same year. This time he piled $3,000 worth of trade goods into huge, heavy wagons. And he blazed a southern cutoff that avoided the steep mountain passes. It was a journey of more than 800

miles—through a long, waterless desert region—but, with water and food in his wagons, Becknell made it. He also made a 2,000 percent profit on his merchandise. When American merchants learned that, they began pouring into Santa Fe. Some New Mexicans—especially those who had been Americans but were now Mexican, and liked the gracious, leisurely life—urged the governor to stop the trade. It was too late. There was no stopping the Americans.

Mostly it was men who traveled the Santa Fe trail. They went in big caravans. They didn't plan to settle. They were going to get rich, or for adventure, or to see new lands. Some of them did all those things. Their heavy wagons were pulled by teams of mules or oxen and were filled with cotton cloth, tin cups, socks, mirrors, cutlery, ribbons, buttons, glassware, ink, hats, gloves, and silk shawls. They brought the food that they ate on the trail, and that included cattle, chickens, and hogs. They slept in tents, or in the open air, or under the wagons.

It was a tough journey from Missouri to New Mexico, and it took over a month. The traders faced blazing heat, fierce thunder-

Mexico had a freedom revolution in 1821. The Spanish government was kicked out and the country became independent. In 1824 it adopted a constitution that made it a republic.

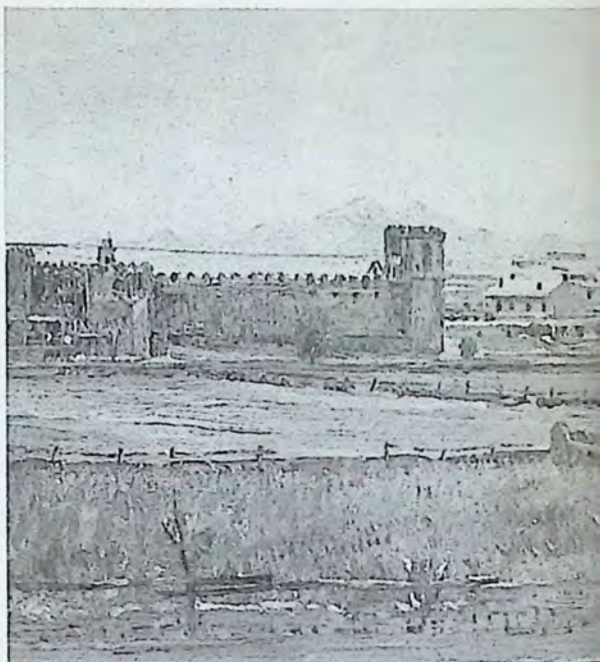
Wagons on the Santa Fe trail had to skirt acres of "dog towns," the homes of colonies of prairie dogs. Wagon wheels got stuck in the dog holes. Prairie dogs taste awful, so they were no use for food.

There weren't many ambushes on the trail, but the fear of ambush was constant.

Who was Marco Polo?

A Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the early 19th century. He was interested in studying our democracy. He wrote, "Nothing struck me more forcefully than the equality of conditions." When the open land was gone, would conditions become less equal?

storms, maddening mosquito attacks, rattlesnakes, long thirsty stretches, and, sometimes, when they were invading Indian territory, ambush. But most of the traders were young, and loved the adventure of it all. They thought of themselves as modern-day Marco Polos. So did others. The editor of the *Missouri Intelligencer* wrote in 1830:

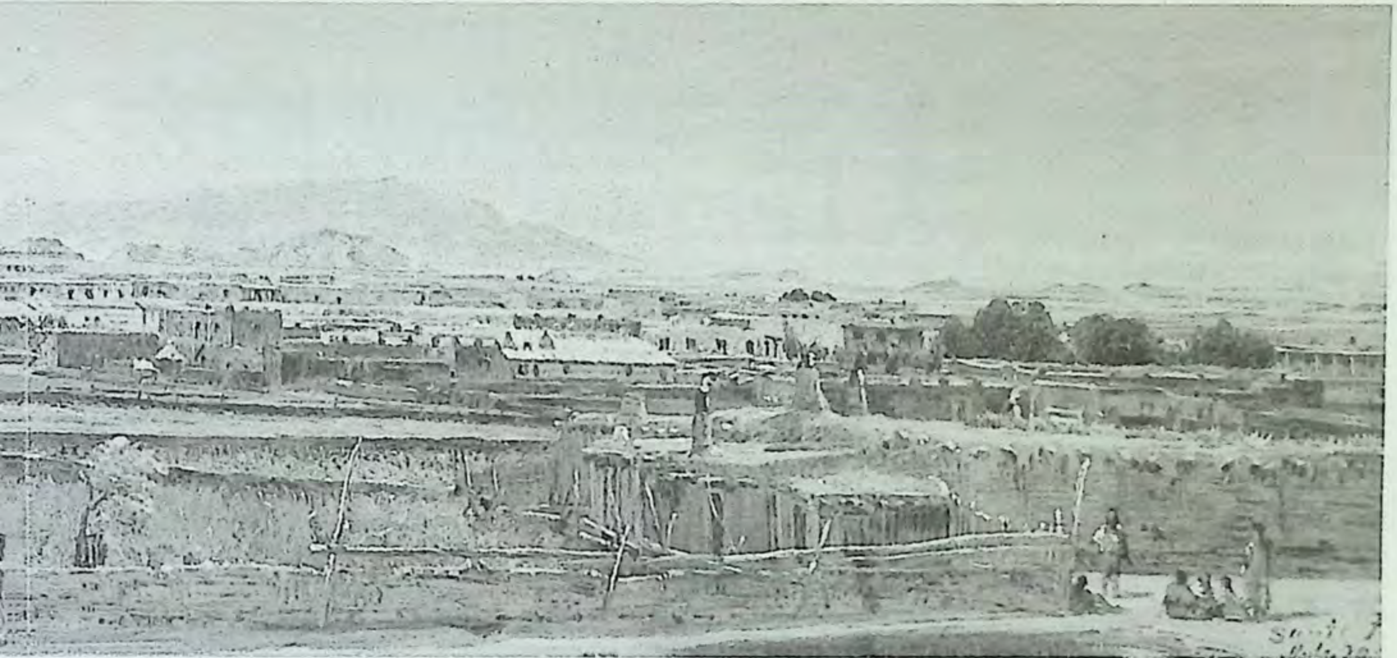


> *The accounts of these inland expeditions remind one of the caravans of the East. The dangers which both encounter—the caravan of the East and that of the West—are equally numerous and equally alarming. Men of high chivalric and somewhat romantic natures are requisite for both.*

It wasn't as dangerous as the storytellers made it sound, but it was dangerous. According to a 20th-century writer, Paul Horgan, "Early encounters with Indians were peaceful; but it was not long until traders, regarding the Indians as inferior creatures, abused them; and Indians replied with all their ancient skill in savage warfare." During the first 10 years of its existence, only eight men died on the Santa Fe Trail. (It was ironic that one was Jedediah Smith. As you know, Jed had survived really dangerous trails, and he was a friend of most Indians.)

The caravans were filled with a mixture of characters. One letter writer told of a wagon train that had men of "seven distinct nations,

Once Pikes Peak was conquered, everyone wanted to climb it. Then, 30 years later, gold was discovered nearby, and the miners arrived—"Pikes Peakers."



each speaking his own native tongue." They included a talkative Frenchman who threw his hands around "with curious gesticulations," two "wanderers from Germany," two Polish exiles of "calm eccentricity," a Creek and a Chickasaw Indian, and Americans who "were mostly backwoodsmen, who could handle the rifle..."

Josiah Gregg went west with 100 wagons in 1831. When he reached New Mexico he found a world that seemed strange and exotic. Gregg had not seen adobe buildings before. He called them "heaps of unburnt bricks—nevertheless they are houses." Here is how Gregg described the scene when a wagon train pulled into Santa Fe:

> *The arrival produced a great deal of bustle and excitement among the natives.* "Los Americanos!"—"Los carros!"—"La entrada de la caravana!" *were to be heard in every direction; and crowds of women and boys flocked around to see the newcomers; while crowds of* léperos *hung about, as usual, to see what they could pilfer. The wagoners were by no means free from excitement on this occasion....They had spent the previous morning in rubbing up; and now they were prepared, with clean faces, sleek-combed hair, and their choicest Sunday suit....[Each wagoner had tied] a bran new cracker to the lash of his whip; for on driving through the streets and the* plaza pública *every one strives to outvie his comrades in the dexterity with which he flourishes this favorite badge of authority.*

When the artist who painted this picture of Santa Fe was making a sketch for it in 1866, an "exceedingly rough-looking fellow" tried to make him sell the painting at gunpoint. The artist told him it would cost $10,000—at which the man fell silent and walked off.

You know who los Americanos *are; can you figure out what* los carros, la entrada de caravana, léperos, *and* plaza pública *mean?*

Pilfer means to "steal in a small way." We now spell ***bran-new*** with a *d*—*brand-new*—but it came from the bran used to ship new goods in barrels.

4 Susan Magoffin's Diary

For the white settlers, the journey west held excitement and promise. They believed they were the front line of a new nation (and they were). But it was an old world to the Native Americans, and they were losing it (and they soon knew that). Here are words, spoken in 1854, by the great Chief Seattle:

There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea covers its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory. I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame.

When the Magoffins hit the trail, they took 14 wagons, 2 horses, 11 mules, and 200 oxen. Susan made the trip from Independence to Santa Fe several times; she died of yellow fever at age 27.

Only a few American women had traveled the Santa Fe Trail in 1846 when Susan Magoffin headed west from Missouri. She was 18, newly married, pregnant, and very much in love. She was excited by the adventure. *Oh this is a life I would not exchange for a good deal!* she wrote from her tent on the trail.

> *There is such independence, so much free uncontaminated air, which impregnates the mind, the feelings, nay every thought, with purity. I breathe free without that oppression and uneasiness felt in the gossiping circles of a settled home.*

Susan's husband was a wealthy trader in charge of a big wagon train. Susan traveled in a carriage with a servant. Still, it wasn't an easy trip for a proper American girl who wore long dresses buttoned to her neck. It was hot on those open plains. Magoffin was a good sport. She pitched in and fed the chickens, cooked meals, sewed, wrote in her diary, made notes on the wild flowers and animals, gathered berries, and settled arguments.

Whatever happened—and a lot did happen—she tried to keep her cheerful spirit. When the rains came and her bed was an island in the tent, she pretended it was a boat. When thunder and lightning raged and the tent collapsed, she made the best of it. When the carriage crashed down an embankment, Susan was hit on the head, knocked out, and almost killed. Somehow, she made the best of that, too.

Susan Magoffin had read Josiah Gregg's diary. She thought people might read hers. She filled it with details, especially of people. The Indians and the Mexicans were fascinated with her and the clothes she wore.

> *A parcel of Indians are around the tent peeping in at me and expressing their opinions. It is a novel sight for them. These are the Pueblos or descendants of the original inhabitants—the principal cultivators of the soil—supplying the Mexican inhabitants with fruits, vegetables, etc.*

When she finally reached Santa Fe, she wrote:

> *What a polite people these Mexicans are...this morning...a little market girl...came in and we had a long conversation on matters and things in general, and I found that though not more than six years old she is quite conversant in all things. On receiving her pay she bowed most politely, shook hands with a kind* "adios" *and* "me alegro de verte bien" *(I am glad to see you in good health), and also a promise to return tomorrow.*

The buffalo were the first to blaze the Santa Fe Trail. Josiah Gregg said where the buffalo had been it seemed like an "immense highway."

"We have much pulling through sand," wrote Susan. "We stopped earlier tonight, on the bank of the Rio del Norte—it resembles the Mississippi much, muddy and dark, the banks are low, with no trees—we are buying wood every day."

"New Mexicans," said Col. Kearny when he reached Santa Fe, "we do not mean to murder you or rob you of your property....My soldiers will take nothing from you but what they pay you for. In taking possession of New Mexico we do not mean to take your religion away from you."

While Susan Magoffin was traveling the Santa Fe Trail, her brother-in-law James Magoffin was on a secret mission. A mission for President James K. Polk. James Magoffin was a smart, successful trader who had married a Mexican woman and settled in Santa Fe. He was full of stories, and fun to be around. No one knows for sure what he was told to do—it was a *secret* mission—but he went into Santa Fe ahead of an American army and persuaded the New Mexican governor (who happened to be his brother-in-law) not to fight. Then Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, of the U.S. Army, arrived and captured New Mexico without spilling any blood. New Mexico became U.S. territory. Some of the Spanish-speaking New Mexicans were furious. They felt they were being taken over by foreign invaders. And they were. (They didn't seem to remember what *they* had done to the Indians.) But

Marching to Santa Fe in 1846, a soldier described the desert: "Dreary, sultry, desolate, boundless solitude reigned as far as the eye could reach....We suffered much with the heat, and thirst, and driven sand—which filled our eyes, and nostrils, and mouths, almost to suffocation."

many New Mexicans were happy to be under U.S. rule.

U. S. control didn't change life a whole lot in Santa Fe. It did make things easier for the Santa Fe traders. They didn't have to fill out the long, tiresome papers the Mexican officials had demanded.

In 1866 (which was after the Civil War), trail traffic hit its peak. That year, 5,000 freight wagons headed west from Missouri. Stagecoaches were making regular runs on the trail, too. By then, railroad trains had already chugged into eastern Kansas. When their tracks reached New Mexico, in 1879, the Santa Fe Trail was history.

Not all these Irish emigrants find a better life in America. Many die young, worn out by domestic or construction work.

The New Americans Are Called Immigrants

It is 1846 and a disease—a blight—has destroyed Ireland's potato crop. There is almost nothing to eat for most of the Irish. It is hard for us to imagine people starving to death, but that is happening in Ireland. It is called the Great Potato Famine. In addition, a "poor law" is taxing small farmers much more than it taxes the rich. Between 1847 and 1854, 1.6 million Irish come to the United States.

Germany is having problems, too. New factories are putting people out of work; cities and villages are filled with poor people; German farmers aren't doing well; and a freedom revolution fails. Then a rumor spreads through Germany: America is going to close its doors. Immigrants will no longer be allowed. It is just a rumor—it isn't true—but it starts a panic. Many Germans pack their bags and hurry off to the land of freedom and opportunity.

In China there are few jobs. In America railroads need building. So, beginning in the late 1840s, boatloads of Chinese come, work on the railroads, and stay.

All these people are ambitious, or they wouldn't have made the big journey to the "New World." They are the kind of people who don't mind moving—and moving again once they arrive in America.

Between 1845 and 1860, more immigrants come to this country in proportion to the total population than at any other time in our history. (Be sure you understand: there will be a larger number of immigrants later, but there will also be a much larger total population.) They come from Germany, China, Ireland, India, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Russia, Italy, Greece, Ethiopia, Morocco, Japan, and Turkey.

Have you ever heard of the Isle of Man? It is near England. People from the Isle of Man are called "Manx." Manx come to the United States. Most of the immigrants come from northern Europe, but wherever there is a nation, there is usually someone who sets out for America.

Rich, successful people don't leave their homelands. Why should they? The people who come to America are mostly poor, or troubled, or persecuted, or kidnapped, or adventuresome. Some of them stay in the East, where the ships leave them, but many travel on—to the West. In America, those ragtag, adventuresome people will show the world the power of opportunity.

5 Pioneers: Taking the Trail West

I've often been asked if we did not suffer with fear in those days but I've said no. We did not have sense enough to realize our danger; we just had the time of our lives. But since I've grown older and could realize the danger and the feelings of the mothers, I often wonder how they really lived through it all.

—NANCY HEMBREE SNOW BOGART, WRITING OF LIFE ON THE OREGON TRAIL

Camping under a cottonwood tree at the Missouri ford, Council Bluffs. Cottonwoods were important to settlers in the almost treeless prairie, because they grew very fast.

Their ancestors had hugged parents and grandparents, wiped away their tears, and set out for a New World. Now another generation of men, women, and children was heading out toward a little-known world. They, too, were leaving parents and grandparents—often never to see them again. They were heading west. For some it would be a great adventure; some would not live to finish the journey. They were going for the reasons that usually make people move: because they wanted a better life for themselves and their children, or because they were adventurous or restless.

They went in trim, wooden-wheeled wagons pulled by oxen or mules. The wagons were called "schooners," named after the fast two-masted ships that sailed out of New England's ports. These were prairie schooners, and they weren't fast. But, when the wind blew over the prairies and filled the canvas that roofed the wagons, they seemed almost to be sailing across the waves of prairie grass.

They called themselves "emigrants" because they were leaving the United States. The pioneers (for that is what we call them now) were going west to places they had heard about from wandering mountain men, or from traders, or from newspaper articles (many of which were written by people who had never left home).

They went due west. They were heading for foreign lands—Mexican

Q: I am food and will walk with the pioneers and fill their cups along the way. What am I?

A: a cow.

California, or the territory of Oregon. (Oregon was claimed by England and the United States.) Most had no intention of settling in the U.S.–owned Louisiana Territory; they all knew what Stephen Long had said about that region.

It was a depression that got many of them started. A depression is a time of economic hardship when money seems to disappear and jobs do, too. In 1837, the United States entered a terrible depression. In New York and Philadelphia and Baltimore, thousands had no jobs. Banks closed and people lost their savings. The price of corn and wheat fell below the cost of growing it. Many farmers who had borrowed money to buy farming equipment and seeds couldn't pay back the loans, so they lost their farms.

A mule pack train crossing the Bitterroot Mountains on a route linking Fort Benton, on the Missouri River, and Fort Walla Walla, on the Columbia (in what is now Washington state). Even after a road was built, in 1862, pack trains took 35 days to travel the 624 miles.

What could they do? They could sell whatever they had left and use the money to head west (where land was free and fertile and opportunity seemed to be waiting). And, in 1843, that was just what some people began to do. They went west on the Oregon Trail.

Many of them never made it. They weren't prepared for the hard, hard journey: for rain that soaked through the canvas cover of the prairie schooner, for biting cold and burning heat, for hunger and accidents and disease. They brought the disease with them from the East. It was called "cholera" (KOL-er-uh), and it had come from Europe with the immigrants. It went west, as they did, and it was a killer. The trails became lined with graves; mothers and fathers buried their children—sometimes children buried their parents.

But they began the trip with optimism; they were looking for adven-

CHOLERA.

THE DUDLEY BOARD OF HEALTH,

HEREBY GIVE NOTICE, THAT IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE

Church-yards at Dudley

Being so full, no one who has died of the CHOLERA will be permitted to be buried after *SUNDAY* next, (To-morrow) in either of the Burial Grounds of *St. Thomas's*, or *St. Edmund's*, in this Town.

All Persons who die from CHOLERA, must for the future be buried in the Church-yard at Netherton.

BOARD of HEALTH, DUDLEY.

Cholera epidemics were common until Americans built sewage systems and understood the importance of a clean water supply.

It is a 2,000-mile walk, over plains and mountains, from Missouri to Oregon. The pioneers set out in early spring and, if they make it on schedule, arrive before the winter snows.

Fort Laramie (in what is now eastern Wyoming) was founded by two of Ashley's mountain men. "Fort Laramie is a great place in the immigration season," wrote one man on his way to California. "A good many wagons are left at this point, many coming to the conclusion of getting along without them....A hotel, store, and post office are located here."

ture. Most were young—many of the mothers and fathers were still teenagers—and they added children as they went west. One in five of the women is said to have been pregnant on some part of the journey. Their babies were born in the hard-floored schooners, or in tents, or in the outdoors. Their children would remember the fun and the freedom of the trip. Martha Morrison went west to the Oregon Territory in 1844, when she was 13.

> *We did not know the dangers we were going through. The idea of my father was to get on the coast: no other place suited him, and he went right ahead until he got there.... We went down the river Deschutes in an open canoe, including all the children; and when we got down there was no way to get to the place where my father had determined to locate us, but to wade through the tremendous swamps. I knew some of the young men that were along laughed at us girls, my oldest sister and me, for holding up what dresses we had to keep from miring; but we did not think it was funny.*

For most pioneers, the journey west began in St. Louis. (The pioneer family might have already traveled from the East Coast on the Erie Canal, and then overland, and then down the Ohio River and on across the Mississippi.) St. Louis, where the Missouri River meets

Deschutes, in French, means "falls" or "rapids." The Deschutes River was filled with rapids and was very dangerous.

the Mississippi, was now the gateway west. Pioneers who had money could take a steamboat from St. Louis, up the Missouri River, and head for a "jumping-off" town, like Independence, Missouri, or Council Bluffs, Iowa. There they could buy supplies and team up with other emigrants. Francis Parkman, who had come from Boston, described Independence in 1846:

> *The town was crowded. A multitude of shops had sprung up to furnish the emigrants and Santa Fe traders with necessaries for their journey; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from a dozen blacksmith's sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired, and the horses and oxen shod. The streets were thronged with men, horses, and mules. While I was in the town, a train of emigrant wagons from Illinois passed through, to join the camp on the prairie, and stopped in the principal street. A multitude of healthy children's faces were peeping out from under the covers of the wagons.*

Usually, only the smallest children and the sick got to ride in the wagons. There was no room for anyone else. The wagons weren't as

O, Susanna,
Now don't you cry for me,
For I come from Alabama
With my banjo on my knee.
—WORDS FROM A POPULAR CAMPFIRE SONG WRITTEN IN 1848 BY STEPHEN FOSTER

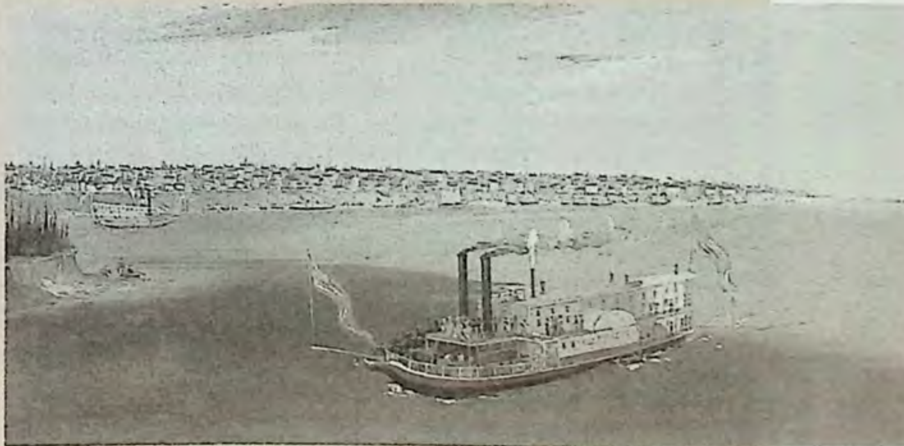
In 1845, Francis Pettygrove (from Portland, Maine) and Asa Lovejoy (from Boston, Massachusetts) were in the Oregon territory laying out a town. They couldn't agree on a name, so they flipped a coin. Pettygrove won and named the settlement after his hometown in Maine.

St. Louis: Improving Considerably

Charles Dickens visited St. Louis in 1842. This was what he found:

In the old French portion of the town, the thoroughfares are narrow and crooked, and some of the houses are very quaint and picturesque: being built of wood, with tumble-down galleries before the windows approachable by stairs or rather ladders from the street. There are queer little barber's shops and drinking-houses, too, in this quarter: and abundance of crazy old tenements with blinking casements, such as may be seen in Flanders. Some of these ancient habitations, with high garret gable windows perking into the roofs, have a kind of French shrug about them; and being lop-sided with age, appear to hold their heads askew, besides as if they were grimacing in astonishment at the American Improvements.

It is hardly necessary to say, that these consist of wharfs and warehouses, and new buildings in all directions; and of a great many vast plans which are still "progressing." Already, however, some very good houses, broad streets, and marble-fronted shops, have gone so far ahead as to be in a state of completion; and the town bids fair in a few years to improve considerably though it is not ever likely to vie, in point of elegance or beauty, with Cincinnati.



George Catlin's painting of St. Louis and the river in 1832

Joseph Henry Byington with his wives, Nancy Avery and Hannah Molland, and their children, on the trail in Cache Valley, Utah, around 1867.

Nine miles out of Independence the wagon trains cross the Missouri state line and are in land guaranteed to the Indians (later the Indian treaties will be forgotten, and this will be Kansas). Thirty-two more miles and the road forks. A small hand-lettered sign points northwest and says, "Road to Oregon." Those who take the other branch are going southwest, on the Santa Fe Trail.

What is a chamberpot?

A Missouri farmer explaining why he was going to Oregon:
Out in Oregon I can get me a square mile of land. And a quarter section for each of you all. Dad burn me, I am done with the country. Winters its frost and snow to freeze a body; summers the overflow from Old Muddy [the Mississippi] drowns half my acres; taxes take the yield of them that's left. What say, Maw, it's God's Country.

big as the heavy Conestogas the Pennsylvania Dutch used back East. The prairie schooners had to be lightweight so they wouldn't exhaust the oxen on the long pull ahead. Besides, there was so much to take that they were always filled.

Pretend you are leaving home—perhaps forever. What will you take with you? You need food for your trip: flour, beans, bacon, coffee, dried fruit, sugar, salt, and vinegar. Sheep, goats, cows, and chickens will come along. You will need clothes. Your mother packs pants, shirts, dresses, and some cloth to make clothes for you children as you grow. Into the wagon go pots, pans, water kegs, teakettles, and chamberpots to use along the way, and axes, plows, and saws, for the new life that is ahead of you. There are books: a Bible, schoolbooks, and storybooks. Your parents are musical: your father has brought his violin (he calls it a fiddle); your mother has packed a harmonica. In the evening, around the campfire, they entertain the others. There is still more in the wagon: a favorite family portrait, a mirror, and a rocking chair. There

are guns, medicines, and spare parts for wagon repairs. You have brought a hoop and some marbles; your sister has brought a doll; the baby, a rattle.

When the oxen are exhausted and lie dying by the trail, your parents will sell the plow, the axe, the books, and the teakettle, get two mules for them and be lucky. The cows will be gone—eaten when there was no game to be shot. The portrait and the rocking chair are gone also, left under a tree, perhaps for Indians to find. As you climb into the Rockies everything that adds unnecessary weight must be left behind—your lives may depend on that.

A Letter From Iowa

Some people were taking the Oregon Trail clear across the land, but others were settling in regions that bordered the Mississippi, such as Iowa and Kansas and Minnesota. Back East, everyone wanted to know: what were those far places like?

Well, it was frontier territory, and things weren't easy, but there was good land, and it was cheap and available. That was what mattered most. Jeremiah Fish traveled from New Jersey to the Iowa territory, and never regretted the move. This is what he wrote to the folks back home:

To: Mr. Samuel Rudderow
Pensaikin, near the city of Camden
New Jersey
From: Louisa County, Iowa Territory, April 25, 1843.

Brother and Sister,

It has been sometime since I wrote particularly to you, but you have heard from me frequent by letters to Rebecca Fish. I am in good health, but have had the hardest winter that I ever experienced. I got my feet badly frozen Dec. 8th and suffered more pain than I am able to describe, but my right foot has got well and I can wear my shoes but my toes are all stiff at the two outer joints and some of the bones came out of three toes. The toes of my left foot are all off and two of them healed over and the other 3 in a good way so that I will be but very little lame in a few more weeks....

When I wrote to you last I recommended this country to you and probably told you that it would be profitable for you to emigrate....I would be the last one to recommend such a thing to connections of mine if I was not positive, and I know NJ well, I understand Iowa well enough not to be mistaken, a man that pays rent or interest money in NJ had better be in Iowa, if he gets a farm paid for in a lifetime in NJ he had done well....here the land will produce at least 3 times as much to the acre, as it will there and with less labor....When I first came to Bloomington there was only 7 families there, now there is 15 good stores there and merchandise of all kinds and the cost has improved as fast as the town, but here with only $80 you would be better off than you would be there in 200 years, even if you could live so long. We do not tell you this under any fake pretense but for the benefit of you and family, weigh the matter and write me and I will tell you more.

Respectfully yours,
Jeremiah Fish

LETTER REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF ALLEN AND CLAIRE RUDDEROW

"[Joy Hakim's] exciting series . . . braids multiple narratives together to bring alive material long dead."
—*New York Times Book Review*

"The telling of stories like these makes for the best kind of patriotism—and Hakim's storytelling is magnificent."
—Mark Gamin, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

Liberty for All?

1820–1860

Early nineteenth-century America could just about be summed up by Henry David Thoreau's words when he said, "Eastward I go only by force, but westward I go free." It was an exuberant time for the diverse citizens of the United States, who included a range of folk from mountain men and railroad builders to whalers and farmers, as they pushed forward into the open frontier, and all their hopes and fears are captured in *Liberty for All?* In addition to colorful accounts of the massive westward migration, the California Gold Rush, a war with Mexico, the Oregon boundary conflict, Texas and the Alamo, *Liberty for All?* takes a deep look at the issue that began to gnaw at the country's core: How, in the land where "all men are created equal," could there be slaves?

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