

# On to Oregon

OVER THE OREGON AND APPLGATE TRAILS



A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Greetings to everyone joining the Southern Oregon Historical Society in marking the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail. This significant milestone in the history of our country is an occasion for great celebration.

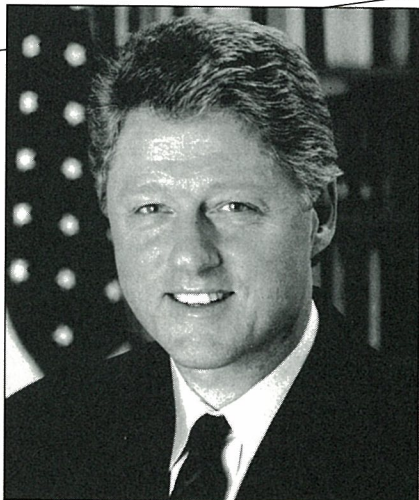
The first wagon train of immigrants headed west from Independence, Missouri, in the early 1840s. Soon after, this arduous 2,000-mile trek from the Missouri River to the mouth of the Columbia River became the route traveled by thousands of pioneers who settled our American West. The westward move allowed strong, courageous, and determined Americans to prosper in a yet untamed land. With endurance and vision they forged a new life for themselves and quickly transformed our nation's profile.

Reenacting events in the history of the Oregon Trail and studying the culture of the early pioneers make us realize the importance of preserving this rich heritage. It is only through an understanding of our nation's history that we are able to engage in meaningful evaluation of our current conditions.

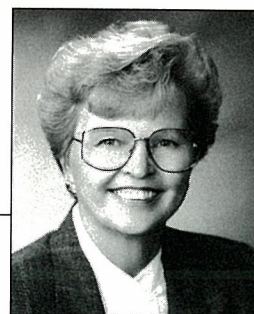
Best wishes for a happy and memorable Sesquicentennial.

*Bill Clinton*

Bill Clinton  
President



# GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON AND GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS



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As Governor of the State of Oregon, it is my pleasure to invite readers of the *Table Rock Sentinel* to join me in celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Oregon Trail.

This special issue invites readers to learn not only about the original Trail which began in Missouri and ended in Oregon City, but also the rich heritage of the Applegate Trail, which provided settlers who wanted to establish homesteads in central and southern Oregon an alternative route of the Oregon Trail and its perilous journey down the Columbia River and over the Cascade Mountains.

Both the Oregon Trail, which crossed northern Oregon and ended in the upper Willamette Valley, and the Applegate Trail, which entered Oregon from the south, are reminders of the Great Migration which began in 1843. The settlers represented many nationalities but shared the courage and vision to come to Oregon and to settle in its rich Willamette Valley.

Today, our roots and commonalities come from these brave individuals. I encourage you to participate in the many events scheduled this year honoring the Oregon Trail and wholeheartedly look forward to participating in the 150th anniversary of the Applegate Trail in 1996.

*Barbara Roberts*

Barbara Roberts  
Governor



# On to Oregon

## OVER THE OREGON AND APPLGATE TRAILS



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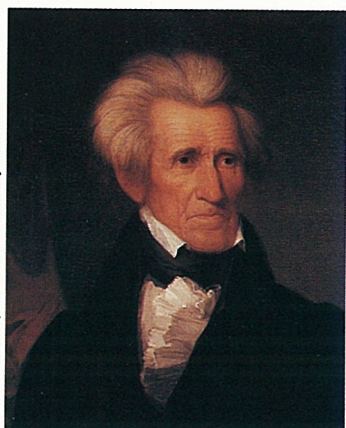
American Indians had occupied Oregon for so long — at least 10,000 years — that they did not tell tales of their ancestors coming to the region. Instead, their creation myths show that like the deer and the bear the native peoples had always been here.

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Courtesy U. S. Naval Academy Museum

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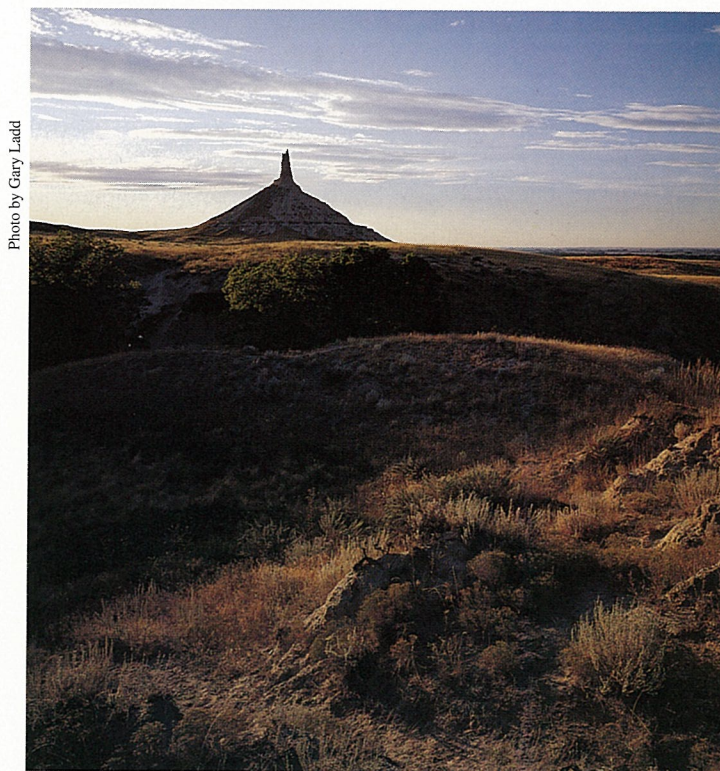


Photo by Gary Ladd

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Cover: "Journey to Wailapu," painting by Roger Cooke. *Wailapu* is the Indian name for the mission at Walla Walla, Washington.





# THE MIGRATION OF 1843

# OPENING THE OREGON TRAIL

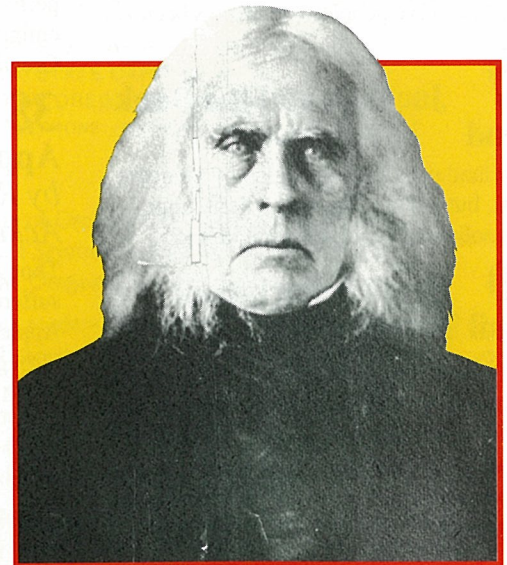
by Doug Foster

**I**n 1843 nearly 1,000 people, mostly families, loaded all their possessions onto wagons and set out to do what had never been done before — take wagons all the way from Missouri to the Oregon Country. They set out with the knowledge that if they failed to complete this arduous 2,000-mile journey within six months, snow would close the mountain passes and they would have to survive the winter in the wilderness.

This group's success became known as "The Great Migration." They were both the first emigrants to drive wagons to the Oregon Country and the first large group to cross what became the Oregon Trail. This year, 1993, marks the sesquicentennial anniversary of that signal event.

**T**oday it is difficult to imagine the magnitude of the overland migration to Oregon, which was generally considered impossible 150 years ago. Dr. John McLoughlin, chief Hudson's Bay Company factor at Fort Vancouver, stated that emigrants might as well "undertake to go to the moon" as to attempt to travel overland to the Oregon Country.<sup>1</sup> The British periodical *Edinburgh Review* described the land between Missouri and the Oregon Country in 1843 as "a howling wilderness of snow and tempests" in winter and the rest of the year a desolate wasteland "of hopeless sterility." The article concluded that "Oregon will never be colonized overland from the Eastern States."<sup>2</sup> Until the Civil War, virtually all maps, including U.S. textbooks and government reports, referred to the great plains east of the Rocky Mountains as the "Great American Desert" and considered the area totally uninhabitable.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the Great American Desert lay the Oregon Country, a huge tract of wilderness extending from Mexico north to Russian Alaska, from

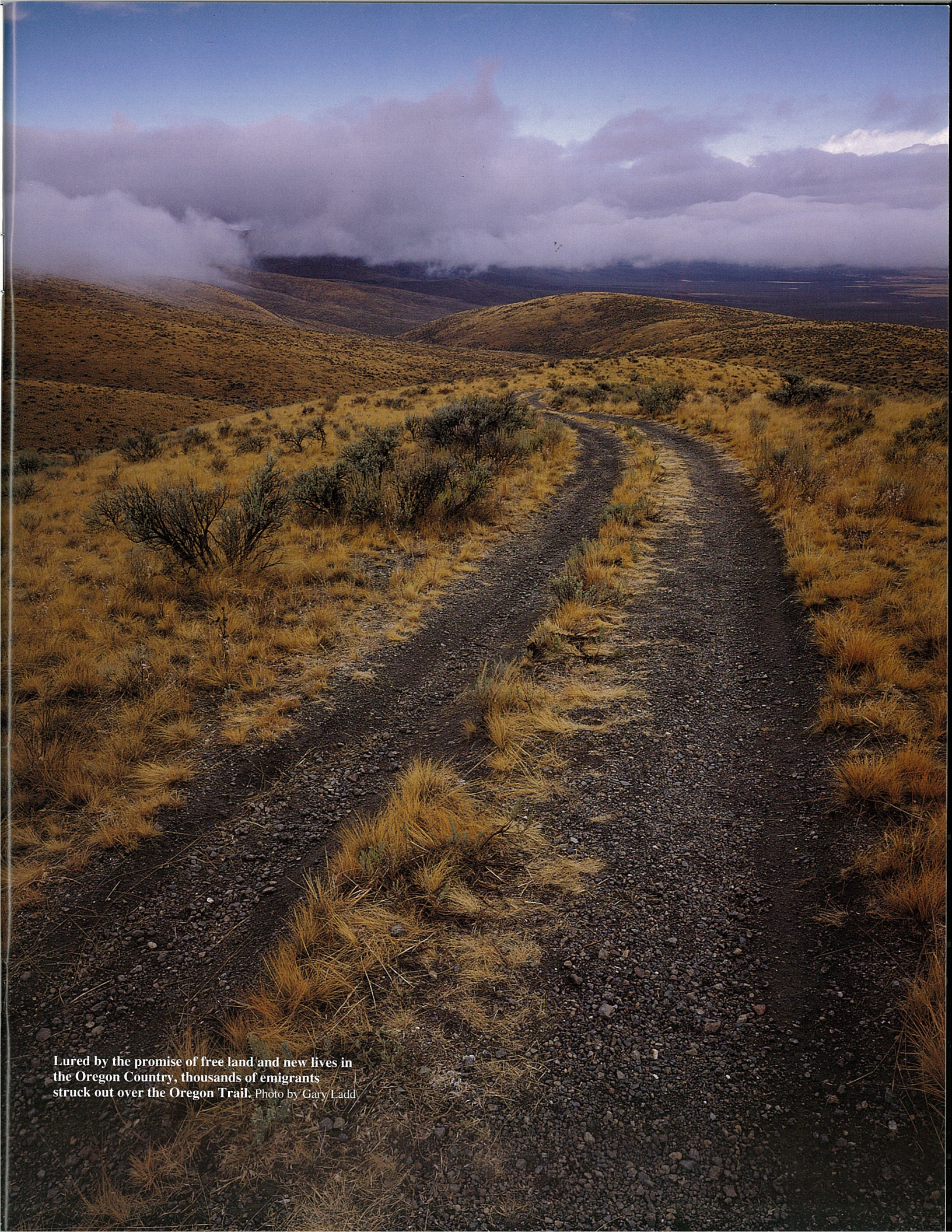


Southern Oregon Historical Society # 13452

**EMIGRANTS MIGHT AS WELL "UNDERTAKE TO GO TO THE MOON" AS TO ATTEMPT TO TRAVEL OVERLAND TO THE OREGON COUNTRY.**

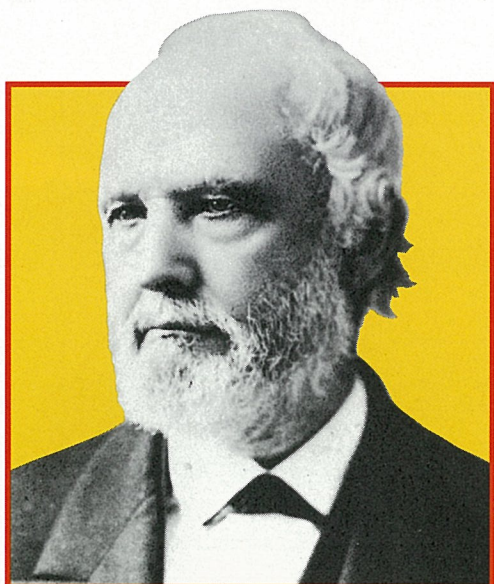
**— DR. JOHN MCLOUGHLIN**





Lured by the promise of free land and new lives in the Oregon Country, thousands of emigrants struck out over the Oregon Trail. Photo by Gary Ladd





Oregon Historical Society # 021773

**“[T]HEY DO SAY, THAT  
OUT IN OREGON THE PIGS  
ARE RUNNING ABOUT  
UNDER THE GREAT ACORN  
TREES, ROUND AND FAT,  
AND ALREADY COOKED,  
WITH KNIVES AND FORKS  
STICKING IN THEM  
SO THAT YOU CAN CUT  
OFF A SLICE WHENEVER  
YOU ARE HUNGRY.”**

**— PETER BURNETT**

the Pacific Ocean east to the Rockies, including the present states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming and British Columbia in Canada. No one knew who owned the Oregon Country: both Great Britain and the United States claimed the area, and it was subject to a “joint occupation” treaty between the two countries.<sup>4</sup>

Why did these people undertake the journey in the face of such uncertainties, such great risks? Many emigrants were already familiar with the frontier, coming mainly from Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, or Illinois; many were primarily farmers who left their homes in hope of obtaining new farm land. The overland pioneers were, in a real sense, immigrants as well, for they went out from their own country into this foreign land. Senator Linn of Missouri introduced a bill in Congress in January 1841 that granted 640 acres of land to every adult male settling in the Oregon Country. The legislation passed the Senate but not the House of Representatives, possibly from fear that it might lead to war with Great Britain.<sup>5</sup>

**I**n 1837 the United States suffered its first major financial collapse: depression enveloped the country and agricultural prices plummeted.<sup>6</sup> Some pioneers left border slave states to distance themselves from the institution of slavery.<sup>7</sup> Jesse Applegate, a thirty-two-year-old Missouri farmer and surveyor who had never owned slaves, set out for Oregon both to find new opportunities and to remove his family from the degrading influence of slavery.<sup>8</sup>

Letters sent back from the Willamette Valley described the mild climate, good soil, and abundant game and fish. “Wayside orators” on the frontier urged people to form wagon trains to go west.<sup>9</sup> One of these orators was Peter Burnett, a thirty-six-year-old, self-taught lawyer who decided to organize a wagon company. He hoped that in Oregon he would be able to repay his old business debts, and he made organizing speeches “wherever [he] could find a sufficient audience.”<sup>10</sup> According to one account, Burnett stood atop a box on the sidewalk and rhapsodized about the rich soil and great wheat crops that could be grown in Oregon and then, with a twinkle in his eye, added, “[T]hey do say, that out in Oregon the pigs are running about under the great acorn trees, round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so that you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry.”<sup>11</sup>

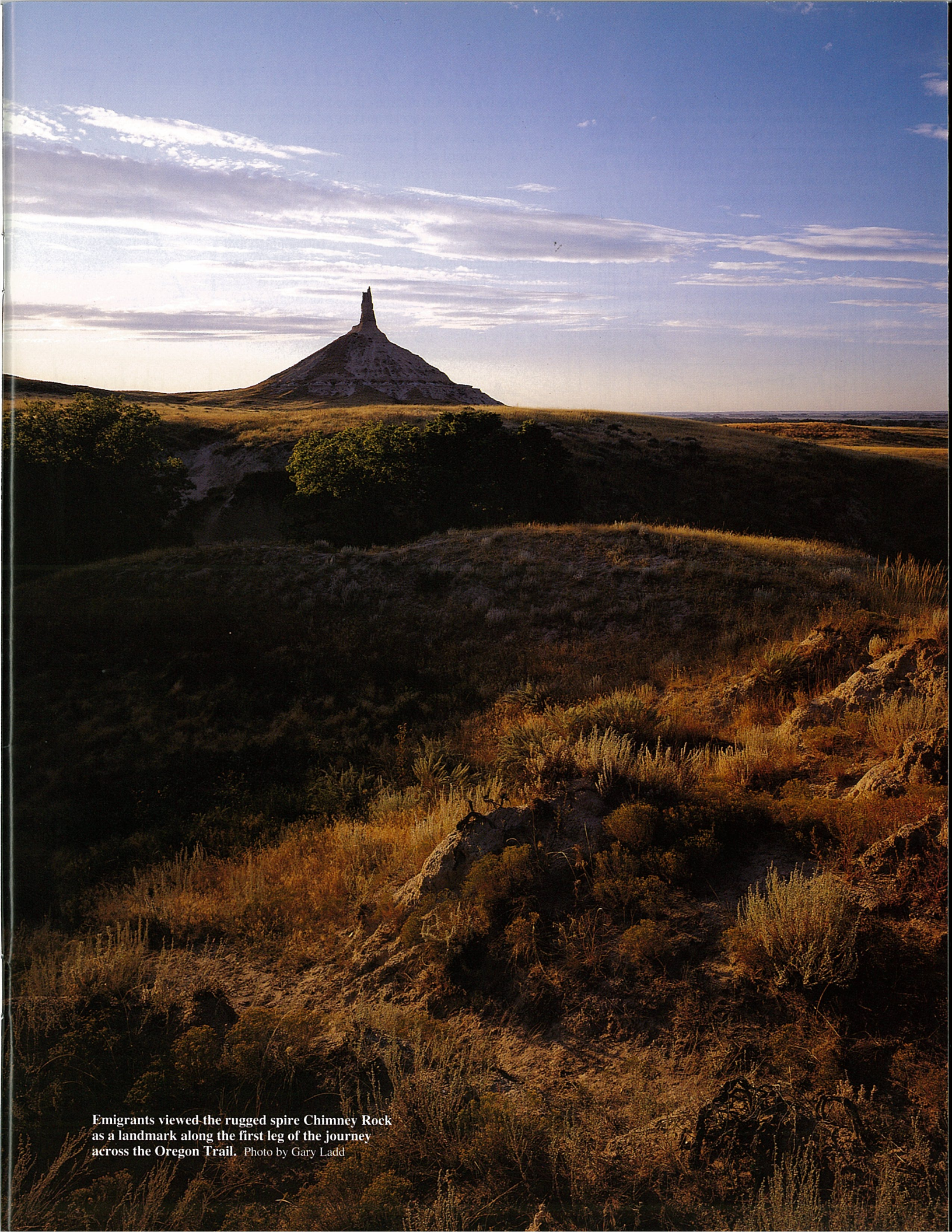
It is easier to explain how the emigrants made their journey than to speculate why they decided to go. Most emigrants traveled by steamboat upriver from St. Louis to the jump-off towns for the West, Independence and Westport. There they found the streets jammed with American Indians in blankets, Mexicans in peaked sombreros, trappers in buckskin, townspeople in tall beaver hats and long frock coats, and many more emigrants in homespun “hickory,” a coarse fabric. The outfitters, blacksmiths, and shopkeepers offered advice and last minute supplies for the five-to-six-month trip.<sup>12</sup>

Many emigrants were farmers who already had moved once on the frontier, so they knew from experience what tools were needed to build roads, repair wagons, and start new homes. Typically, they brought plows, axes, bucksaws, tinware, chamber pots, cast iron skillets, oxen shoes, dutch ovens, tar, and heavy ropes to ease wagons down steep slopes.<sup>13</sup> Of course, many also brought books, violins, painted china, spool beds,

**Most emigrants actually began their overland journey west by taking a steamship, similar to one pictured, from St. Louis to the beginning of the Oregon Trail at Independence, Missouri.** Southern Oregon Historical Society #7911





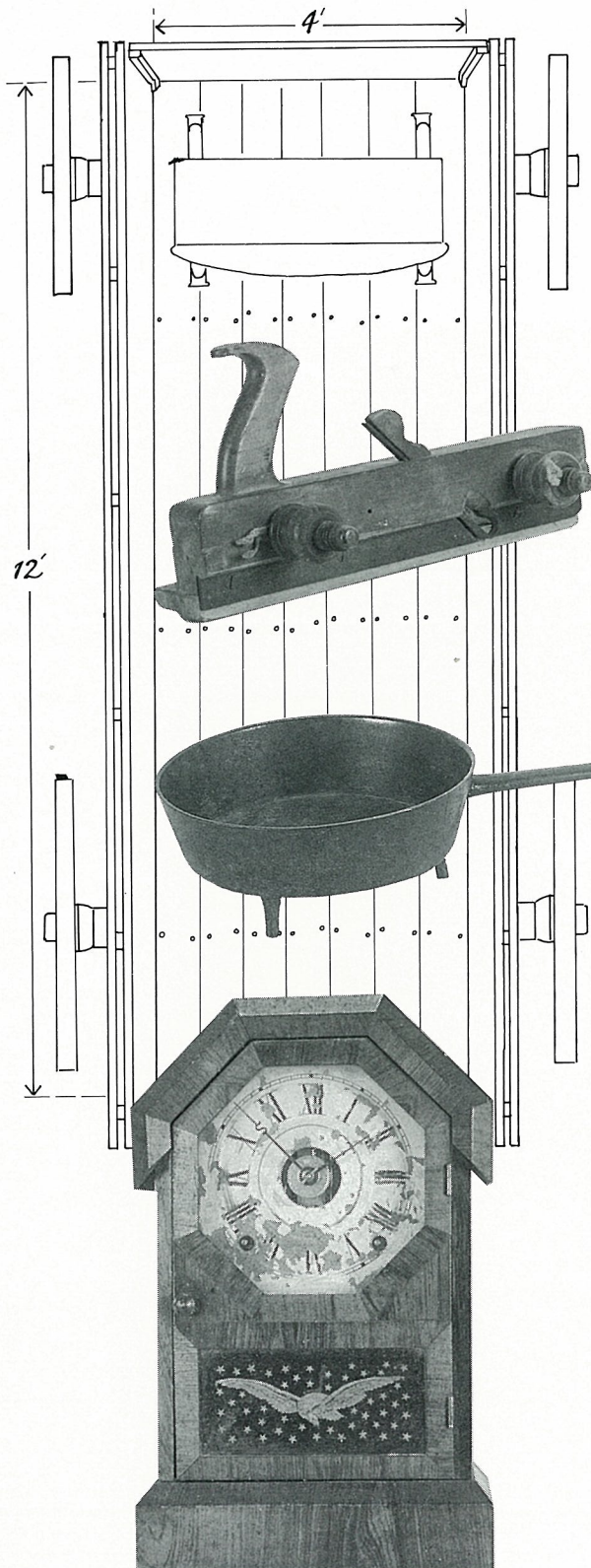


Emigrants viewed the rugged spire Chimney Rock as a landmark along the first leg of the journey across the Oregon Trail. Photo by Gary Ladd



The small size of the wagons (four feet by ten or twelve feet) limited the number of possessions a family could bring to the Oregon Country. After packing such necessary items as tools, cooking utensils, and food, most found little room for family heirlooms or personal luxuries.

Southern Oregon Historical Society #3612, #361, #2121



and heavy tables with fine clawed feet, although some of these heavier keepsakes — and even clothing and food — were strewn along the trail to lighten loads of excess weight.<sup>14</sup>

Food was most difficult to plan. Experienced travelers advised emigrants to pack less rice and beans because they took too long to cook on a wagon train that must move each day. The mainstays were wheat flour (over 100 pounds) and dried fruit (a bushel, to prevent scurvy).<sup>15</sup> Young Edward Lenox wrote that his family's wagon carried such staples as 100 pounds of flour, 300 pounds of bacon, 100 pounds of sugar, 100 pounds of dried apples, fifty pounds of coffee, fifty pounds of salt, a keg of syrup, (and a keg of tar).<sup>16</sup>

A typical wagon or "prairie schooner" could carry loads of up to 2,500 pounds with a wagon box (bed) ten-to twelve-feet long, four-feet wide and two-feet deep. Emigrants often built the wagon boxes themselves but relied on wagon shops to build the complex structure of axles and wheels out of seasoned hardwood reinforced with scrap iron. If they could afford the cost, a family would take two or three wagons. For his wife and six children, Peter Burnett brought a small horse-drawn wagon and two larger wagons, each drawn by two yoke of oxen.<sup>17</sup> Jesse Applegate brought four wagons and 100 head of livestock.<sup>18</sup> Wagon bows were made high enough so a person could stand upright in the center of the arch. Goods were packed high on each side, leaving a narrow passage down the middle for an injured person to lie or for others to ride. Since the wagons lacked springs, it was easier to walk where the trail was rocky.<sup>19</sup> The most detailed maps of the area available were from Frémont's 1842 expedition, but those reached only to South Pass (in present-day Wyoming), less than half way to the final destination. (Frémont's enthusiastic 1842 report compared the grade over the Rocky Mountains at South Pass to the "ascent of the Capitol hill from the avenue, at Washington.")<sup>20</sup>

Captain John Gantt, an experienced fur trader, was hired by the 1843 emigrants to guide them to Fort Hall (in present-day Idaho) where Gantt planned to veer south for California. His fee was one dollar per emigrant. They also hired Marcus Whitman — who was returning to his mission on the Walla Walla River (in present-day Washington) — to guide the group beyond Fort Hall. There were enough men in the party, Whitman said, to build whatever roads were needed. Whitman's fee for his work was eighty dollars.<sup>21</sup>

In late May, after the spring rain brought up enough grass for the draft animals, the emigrants set out: a total of 120 wagons.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the first day, they elected a captain for the wagon train to act as "supreme military commander of the company."<sup>23</sup> A witness described this election process in the November 21, 1843, issue of the New Orleans *Picayune*:

*The candidates stood in a row behind the constituents, and at a given signal they wheeled about and marched off, while the general mass broke after them 'lick-a-ty-split,' each man forming in behind his favorite, so that every candidate flourished a sort of tail of his own, and the man with the longest tail was elected.*<sup>24</sup>

Peter Burnett, the lawyer from Missouri, was so elected, for his line was the longest.<sup>25</sup>





## THE OREGON TRAIL



**PIONEERS ARGUED ABOUT WHICH WERE THE BEST DRAFT ANIMALS: OXEN OR MULES. PETER BURNETT WROTE: "THOSE WHO COME TO THIS COUNTRY WILL BE IN LOVE WITH THEIR OXEN BY THE TIME THEY GET HERE."**

ON TO OREGON

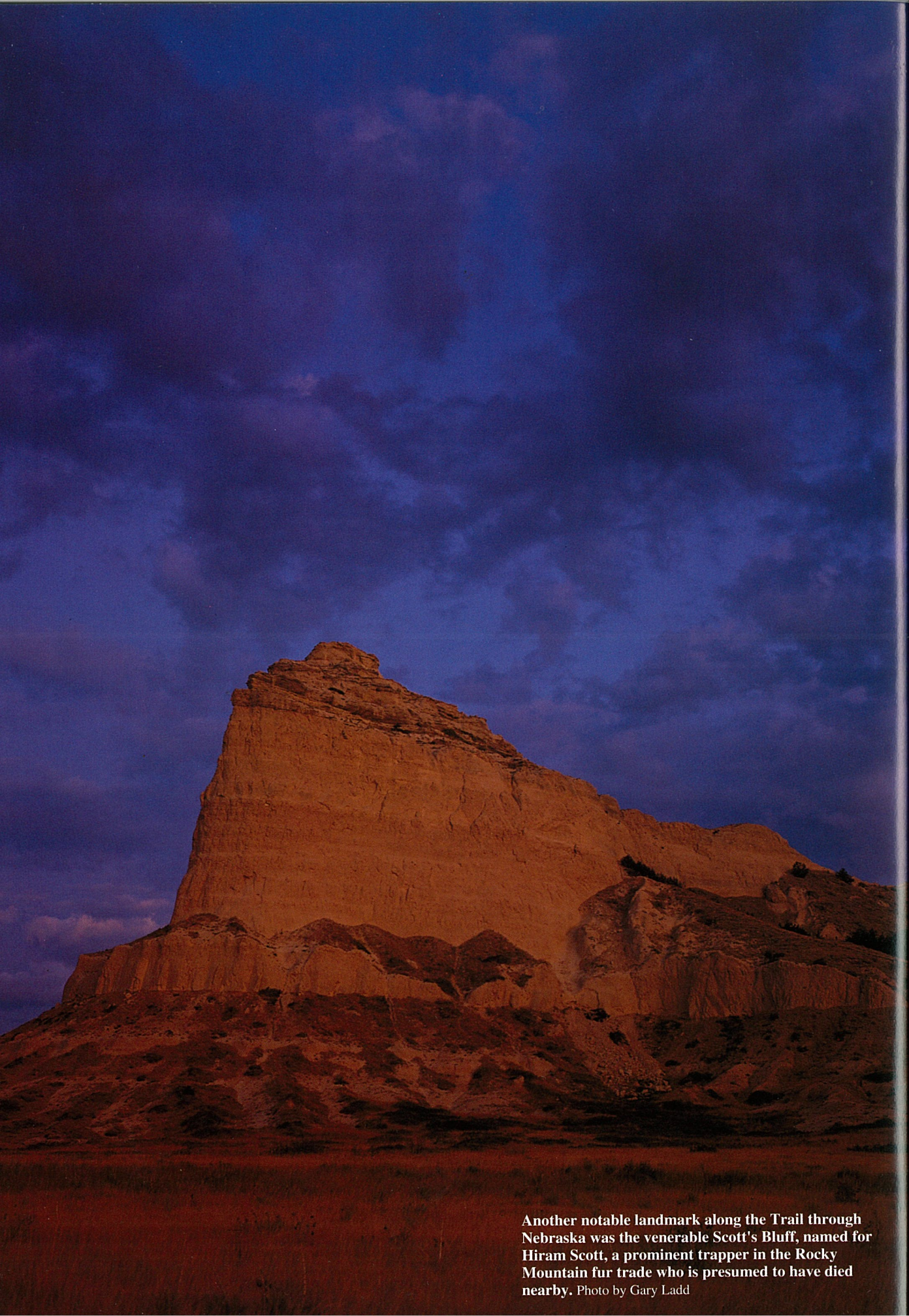
Pioneers perennially argued about which draft animals were the best: oxen or mules. Mules were faster, had sound hooves, but were sulky and prone to stampede and required that the driver sit in a jouncing wagon all day holding the reins. Oxen (adult, castrated, male cattle) could eat anything, did not run away during the night, could pull heavier wagon loads, and only cost half the price of a mule. Their cheaper cost and ease of handling persuaded most emigrants to use oxen.<sup>26</sup> Peter Burnett, whose own wagons were drawn by oxen, wrote: "The ox is the most noble animal, patient, thrifty, durable, gentle. Those who come to this country will be in love with their oxen by the time they get here."<sup>27</sup>

To lead oxen, an emigrant would walk beside them, cracking a long bull whip for the pistol-like noise it made. For control, the emigrant would shout "giddap" to go, "haw" to turn to the left, "gee" to turn to the right, and "whoa" to stop. Two yoke of oxen could pull a wagon, but three were considered better. Burnett noted in his journal that "A trip to Oregon with ox teams was at that time a new experiment, and was exceedingly severe upon the temper and endurance of people . . . I adopted rules and endeavored to enforce them, but found much practical difficulty and opposition." Within a month Burnett resigned as captain.<sup>28</sup> Then the wagon train split into two parts; those with cattle followed behind in a separate wagon train, called the "cow column," of which Jesse Applegate was captain.<sup>29</sup>

At night the wagons formed a circle about 100 yards in diameter with the wagons' tongues pointed out and ox chains fastened to close the gaps between wagons. Mules and horses were picketed inside this corral until dawn; oxen and cattle grazed outside the corral all night — sometimes up to two miles away — while watched by guards. The emigrants pitched their tents and cooked outside the corral.<sup>30</sup>

According to Applegate, the morning routine began at 4:00 a.m. to the discharge of the sentinel's rifle; the emigrants rose and sent out men to bring cattle and oxen into the corral. From 6:00 to 7:00 a.m., the emigrants would eat breakfast, load wagons, strike tents, and yoke oxen, fastening the curved wooden frames over the animals' necks just behind





Another notable landmark along the Trail through Nebraska was the venerable Scott's Bluff, named for Hiram Scott, a prominent trapper in the Rocky Mountain fur trade who is presumed to have died nearby. Photo by Gary Ladd



their horns.<sup>31</sup> In his memoir of 1843, *A Day with the Cow Column*, Applegate states:

*It is on the stroke of seven the rushing to and fro, the cracking of whips, the loud command to oxen, and what seems to be the inextricable confusion of the last ten minutes has ceased.*

*Fortunately, every one has been found and every teamster is at his post. The clear notes of the trumpet sound in the front; the pilot and his guards mount their horses, the leading division of the wagons move out . . . .*<sup>32</sup>

The emigrants traveled across the vast plains of what now is the state of Nebraska, much of their route adjacent to the Platte River. *Nebraska* is an Indian word meaning “flat and shallow” and *platte* is a French equivalent. Both describe the Platte River’s broad band of flowing silt.<sup>33</sup> This shallow, lazy river — “a mile wide and an inch deep” — was described by one emigrant as “bad to ford, destitute of fish, too dirty to bath[e] in, and too thick to drink.”<sup>34</sup> From the alkali water of the Platte, the cows got the “scours,” a farm term for diarrhea in farm animals. The dryness of the Nebraska prairies reddened eyes, chapped lips until puffy and cracked, and shrank wagon wheels so that spokes and tires loosened. Repairs constantly were needed: strap iron, called a tire, had to be cut from around the wooden wheel, shortened, then hammer-welded back onto the wheel.<sup>35</sup>

**B**uffalo, also called bison, still were plentiful in the 1840s, and some mornings the emigrants found them quietly grazing among their cattle. Since no trees grew on the prairies, emigrants burned buffalo chips (dried dung) in order to cook and to warm themselves.<sup>36</sup> Many journals kept by women expressed squeamish feelings about using buffalo chips, which was surprising considering their own primitive sanitary arrangements — canvas-sheltered latrines in camp and a circle of friends when the train was on the move.<sup>37</sup> They were pleased however, to discover that when placed in shallow trenches the chips produced a hot, clear, odorless flame.

Near the northeast corner of present-day Colorado, the pioneers crossed the South Fork of the Platte River. According to Peter Burnett’s journal, that crossing took five days. A number of water-tight boats were made by covering several wagon-boxes with green (uncured) buffalo hides sewn together, stretched tightly and tacked down hide-side out, rubbed with ashes, and left in the sun to dry.<sup>38</sup> On the far western side of Nebraska, the group passed the sandstone formations rising up from the prairie, including the famed Chimney Rock. Then, they entered the present state of Wyoming.

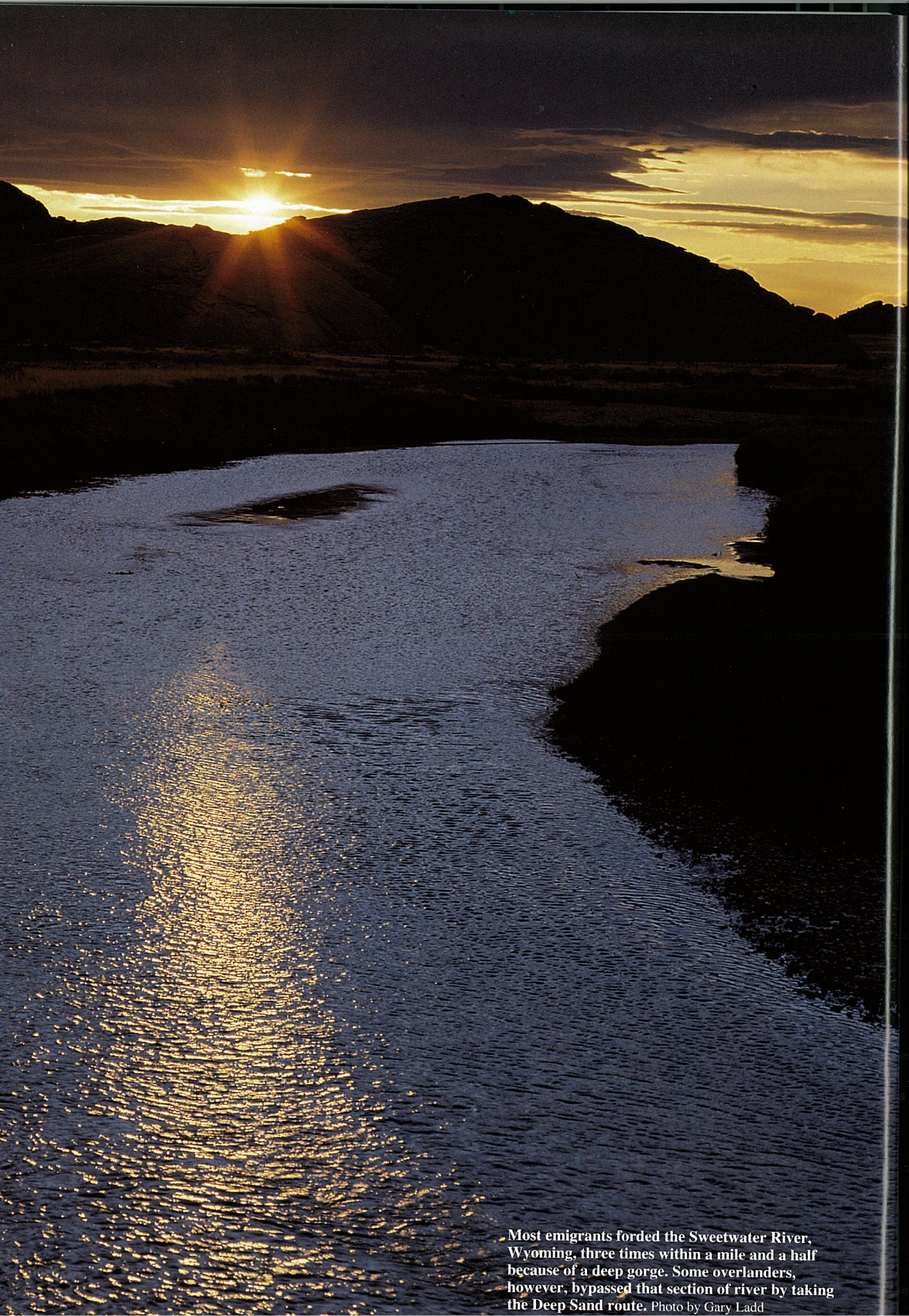
Fort Laramie, located at the junction of the North Platte and the Laramie rivers in eastern Wyoming, was not a military post in 1843, just a fur trappers’ trading post surrounded by a fifteen-foot tall adobe wall. This was the last established outpost in the United States; the wagons had covered 640 miles and had 1,400 miles yet to go. At Fort Laramie the emigrants rested, washed clothes, repacked wagons, and bought a few provisions. (Marcus Whitman reported that the emigrants bought \$4,000

**Buffalo, once plentiful across the Plains, provided emigrants with meat to fill their kettles and chips to fuel their fires. Photo by Natalie Brown**



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Most emigrants forded the Sweetwater River, Wyoming, three times within a mile and a half because of a deep gorge. Some overlanders, however, bypassed that section of river by taking the Deep Sand route. Photo by Gary Ladd



worth of provisions at Fort Laramie and the three succeeding forts—Bridger, Hall, and Boise.)<sup>39</sup>

**T**he emigrants crossed the Continental Divide into the Oregon Country at South Pass. Although the pass stood 7,000 feet above sea level, it was crossed by a gradual ascent up an undramatic sagebrush plain nineteen miles wide.<sup>40</sup> Young Edward Lenox wrote, "I was never more surprised in my life, for I was looking for a steep hill and did not find it, the ascent was so gradual . . ."<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the emigrants had what one called a "grand complimentary ball to the Rocky Mountains" just before crossing South Pass.<sup>42</sup>

Once across the Divide and beyond the Great Plains, the emigrants ate game but not buffalo.<sup>43</sup> The pioneers missed the buffalo steaks. Peter Burnett wrote that "the flesh of no animal is more delicious than that of a young buffalo cow, in good order. You may eat as much as you please, and it will not oppress you."<sup>44</sup> They also found that they even missed the buffalo chips, for now they had to wrench up hunks of knotted, pungent, quickly consumed sagebrush to warm themselves and to cook.<sup>45</sup>

North of the Wasatch Mountains they arrived at Fort Bridger, a ramshackle fort built in 1841 by legendary mountain man Jim Bridger. Marcus Whitman had met Bridger years before, in the late 1830s when as an early medical missionary he removed a three-inch long, iron arrowhead that had been lodged in Bridger's back for three years.<sup>46</sup> More than just a colorful mountain man, Bridger wrote in a letter dated December 10, 1843, to Messrs. P. Chouteau & Co., an eastern supplier: "I have established a small fort, with a Black Smith Shop and a supply of iron in the road of the Emigrants which promises fairly. They, in coming out are generally well supplied with money, but by the time they get here, are in want of all kind of supplies."<sup>47</sup>

In late August, the emigrants next reached Fort Hall, located at the junction of the Snake and Portneuf rivers (in present-day Idaho). In 1843 this was not a military installation but a trading post run by the Hudson's Bay Co. The company's trappers advised the emigrants to sell their wagons and cattle, warning that they could not get through and that no one ever before had taken wagons beyond Fort Hall. Nineteen wagons were abandoned at the fort by the small emigrant party of 1842 and stood as a mute testimonial to the trappers' warnings.<sup>48</sup>

The emigrants knew that their mountain man guide, Gantt, would be departing to the south for California, yet Whitman urged them on, saying they could make it, for they had enough men to build whatever roads were needed. On leaving Fort Hall, Burnett wrote:

*We had now arrived at a most critical period . . . We had many misgivings as to our ultimate success in making our way with our wagons, teams, and families. We had yet to accomplish the untried and most difficult portion of our long and exhaustive journey. We could not anticipate at what moment we might be compelled to abandon our wagons in the mountains, pack our scant supplies upon our poor oxen, and make our way on foot through this terribly rough country as best we could.*<sup>49</sup>

Their long journey across what is now the state of Idaho found some relief with a new variety of food, salmon. Along the Snake River, American Indians sold dried salmon to the pioneers, charging one musket



**"Emigrants descending the Blue Mountains of Oregon," painting by William Henry Jackson.**

Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

**HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY  
TRAPPERS ADVISED  
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HAD TAKEN WAGONS  
BEYOND FORT HALL.**



ball and one charge of powder for each salmon.<sup>50</sup> Records indicate that pioneers traded extensively with Indians along the trail. For example, James Nesmith, the "orderly sergeant" for the wagon train,<sup>51</sup> purchased a horse from a Snake Indian then later exchanged it for a canoe in a deal with a Chinook Indian.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, in the northeast corner of present-day Oregon, the group reached one of the most difficult parts of their journey, the steep and heavily wooded Blue Mountains, where the pioneers literally had to chop their way through the forest.<sup>53</sup> While they were crossing these mountains, Whitman was called ahead to his Walla Walla mission. Stickus, an Indian chief from the mission, led the emigrants through the rugged mountains and on to the Columbia River. Stickus, whom Burnett said "proved to be both faithful and competent,"<sup>54</sup> was accompanied by his wife and two daughters.<sup>55</sup> Not only were there no fights with hostile Indians on this trip but an Indian chief proved invaluable to the wagon train in their time of great need.

**B**y the time the emigrants reached the Columbia River, they had been on the trail almost five months, and their provisions were nearly gone. Jesse Applegate's twelve-year-old nephew Jesse A. Applegate wrote in his journal: "Emigrants were hungry all the time. Children seated in boats would enjoy themselves for hours gnawing off the fat coating from dried salmon skins. An emigrant not hungry was thought to be ill."<sup>56</sup>

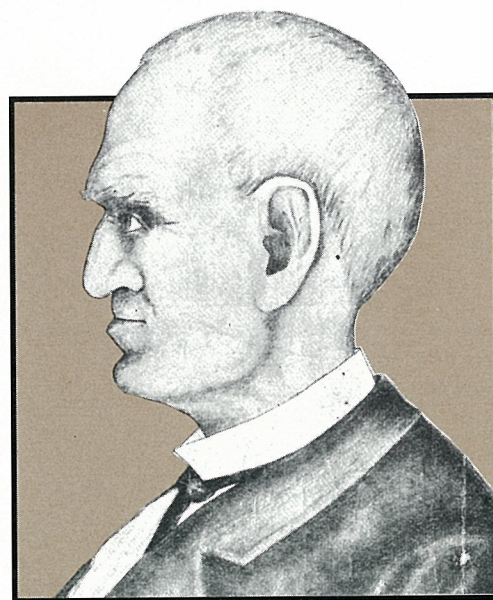
Because the narrow trail through the Columbia Gorge was almost impassable by wagon, the emigrants had to float down the river. They chopped down trees and built huge rafts that could carry six to eight wagons.<sup>57</sup> In the great, turbulent waters of the Columbia, three drowned, including a son and a nephew of Applegate.<sup>58</sup>

By November the group finally arrived in the Willamette Valley. Each family had to build shelter from winter rains; in the spring, land had to be cleared for homes and farms using the faithful oxen. Peter Burnett wore out his boots after plowing three acres, so he worked outside without boots. Though trained as a lawyer, Burnett had to learn to sew his own boots from tanned deer skin.<sup>59</sup>

Six years later, when gold was discovered in California, Burnett led the first wagon train from Oregon to California. After an unsuccessful year in the gold fields, he took a job with John Sutter as attorney and supervisor of lot sales in Sacramento City.<sup>60</sup> A year later in 1850, Burnett became the first governor of California, and he later founded and was president of a major bank.<sup>61</sup> Jesse Applegate played a key role in the organization of the governments of the territory and state of Oregon,<sup>62</sup> but he is best remembered for laying out a southern route to Oregon three years later in 1846, a dangerous task which he voluntarily undertook without thought of compensation.<sup>63</sup>

Nearly thirty years after their overland trip to Oregon, when both men were in their sixties, Applegate and Burnett met again: Burnett, then the bank president, and Applegate, a man of modest means, having suffered great financial losses when he was a merchant near Roseburg. Applegate told Burnett, "I did business upon this theory: I sold my goods on credit to those who needed them most, not to those who were able to pay." Burnett later opined that: "It was just like the man . . . his generous heart said yes; and that kind heart of his overruled his better judgment."<sup>64</sup> Though one man was financially more successful than the other, both were great pioneers and great leaders.

The emigrants of 1843 doubled the Oregon Country's Euro-American population and provided the organization for a provisional government. These emigrants and the other pioneer families that followed the Oregon and Applegate trails led to the settlement of this region and to statehood for Oregon.<sup>65</sup>



Jesse Applegate. Southern Oregon Historical Society #256

**JESSE APPLGATE'S  
TWELVE-YEAR-OLD  
NEPHEW WROTE IN HIS  
JOURNAL: "EMIGRANTS  
WERE HUNGRY ALL THE  
TIME. CHILDREN SEATED  
IN BOATS WOULD ENJOY  
THEMSELVES FOR HOURS  
GNAWING OFF THE  
FAT COATING FROM  
DRIED SALMON SKINS.  
AN EMIGRANT NOT  
HUNGRY WAS THOUGHT  
TO BE ILL."**



Of these people, Jesse Applegate wrote:

*No other race of men with the means at their command would undertake so great a journey, none save these could successfully perform it, with no previous preparation, relying only on the fertility of their own invention to devise the means to overcome each danger and difficulty as it arose . . . May we not call them men of destiny?*<sup>66</sup>

Today, we may with certainty answer yes.

*Doug Foster is a free lance writer and research historian. Before leaving a law career for writing, he specialized in American Indian and public land issues.*

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"Drifting the Columbia River," oil painting by Roger Cooke.

**BECAUSE THE NARROW  
TRAIL THROUGH THE  
COLUMBIA GORGE WAS  
ALMOST IMPASSABLE BY  
WAGON, THE EMIGRANTS  
HAD TO FLOAT DOWN  
THE RIVER.**

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# GRIZZLY BEAR, KAMUKAMTS, & KUMOOKUMTS



**A** MERICAN INDIANS have lived in Oregon at least 10,000 years. Over this great span of time, they developed customs and traditions uniquely suited to their environment.

Oregon's geographic features—deserts, rivers, mountains, shorelines—and rich natural resources formed the basis for the Indians' lives and cultures.

The Indians lived on the land for so long that they could not imagine the landscape *living* without them. They believed that like the oak trees and the deer they had always been here. They did not tell tales of their ancestors coming to the region; they had, instead, creation myths and legends about the interrelationships between living things. Myths and legends from three native cultures have been selected to represent those of the many tribes and bands of traditional Oregon: the Takelma, the Klamath, and the Modoc.

As early as 1790 when white explorers entered the area, Indian cultures began to disintegrate. It was the opening of the Oregon Trail in 1843, however, that brought large numbers of Euro-American settlers to challenge not only the use of the land and its ownership but the very existence of American Indians.

—JBD

**A Klamath Indian woman gathers wocus bulbs.**  
Southern Oregon Historical Society #1160

Myths  
and  
Legends  
of the  
Takelma,  
Klamath,  
and  
Modoc  
Peoples



## ▲ TAKELMA ▲

A HOUSE THERE WAS, Grizzly Bear, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear's two children, and Black Bear's two children. Every day they used to pick hazel nuts, and were wont to return; "sisters" they called each other. Then, 'tis said, a long time elapsed. "Let us hunt for your lice," said Grizzly Bear, to Black Bear she said it. Whenever the evening came, they always brought home burden baskets full of hazel nuts, every day they did that in the mountains. "For your lice let us hunt," said Grizzly Bear, and for her [Black Bear's] lice she always hunted.

Then, 'tis said, a long time elapsed. "Let us hunt for your lice," said Grizzly Bear. Now, 'tis said, she bit Black Bear's head a little [while] hunting for her lice. "You've bit me!" said Black Bear. "I did not know that I was biting you," said Grizzly Bear. Then, it is said, when the evening came they returned home, each other's neighbors they were.

Now they used to pick hazel nuts. Then again, 'tis said, Grizzly Bear said, "Let us hunt for your lice." Now again she bit her a little. "You've bit me, haven't you?" said Black Bear. Now for a long time she did that to her. Then again they returned home, and burden baskets full of hazel nuts they brought home. "I did not know that I was biting you, sister," said Grizzly Bear. Then, 'tis said, Black Bear knew that Grizzly Bear was intending to kill her.

Then, 'tis said, when they returned home in the evening, "Now when the next day comes, then let us again pick hazel nuts," Grizzly Bear said to her. "Sister," she called her. Now then, 'tis said, Black Bear stood up an acorn pestle; she knew that [Grizzly Bear] was intending to kill her. Then to her daughters she said, "Should this acorn pestle fall, then she will have killed me. You should watch that. Should it fall, then she will have killed me," said Black Bear, to her daughters that she said. "In that case, to those children of Grizzly Bear next door, you shall say, 'Let us bathe!' and then you shall drown them," said Black Bear to her daughters. Then, 'tis said, they watched this acorn pestle. "If it should fall, in that case you shall say to them. 'Let us

play in the water!'" she said, "and then you shall bury them in the fireplace," said Black Bear to her daughters. "When they are done, you will take them out, and you will split them open," said Black Bear to them.

Now then, 'tis said, noon came, and the acorn pestle fell. They went next door to Grizzly Bear's children. "Let us all bathe, let us play in the water!" said the daughters of Black Bear. "Yes!" they said. Then, 'tis said, they bathed in the water. Now they drowned them in the water, the two daughters of Grizzly Bear died. Then into the house of Grizzly Bear they took her children; now they roasted them in the ashes, down under the ground they threw them into the fire. Then, it is said, they were done, and the daughters of Black Bear took them out . . . Then they ripped them open. In the afternoon, just then they did so, they roasted the children of Grizzly Bear.

Now formerly, their mother had told them, "You will lift up the rock acorn-mortar, [under] there you will go," said Black Bear; [she said that] to her daughters. Then into their own house returned the children of Black Bear. Then the rock acorn-mortar they lifted up, and went off; in there they passed, off they went [in a tunnel]. Now Black Bear's children ran away, Grizzly Bear's children they had killed. Then off they went.

When evening came Grizzly Bear returned. Now her children were not there; she listened. "Where are you?" In the water there was laughter [as of] little girls, "He he he he! He he he he!" A burden basket full of hazel nuts she carried on her back. Not yet had she entered the house. After a little while she went inside. Now then [they lay there] all done, spread out, ripped open. Now then, 'tis said, she ate their livers. Now just then [she said], "Come back, come back!" as she rushed out to where there was laughter [as of] little children; now there she came. "Come back, come back!" Now into the water she went. Then, 'tis said, where there was laughter, there she went; there she arrived, but they were not there. Just down river: "He he he!" Now again

there she ran: "Come back, come back!" There she arrived, but they were not there. Now again up river there was laughter (as of two little children). Now again up river she ran. "Come back, come back!" Now again there she arrived, but they were not there. Now then just down river there was laughter again; again there she ran. "Come back!" said Grizzly Bear. Now again just up river there was laughter once more; she was plumb tired out. Right there she then found it out, she stood still. "What is the matter?" she kept shouting. Now she was tired; to every place had she run.

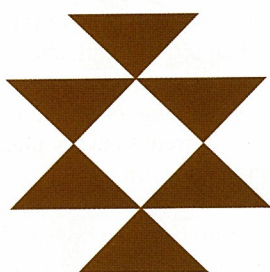
Now she went home into her own house. "So it is my children? So that was their livers that I ate?" she said. Next door she went. Then everything she turned over; the earth she asked, everything she asked, "Where did my children go?" Some time elapsed, and then she lifted up the rock acorn-mortar, last of all she discovered their footprints right there. Now then, 'tis said, she pursued them. "O my liver!; O my liver!" now thus she cried. She pursued them, and "O my liver; O my liver!" she said. Somewhere or other they had arrived, and now Black Bear's children were on the other side of the water. Indeed Crane had thrown his leg across the river and made a canoe of it, and the little girls passed over on it.

Grizzly Bear arrived at the house of old woman Excrement, and went inside. "Where are the orphans?" said Grizzly Bear. "I swing about the shells in my ears, I coil my basket tight," said a certain Excrement woman, I know not what sort of woman. "I swing about the shells in my ears," said the old woman, she answered not Grizzly Bear. "Where are the orphans? Did you not hear what I said to you?" said Grizzly Bear. After a little while the old woman became angry . . . , towards the fireplace she turned around, her awl she seized. "Wherefore do you ask me?"

Now Grizzly Bear, for her part, jumped out of the house, then ran to the water. Now she called for a canoe, "Paddle a canoe over here!" she said. Now Crane, indeed, [said] "Eehhh!"



and he stretched his own leg across, his own leg he gave her. Now she walked on top of it. And she scratched his leg with her claws . . . in the middle of the water. "Eehhh!" [exclaimed Crane]. Now Crane turned his leg to one side, and Grizzly Bear died, Crane threw her into the water. But Black Bear's children had escaped by just passing over Crane's leg.



## ▲ KLAMATH ▲

**T**HERE WAS NO LAND, only a great lake. Kamukamts came from the north in a canoe. It floated along. It stopped. He shook it, but could not move it. He looked down, and in the water he saw the roof of a house. It was the house of Pocket Gopher. Gopher looked up. Then Kamukamts went down into the house, and they talked.

Kamukamts said, "You had better be thinking of what is the best thing to do."

"Yes, I am thinking of that now," replied Gopher.

"If you can plan anything better than I can do, you shall be the elder brother," promised Kamukamts. "What kind of food are we going to have?"

Gopher opened his mouth to yawn, and fish, roots, and berries came forth.

"It seems that you will be the elder brother," said Kamukamts.

That night Gopher caused his companion to sleep, and he burrowed under the bottom of the lake and made it bulge up into hills and mountains, which raised their tops above the surface. In the morning he said, "You had better go and look around!" When Kamukamts went out he was astonished. Gopher asked what should become of his house, and Kamukamts replied, "It will always remain as the oldest mountain" [Modoc Point].

"What will our children have for amusement?" asked Kamukamts. They played the game of throwing spears at a

mark. They threw them, and their targets were hills. Kamukamts' spear knocked off the top of Bare Island, and so it is today. Then they invented all the other games.

Gopher asked, "What will live on the mountains?"

Mountain lions, bears, elk, deer." Kamukamts named all the animals, both beasts and birds.

What will grow in the mountains?" asked Gopher.

I will walk over the earth and see what I can do," replied Kamukamts. So he went about and selected homes for the different tribes, and in each territory he placed something which was to characterize that particular tribe, such as obsidian in the Paiute country, marble in the Shasta country, and tules in the Klamath country. Then he looked about and saw smoke.

Kamukamts said, "What is the matter, I wonder? I see smoke here and there."

And Gopher replied, "You have beaten me. You are the elder brother." For he knew that the smoke was from the fires of people brought into being by Kamukamts. They listened, and heard the sound of people talking, and of children laughing and playing. The people increased very rapidly, and the animals and plants on the mountains multiplied.

*Takelma and Klamath myths courtesy Jarold Ramsey, Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literature of the Oregon Country (University of Washington Press, 1980).*

## ▲ MODOC ▲

**I**N THE BEGINNING, the world was a small flat disk. One day Kumookumts, who was part female and part male, decided to expand the world.

Working like a basket weaver, he did so, then named the mountains, rivers, and lakes. Afterwards he created the first beings, who lived before humans.

After they had lived a long time, Kumookumts decided to change them into plants, animals, and gave them their names.

When that was done, Kumookumts created many tribes of humans by scattering seeds across the earth. The

Modocs, called Ma Klaks or the people, were one of these tribes.

After they were created, Kumookumts told them: "Though few in number, you will be bravest of all. Even if many people come against you, you will kill them"

Finally Kumookumts named the different kinds of food the people should eat. There were more than 200. As he named them, they appeared in the land.

Then he decided how the food should be gathered. He told the people: "Women shall dig roots, get wood and water, and cook. Men shall hunt and fish and fight."

After this, Kumookumts went away. In place of himself and other gods, he left spirits through whom humans might influence the world, including Frog, Rattlesnake, Fish, and Coyote.

After Kumookumts went away, the spirits held a council. They made the night and said it should be followed by morning. They put the moon in the sky to light the night, and the sun to light the day. They decided the length of the day and of the seasons.

At the end of the council, the spirits faced the hardest question of all. "How long should humans live?"

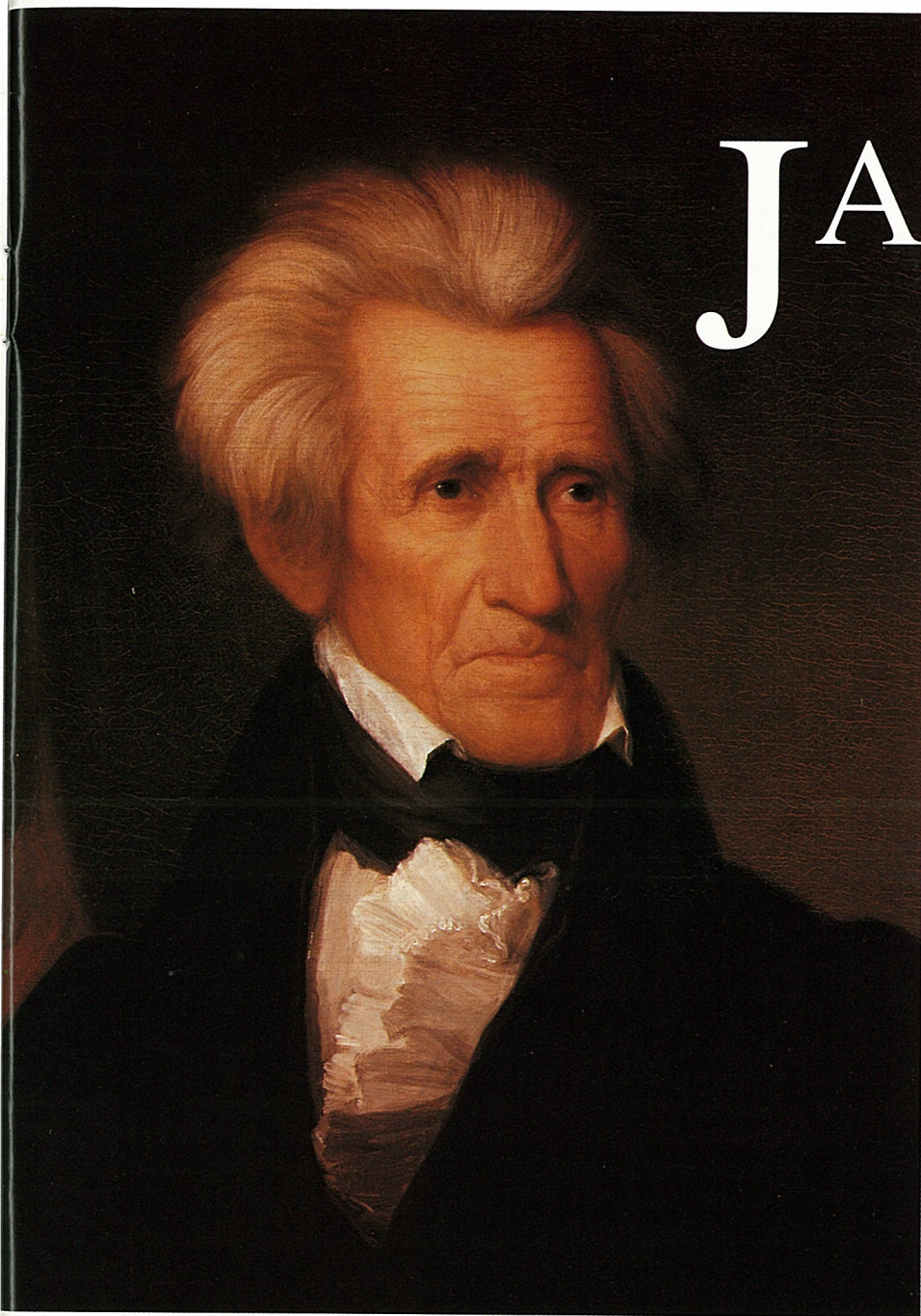
Some of the spirits said humans should live forever, but Mole argued "I want them to grow old, and get cold when they sit down." The world would get too full if everything lived forever."

The council agreed with Mole, and now humans grow old and die.

*An adaptation from "The Oregon Trail & Our Valley" special edition, Mail Tribune (Medford, Oregon, March 18, 1993) and The Modoc (Chelsea House Books, 1988) by Odie and Laura Faulk.*







President Andrew Jackson,  
ca. 1835. Courtesy United States  
Naval Academy Museum

# JACKSON AND THE BANK FEUD

by Jay Mullen

*Western youths  
So impatient,  
full of action,  
full of manly pride  
and friendship.*

— Walt Whitman

Free land may  
have drawn many  
pioneers West, but  
Andrew Jackson's  
tight monetary  
policies provided  
the initial boot.

Traditionally, the “full of action” pioneers on the Oregon Trail evoke images of buckskinned men and bonnetted women, of whistles, shouts, and cracking whips, of dust clouds from creaking wagons that rutted the prairie by day and circled for protection by night. The resolute settlers who pressed ox teams westward toward new beginnings in Oregon earned a reputation for daring, adventure, and rugged independence. It is an enduring image that generations of Oregonians claim as a legacy even today.

Free land was the pioneers' incentive. American historian Frederick Jackson Turner concluded that cheap and abundant land combined with the frontier experience to shape American traits and institutions. In 1893 he wrote: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advancement of American settlement westward explain American development.” The frontier (that place where the Euro-American settlement line abutted nature) fostered inventiveness, self-reliance, and individualism among Americans; ability, not



pedigree, promoted success there. However, contrary to Turner's assertion, frontier land was not free. Not, that is, until Oregon was opened.

In its sovereignty over and ownership of the land, the government adopted a survey-and-sell policy that promoted orderly settlement. Nevertheless, some people — squatters, preemptioners, or sooners — pushed beyond the surveyed tracts to establish homes on lands that they occupied and worked, but did not pay for, and therefore did not own. So they faced a persistent specter of eviction should a buyer purchase title to that land from the government. Any improvements wrought by



**JACKSON BELIEVED  
THAT PEOPLE SHOULD  
NOT CONTRACT DEBTS  
THEY COULD NOT  
PAY AND THAT  
TRANSACTIONS SHOULD  
BE IN REAL MONEY.**

the squatters' labor then would be for naught, for generally the authority of the courts and sheriffs sustained buyers, not preemptioners. One of America's most celebrated pioneers, Daniel Boone, lost in such a land dispute, and subsequently moved westward in search of "elbow room." However, the U.S. Congress appreciated settler initiative and hard work and sympathized with squatters to the extent that it gave them the right of purchase priority when land buyers challenged them. They had to produce the amount of the purchase price, however, to keep their land. Usually short of cash, squatters either moved on, as Daniel Boone did, or turned to banks.

**B**anks had inspired intense arguments since the birth of the independent American nation. No sooner had the founding fathers addressed land policy than they confronted banking policy. Banking was the nation's first partisan political issue and divided followers of Alexander Hamilton from those of Thomas Jefferson. As part of

his program to extricate the new nation from debt, Treasury Secretary Hamilton advocated a national bank to provide both flexible credit and sound currency. Jeffersonians countered that the Constitution countenanced no such institution. George Washington accepted Hamilton's argument of constitutional elasticity and chartered a central bank, the Bank of the United States, acronymed the BUS.

Co-existing with the BUS were state-chartered banks, some of which were termed "wildcat" in acknowledgement of the neighbors with which they shared the frontier habitat. State banks were popular frontier fixtures because they issued bank notes which circulated as currency. Credit-hungry pioneers appreciated this inflationary paper, which could be used to meet mortgage payments.

The BUS, which functioned as a central bank with branches in the various states, curbed bank-note inflation by forcing the wildcat banks to redeem their own notes with hard money — precious metal coin known as specie. Settlers who found money scarce blamed the restrictive monetary policies of the BUS. Their frustration found expression through Andrew Jackson, frontiersman par excellence.

Jackson typified the frontier ideal of the self-made man. Orphaned at fourteen, he migrated West at twenty-one and, through hard work and ability, prospered on the frontier. As an early settler in Tennessee, he acquired land cheaply before the immigration tide. During some fast land transactions based on promissory notes, he confronted financial ruin when some note-signers defaulted. Though he managed to avert disaster in an era of debtors' prisons, the experience sobered him and fostered an abiding suspicion of land speculation, paper financing, and indebtedness. He believed that people should not contract debts they could not pay and that transactions should be in real money. In other words, Jackson distrusted

BORN TO COMMAND.

HAD I BEEN CONSULTED

KING ANDREW THE FIRST.

# KING ANDREW

THE FIRST,  
"Born to Command."

A KING who, possessing as much power as his Gracious Brother William II., makes a worse use of it.  
A KING who has placed himself above the laws, as he has shown by his contempt of our judges.  
A KING who would destroy our currency, and substitute *Old Hags*, payable by no one knows who, and no one knows where, instead of *good Silver Dollars*.  
A KING born to command, as he has shown himself by appointing men to office contrary to the will of the People.  
A KING who, while he was feeding his favorites out of the public money, denied a pittance to the *Old Soldiers* who fought and bled for our independence.  
A KING whose *Prime Minister* and *Heir Apparent*, was thought unfit for the office of ambassador by the people:

**Shall he reign over us,  
Or shall the PEOPLE RULE?**

Satirist Edward Williams Clay dramatized President Andrew Jackson's flagrant use of the power of his office in an 1834 broadsheet. Courtesy Tennessee Historical Society



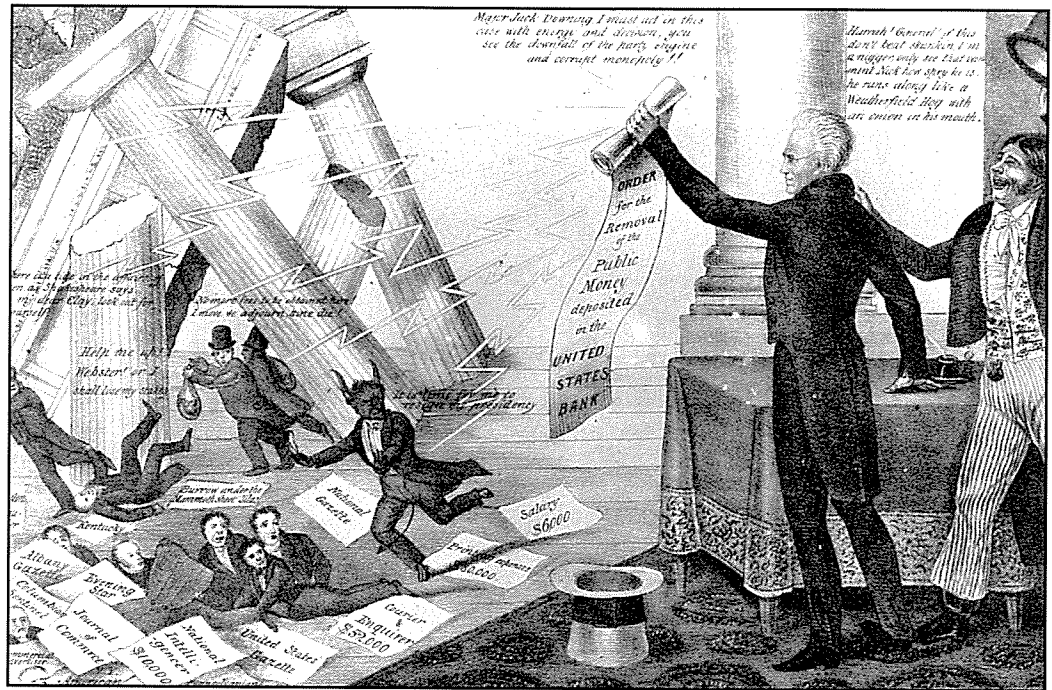
banks. To him the nation's biggest paper manipulator was the BUS, and, as a Jeffersonian, he favored a strict, not elastic, interpretation of the Constitution. Furthermore, as a Jeffersonian advocate of state's rights, he viewed the BUS's constitutionality with skepticism.

Jackson's foremost dissatisfaction with the BUS appeared to stem from his frontier egalitarianism. To him and to other pioneers, it appeared that an Eastern elite — the BUS's directors — enjoyed privilege approaching aristocracy, for they could dictate the nation's monetary policy without answering to anyone. And with its national charter, the BUS could operate in every state. Therefore, the fortunes of frontiersmen were dictated not by their ability but by decisions in a Philadelphia boardroom. Furthermore, Jackson, ever the politician, believed that the BUS was asserting its influence by meddling in politics. He decided to slay "The Monster."

With its charter scheduled to expire in 1836, the BUS's renewal became the dominant issue in the 1832 presidential campaign. Upon reelection, Jackson assumed he had a mandate to move immediately against the BUS, which he did by removing the government's money from its vaults and redepositing those funds in select state banks. Swollen by this bonanza, the state banks in turn issued additional notes, tripling their circulation so that land purchases (and speculation) flourished. Frontiersmen invoked the name of Andy Jackson with affection.

Then the bubble burst. In 1836 the government promulgated the *Specie Circular*: only gold would be accepted in payment for land. Mortgage holders then headed for the banks to exchange bank notes for specie. However, since wildcat bank notes had fueled rampant inflation, the face amount of circulating notes far exceeded gold deposits. Banks ruptured when they could not meet the demand for specie, and in the ensuing depression, farmers who could not make their payments faced foreclosure.

What prospects existed with farmers' lands repossessed and with no money to buy new



**Jackson is shown trouncing the establishment's financial temple in another 1830's caricature.** Courtesy American Antiquarian Society

ones? There was hope — 2,000 miles distant. Fur trappers and missionaries on the Pacific Slope described fertile lands "where rolls the Oregon." By the Convention of 1818, Britain and the United States had agreed to occupy the region jointly. Since neither claimed ultimate sovereignty, the land, in effect, was free. Therefore four to six months on the trail led to opportunity, and to farmers dispossessed by the bank panic, this was incentive enough.

The Oregon Trail originates in Jackson County, Missouri. The name Jackson, in all its variations — Jackson, Michigan; Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Jackson, Tennessee; Jackson, Mississippi; Jackson Hot Springs and Jacksonville, Oregon — designates more geographical features in the United States than any other name, acknowledging the frontier/common-man virtues that Andrew Jackson embodied and that Frederick Jackson Turner believed characterized Americans. Not surprisingly, the people of Oregon named one of their counties to honor the man who symbolized the frontier experience. Jackson, however, merits memory not only for his symbolic value but because his feud with the bank helped set in motion the dynamics that populated Oregon with Euro-Americans.

If free land was the magnet at one end of the Oregon Trail, Andrew Jackson's bank bludgeon and Specie Circular were a prod at the other end.

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# TRAIL TRAVELER, TRAIL TELLER

## FRANCIS PARKMAN

by Steve Blackmun

*In this year of remembrance and reflection on the Oregon Trail, many works previously forgotten are being dusted off and enjoyed. One such book is Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, first published in 1847. Long considered a classic in western literature, it is also a standard on the emigrant route. Drawing from his journals, Parkman created a story that provided what came to be accepted as the most popular account of this romanticized journey.*

*Through his narrative, Parkman brings to life the adventurous journey of those who traveled across the desolate prairies and the Rockies on their way to Oregon. His picturesque prose traces a procession of "trappers, traders, scouts, guides, and the rest of that motley crowd of adventurers and emigrants who set their eyes towards that promised land."<sup>1</sup>*

From the time he was a teenager, Francis Parkman had exhibited a profound interest in the outdoors.<sup>2</sup> His western adventure gave him the chance to gather the information he needed to portray the people who traveled and lived on that untamed land as well as the opportunity to create a heroic, masculine image for himself.<sup>3</sup> In 1844, while still at Harvard studying the French fighting in Canada, Parkman, with the support of his parents, took a trip to Italy to deal with an eventually crippling nervous disorder. Upon returning, he was considered to be cured; nonetheless, prior to his western experience, he trained hard to make himself physically fit.<sup>4</sup>

As Parkman began his book, he already had arrived in Missouri. His romance with the West also had begun as is evident from his description of what must have been a typical scene in crowded Independence, as he prepared to embark on his own journey in 1846:

*A multitude of shops had sprung up to furnish the emigrants and Santa Fe traders with necessities for their journey; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from the dozen blacksmith's sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired, and the horses*



**"Bartering with Traders" by Thomas Hart Benton, who illustrated some editions of Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*.**  
Courtesy Museum of Nebraska Art



and oxen shoed. 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. Here and there a buxom damsel was seated on horseback, holding over her sunburned face an old umbrella or a parasol, once gaudy enough, but now miserably faded. The men, very sober-looking countrymen, stood about their oxen; and as I passed I noticed three old fellows, who, with their long whips in their hands, were zealously discussing the doctrine of regeneration. The emigrants, however, are not all of this stamp. Among them are some of the vilest outcasts in the country."<sup>5</sup>

Not long after Parkman's departure from Missouri he suffered an onslaught of symptoms from his harassing illness, which he openly discussed in his book:<sup>6</sup>

... I was so reduced by illness that I could seldom walk without reeling like a drunken man, and when I rose from my seat upon the ground the landscape suddenly grew dim before my eyes, the trees and lodges seemed to sway to and fro, and the prairie to rise and fall like the swells of the ocean. Such state of things is not enviable anywhere. In a country where a man's life may at any moment depend on the strength of his arm, or it may be on the activity of his legs, it is more particularly inconvenient.<sup>7</sup>

Parkman also provided evidence of his personal daring and bravado, which created a more heroic image of himself. One such example is his description of his participation in one of the many buffalo hunts:

Neither I nor my horse were at that time fit for such sport, and I had determined to remain a quiet spectator; but amid the rush of horses and buffalo, the uproars and the dust, I found it impossible to sit still; and as four or five buffalo ran past me in a line, I lashed Pauline in pursuit. We went plunging through the water and the quicksands, and clambering the bank, chased them through the wild sage bushes that

covered the rising ground beyond . . . At last, however, they came full upon a ravine too wide to leap over; and as this compelled them to turn abruptly to the left, I contrived to get within ten or twelve yards of the hindmost. At this she faced about, bristled angrily, and made a show of charging. I shot at her, and hit her somewhere in the neck.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of his illness and intent to boast his image, Parkman, like so many others, displayed a fascination with the great diversity of travelers willing to make the long, arduous journey west. He "perplexed" himself "to derive the[ir] various motives." As he observed,

... whatever they may be, whether an insane hope of a better condition in life, or a desire of shaking off restraints of law and society, or mere restlessness, certain it is, that multitudes bitterly repent the journey, and after they reached the land of promise, are happy enough to escape from it.<sup>9</sup>

Parkman had an altogether different motive when he set out on his journey.

According to F. G. Young's retrospective on the Oregon Trail published in 1900, Parkman actually wanted to study the uninfluenced Indian as well as to write a history of the French in North America.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, Parkman was able to complete a sixteen-volume history of French-British conflicts that he had begun while at Harvard University.<sup>11</sup> By learning on a more personal basis the essentials of Indian life, he gained a first-hand knowledge of French-Indian encounters and, therefore, was better able to understand this period of French history in North America.<sup>12</sup> Edward Gaylord Bourne noted in a critical essay that for Parkman, "the whole

excursion was a journey into the past; each successive stage took him not merely further west but further back in time" and closer to realizing his motive.<sup>13</sup>

For these reasons, Parkman was especially fascinated with the Indians and the French. The latter, he suggested, were highly admirable: "If bravery be the most potent charm to win the favor of the fair, then no wooer could be more irresistible than a Rocky Mountain trapper"<sup>14</sup> and "I defy the annals of chivalry to furnish the record of a life more wild and perilous than that . . ."<sup>15</sup> He clearly liked the lifestyle of



"Buffalo and Sunflower" by Thomas Hart Benton.

Courtesy Museum of Nebraska Art



the Indians but did not view them in a favorable way<sup>16</sup>: "They were thorough savages. Neither their manners nor their ideas were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization."<sup>17</sup> His descriptions portray them as a wild and untamed people.<sup>18</sup> His desire was to discover and study them as they were when they first encountered the French. On one occasion, however, Parkman was nothing short of disappointed when he visited an Indian fort and found, according to one Parkman biographer, "Iroquois men dressed in overalls quietly smoking cigars."<sup>19</sup>

Parkman also did not think highly of the emigrants: "They seemed like men totally out of their element, bewildered and amazed, like a troop of schoolboys in the woods."<sup>20</sup> He therefore had no hesitation in joining, instead, a group of British soldiers heading west: "Feeling no greater partiality for the society of the emigrants than they did, we thought the arrangement a good one and consented to it."<sup>21</sup>

In spite of his personal biases, Parkman immersed himself in the life about which he wrote. His "deep sympathy with his subject is the secret of his success . . . Each actor in the scene is his friend or foe." According to Bourne, Parkman took "musty records, skeletons of fact, dry bones of barest history, and breathed on them that they might live."<sup>22</sup> It was his immersion in the frontier life which separated Parkman from such noted historians as Irving, Prescott and Bancroft,<sup>23</sup> for with Parkman, "The war-screams of the savages and the howling of the prairie wolves make the music for this grand and glorious forerunner of all the stories of the great West."<sup>24</sup>

For all his chronicling of the Great Migration experience, Parkman did not travel all of the Oregon Trail.<sup>25</sup> The book, based upon his travel and experiences, could just as easily have been entitled "The Santa Fe Trail." The work was first printed in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in February 1847 under the title "The Oregon Trail, or a Summer Journey Out of Bounds." In 1849 it appeared in book form and was entitled *The California and Oregon Trail, Being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life*. The reason for the name change was the eruption of country-wide, gold rush fever. The Oregon Trail title,

attributed in 1847, which has remained ever since, was given for reason of the popularity of the Trail.<sup>26</sup> According to Young, were it not for its enduring title, the book might have been lost forever to anyone outside of Oregon.<sup>27</sup>

As for Parkman's image of himself, with his health becoming progressively worse, he relied on the experiences of that one summer for his future works.<sup>28</sup> The fascination with the Oregon Trail and the West never left him. A description in a later edition of his book reads: "Nothing like this story has ever been written, for it is the true record of Parkman's adventures — more real, thrilling and blood-stirring than any fiction story ever told."<sup>29</sup> Parkman knowingly and inescapably captured the West while it was still open frontier and the trials and travails of the nineteenth-century pioneers who lived the great adventure.



"Trapper in Windstorm" by Thomas Hart Benton.

Courtesy Museum of Nebraska Art

#### ENDNOTES

1. Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (Grosset & Dunlap: 1927), insert.
2. Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Francis Parkman, Historian as Hero: The Formative Years* (University of Texas Press, 1991), 8.
3. Jacobs, x.
4. Jacobs, 9-10.
5. Parkman, 5.
6. Jacobs, 9-10.
7. Parkman, 132.
8. Parkman, 186-7.
9. Parkman, 5-6.
10. F.G. Young, "The Oregon Trail," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 1, 342-3.
11. Jacobs, ix.
12. Young, 342.
13. Edward Gaylord Bourne, "Francis Parkman" in *Essays in Historical Criticism* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1961), 281.
14. Parkman, 134.
15. Jacobs, 117.
16. Jacobs, x.
17. Parkman, 162.
18. Jacobs, 170.
19. Jacobs, 6.
20. Parkman, 91.
21. Parkman, 4.
22. *The Spectator*, in Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (Little, Brown, 1896).
23. Bourne, 280.
24. Parkman, insert.

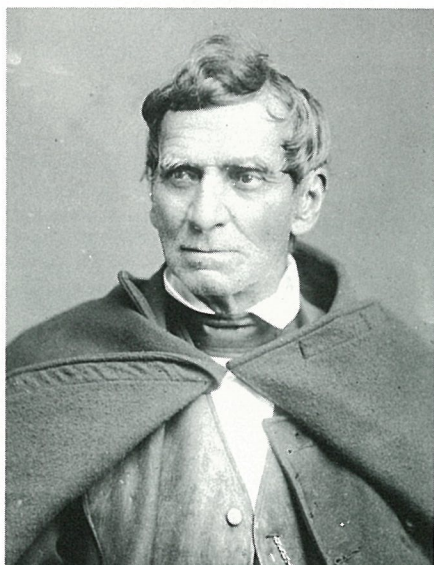
25. Jacobs, 30.
26. Bourne, 282.
27. Young, 343.
28. Bourne, 281-3. Jacobs, 104.
29. Parkman, insert.

*A newcomer to Oregon, Steve Blackmun immersed himself in the American West while obtaining a history degree from DePauw University, Indiana. He currently lives in Ashland.*



Whether searching  
for free land or a fresh  
start, emigrants rolled  
along the Oregon  
Trail, bringing to their  
new homes their  
stories and visions.

# TRAVELERS ON THE TRAILS



Southern Oregon Historical Society #1233

## LINDSAY APPLGATE

Lindsay Applegate and his two brothers, Charles and Jesse, were among the thousands of emigrants who brought their families across the Oregon Trail in 1843. A tragic rafting accident on the Columbia River that drowned several family members prompted the men to seek a safer route into Oregon. In 1846 Jesse, Lindsay, and eleven other determined trailblazers braved uncharted forests and unrelenting deserts to open up an alternate route into the Oregon Country.



Applegate family watch. Southern Oregon Historical Society # 2121

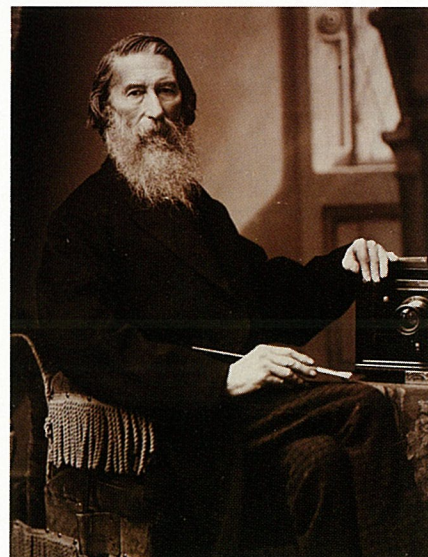


Southern Oregon Historical Society #278

## CLARISSA "CLARA" FLEMING BIRDSEYE

Clarissa "Clara" Fleming had a comfortable and protected life in Wellsburg, Virginia, which was shattered suddenly when her father made the decision to go to Oregon. Eighteen-year-old Clara was forced to leave her fiancé and join her family on the 1852 trek.

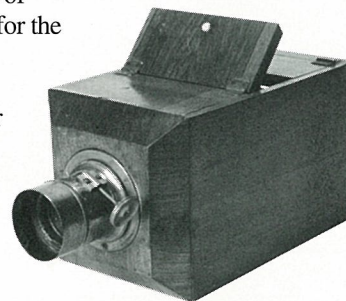
James Fleming settled the family in Portland, where they were soon attending popular social events. Clara met and married David Birdseye in June 1853, and they immediately moved to his donation land claim along the Rogue River near Gold Hill.



Southern Oregon Historical Society #725

## PETER BRITT

At the age of thirty-three, Peter Britt abandoned his studio in Highland, Illinois, where he was practicing the fledgling craft of photography, for the promise of western adventure. For Britt, the trail ended at the mining camp of Table Rock City (now Jacksonville) in November 1852.



Britt's first daguerreotype camera. Southern Oregon Historical Society # B916

Over the next fifty years, Britt remained a noted regional personality. In spite of his many interests — horticulture, wine making, painting — it is for his photographs of the pioneers and their land that he is best remembered.

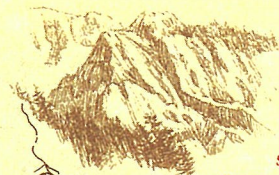
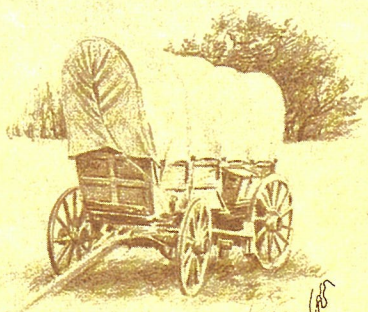
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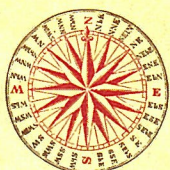


# OREGON

Commem



**OREGON CITY**  
 "Here we are at last in Oregon City... we are alive, and although depleted in strength from scarcity of food and exhaustive travel, we offer prayers to the good Lord who watched over us." (Esther Hanna, 1852)



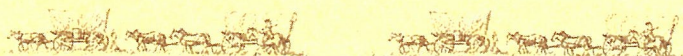
— Credit —  
 Mapping: Linda Lee Miller (P.L.S.)  
 Illustrations: Don Gray  
 Design Layout: Rebecca Chambers  
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 Box 204  
 Prineville, Oregon 97754

**CALIFORNIA CUT-OFF**  
 It is estimated that 250,000 emigrants used the California Cut-Off trail to the gold diggings in the Sierra Nevada and the fertile farm land in the interior valleys.

**SOUTH PASS**  
 "I am weary of this journey. I long for the quiet of home where I can be at peace once more...." (Agnes Stewart, 1853)

**FT. BRIDGE**  
 "It is built of daubed with mud shabby concern." (J. 1846)

**FT. LARAMIE**  
 "We found a number of here—many with broken-down some preparing to pack, others back...." (Dr. T., 1849)





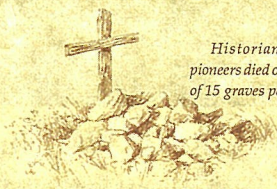
# TRAIL

Special  
Illustrative Edition



## GRAVES

Historians believe that 30,000 pioneers died on the way west, an average of 15 graves per mile.



## INDEPENDENCE ROCK

Independence Rock was the "great register of the desert" where travelers would carve their names. It marked the mid-point on the Oregon Trail and was usually reached by early July.



## HUNTING

On the way west the pioneers killed and ate buffalo, antelope, rabbits and sage hens.

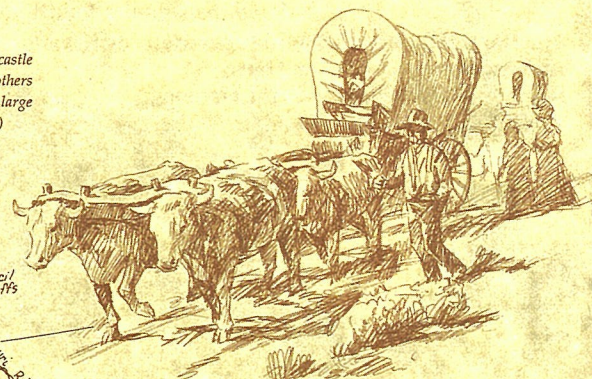
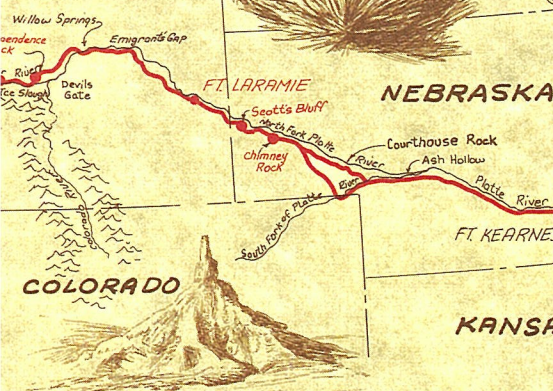
## OREGON TRAIL

Historians recognize 1843 as the official beginning of the Oregon Trail. That spring a group of nearly a thousand men, women and children, 120 wagons, and 5,000 head of cattle assembled at Elm Grove, Missouri to begin the 2,000 mile overland journey to Oregon.

## SCOTT'S BLUFF

"(Scott's) Bluff looks like an old castle with a rounding top and several others similar in line like a number of very large buildings." (Asahel Munger, 1839)

WYOMING



KANSAS

MISSOURI

## INDEPENDENCE

"The Emigrants were encamped in every direction for miles around the place awaiting the time to come for their departure." (James Pritchard, 1849)

## CHIMNEY ROCK

"This afternoon we sighted at a distance the so-called Chimney Rock... nothing new otherwise." (Charles Preuss, 1842)

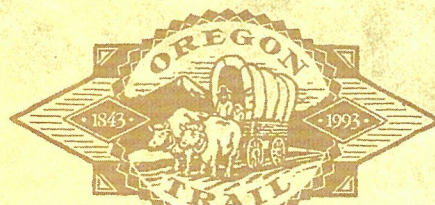


## MOUNTAIN MEN

The mountain men were the first to discover the route that became the Oregon Trail.

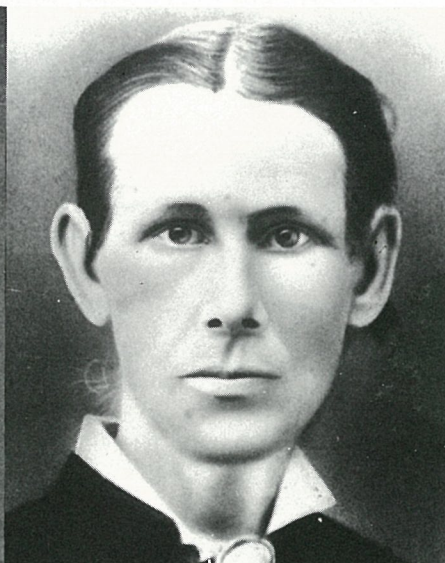
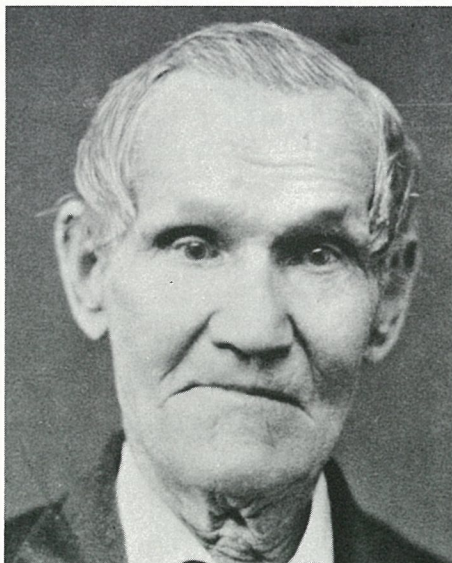
## PROVISIONS

The following provisions were advised for each adult making the trip over the Oregon Trail: 150 lbs. of flour, 25 lbs. of bacon, 15 lbs. of coffee, 25 lbs. of sugar, a quantity of yeast for making bread, and salt and pepper.



Correction: Fort Boise should appear in western Idaho not eastern Oregon.



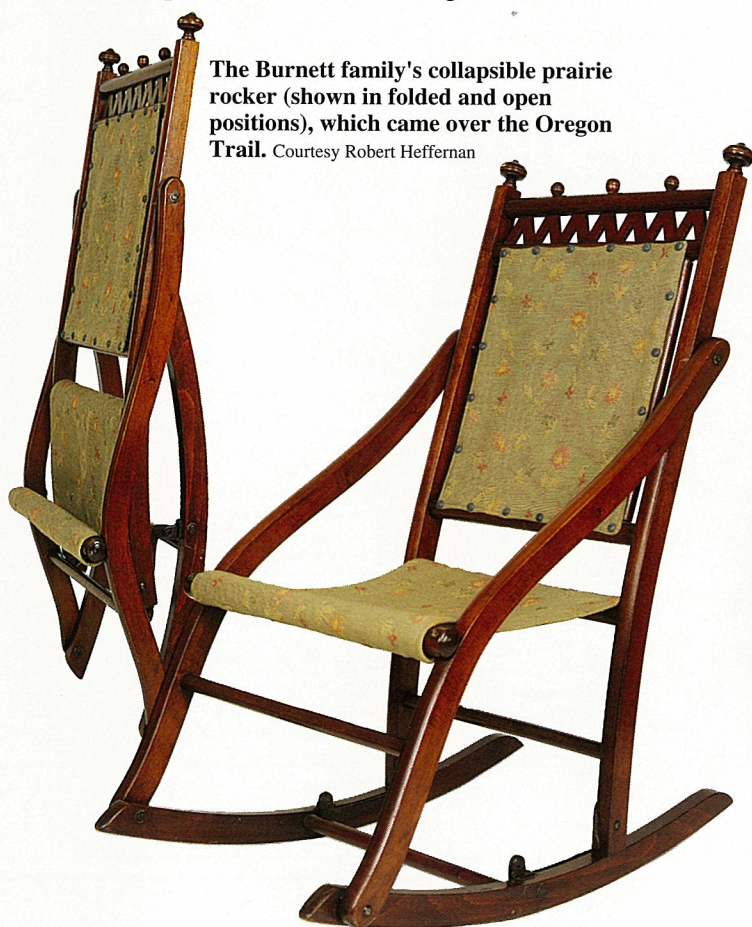


Southern Oregon Historical Society #9474, #9738

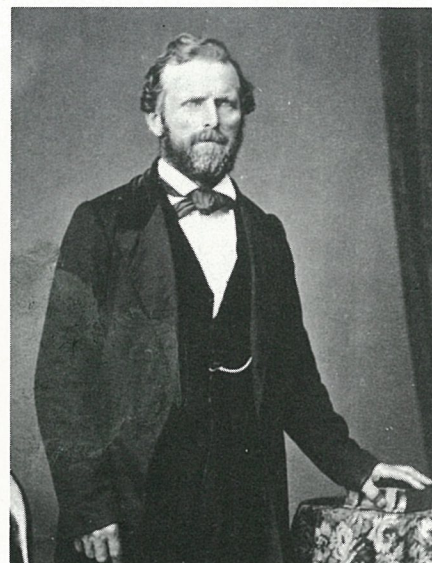
### JOHN S. BURNETT & MARTHA BURNETT HANLEY

Mexican-American War veteran John Burnett first entered Oregon from California in 1849. He liked what he saw, returned to the East for his family, and brought them over the Oregon Trail in 1852. Burnett settled his family on a donation land claim in Round Prairie, just south of Roseburg.

One of Burnett's daughters, Martha, caught the attention of Michael Hanley of Jacksonville as he passed through the area on business. Hanley took out a land claim near Burnett and married Martha in 1854. In 1857 the couple settled on a farm they purchased in southern Oregon, later known as The Willows.



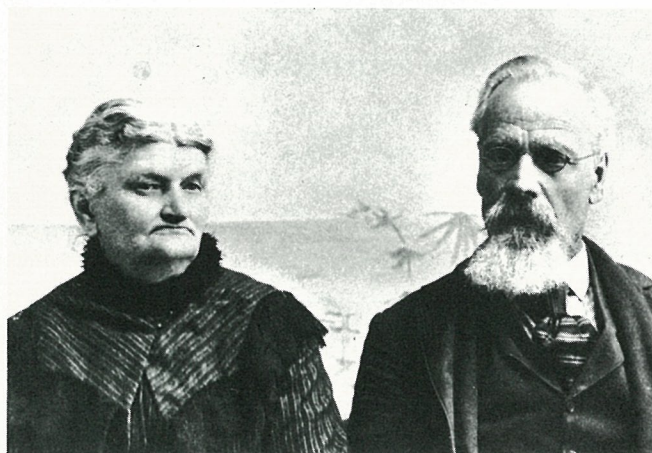
The Burnett family's collapsible prairie rocker (shown in folded and open positions), which came over the Oregon Trail. Courtesy Robert Heffernan



Southern Oregon Historical Society #14223

### JACOB WAGNER

Jacob Wagner journeyed across the Oregon Trail in 1850. After mining for gold in Yreka, California, he returned to Oregon in 1852, settling a few miles north of Ashland on what is now called Wagner Creek. As contact with American Indians escalated in 1853, a stockade, known as Fort Wagner, was built on his property. The fort also sheltered neighboring settlers.



Southern Oregon Historical Society #8039

### JOHN M. & MARYUM MCKEE

Maryum McKee dug a yellow rose from her father's Missouri yard and tucked it into the wagon just before she and her family left for Oregon. The McKees arrived in the Rogue Valley in 1853 along with Maryum's father and stepmother, John and Roxy Ann Bowen. Both families settled at the foot of a small mountain, which they named Roxy Ann. It was there that Maryum first planted her Missouri rose.





Southern Oregon Historical Society #469, #467

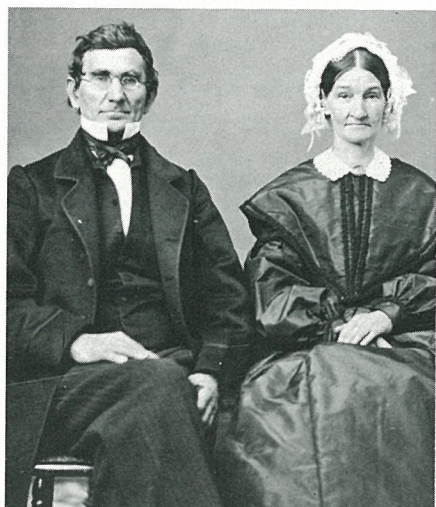
William Royal, Barbara, and their son Jason Lee Royal (left); Thomas F. Royal family (right).



## WILLIAM ROYAL & THOMAS FLETCHER ROYAL

William Royal, a circuit-riding preacher from Illinois, traveled with his family over the Oregon and Applegate trails in 1853. Their trip is well-documented in published diaries from four unrelated families, including the Hoffmans, who traveled on the same wagon train. Each diary entry describes incidents of daily trail life from various perspectives.

Upon arrival in Jacksonville, Thomas Fletcher began raising funds to build the first protestant church in southern Oregon. A preacher like his father, William, Royal established the Methodist-Episcopal Church, erected at Jacksonville in 1854.



Southern Oregon Historical Society #12218

## WILLIAM HOFFMAN & CAROLINE SHAFFER HOFFMAN

William and Caroline Hoffman came to southern Oregon in 1853 with a party of eighteen people, including their six daughters and seven hired hands. The family acquired a cabin six miles from Jacksonville that they made larger by placing two covered wagons to be used as bedrooms at the cabin's sides.

The Hoffman girls married within the Jacksonville community. Among their husbands were the town's banker, carpenter, hardware merchant, tinsmith, lawyer, and owner of the marble works. Most of the Hoffman's needs could be met within their own family.

ON TO OREGON



Thomas Fletcher Royal packed his bible in a saddlebag and rode from town to town in southern Oregon, bringing regular prayer services to communities without organized churches. He later founded the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Jacksonville (right).

Southern Oregon Historical Society #86.1.327, #673

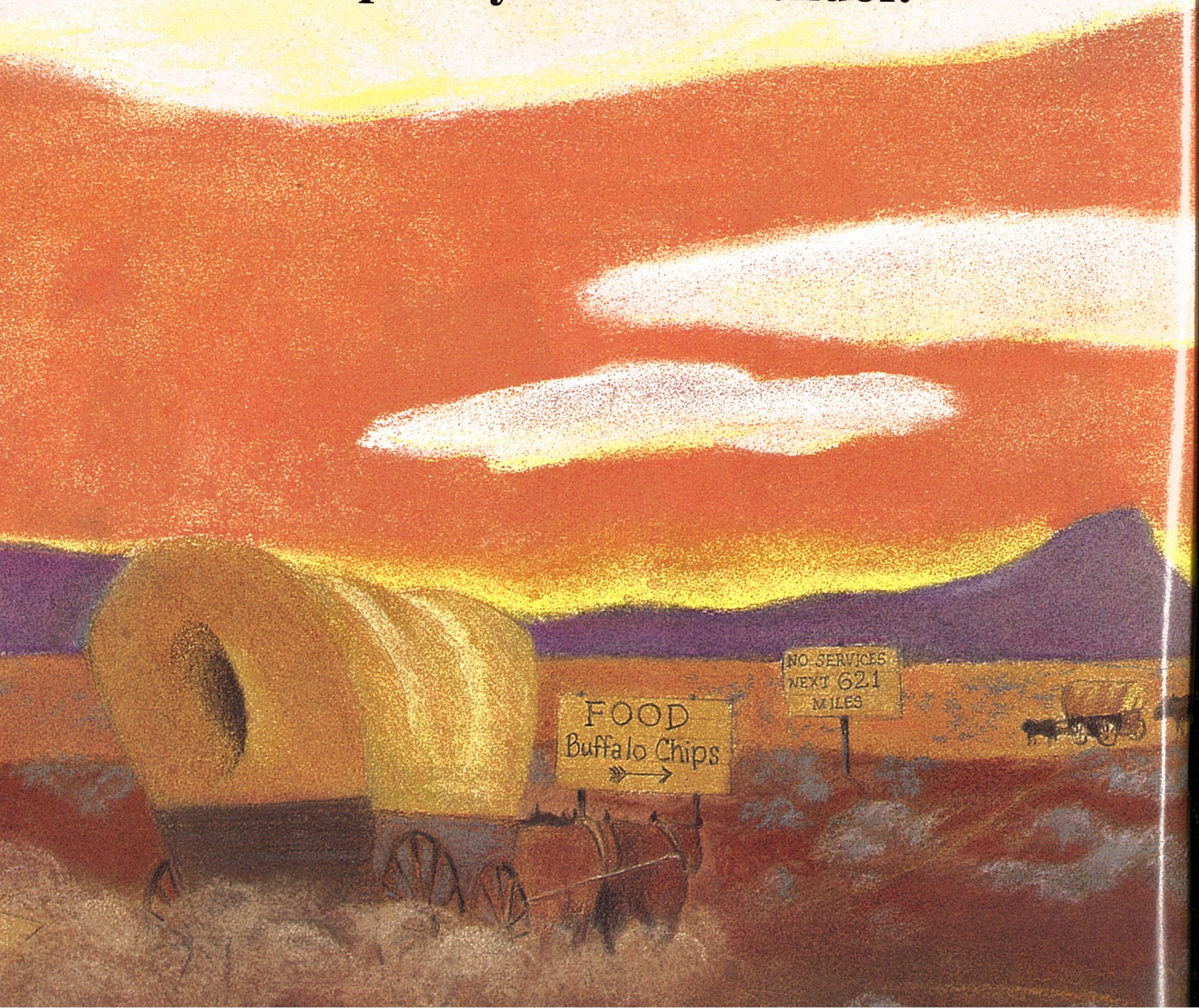




# BACON, BREAD,

by Peggy A. Lutz

The boring fare of the emigrants was  
broken up by an occasional buffalo  
or plucky trailside vendor.

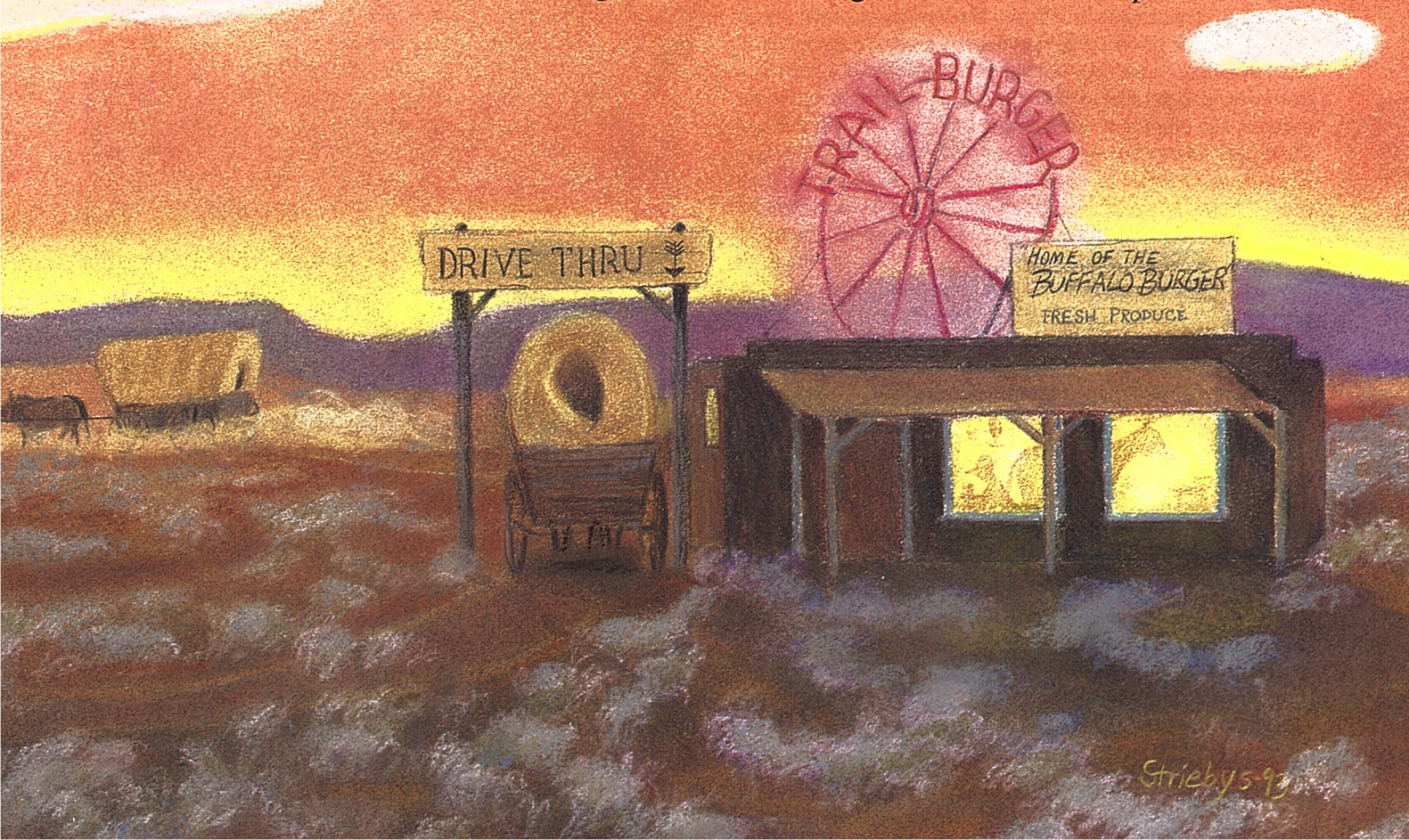




# & COFFEE TO GO

**A** traditional image surrounding the Oregon Trail is one of thin, desperate pioneers facing an endless horizon without food or water. It is time this myth was dispelled. Except for occasional lean periods, food for the trail traveler was adequate — though often boring. Unlike popular belief, people did not die frequently because of inadequate food supplies. Most deaths came because of accidents, childbirth, and diseases; as many as 5,000 may have died during the cholera epidemic alone from 1849-54.<sup>1</sup>

When supplies ran dangerously low, pioneers almost always found the help they needed. The government often sent troops from the forts with a wagon of flour and a herd of cattle, as recounted by traveler Sarah Elizabeth York.<sup>2</sup> Roadside vendors sold their goods at trading posts established as early as the 1840s; Margret Kuhn Staley Caples, in her reminiscences of 1852, recalled proprietors of a trading post in the Blue Mountains who raised cattle, slaughtered and sold beef, and offered fine vegetables from their garden at “enormous prices.”<sup>3</sup>





Settlers along the trail sold and gave supplies to the pioneers, and the Indians often traded with the emigrants, as noted by Andrietta Applegate Hixon.<sup>4</sup> Last, and maybe most importantly, the pioneers helped each other.

There were times, however, when privation took on desperate proportions. Esther Belle Hanna wrote in her 1852 diary that toward the end of their journey, members of her train were eating a crust of bread and a cup of water for supper.<sup>5</sup> Martha Hockersmith described her experience with the "Lost Train," a party that took a wrong turn and got lost in the Cascade Mountains. She wrote that the members were reduced to eating "blue beef," or uncooked meat. With winter fast approaching, they did not dare stop their search for civilization long enough to cook.<sup>6</sup> Emeline Fuller, who journeyed across the Oregon Trail at age thirteen, recalled that her party was attacked by Indians, and those who survived ate horsemeat, rosebuds, and "pulsey," which may have been Indian parsley.<sup>7</sup>

All these people made it to Oregon without starving, as one form of help or another greeted them on the trail. This was the case with most pioneers. Instances such as the starvation and cannibalism of the Donner party — the famous wagon train that was trapped in a snowstorm in the Sierras — were the exceptions, not the rule.

Food was much more tedious than it was sparse. Basics of the pioneers consisted of bacon, bread, and coffee.<sup>8</sup> Beans were not listed among the daily overland foods because their preparation time prohibited their daily use, especially in high altitudes. However, beans occasionally enhanced the otherwise strict diet of the travelers, as did other special foods. According to Merrill Mattes, some of the extras brought along included chipped beef, rice, tea, dried fruit, dried beans, saleratus (now known as baking soda), vinegar, cheese, cream of tartar, pickles, ginger, mustard, corn meal, and hardtack.<sup>9</sup> Those fortunate enough to have these "luxury foods" prepared beans, cheeses, and other delicacies during layovers. Cecelia Emily McMillan Adams recorded such an occurrence: "P. done some washing and I baked bread and made pumpkin and apple pies, cooked beans and meat, stewed apples and baked suckeyes in quantity sufficient to last some time, besides making Dutch cheese, and took everything out of the wagon to air."<sup>10</sup>

The Adamses were a well-fed family. Others lived with just the basics as were prescribed by such popular guidebook writers as Lansford Hastings. He suggested each pioneer bring 200 pounds of flour, 150 pounds of bacon, ten pounds of salt, twenty pounds of sugar, and ten pounds of coffee for the six-month trip.<sup>11</sup> This list of staples spelled monotony.

Hunting and fishing supplemented this dreary diet and helped save meager supplies. The men hunted and fished chiefly during layovers, while the women cooked, washed, cleaned out the wagon, and, in some cases, foraged for wild fruits and vegetables.

In diaries written before the 1870s, buffalo was the most frequently mentioned source of wild game; substituted for salted pork, buffalo generally was appreciated by the pioneers, though some did not care for it. Recalling her family's journey, Virginia Watson Applegate wrote that she did not like the buffalo meat because it was dark and coarse.<sup>12</sup> On the

other hand, Martha Ann Tuttle McClain pronounced buffalo to be the best meat she had ever tasted.<sup>13</sup> Amelia Hadley wrote, "Our curiosity is pretty much satisfied as to Buffalo, having had some to eat, you could not tell it from beef."<sup>14</sup> Some even attributed medicinal properties to the wild meat. Sarah J. Cummins wrote that buffalo meat allowed her to enjoy good health for the first time.<sup>15</sup>

The next most frequently hunted wild game was antelope. When a man in the company of Maria A. Belshaw killed one, she wrote with relish that her party had a feast.<sup>16</sup> Another common item on the plates of pioneers was grouse. Amelia Hadley described her experience with it: "... plenty of grouse which is a kind of prairie [*sic*] chicken and you could not tell them from tame chicken they are blacker than a prairie [*sic*] chicken, but the meat is as white and sweet as tame chicken."<sup>17</sup> Tame chickens were brought by at least one family, mentioned in the diary of Margaretta Faber McClintock.<sup>18</sup>

Pioneers also obtained fish, either by trading with the Indians or by catching it themselves. Esther Belle Hannah entered in her diary that her husband and two other men in her mess caught more than twenty "two foot long trout" at the Lewis Fork of the Columbia; consequently, they had a "rich repast of trout with stewed currants" one night.<sup>19</sup> A surplus of fish never went to waste, for the women salted it.<sup>20</sup> There are accounts of women fishing as well; one diary spoke of a woman casting her line into the stream, though she did not catch anything.<sup>21</sup>

Vegetables, too, supplemented the travelers' diet. On the eastern leg of the journey, women and children foraged for wild greens and berries.<sup>22</sup> Cultivated produce became more available as the pioneers traveled farther west. As early as 1836, at Fort Walla Walla on the banks of the Columbia River, the missionary Narcissa Whitman wrote in her diary that her party was treated to a feast of melons. Largest among them was the "mushmelon," or muskmelon, which is a cantaloupe.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the years of migration, fresh fruits and vegetables were abundant on the Oregon section of the trail. In 1850 Mary Jane Hayden wrote that her train had purchased produce from an Oregon farmer.<sup>24</sup> In 1878 Pamela Francis Benson wrote that her party always tried to camp where it could get plenty of apples, tomatoes, muskmelons, pears, peaches, and sweet corn.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the most quaint example is recounted by Arvanzona Angeline Cooper, who wrote that she had a "webfoot welcome" in Oregon. The settlers came rushing out to greet the pioneers with aprons, hats, and pails full of the bounty of the earth. There was so much produce, according to Cooper, that the travelers could not eat it all and had to hide the leftovers behind trees to get ready to receive the next huge batch.<sup>26</sup>

The variable in the bread-bacon-coffee formula was the bread. While wagons were traveling, a biscuit was made with saleratus, which was used as the leavening agent. Many diaries mentioned that in the alkali regions, "a white crust of saleratus"<sup>27</sup> was scraped off the rocks and used to raise biscuits.<sup>28</sup>

During layovers, enough bread was made to last for a long period. Andrietta Applegate Hixon wrote that her mother became quite proficient at making sourdough.<sup>29</sup> This wild yeast was the most commonly used leavening for risen bread,



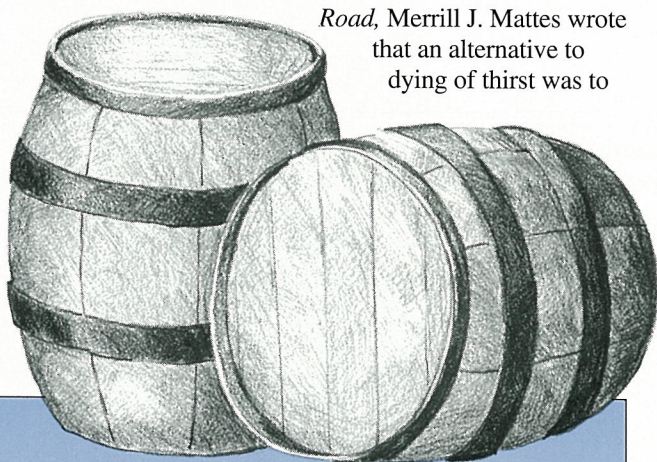
though cultured yeasts were not unknown on the Trail. Margret Kuhn Staley Caples wrote that she prepared yeast cakes for the journey before leaving the Midwest.<sup>30</sup>

Churning butter was the one chore that was easier on the Trail, for the morning's milk was placed in a churn or can and lashed to the back of the wagon. The movement of the wagon did all the work and by nightfall there was butter and buttermilk.<sup>31</sup>

Though coffee was a staple, pioneers also drank an interesting concoction made of water, sugar, and a splash of vinegar. Mary Jane Hayden wrote of using this "acid" drink at the Soda Springs<sup>32</sup> (in present-day Idaho) as did Mary Collins Parsons.<sup>33</sup> Also at the Soda Springs, Margret Kuhn Staley Caples wrote that they took their store of lemons and tartaric acid (which is found in wine vinegar) and "made refreshing drinks greatly relished by all."<sup>34</sup>

Although alcohol generally was not used as a regular drink on the trail, many families brought a keg of whiskey for trading with the Indians or for medicinal purposes, such as numbing wounds and buoying one's spirits after the crossing of a particularly threatening river.

When water and other beverages ran out, pioneers had to resort to drastic measures to survive. In *The Great Platte River Road*, Merrill J. Mattes wrote that an alternative to dying of thirst was to



## FOR MEDICINAL PURPOSES

by Jackie Williams

Recognizing possible "stressful" situations during the journey west, realistic emigrants included brandy, rum, or whisky in their necessary list of provisions, claiming it was for "medicinal purposes." Some even devised a detailed plan for having a nip now and then:

*Now none of us were in the habit of taking a drink, yet we came to the conclusion that it would benefit us, keep us from taking cold; therefore we [who] were a little sick and took some brandy all around. I want to say right here that we had agreed that no one was to have brandy from that bottle unless we were sick, and then a little quinine must be added . . . the brandy, seemed to give us instantaneous relief.<sup>1</sup>*

1. E. W. Conyers, "Diary of E. W. Conyers," *Transactions*, Oregon Pioneer Association, 33rd annual reunion, Portland, 1905, 425.

drink the urine of mules, which "tastes like coffee."<sup>35</sup> Some pioneers quenched their thirst with straight vinegar.<sup>36</sup> Sarah Elizabeth York noted that often her party had to get water out of the river in which cattle had waded and even died.<sup>37</sup> Abigail Scott Duniway wrote that near Fort Kearney, the water was so thick with sand it had to be mixed with corn meal, let settle, then strained. The result was tolerably clear water.<sup>38</sup>

Another worry for pioneers was finding fuel. Cooking on the Oregon Trail was primitive. Of all the sources of fuel, the one used most frequently was buffalo chips. On his trip from Missouri, David E. Pease noted, "At night we camped where there was not a stick of wood [and] the 'bois de vaché' was to [sic] wet to burn."<sup>39</sup> The account of Mary Jane Long mentioned the preliminary burning of buffalo chips to a cinder. Then the frying, boiling, and cooking began. She said the smell of green smoke could never be forgotten.<sup>40</sup>

Buffalo chips were replaced by other sources of fuel, especially after the 1870s when buffalo herds were depleted. Margret White Chambers wrote that it was not much fun cooking with sagebrush, because it was so dry it burned like straw. She added that sometimes the flapjacks turned black due to ashes blowing from the fire. (Chambers also gave a recipe for flapjacks: warm water, soda, and some sourdough, if it was available.)<sup>41</sup> An 1898 diary described the employment of cow chips for a fire.<sup>42</sup> Other fuels mentioned were sageroots<sup>43</sup> and a shrub called greasewood.<sup>44</sup>

The foods cooked on these various fires were not always plain and monotonous. At times there were extraordinary foods prepared over struggling fires. On the Fourth of July, 1883 Sarah Collins fed her family canned strawberries and cake made without eggs.<sup>45</sup> The Applegates ate boiled custard one night using the last of their eggs.<sup>46</sup> As late as 1895, Katherine Stuart Forbes wrote in her overland journal that her family members indulged in apricot shortcake with milk once they reached the Oregon section of the Trail.<sup>47</sup>

It would seem that Forbes took just as much delight in the milk as she did in the shortcake; milk became rare especially in the alkali regions, which Merrill Mattes says were worst in the Wyoming area.<sup>48</sup> Here the high density of salt in the grass and water made the livestock sick and in some cases killed them. There were a number of antidotes for trying to cure the cattle and oxen. The most common antidote was to feed them raw bacon. Another was to pour vinegar down their throats. A third, equally ineffectual means was to feed them lard. The most successful but taxing way to save the livestock was to drive them straight through the region without allowing them to eat or drink.

By the time the pioneers reached their destination, they were sick of bacon, bread, and coffee. They had endured their share of privation and desperation. Etched in their memories, however, were the rare occasions when they ate apricot shortcake and other delicacies or luxury foods on the Trail.

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# GOURMET

by Jacqueline Williams

**F**ourth of July celebrations with toasts of good cheer and "guns bursting in air" took place 150 years ago when men, women, and children crossed desolate lands and endured tremendous hardships to find new homes in the West. No day captured the courage and ingenuity of these hardy travelers so well as July Fourth. Special foods and festivities were part of the celebrations.

Just as folks back home baked and fried so did the emigrants. Diaries reveal that on the Fourth of July dazzling desserts vied for special honor as creative cooks baked fruit, pound, frost, jelly, and sponge cakes. The custom may have started with Captain John Frémont, the noted explorer. On July 4, 1842, when his friends in St. Louis provided him with a "large supply of excellent preserves and rich fruit-cake [sic]."<sup>1</sup> Frémont procured his cake the easy way; those who followed him baked their own. Frémont's cook did not worry about having the right ingredients, for St. Louis was a commercial center. Butter, eggs, fruit, and brandy were available ingredients for a rich fruitcake.

Prairie cooks had flour, sugar, and spices, but they had to hope that their flour was not damp, the brandy was still in the bottle, and the cows were still giving milk. The smart emigrants already had figured out that if they poured milk into a jar, the jostling of the wagons bouncing along the road pockmarked with ruts and grooves transformed the white liquid into butter. Emigrants also had to know how to bake a cake without eggs. Many travelers did not have chickens, and trading posts usually did not sell eggs.

Strange as it may seem, baking cakes without eggs was quite common in the mid-century. Without heated hen houses, chickens did not lay eggs in the winter. Eggless cake recipes found in early cookbooks give examples of what the emigrants baked on that special day. The following recipes are not abbreviated; since early food writers assumed people knew how to bake, they did not give detailed directions.



# FOODS ON THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

## *Cake Without Eggs—No. 1*

2 cups and a half cups of flour, one cup of sugar, one cup sweet milk, one half cup of butter, one teaspoonful of cream of tartar, one half of soda. Flavor with lemon.<sup>2</sup>

## *Fruit Cake [sic] Without Eggs*

1 pound fat pork chopped fine; pour over it 1 pint boiling water or coffee, 2 cups molasses, 1 cup sugar, 2 pounds raisins, 1 pound currants, 2 tablespoons cinnamon, 1 tablespoon nutmeg, 1 tablespoon allspice, 1 teaspoon soda, 8 cups flour.<sup>3</sup>

**F**ruit pies also made the list of delicacies that appeared on the holiday menu. Flat surfaces such as wagon seats, a board, and the top of the provision boxes were the favored places for rolling out crusts. If a rolling pin was not available, crafty cooks used a cup, a bottle, or their hands to shape the dough for the crust. A flaky crust was not the desired finish but rather one that would hold a filling and not burn on the bottom when prepared over a quick burning, hot fire.

Lard was the preferred shortening for pies, although when that was not available, tallow, fat rendered from beef or mutton, was used. No shortening meant a bland crust of flour, water, and salt. Fruit in those days was air-dried, except when trail cooks made pies from freshly gathered berries. Before it was put into the pie crust, the dried fruit had to be softened by either soaking in hot water or simmering over a fire.

Besides baking cakes and pies, emigrants made a special attempt to obtain fresh meat. Soups, stews, and fried or roasted victuals prepared from antelope, sage hens, buffalo, fish, and wild fowl were featured attractions. Around several campfires, meat turned up in savory pies. "The crowning piece of the feast was a savory pie, made of sage hen and rabbit, with a rich gravy; the crust having been raised with yeast,

was as light as a feather," recalled Phoebe Judson.<sup>4</sup> Before being put into the pie dough, the meat was fried, stewed, or roasted. The juices and fat made the gravy; wild onions or garlic might have been added for flavoring.

Incredulous as it sounds, ice cream desserts were featured at several holiday festivities. Taking advantage of the snow in the mountains, clever cooks sweetened milk, packed it into containers, and froze the concoction in makeshift ice cream machines. Thanks to Charles Parke, a recipe survives:

"This being the nation's birthday . . . I procured a small tin bucket which held about 2 quarts. This I sweetened and flavored with Peppermint—had nothing else. This bucket was placed inside a wooden bucket, or Yankee Pale [sic], and the top put on. Nature had supplied a huge bank of coarse snow, or hail, nearby, which was just the thing for this New Factory. With alternate layers of this, and salt between the two buckets and aid of a clean stick to stir with, I soon produced the most delicious ice cream tasted in this place."<sup>5</sup>

**T**he prize for the most elaborate dinner on the Fourth of July surely would have been awarded to the E.W. Conyer party. Its members began their preparations on July 3, when the men took boards from the covered wagons and formed them into tables which were decorated with evergreens and wild flowers. While the men hunted game, the women prepared the food and made a flag which "waved as majestically and graceful as though it had been made of the best Japan silk." Their bill of fare follows:

## *Meats*

Roast Antelope, Roast Sagehen, Roast Rabbit, Antelope Stew, Sagehen Stew, Jack-Rabbit Stew, Antelope Potpie, Sagehen Fried, Jack Rabbit Fried.

## *Vegetables*

Irish Potatoes (brought from Illinois), Boston Baked Beans, Rice, Pickles.

## *Bread*

White Bread, Graham Bread, Warm Rolls, fresh from the oven.

## *Pastry*

Pound Cake, Fruit Cake [sic], Jelly Cake, Sweetwater Mountain Cake, Peach Pie, Apple Pie, Strawberry Pie, Custard Pie. (A dozen or more varieties, both of cake and pies not enumerated.)

## *Drinks*

Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, and Good, Cold, Mountain Water, fresh from the brook.<sup>6</sup>

As they settled in their new homes, the pioneers kept the spirit of the Glorious Fourth. The holiday still remains a celebration of patriotism and a reminder of the nation's more recent past.

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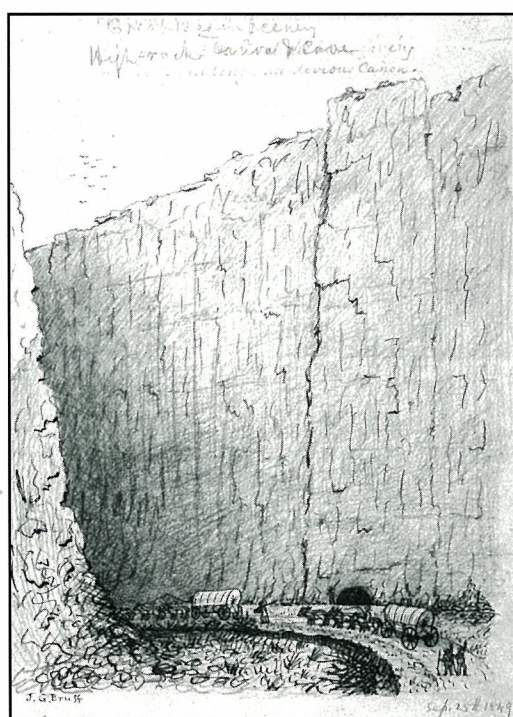
Jackie Williams is a free lance writer and cookbook author living in Seattle, Washington. These articles are taken from *Wagon Wheel Kitchens: Food on the Oregon Trail*, published by University Press of Kansas, August 1993.



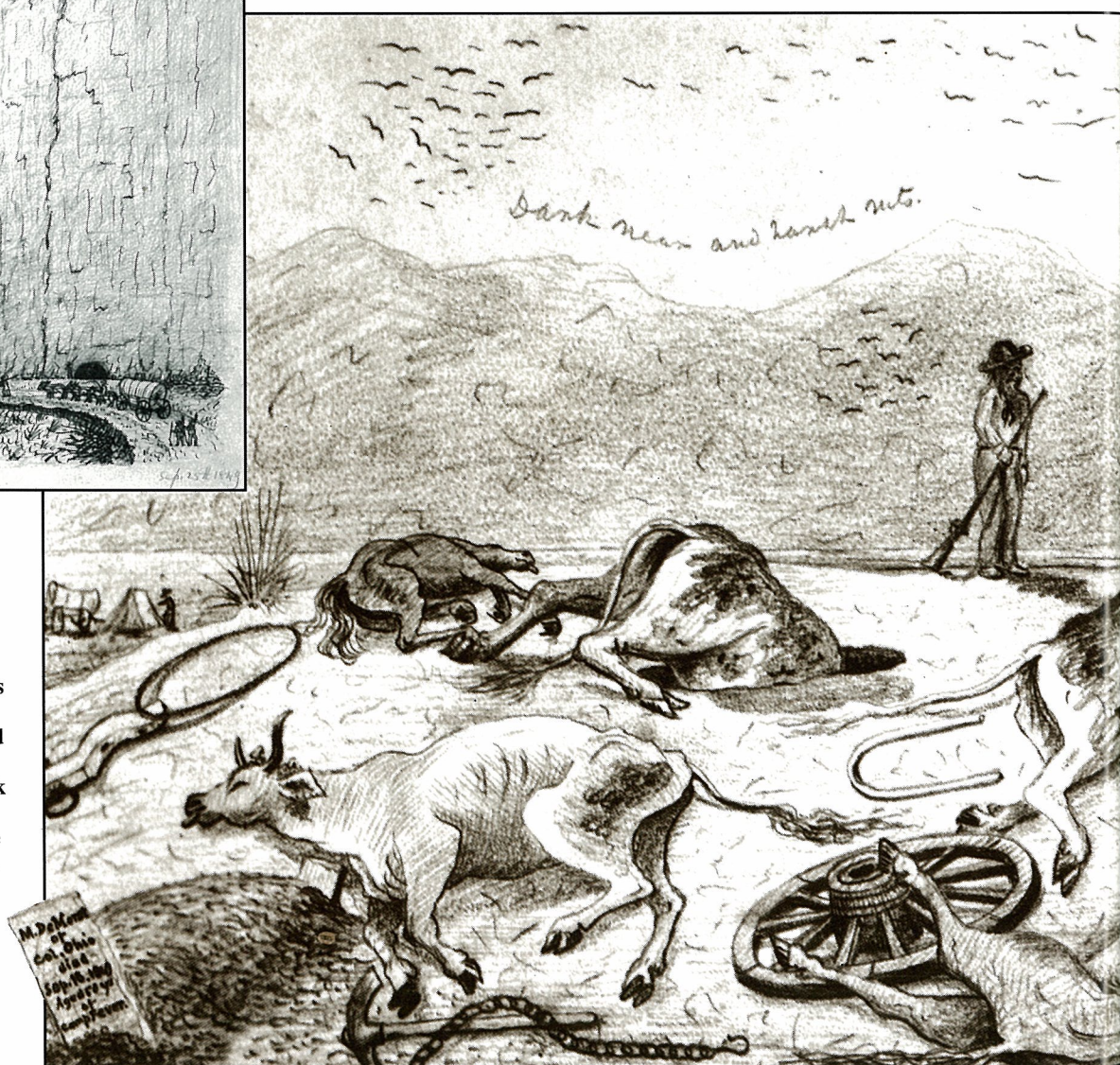
# BRUFF

## J. GOLDSBOROUGH BRUFF

PICTURES FROM  
THE "PERFECT GUIDE"



J. Goldsborough Bruff sought to provide Oregon Trail emigrants with the "perfect guide" through unknown western terrain. His illustrations and writings portrayed with blunt honesty the splendor and suffering on the Trail. Wagons enter High Rock Canyon (above). Suffering at Rabbit Hole Springs (right). Illustrations courtesy Huntington Library





Joseph Goldsborough Bruff was born in Washington, D.C., in 1804. His parents, who were second cousins, had eighteen children, with only five boys and an equal number of girls living to "grow up."<sup>1</sup> The father, a physician and inventor of dental tools, fostered the children's many talents, which included art and engineering. It is for these skills and his love of adventure that Bruff is remembered.

Adventure entered his life early. At the age of eight, Bruff saw the English invade the nation's capitol city in 1812. About the time Bruff was fourteen, he caught the attention of then General Andrew Jackson, who noted the youth's ability to sketch.<sup>2</sup> Later in his mid-teens, Bruff signed on as a cabin boy on a merchant vessel sailing from Georgetown.<sup>3</sup> Later he continued to travel to European and

South American ports.<sup>4</sup> Sometime prior to 1830, he returned to his family and took a draftsman position at the Gosport Navy-Yard, in present-day Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

According to a personal manuscript fragment, his "Spirit of adventure" was revived when Bruff, then a draftsman for the Bureau of Topographical Engineers, made duplicate drawings of all John C. Frémont's reports, maps, plates, and other documents for the two houses of Congress.<sup>6</sup> Soon thereafter, news of the discovery of gold in California reached Washington, D.C.

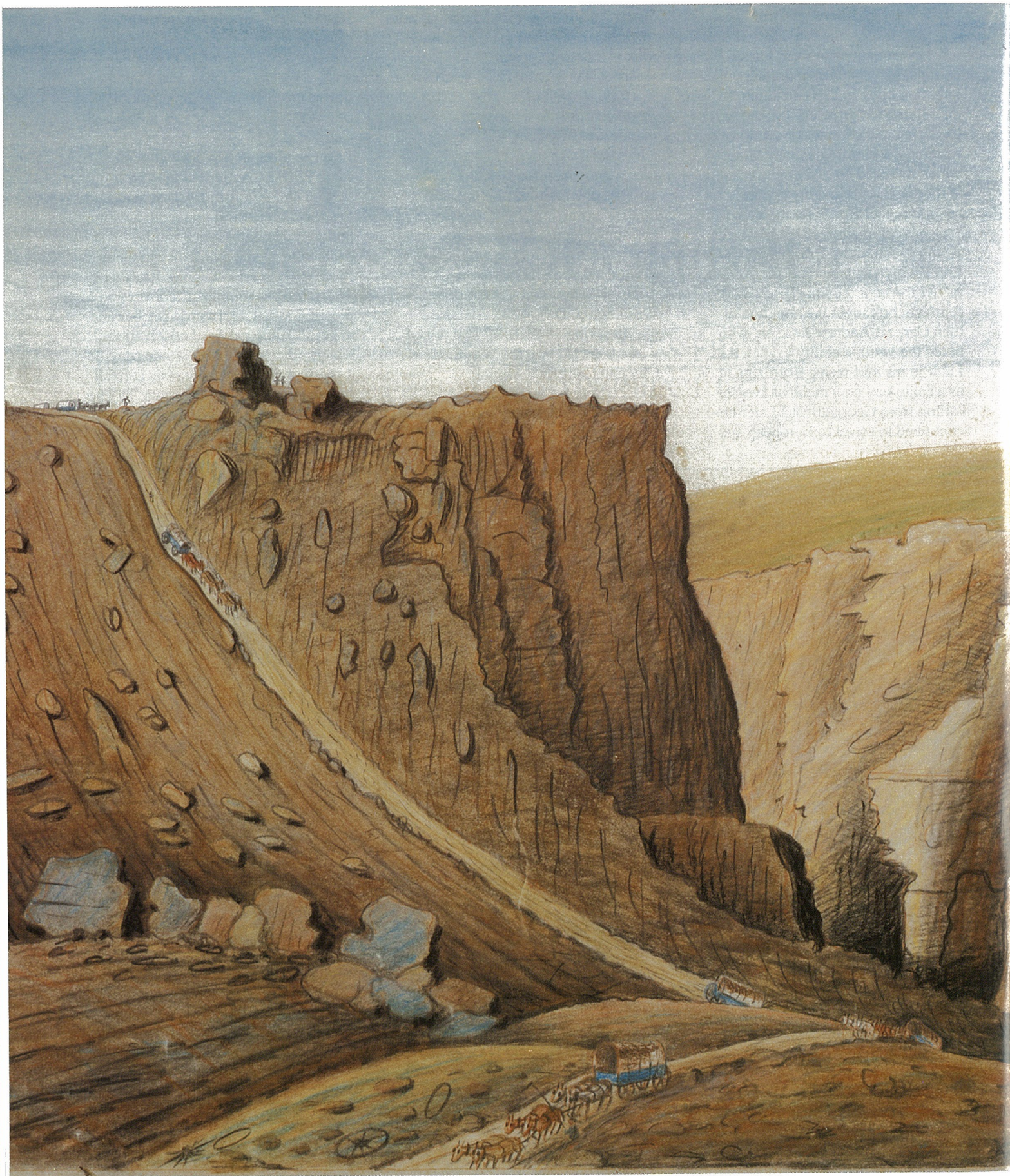
In spring 1849, Bruff had joined with others to form the Washington City and California Mining Association, for which he became the chair.<sup>7</sup> This emigration party, duly incorporated, was comprised of sixty-

six members, mostly young men stricken with gold fever. As noted in the *New York Tribune* in December 1848, "We are all fairly afloat upon one or the other of the three great C's of excitement—Congress, Cholera, and California."<sup>8</sup>

The group left Washington on April 2, 1849. A married man with several children, Bruff was "compelled to leave [the family] on credit, awaiting probably 8 months, ere I will be enabled to send a remittance to them."<sup>9</sup> In addition to seeking gold, Bruff was determined to compile a "correct and precise journal . . . [with] sketches and mete[o]r[o]logical [*sic*] observations" which, when published, would provide a "perfect guide in every respect to all future traveller[s] on that route."<sup>10</sup> The route chosen was the Oregon-California Trail.









Bruff led the group to the western outpost of the Sierra Nevada, about thirty-five miles from the Sacramento River by October 2, 1849. Like many who failed to find success during their westward adventure, the group disbanded. Although Bruff did not leave California to return to Washington until June 1851, his personal and professional skills provided the only rewards for his adventure.

True to his word, Bruff developed his "perfect guide." His final work incorporated notes and sections from many other sources, including Clayton's *Emigrants' Guide*, Ware's *Emigrants' Guide*, Jefferson's Map and the *Accompaniment*, Frémont's *Report* (the drawings for which Bruff had done while in Washington), and Hastings' *Emigrants' Guide*.<sup>11</sup> Bruff even copied information about Peter Lassen and the trail that bore his name into his journal. These appear to be almost identical with "Way Bill from Fort Hall to Willamette Valley" by Jesse Applegate, which was printed in the April 6, 1848, issue of *The Oregon Spectator*.<sup>12</sup>

In capturing the travels of the Forty-Niners, Bruff distilled through his journal and drawings the essence of the Great Migration like no guide book had ever done. Unlike Francis



Parkman, Bruff lived the full adventure and preserved for others the graphic landscape of those exciting days.

—JBD

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11. Read and Gaines, xxxv.
12. Read and Gaines, xxxvii.

**Bruff illustrations depict the four-mile descent down High Rock Canyon to Mud Lake Basin (left), Fort Hall (above) and a singular rock (below).** Illustrations courtesy Huntington Library



A Singular rock on left, 2 days to Sierra Nevada Mts

Sept 30/49



## CANON CREEK:

—6 feet wide. Good water, but no grass; you will pass over a rough road for some distance to

## DECEPTION VALLEY:

—This valley from the surrounding hills has the appearance of a beautiful meadow, but it is all weeds.

## DEEP FORK (of Humboldt):

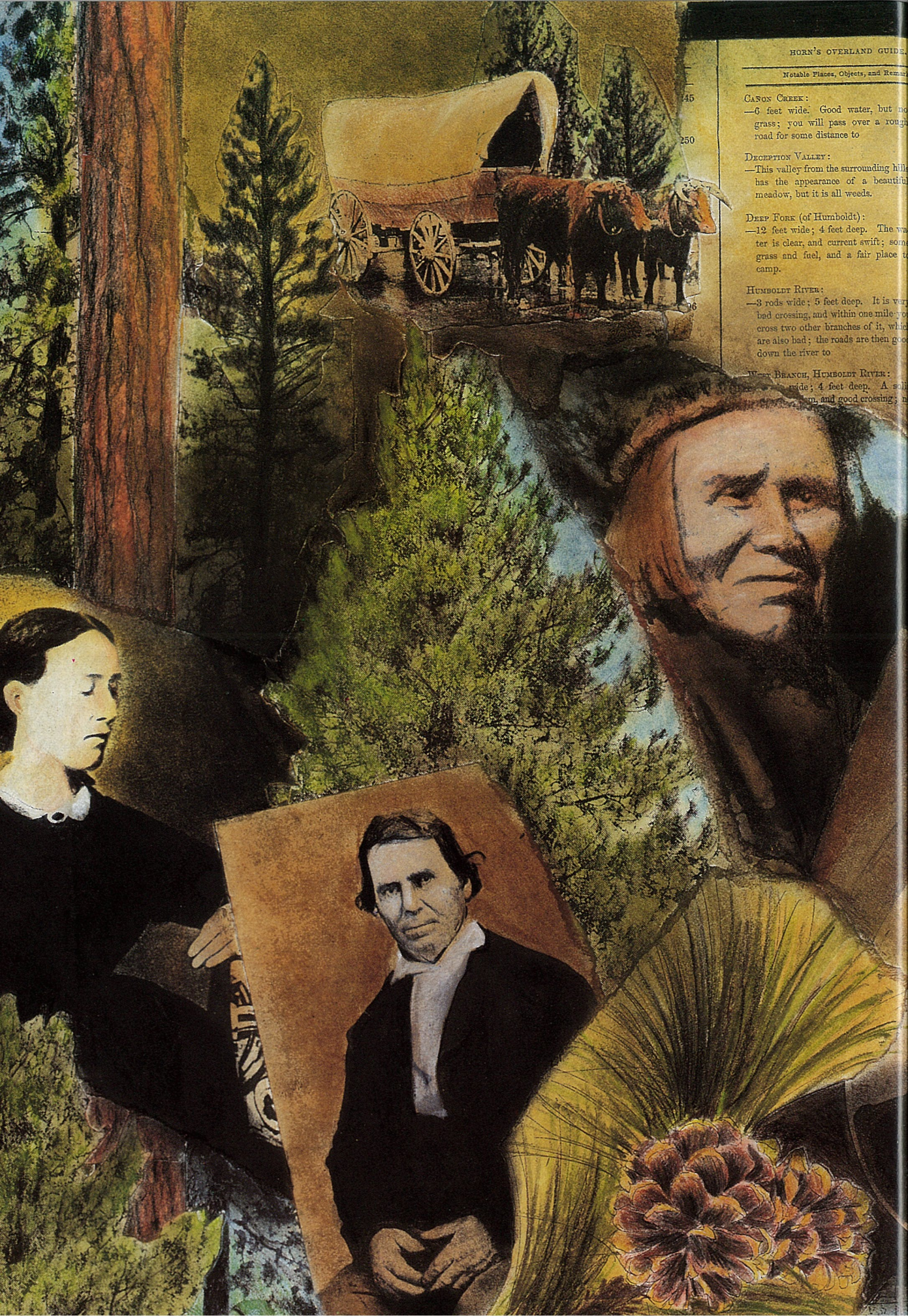
—12 feet wide; 4 feet deep. The water is clear, and current swift; some grass and fuel, and a fair place to camp.

## HUMBOLDT RIVER:

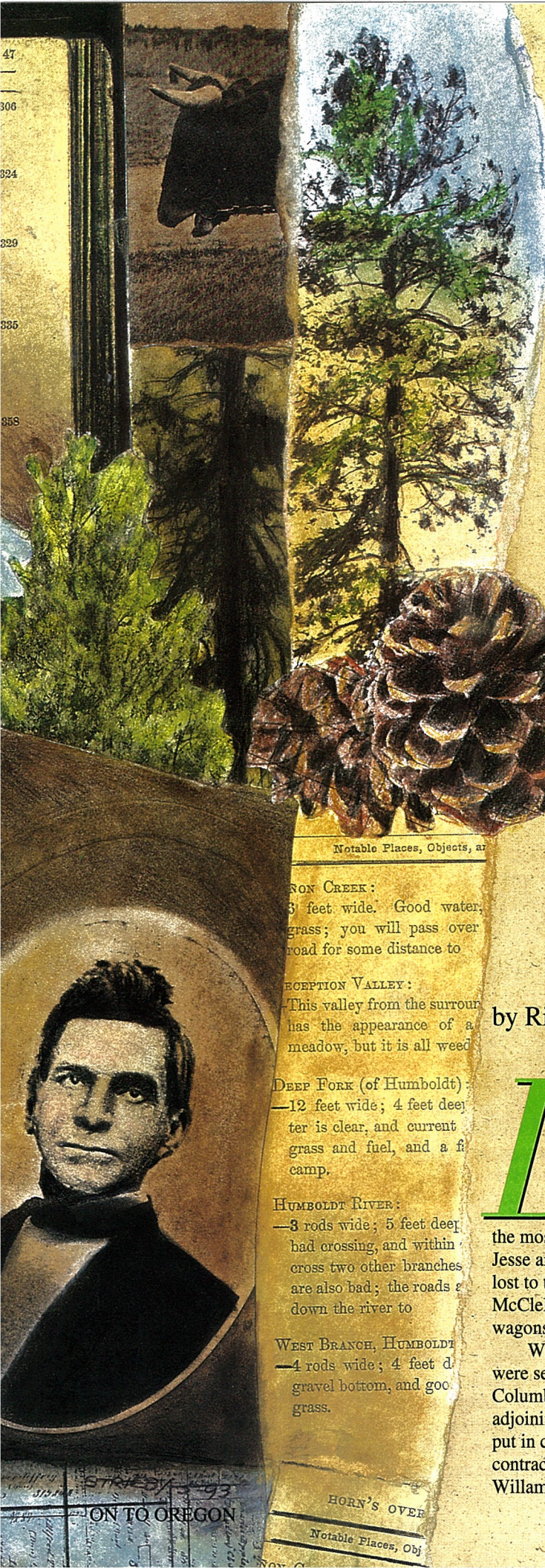
—3 rods wide; 5 feet deep. It is very bad crossing, and within one mile you cross two other branches of it, which are also bad; the roads are then good down the river to

## WEST BRANCH, HUMBOLDT RIVER:

—12 feet wide; 4 feet deep. A solid stream, and good crossing; no







# BLAZING THE APPLEGATE TRAIL

Though its first wagon train suffered much, the Applegates' new route through Oregon proved its worth — and endures to this day.

by Richard W. Ackerman

NON CREEK:

3 feet wide. Good water, grass; you will pass over road for some distance to

RECEPTION VALLEY:

This valley from the surround has the appearance of a meadow, but it is all weed

DEEP FORK (of Humboldt):

—12 feet wide; 4 feet deep; water is clear, and current grass and fuel, and a fine camp.

HUMBOLDT RIVER:

—3 rods wide; 5 feet deep; bad crossing, and within cross two other branches are also bad; the roads down the river to

WEST BRANCH, HUMBOLDT:

—4 rods wide; 4 feet deep; gravel bottom, and good grass.

During the winter of 1843-44, the Applegate brothers, Charles, Lindsay, and Jesse, with their families established winter quarters in the vacated building of the Methodist Mission at Mission Bottoms in the Willamette Valley. The Applegates recently had crossed the plains with the first major migration over the Oregon Trail. Relief at having reached their destination was clouded by grief over a tragedy that struck at the most hazardous portion of their journey, traversing the Columbia River. Both Jesse and Lindsay Applegate lost ten-year-old sons when one of their boats was lost to the rapids near The Dalles; they also lost a long-time friend, Alexander McClellan. Adding to their misery was the fact they had to leave their stock and wagons temporarily behind at Fort Walla Walla.

While pondering this tragedy, the brothers resolved that once their families were settled they would search for a route better than the one down the Columbia, into the western valleys. In spring 1844, the brothers relocated to adjoining parcels of land on Salt Creek, west of present-day Dallas; there they put in crops and built cabins to prepare for the coming winter. They also contracted to bring their cattle and wagons from Fort Walla Walla to the Willamette Valley.

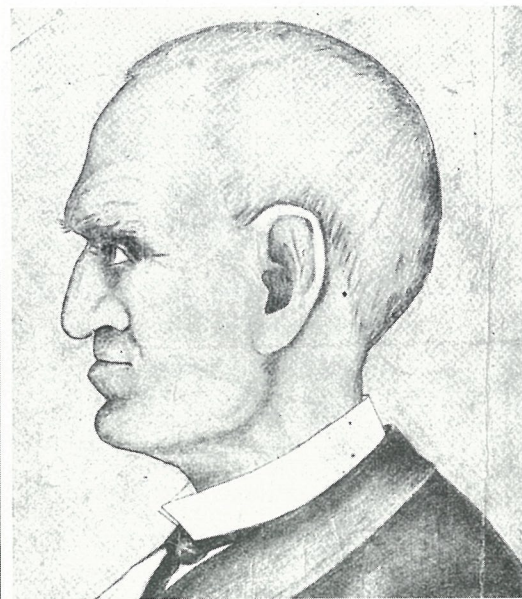
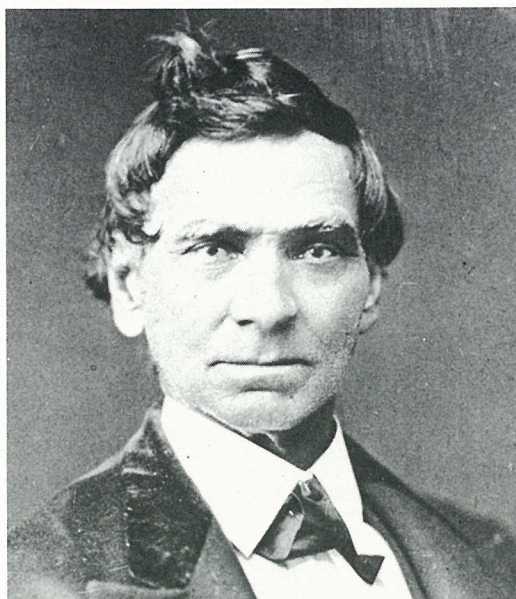


**B**y spring 1846, storm clouds were brewing between Great Britain and the United States over rights to the Oregon Country. The Provisional Government of Oregon was concerned because Britain's Hudson's Bay Company controlled the Columbia River corridor, which was the only route accessing the western valleys. Oregon's government hoped someone would find a new route for emigrants to follow. The Applegate brothers felt the time was right to follow through on their commitment to search for a new route.

Charles stayed behind to care for the three families and their property while Jesse and Lindsay formed a scouting party. In mid-June, they met with other trailblazers at La Creole Creek (today called Rickreall Creek) to prepare for the trip. The next day they were joined by Levi Scott, who just had returned from an unsuccessful expedition with information on some routes not to follow. The Applegate brothers previously had visited with Peter Skene Ogden and John C. Frémont and, on their advice, decided to follow the trappers' route south, making what changes were necessary to convert it to a wagon road. Once the scouting party reached the Bear Creek Valley in southern Oregon, they would be blazing an entirely new trail, which they hoped would intersect with the California Trail somewhere west of the junction with the Oregon Trail.

Thirteen trailblazers, each with his own saddle horse, pack horse, and supplies, headed south along the western extremities of the Willamette Valley after electing Jesse Applegate as the party's leader. At about present-day Cheshire, the trailblazers crossed the Long Tom River and headed toward Eugene, along the approximate route of today's Interstate 5 to just south of Ashland. There they headed east, reaching the top of Greensprings Mountain at about the same place present-day Highway 66 crosses. They continued east in close proximity to that highway, crossing the Klamath River at present-day Keno.

From there they headed south around

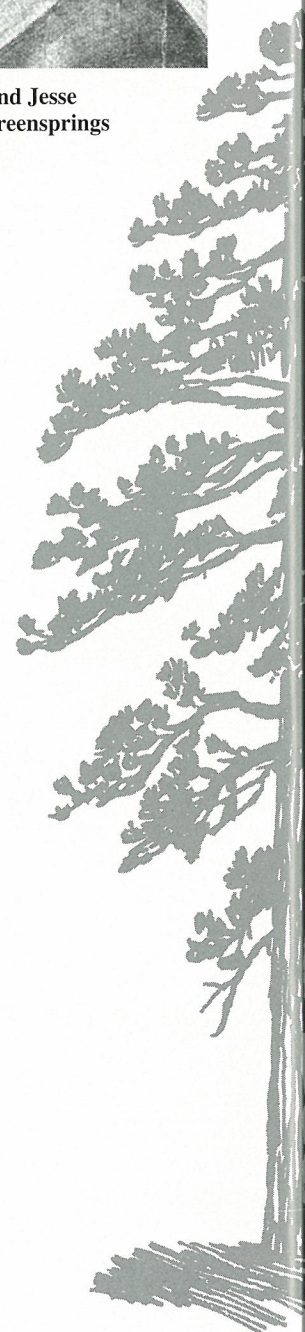


**Committed to finding a safer passage for travelers bound for Oregon, Lindsay (left) and Jesse Applegate led the ill-fated 1843 expedition through the Black Rock Desert, over Greensprings Mountain to the Willamette Valley.** Southern Oregon Historical Society #13118, #256

lower Klamath Lake. Local Indians led them to a natural crossing of Lost River, where the water flowed over a shelf of solid rock, making a substantial natural underwater bridge that wagons could traverse safely. Finding this bridge played an important role in the establishment of a wagon road through what was commonly known in the early days as the Lakes Country. After crossing the river, the trailblazers rounded the north end of Tule Lake and headed east again. In this area, they followed trails made by Modoc Indians, who lived there and traveled, hunted, and gathered food as far east as the southern shore of Goose Lake.

Before reaching Goose Lake, the exploring party could see the Warner Mountain range to the east and headed for the lowest pass. From there they dropped down into Surprise Valley, crossing it between Upper and Lower Alkali lakes, continuing in a slightly southeasterly direction until they picked up a creek that led them into High Rock Canyon and eventually to the Black Rock Desert. After searching out water holes, they reached the Humboldt River near present-day Rye Patch Reservoir, just southwest of Winnemucca, Nevada. There the trailblazers decided a few of the party should stay behind to rest their stock while the others continued on to Fort Hall, Idaho, to obtain fresh supplies and to inform the Oregon Trail travelers of the new route.

Jesse Applegate led the advance group. He was quite successful in persuading pioneers at Fort Hall to try the new road to the Willamette Valley; he expressed confidence that this new







trail ultimately would be much better than the Columbia River route. Perhaps in his enthusiasm he overlooked stressing that the new trail still had to be cleared for wagon traffic, which would require a lot of work.

It has been estimated that there were more than 200 men, women, and children — and some historians report nearly 100 wagons — in this first group to travel over the southern road.

The trailblazers that stayed at Winnemucca hardly could believe their eyes when they saw the number of pioneers, wagons, and cattle coming down the trail to meet them. There had been no attempt while the scouting party was at Fort Hall to clear a path for wagons. That was something the pioneers of the new wagon train would have to do themselves.

task, even with today's modern, heavy-duty power equipment. Some of the more hardy men went ahead to help blaze the trail for the wagons. Levi Scott agreed to stay with the train, but he first met with the pioneers to warn them it was going to be a tough journey. It would require a lot of hard work and dedication to get through the mountains before winter snows trapped them. The pioneers assured him they would follow his directives explicitly. David Goff volunteered to stay behind and help Scott. With no more delay, the wagon train turned off the California Trail and headed toward the Black Rock Desert.

The wagons did not move as fast as Scott would have liked, although things went acceptably well until the pioneers reached the



**Applegate Trail remnants remain along Fletcher Creek in northeastern California to the west of Goose Lake.** Photo by Richard Ackerman

**E**quipped with pack horses and a few tools, the trailblazers leading the wagon train had about sixty days before winter storms set in to open more than 500 miles of road — a seemingly insurmountable

west side of Surprise Valley. Here they entered timber country and needed the cooperation of one another not only to clear the trail but to double-team or triple-team to get over some of the hills. This meant the train moved forward at the pace of the slowest wagons. From here on Scott spent most of his energy trying to get everyone to start on time and to take as few unscheduled breaks as possible. Although Scott did not know it yet, the winter of 1846-47 was going to be a record season of snowfall, with





**Covered by water when the Lost River was dammed in 1910, this section of the Applegate Trail reappeared during the drought of 1992 when the lake was completely drained.** Photo by Richard Ackerman

heavy snow starting very early. These storms were the same ones that trapped the Donner Party heading over the Sierras not far south of where Scott was crossing the mountains with his wagon train.

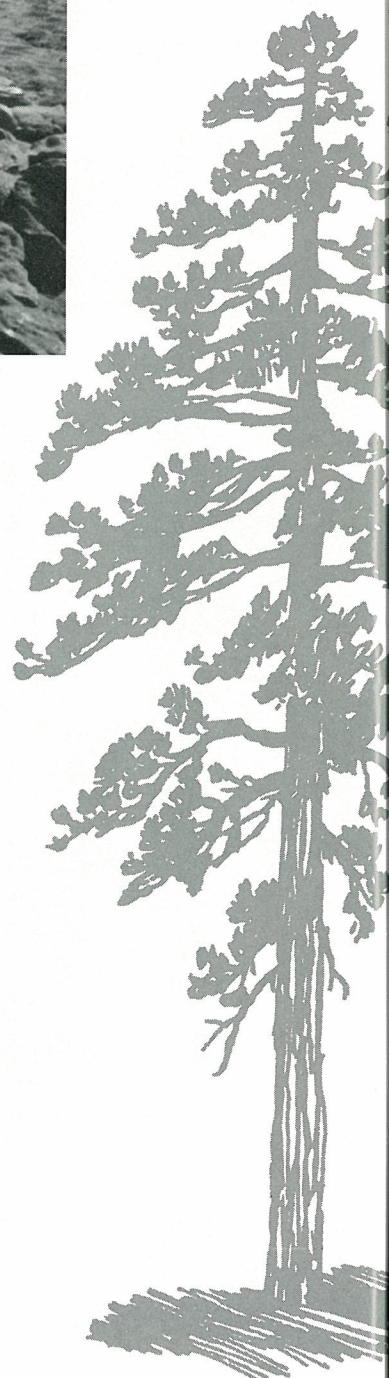
One morning the pioneers realized that one of their members had not shown up in camp the evening before — David Tanner, who was driving a few head of stock and was last seen just after crossing Lost River. Scott left orders for the wagons to continue on while he and several men went back to look for Tanner. Just west of the river they discovered signs that Indians had been tracking him. A little farther on, they found where a fight had taken place but had to search for some time before finding his body hidden in the bushes. He had been robbed of all of his clothing, including his boots, and, of course, the stock was gone. Whether the stock was stolen or just wandered off is not known. Scott's men buried Tanner at the site and concealed his grave as best they could. Scott and his party were not able to catch up with the wagon train until nearly nightfall.

By the time the wagon train reached the Rogue Valley, the winter rains had set in and from then on it rained or snowed most of the

way. Supplies were running out and game was scarce. The trail had become harder to clear, with brush and trees everywhere. The weather was cold; everything was slippery and muddy, and at times the best trail they could find was down the center of a creek that was extremely cold and rock-strewn. Trying to start a fire to get warm and dry was almost impossible. The pioneers were strung out for miles. Some were tired and did not want to move; others may have found a dry place under a tarpaulin and would rather stay there than get wet again. Scott tried to persuade those who were stopped to keep moving because things could get worse.

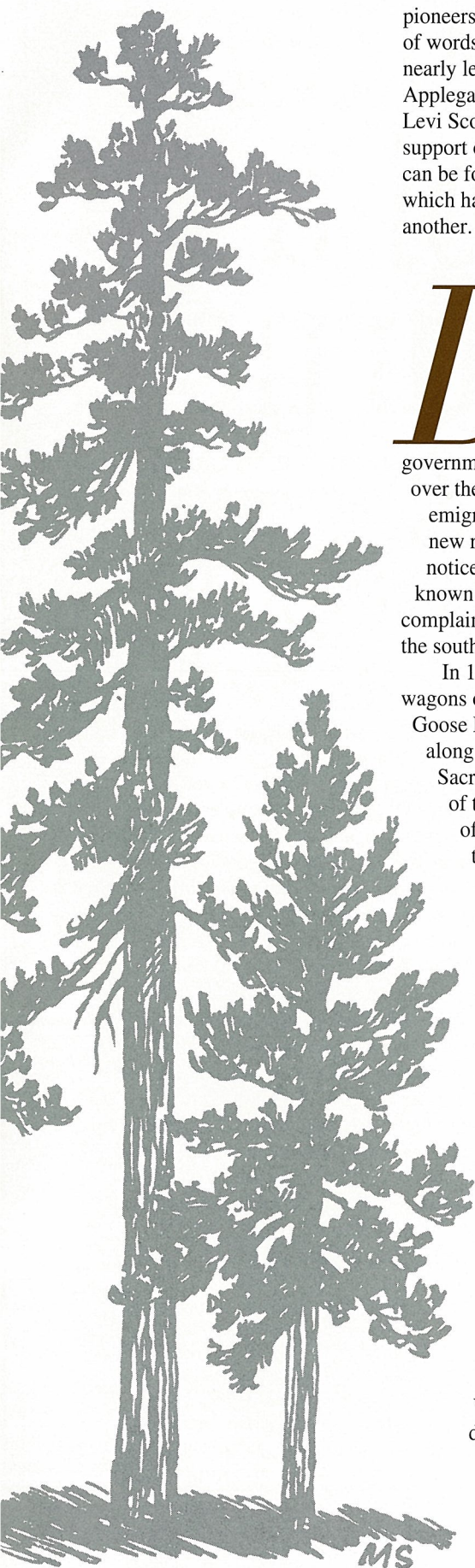
The first pioneers to arrive at Willamette Valley settlements passed word of what was strung out behind them, and relief parties immediately headed back down the trail with what supplies they had to share with those in need. Although the trailblazers always referred to this route as the "Southern Road," adversaries of the trail such as J. Quinn Thornton preferred to degrade the Applegate name and referred to it as the "Applegate Trail" at every opportunity.

Quinn blamed Jesse Applegate for all the hardships the first wagon train endured and felt



ON TO OREGON





Jesse should suffer for what he had put the pioneers through. Quinn commenced a war of words through the local newspaper that nearly led to a duel between him and an Applegate supporter. Though people such as Levi Scott and David Goff came out in support of the Applegates, even today there can be found signs of those hard feelings which have been passed from one generation to another.

**D**espite its detractors, the Applegates' alternate route through Oregon eventually contributed substantially to the development of the Northwest. Scott, at the urging of the provisional government, agreed to go back to Fort Hall over the Southern Road in 1847 to lead emigrants who wished to travel over the new route. In doing this, Scott made some noticeable improvements. Today there is no known historical evidence indicating public complaints from the 1847 trail travelers about the southern route.

In 1848 Peter Lassen brought a group of wagons over the Applegate Trail as far as Goose Lake, there heading southwesterly along the Pit River and eventually into the Sacramento Valley, establishing a branch of the California Trail. In 1849 it was one of the most frequently used routes by those from the East seeking to reach California gold fields.

In 1848 with the discovery of gold in California, Peter Hardman Burnett led 150 pioneers with fifty heavily laden wagons from Oregon City over the Applegate Trail going south to the gold fields. They were followed a few days later by a smaller group of men and wagons from north of the Columbia River. Burnett followed the Applegate Trail to the east side of Tule Lake before turning south, where his train intersected Peter Lassen's wagon tracks near the Pit River. Following Lassen's route, the pioneers soon caught up with Lassen and helped him blaze a new trail to his ranchero in the Sacramento Valley, a few miles north of present-day Chico, California. In doing this, they established the first wheel route between the valleys of California and Oregon. This remained a major



## APPLEGATE TRAIL BROCHURE AVAILABLE

To receive a free copy of the Tackle the Trail brochure on the Applegate Trail containing maps and items of historical interest, contact the

Southern Oregon Historical Society,  
106 N. Central Ave., Medford, OR  
97501-5926, tel. (503) 773-6536 or  
FAX (503) 776-7994.

wagon route for more than a decade. Later, of course, came Highway 99 and then Interstate 5, all on approximately the same corridor in Oregon as the original wagon route. Today Highway 140 ties Nevada's Humboldt Valley with the Rogue Valley of southern Oregon. In 1852 a group blazed a trail off the Applegate route south of lower Klamath Lake to the Yreka area; this trail was used for many years to help populate that part of northern California.

There is little doubt that the first group to use the Applegate Trail underwent a great deal of trouble and untold suffering. As time went by, however, this route proved its worth, becoming the basic corridor for the modern transportation system used by millions of people today.

*Richard W. Ackerman is a former president of the Oregon-California Trails Association and lives in Salem, Oregon.*



**Historical markers, such as this one at Klamath River, still note the efforts of the Applegates, Levi Scott, and early emigrants along the South Road.** Photo by Richard Ackerman





**WANDERING FOOT (1852)**

**MADE BY ALMEDIA GRIMSLEY MORRIS (1826-1912)  
COLLECTION OF LEONA RINK & HONORA DALLAS,  
OREGON CITY**

Almedia and Joseph Hooker Morris traveled to Oregon in 1851, Almedia pregnant with their daughter, Sarah. The solid blocks of fabric in the quilt are made from the same bolt of cloth that Almedia brought with her on the Trail to make baby clothes. The Wandering Foot pattern also suggests that the quilt was pieced on the Trail.

**WOOL QUILT (ca. 1860)**

**MADE BY AURORA  
COLONY MEMBERS  
COLLECTION OF OLD  
AURORA COLONY  
MUSEUM, AURORA**

The Aurora Colony was the creation of Dr. William Keil, a German immigrant, women's tailor, and Methodist minister. Keil formed his own communal society in 1844 and led the group to Oregon in 1856. The woolen fabric in the quilt was produced in the Colony.



# **P**attern of a Journey

## QUILTS OF THE OREGON TRAIL

**B**eginning in the 1840s, economic depression, a growing population, and hope for a better life prompted thousands of people to begin a 2,000-mile trip to the Oregon Country. These emigrants packed a few possessions in their wagons, organized into wagon trains, and set out across the plains and over the mountains following the Oregon Trail.

Almost every pioneer family brought quilts with them on their trip. Women made quilts especially for the journey or were given quilts by friends, church congregations, or relatives as going-away presents. Quilts were used on the Trail as bedding or shelter. Other quilts were rolled up or packed in trunks, sometimes cushioning valuable dishes or breakable items.

Some women worked on their quilting to help pass the time during the slow and arduous ride in a covered wagon. Other quilters postponed their needlework until they settled in their new homes. These women made quilts to celebrate their successful new life in the West.

Quilts that were made for the journey, on the journey, or after the journey reflect the pattern of a great migration during a unique era in American history.

*A traveling exhibit, Pattern of a Journey was developed by the Douglas County Museum of History and Natural History in Roseburg. Funding was provided by the Douglas County Museum and the Oregon Council for the Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*





**CRAZY QUILT (1894)**  
**MADE BY ANNIS**  
**PARSONS BONNETT**  
**(1822-1902)**  
**COLLECTION OF**  
**LANE COUNTY**  
**HISTORICAL**  
**MUSEUM, EUGENE**

Annis Parsons Bonnett and her husband Samuel Jasper Bonnett emigrated from Iowa to Oregon in 1854. They were the third family to settle in Eugene, Oregon, in 1855. Later they moved to a land claim on the McKenzie River where they made a home and raised eleven children. Crazy Quilts were often made to commemorate family life. The central feature of this quilt is a ribbon displaying the maker's name, age, and date the quilt was completed.

*Mrs. Annis Bonnett. Age 72 1894*



# Rethinking the Oregon Trail

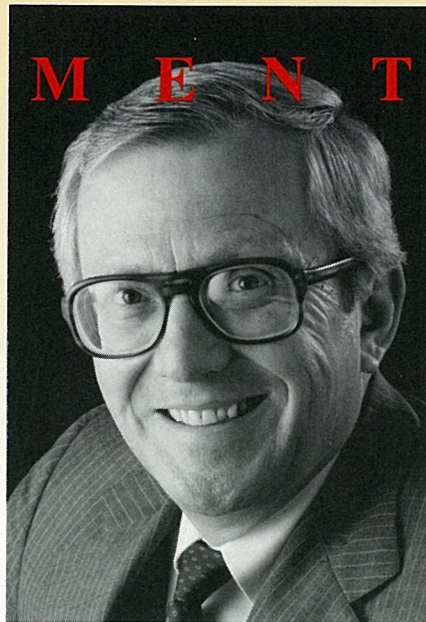
by Joseph Cox

SOME OF ITS LEGACIES ARE TIMELESS; OTHERS MUST CHANGE.

With a national spotlight on the Oregon Trail's sesquicentennial, we Oregonians enthusiastically celebrate what the Trail has meant to the history of our state and the larger nation. Commemorations, Chautauqua lectures, school pageants, and a flurry of other popular and scholarly activities will intensify. It is the ideal time to pause and reflect on how that central experience continues to influence and shape this state in many ways, some of which are outdated and others we hope will never change.

The lure of the Oregon Trail was one of the most powerful factors in the history of American migration. The vision was intoxicating. Oregon was where these hearty pioneers would realize their dreams; where the chance for a better life was reality, not mere advertising rhetoric; where the land was rich and its bounties were legendary. If people were willing to sacrifice, work hard, and dedicate themselves to the task, they could create a good life for themselves, their families, and their communities from the forests, fields, rivers, and seas of the Northwest.

On the frontier, pioneers could succeed without very much, if any, formal education. The standard three R's — reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic — were enough, and as Gordon B. Dodds wrote in *Oregon: A History*, "Education continued in the safe channels of the rudiments for all,



vocational training for the many, and a liberal arts education for the few." I have the impression occasionally that, despite the advances made by higher education in the past 100 years, something in our collective psyche still clings to that pioneer view. That's part of the legacy of the Oregon Trail that we must revisit and rethink.

The reality is that in the Oregon of the twenty-first century, with a dramatically changed economy in which high technology, management, manufacturing, and the service industry dominate, education — more than any other single feature — will determine whether Oregonians continue to enjoy the quality of life their predecessors always found at the end of the Oregon Trail. At the very time when, between now and the year 2000, 35 percent more young Oregonians will graduate from high school, the state will be compelled to downsize its higher education system by 8,000 to 9,000 students. That means cutting enrollment back to the levels of the late 1960s.

It is not difficult to comprehend the frustration of Oregon voters and taxpayers who, despairing of change occurring any other way, passed the property tax-restricting Ballot Measure 5. They never intended to cripple higher education and disinvest in Oregon's future, but that is the effect — a bit like my grandfather's twelve-gauge shotgun which "killed in front and crippled behind."

Oregon stands at one of those watersheds historians love to write

about. This state has a strong tradition of citizen participation directed at confronting issues. The pioneers who bequeathed that legacy also instilled a spirit of rising to the challenges each new generation faced. Oregonians can either pull together to work out and implement solutions to our problems that are in Oregon's best long-term interests or we can govern by referendum, initiative, and recall, and enjoy the party until the lights go out and the band goes home. Oregonians are more resourceful than that. Those who preceded us over the Trail that led to this special place surely would have answered the call. So must we.

The other side of the coin is that the pioneer experience also molded contemporary Oregon in ways that are enduringly relevant and timeless. The pioneer experience imprinted on our culture a strong sense of community and assisting one another when trouble strikes, which is both very western and very Oregonian.

*Late one Friday night in February 1993, during the season's worst blizzard, a van carrying the Southern Oregon State College men's basketball team skidded and rolled over three times in the Columbia Gorge near The Dalles. The response of that community to a party of travelers in trouble was so wonderful, caring, and beyond the call that none of us will ever forget it. From The Dalles hospital staff, to the local police and rescue teams, to the two couples who drove the bruised and shaken young men home to Ashland in vans borrowed from the hospital in yet another storm the next day, the response was pure Oregonian. The real spirit and the legacy of the Oregon Trail are still alive and well.*

*We all are going down the same trail together toward an unknown destiny. The way we will get there is by caring for each other and lending a hand to those who need it.*

*That's the Oregon way.*

---

*Historian Joseph Cox is president of Southern Oregon State College, Ashland.*





Photo by Catherine Noah

## THE NATIONAL HISTORIC OREGON TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER

### A MUSEUM TACKLES THE TRAIL

by Catherine Noah

**I**t sits atop a hill in the middle of nowhere, an imposing structure of glass and steel and wood surrounded by desert. But for the past year, more than 290,000 visitors have pilgrimaged to this incongruous mecca for one purpose: to learn what drew hundreds of thousands of emigrants to Oregon 150 years ago.

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, located on the Oregon Trail just outside Baker City, Oregon, is the largest of its kind in the nation says Jonne Hower, public affairs officer for the Bureau of Land Management, which operates the facility. From the center's perch atop Flagstaff Hill, visitors can see eleven miles of actual wagon ruts. It was for this reason the site was selected, out of several others throughout the country, by the federal government for an Oregon Trail memorial that would take five years and \$10 million to build.

Though Congress appropriated the manpower and \$6.7 million for the facility, it was a local effort from the beginning. Hower says, "The idea for the center was born in the hearts and minds of the people in the community. It was originally conceived of as a tool for economic development, but the people in the community have always had a fondness for the Oregon Trail."

Baker County residents raised more than \$1 million in state, local, and private donations before the center opened on May 23, 1992, and they have maintained a 250-strong volunteer organization to help run it ever since. Called the Trail Tenders, its members staff the gift shop and provide exhibit police who keep would-be pathfinders from riding the buffalo or climbing the wagons.

Unlike many museums in which history is told through glass cases and exhibit labels, the Interpretive Center strives to recreate the Oregon Trail experience in personal terms. There are no barriers to the exhibits; visitors can

smoked as the American Indians would have done to keep it pliable.

Mile markers set throughout the center help visitors follow a family through its 141-day, 1,924-mile journey over the Trail. Videos in small

theaters depict the family's start at Independence, Missouri; their dangerous crossing of the Snake River; and their arrival in Oregon City. Issues and emotions surrounding the migration are told through wall



Photo by Catherine Noah

**Exhibits strive to bring the visitor face to face with a realistic trail experience.**

touch the oxen or inspect the encampments. As they walk through a life-size wagon train, visitors can hear the pioneers' voices, the creak of wagon wheels, and the bellows of tired oxen. Visitors learn the tough decisions emigrants had to make at the journey's outset by loading a scale-model wagon—and leaving out what does not fit. They meet wagon masters reflecting on their responsibilities as leaders, women telling of daily hardships, and American Indians trading meat for cloth and firearms.

Designers of the center took great pains to depict the Trail experience authentically. The mannequins' clothes are dirty and worn as they would have been after several months on the Trail. The oxen have flies in their eyes and saliva around their mouths. The reproduction buffalo-skin teepee was

#### NATIONAL HISTORIC OREGON TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Where: 5 miles east of Baker City on Oregon Route 86 of Interstate 84.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, May through September; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, October through April. Best times to visit are afternoon hours, when the center is less crowded.

Cost: Free

For more information: Write the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 987, Baker City, OR 97814, or call (503) 523-1843.

Accommodations: Ample motels, bed and breakfasts, and RV parks are available in or near Baker City. For information, write the Baker County Visitor & Convention Bureau, 490 Campbell St., Baker City, OR 97814, or phone 1-800-523-1235.



displays, maps, and quotes from settlers' journals. "The little ones and myself are shut up in the wagons from the rain. Still it will find its way in . . .," says one. "It is like something out of Dante's Inferno, this barren waste of lava peopled with the skeletons of animals," says another.

Surrounding the center are 4.2 miles of trails that lead to views of wagon ruts and to living history areas where volunteers in period costume recreate a pioneer encampment and a lode mining operation. Emigrants' experiences also are retold through live presentations in the center's 150-seat indoor theater.

According to Hower, "The whole complex gives people a perspective of history that's personal . . . . You get a sense of what it might be like to be [an Oregon Trail emigrant]. To me, it gives another dimension to history."

*Catherine Noah is a free lance writer and editor living in Newport, Oregon.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE OREGON TRAIL

### BOOKS ABOUT THE OREGON TRAIL

■ *A Day With the Cow Column* by Jesse Applegate. (Ye Galleon, 1991). \$14.95  
One of Oregon's most celebrated pioneers, Jesse Applegate was among the first travelers along the Trail in 1843. In this small book he described in detail an average day in the life of the "cow column," the wagon train pulled by oxen that exemplifies the Trail experience.

■ *Emigrant Life on the Plains* by Elizur Shaw. (Harvey the Printer, 1992). \$7.95  
Elizur Shaw traveled along the Oregon Trail in 1862; twenty-four years later he penned this collection of memoirs about his trip across the plains.

■ *Ezra Meeker: Champion of the Oregon Trail* by Bert and Margie Webber. (Webb Research Group, 1992). \$10.95  
Ezra Meeker first came west on the Oregon Trail in 1852. At the turn of the century, Meeker became a nationally known figure as he traveled along the Trail by ox team at the age of seventy-six, publicizing the need for its preservation.

■ *My Journal*, 2nd ed., by Narcissa Whitman (Ye Galleon, 1985). \$7.50  
Narcissa and Marcus Whitman came to

Oregon with Henry and Eliza Spalding in 1836 to serve as missionaries to the Indians. After helping hundreds of pioneers on the last leg of their journey to Oregon, the Whitmans were killed by Cayuse Indians near Walla Walla in 1847. This brief diary describes Narcissa's journey as one of the first two white women to travel over the Trail.

■ *On the Oregon Trail* by Jonathan Nicholas and Ron Cronin. \$45.00  
This profusely illustrated, hardcover book describes in historical and narrative prose the scenes along the Trail.

■ *The Oregon Trail* by Leonard Everett Fisher. (Holiday House). \$14.95  
This volume, illustrated with historic drawings and photographs, briefly relates the history of the Trail and the story of those who traveled it.

■ *The Oregon Trail* by Francis Parkman. (Viking Penguin, 1982). \$5.95  
A classic book in the corpus of works about the American West, *The Oregon Trail* describes Parkman's adventures on the Great Plains and in the Rocky Mountains during the time of America's great westward migration.

■ *Oregon Trail* by Rick Steber. (Bonanza, 1986). \$4.95  
The first volume in the series *Tales of the Wild West*, this work is a collection of short stories set along the Oregon Trail.

■ *The Oregon Trail: Story of the Lost Trail to Oregon* by Ezra Meeker. (Webb Research Group, 1989). \$4.95  
This pamphlet briefly describes the life and career of Ezra Meeker and includes one of his short works describing the history of the Trail and calling for its preservation.

■ *The Oregon Trail Cookbook* by Leslie J. Whipple. (Maverick, 1992). \$14.95  
A collection of delectable recipes brought west by travelers along the Oregon Trail, this book is interspersed with vignettes about those pioneers with whom the recipes are associated.

■ *Wagon Wheel Kitchens: Food on the Oregon Trail* by Jacqueline Williams. (University Press of Kansas, 1993).  
This unique volume compiles food stories and recipes from the journey across the continent.

■ *Treasures in the Trunk: Quilts of the Oregon Trail* by Mary Bywater Cross. (Rutledge Hill Press, 1993). \$24.95  
Lavishly illustrated, this book features quilts made on the Trail or those made to commemorate the Trail experience.

■ *Oregon Trail Souvenir Book, Commemorative Edition* by Rick Steber. (Bonanza, 1992). \$2.50  
This little volume briefly highlights some of the most significant places and events along the Oregon Trail and is illustrated with pen and ink drawings by Don Gray.

■ *Oregon Trail Voyage of Discovery: The Story Behind the Scenery* by Dan Murphy and Gary Ladd. (KC Publications, 1992). \$5.95  
Beautiful color photographs illustrate sites along the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City in this book that depicts the land seen by the pioneers on their journey west.

■ *The Oregon Trail: Yesterday and Today* by William E. Hill. (Caxton, 1986).  
Illustrated with historic photographs, maps, and drawings, this work traces the early history of the Trail and subsequent developments that made it such a significant part of the history of the American West.

■ *The Ox Team: On the Old Oregon Trail, 1852-1906* by Ezra Meeker. (Indianapolis: Ezra Meeker, 1906).  
Published by Meeker himself, this volume (available at many public libraries) describes his many journeys along the Oregon Trail. Out of print.

### OREGON TRAIL DIARIES

Available separately or as a set for \$48.95, this illustrated collection of diaries covers the period from 1844 to 1865 when the heaviest travel took place along the Oregon Trail. Published by Webb Research Group.

■ *The Oregon Trail Diary of Twin Sisters Cecilia Adams and Parthenia Blank in 1852*. \$7.50

■ *The Oregon & Applegate Trail Diary of Welborn Beeson in 1853*. \$7.50

■ *The Oregon Trail Diary of Rev. Edward Evans Parrish in 1844*. \$7.50

■ *The Oregon & California Trail Diary of Jane Gould in 1862*. \$7.50

■ *The Oregon Trail Diary of James Akin, Jr. in 1852*. \$7.50

■ *The Oregon & Overland Trail Diary of Mary Louisa Black in 1865*. \$7.50

■ *Comprehensive Index to Oregon Trail Diaries*. \$7.50

### HOW TO ORDER

All currently published items listed above are available at The History Store, Southern Oregon History Center, 106 N. Central Ave., Medford OR 97501-5926. For shipping information, call (503) 773-6536 or FAX (503) 776-7994.



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