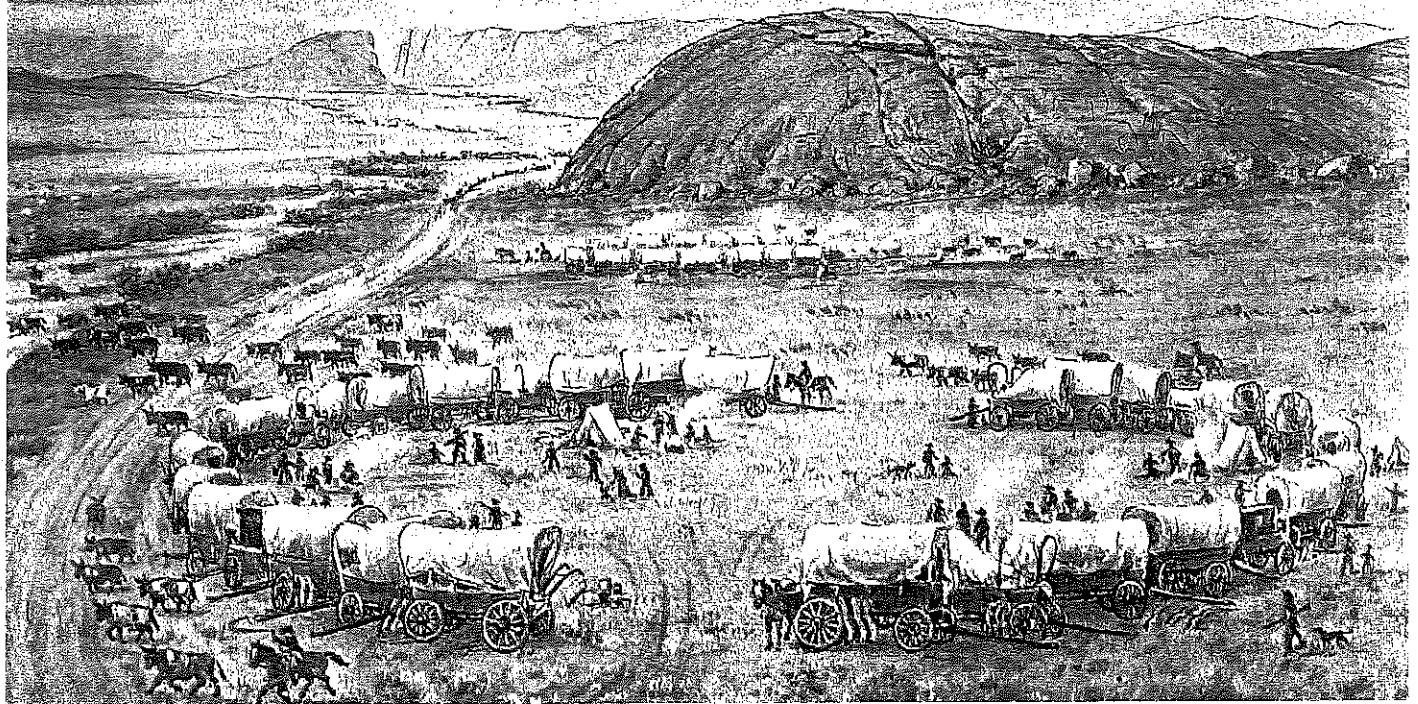


A group of pioneers in their covered wagons camped by the Sweetwater River near Independence Rock, Wyoming, in this classic painting of the Oregon Trail.



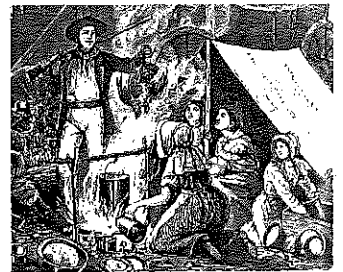
OREGON FEVER!

In 1852, an 11-year-old girl and her family became part of the great American migration west on the Oregon Trail

WORDS TO KNOW

- **cholera** (*n*): a highly infectious, often fatal intestinal disease
- **Oregon Country** (*n*): an area of the Pacific Northwest from which Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming were formed

1. **“G**o West, young man, and grow up with the country.” From the beginning of the United States, the spirit of those words seemed stamped on the American character. By the 1840s, as more of the continent beyond the Mississippi River opened for settlement, Americans were pushing relentlessly toward the Pacific Ocean—part of the great movement called the Westward Expansion.



2. From 1840 to 1860, at least 50,000 of these people took the 2,000-mile road called the Oregon Trail (*see map*). Mountain and prairie paths were sometimes jammed with covered wagons headed for **Oregon Country**—a place described by fur trappers and adventurers as a paradise of rich soil and mild climate.

3. “The Oregon fever has broken out,” the *Boston Evening Transcript* said in 1843, “and is now raging like any other contagion.”

Harriet Scott’s family was one of many who got the fever. In 1852, the Scotts—nine children ages 4 to 19 along with their parents—joined a wagon train from Illinois heading west. Much later in life, Harriet recalled that epic, six-month journey and the many hardships and wonders that she and her family encountered on the Oregon Trail.

4. Although I was but a girl of 11 years, I distinctly remember many things connected with that far-off time when all of our western country was a wilderness.

5. The first of April came, 1852. The long line of covered wagons, so clean and white, but oh so battered, torn, and dirty afterward. We took a last look at our dear homestead as it faded from view. We crossed the Illinois River on a ferry and stopped at St. Joseph, Missouri, to get more provisions.

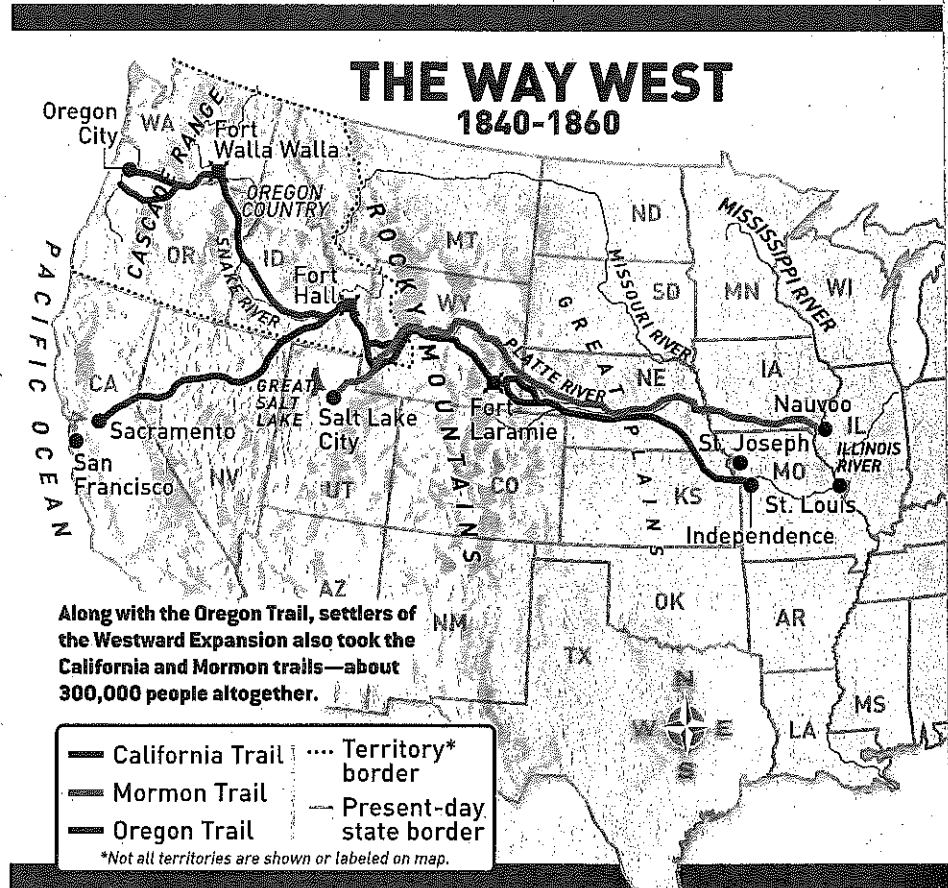
6. When we crossed into Nebraska, it seemed such a wide stretch of plain. An open country was now before us. The melting snows had made the streams high, the roads nearly impassable. The Platte River, swift and swollen, didn't seem to have any banks.

7. The loud voices of the drivers as they yelled and whipped up the oxen, the jogging of the wagons through the surging waters—the memory is with me yet.

8. Mother's health was not very good, and she fell victim to the cholera so prevalent that year on the plains. It was a crushing blow. We had to journey on, and leave her in a lonely grave—a feather bed as a coffin, and the grave protected from the wolves by stones heaped upon it.

9. The old emigrant trail held many hard experiences. On one occasion we made camp after dark, and there was such a stench in the air. Early daylight found us camped between two dead oxen on one side and a dead horse on the other.

10. On and on we journeyed, averaging 15 miles a day over cactus, sagebrush, hot sand. Everybody's shoes gave out and we bartered with Indians for moccasins.



Along with the Oregon Trail, settlers of the Westward Expansion also took the California and Mormon trails—about 300,000 people altogether.

“Oh, How We All Cried!”

11. One by one the oxen fell by the way. We came to Burnt River [near Snake River], a most desolate country. Here our baby brother Willie fell sick and passed away.
12. August passed. We were nearing the Cascade Mountains. The oxen were worn out, and the wagons were in poor condition to cross the mountains. Our provisions were exhausted by this time, and for days we had only berries and some soup made by thickening water with some flour.
13. I was given charge of an old sorrel mare with one eye named Shuttleback. One day we had traveled long in the heat and both Shuttleback and I needed water. Off at the side of the road a grove of willows was growing.
14. It was a steep place. The mare began to plunge and I soon saw

she was in quicksand. I held on tightly to her rein and yelled with all my might, knowing there was a man behind me driving cattle. He rushed ahead and brought back my father and three other men, and with ropes and a long pole they pried her out of the quicksand and floated her down the stream where she finally landed on her feet.

15. Then we reached Laurel Hill, in the Cascade Mountains. Oh, that steep road! We had to chain the wagon wheels and slide the wagons down the rutty, rocky road.

16. When we came to Fort Walla Walla, we saw a crowing rooster on a fence. Oh, how we all cried! There we stood, a travel-worn, weary, heart- and homesick group, crying over a rooster crowing.

Adapted from “Crossing the Great Plains by Ox-Wagons,” by Harriet Scott Palmer

MAP: JIM MCARDON/MAPWART