

The Mountain Men

The Lewis and Clark expedition stirred new interest in an old industry, the fur trade. Inspired by the explorers' reports of finding beaver in the Rockies, a Spanish trader named Manuel Lisa followed their route west. In 1807, Lisa led 42 trappers up the Missouri River. The next year, he took 350 trappers into the Rockies. For the next 30 years, trappers crisscrossed the West in search of valuable furs.

The Trapper's Life

The trappers, who were also called mountain men, lived hard and usually died young. During the spring and fall, they set their traps in icy streams. In July, they traveled to trading posts to swap furs for supplies or gathered for an annual "rendezvous," or get-together. Here is how writer Washington Irving described one rendezvous:

"This, then, is the trapper's holiday.... [The men] engaged in contests of skill at running, jumping, wrestling, shooting with the rifle, and running horses.... They drank together, they sang, they laughed, they whooped; they tried to outbrag and outlie each other in stories of their adventures and achievements. Here were the free trappers in all their glory."

The rendezvous may have been fun, but the trappers' lives were filled with hazards. Trappers were attacked by fur thieves, Indians, wolves, and bears. Mountain man Hugh Glass was mauled by a mother bear that threw chunks of his flesh to her hungry cubs before friends rescued him.

Accidents were common, too. A single misplaced step on a mountain, or a misjudged river rapid, often meant sudden death. Disease also took a heavy toll. When one man asked for news about a party of trappers, he learned that "some had died by lingering diseases, and others by the fatal [rifle] ball or arrow." Out of 116 men, he wrote, "there were not more than sixteen alive."

Freedom and Adventure

Trappers braved this dangerous way of life because of its freedom and adventure. A good example is Jim Beckwourth, a slave who fled Virginia to become a fur trapper. While hunting beaver in the Rockies, Beckwourth was captured by Crow Indians. According to Beckwourth, an old woman identified him as her long-lost son, and he was adopted into the tribe. "What could I do?" he wrote later. "Even if I should deny my Crow origin, they would not believe me."

Beckwourth lived with the Crow for six years and became a chief. By the time he left the tribe in the 1830s, the fur trade was in decline. Like other mountain men, however, Beckwourth continued his adventurous life as an explorer, army scout, and trader. In 1850, he discovered the lowest pass across the Sierra Nevada mountain range, known today as Beckwourth Pass.

The Mountain Men's Legacy

In their search for furs, the mountain men explored most of the West. The routes they pioneered across mountains and deserts became the Oregon and California Trails. Their trading posts turned into supply stations for settlers moving west along those trails.

A surprising number of mountain men left another kind of legacy as well—personal journals. Their stories still have the power to make us laugh and cry—and to wonder how they lived long enough to tell their tales.



The Californios

If Lewis and Clark had turned south from Oregon after reaching the Pacific, they would have found Spain's best-kept secret, a sun-drenched land called California.

The California Missions

In 1769, a Spanish missionary named Junipero Serra led soldiers and priests north from Mexico to California. Serra's goal was to convert the California Indians to Christianity. To do this, he began a chain of **missions** that eventually stretched from San Diego to just north of San Francisco. Each mission controlled a huge area of land, as well as the Indians who worked it.

Although the missionaries meant well, the missions were deadly to native Californians. Indians were sometimes treated harshly, and thousands died of diseases brought to California by the newcomers.

Settlers followed the missionaries to California. "We were the pioneers of the Pacific coast," wrote Guadalupe Vallejo, "building pueblos [towns] and missions while George Washington was carrying on the war of the Revolution." To reward soldiers and attract settlers, the Spanish began the practice of making large grants of land.

When Mexico won its independence in 1821, California came under Mexican rule. In 1833, the Mexican government closed the missions. Half of the mission land was supposed to go to Indians. Mexico, however, established its own system of land grants in the Southwest and gave most of California's mission lands to soldiers and settlers. The typical Spanish-speaking Californian, or *Californio*, was granted a **rancho** of 50,000 acres or more.

Life on the Ranchos

Life on the ranchos combined hard work and the occasional fiesta, or social gathering. Most families lived in simple adobe houses with dirt floors. The Californios produced almost everything they needed at home. Indian servants did much of the work.

The ranchos were so huge that neighbors lived at least a day's journey apart. As a result, strangers were always welcome for the news they brought of the outside world. During weddings and fiestas, Californios celebrated with singing, dancing, and brilliant displays of horsemanship.

In the 1830s, cattle ranching became California's most important industry. Cattle provided hides and tallow (beef fat) to trade for imported goods brought by ship. An American sailor named Richard Henry Dana described the goods his trading ship carried to California:

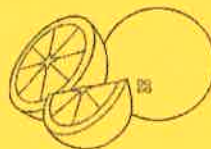
"We had...teas, coffee, sugars, spices, raisins, molasses, hard-ware, crockery-ware, tin-ware, cutlery, clothing of all kinds, boots and shoes...shawls, scarfs, necklaces, jewelry...furniture...and in fact everything than can be imagined, from Chinese fire-works to English cart-wheels".

Because California was so far from the capital in Mexico City, the territory was neglected by the Mexican government. Soldiers were not paid, and they took what they needed to survive from the people they were supposed to protect. Officials sent to govern California were often unskilled and sometimes dishonest.

The Californios' Legacy

In 1846, the United States captured California as part of the war with Mexico. Before long, Californios were a minority in California.

Still, the Californios left a lasting mark. California is full of Spanish place names such as San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The Californios also introduced many of California's famous crops, such as grapes, olives, and citrus fruits. Most of all, they opened California to the world. As you will see, the world soon rushed in.



The Missionaries

Ever since Lewis and Clark appeared among them, the Nez Percé had been friendly toward Americans. In 1831, three Nez Percé traveled to St. Louis to learn more about the white man's ways. There, the Nez Percé asked if someone would come west to teach their people the secrets of the "Black Book," or Bible.

Several missionaries answered that call. The best known were Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and Henry and Eliza Spalding. In 1836, the two couples traveled west from St. Louis along the **Oregon Trail**.

It was a difficult journey. Narcissa described the Rockies as "the most terrible mountains for steepness." Still, the missionaries arrived safely in Oregon, proving that women could endure the journey west.

A Difficult Start

On reaching Oregon, the group split up. The Spaldings went to work with the Nez Percé. The Whitmans worked among a neighboring group, the Cayuse. Neither couple knew very much about the people they hoped to convert. The result was a difficult start.

After three years the Spaldings finally made their first converts. In 1839, Henry baptized two Nez Percé chiefs. A year later, one of the chiefs had his infant son baptized as well. The child would grow up to be the leader best known as Chief Joseph. You will meet him again later in this book.

The Whitmans were less successful. The Cayuse were far more interested in the whites' weapons and tools than in their religion. The couple also offended the Cayuse. They refused to pay for the land they took for their mission or to offer visitors gifts, as was the Indians' custom. Not a single Cayuse converted to the new faith.

A Pioneer's Paradise

Marcus Whitman was far more successful at converting Americans to the belief that Oregon was a pioneer's paradise. "It does not concern me so much what is to become of any particular set of Indians," he wrote. "Our greatest work is...to aid the white settlement of this country and help to found its religious institutions."

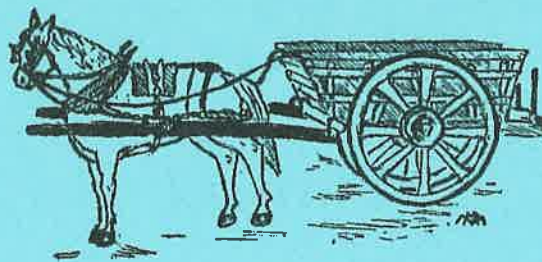
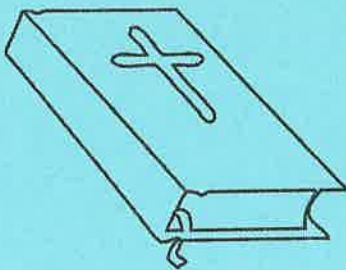
In 1842, Marcus traveled east on horseback. Along the way, he urged Americans to settle in Oregon. On his return, he guided a large group of settlers along the Oregon Trail. More settlers soon followed. "The poor Indians are amazed at the overwhelming number of Americans coming into the country," observed Narcissa. "They seem not to know what to make of it."

In 1847, measles came west with settlers and swept through the Whitman mission. Marcus treated the sick as best he could. The Cayuse noticed that whites usually recovered, while their own people were dying. Rumors spread that Whitman was giving deadly pills to Indians. Angry warriors attacked the mission, killing both Marcus and Narcissa.

The Missionaries' Legacy

Like the Spanish priests in California, American preachers in Oregon hoped that their legacy would be large numbers of Christian Indians. In fact, relatively few Indians became Christians. Many, however, died of the diseases that came west with the missionaries.

The missionaries' true legacy was to open the West to settlement. In California, Oregon, and other territories, settlers followed in the footsteps of western missionaries.



The Pioneer Women

Women pioneers shared in the danger and the work of settling the West. Most of these women were wives and mothers, but some were single women seeking **homesteads**, husbands, or other new opportunities. Pioneer women not only helped to shape the future of the West, but also earned new status for themselves and for women throughout the United States.

On the Trail

Between 1840 and 1869, about 350,000 people traveled west in covered wagons. Most westward-bound pioneers gathered each spring near Independence, Missouri. There they formed columns of wagons called *wagon trains*.

The journey west lasted four to six months and covered about 2,000 miles. Wagon space was so limited that women were forced to leave most of the comforts of home behind. The few treasures they managed to fit in often had to be tossed out when the way became steep. The Oregon Trail was littered with furniture, china, books, and other cherished objects.

Women were expected to do the work they had done back home, but while traveling 15 to 20 miles a day. They cooked, washed clothes, and took care of the children. Meals on wheels were simple. "About the only change we have from bread and bacon," wrote Helen Carpenter, "is to bacon and bread."

The daily drudgery wore many women down. Lavinia Porter recalled, "I would make a brave effort to be cheerful and patient until the camp work was done. Then starting out ahead of the team and my men folks, when I thought I had gone beyond hearing distance, I would throw myself down on the unfriendly desert and give way like a child to sob and tears."

Trail Hazards

The death toll on the trail was high. Disease was the worst killer. Accidents were also common. People drowned crossing rivers. Children fell from wagons and were crushed under the wheels. Indian attacks were rare, but the prospect added to the sense of danger.

By the end of the journey, each woman had a story to tell. Some had seen buffalo stampedes and prairie fires on the Great Plains. Some had almost frozen to death in the mountains or died of thirst in the deserts. But most survived to build new lives in the West.

One group of pioneer women faced a unique set of dangers—African Americans who had escaped from slave states or who were brought west by their owners. Even though slavery was outlawed in most of the West, fugitive slaves were often tracked down by bounty hunters. But for some African American women, the move west brought freedom. For example, when Biddy Mason's owner tried to take her from California (a free state) to Texas, Biddy sued for her freedom and won. She moved to Los Angeles, where she became a well-known pioneer and community leader.

The Pioneer Women's Legacy

The journey west changed pioneer women. The hardships of the trail brought out strengths and abilities they did not know they possessed. "I felt a secret joy," declared one Oregon pioneer, "in being able to have the power that sets things going."

And women did set things going. Wherever they settled, schools, churches, libraries, literary societies, and charitable groups soon blossomed. A good example is Annie Bidwell. When Annie married John Bidwell, she moved to his ranch in what is now the town of Chico, California. There she taught sewing to local Native American women and helped their children learn to read and write English. Annie convinced John to give up drinking—he closed the tavern that had been part of his home—and encouraged the building of Chico's first church.

Annie was active in other causes as well, including the movement to give women a right that had long been denied them in the East—the right to vote. Wyoming Territory led the way by granting women the right to vote in 1869. By 1900, a full 20 years before women across the nation would win the right to vote, women were voting in four western states. The freedom and sense of equality enjoyed by women in the West helped pave the way for more equal treatment of women throughout the United States. This was perhaps the greatest legacy of the women pioneers.

The Mormons

In 1846, a wagon train of pioneers headed west in search of a new home. Looking down on the shining surface of Great Salt Lake in what is now Utah, their leader, Brigham Young, declared, "This is the place!"

It was not a promising spot. One pioneer described the valley as a "broad and barren plain...blistering in the rays of the midsummer sun." A woman wrote, "Weak and weary as I am, I would rather go a thousand miles further than remain." But that was one of the valley's attractions. No one else wanted the place that Brigham Young claimed for his followers, the Mormons.

A Persecuted Group

The **Mormons** were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This new church was founded in New York by Joseph Smith in 1830. Smith taught that he had received a sacred book, The Book of Mormon, from an angel. He believed that it was his task to create a community of believers who would serve God faithfully.

Smith's followers lived in close communities, working hard and sharing their goods. Yet wherever they settled—first New York, then Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois—they were persecuted by their neighbors.

Many people were offended by the Mormons' teachings, especially their acceptance of polygamy—the practice of having more than one wife. Others resented the Mormons' rapidly growing power and wealth. In 1844, resentment turned to violence when a mob in Illinois killed Joseph Smith.

After Smith's murder, Brigham Young took over as leader of the Mormons. Young decided to move his community to Utah. There, the Mormons might be left alone to follow their faith in peace.

West to Utah

Young turned out to be a practical as well as pious leader. "Prayer is good," he said, "but when baked potatoes and pudding are needed, prayer will not supply their place."

Young carefully planned every detail of the trek to Utah. The pioneers he led west stopped along the way to build shelters and plant crops for those who would follow.

Even with all this planning, the journey was difficult. "We soon thought it unusual," wrote one Mormon, "to leave a campground without burying one or more persons."

When he arrived at Great Salt Lake, Young laid out his first settlement, Salt Lake City. By the time he died in 1877, Utah had 125,000 Mormons living in 500 settlements.

To survive in this dry country, Mormons had to learn new ways to farm. They built dams, canals, and irrigation ditches to carry precious water from mountain streams to their farms in the valley. With this water, they made the desert bloom.

The Mormons' Legacy

The Mormons were the first Americans to settle the Great Basin. They pioneered the farming methods adopted by later settlers of this dry region. They also helped settlers make their way west. Salt Lake City quickly became an important stop for travelers in need of food and supplies.

To the Mormons, however, their greatest legacy was the faith they planted so firmly in the Utah desert. From its center in Salt Lake City, the Mormon church has grown into a worldwide religion with more than 7 million members.



The Forty-Niners

In 1848, carpenter James Marshall was building a sawmill on the American River in northern California. Suddenly, he spotted something shining in the water. "I reached my hand down and picked it up," he wrote later. "It made my heart thump, for I felt certain it was gold."

When word of Marshall's discovery leaked out, people across California dropped everything to race to the goldfields. "All were off to the mines," wrote a minister, "some on horses, some on carts, and some on crutches."

The World Rushes

In By 1849, tens of thousands of gold seekers from around the world had joined the California gold rush. About two thirds of these **forty-niners** were Americans. The rest came from Mexico, South America, Europe, Australia, and even China.

The forty-niners' first challenge was simply getting to California. From China and Australia, they had to brave the rough crossing of the Pacific Ocean. From the East, many traveled by ship to Panama in Central America, crossed through dangerous jungles to the Pacific side, and boarded ships north to San Francisco. Others made the difficult journey overland.

Most forty-niners were young, and almost all were men. When Luzena Wilson arrived in Sacramento with her family, a miner offered her \$5 for her biscuits just to have "bread made by a woman." When she hesitated, he doubled his offer. "Women were scarce in those days," she wrote. "I lived six months in Sacramento and saw only two."

Life in the Mining Camps

Wherever gold was spotted, mining camps with names like Mad Mule Gulch and You Bet popped up overnight. At Coyote Diggings, Luzena found "a row of canvas tents." A few months later, "there were two thousand men...and the streets were lined with drinking saloons and gambling tables." Merchants made fortunes selling eggs for \$6 a dozen and flour for \$400 a barrel.

With no police to keep order, the camps were rough places. Miners frequently fought over the boundaries of their claims, and they took it on themselves to punish crimes. "In the short space of twenty-four hours," wrote Louise Clappe, "we have had murders, fearful accidents, bloody deaths, a mob, whippings, a hanging, an attempt at suicide, and a fatal duel."

Digging for gold was hard and tedious work. The miners spent long days digging up mud, dirt, and stones while standing knee-deep in icy streams. All too soon, the easy-to-find gold was gone. "The day of quick fortune-making is over," wrote a miner in 1851. "There are thousands of men now in California who would gladly go home if they had the money."

The Forty-Niners' Legacy

By 1852, the gold rush was over. While it lasted, about 250,000 people flooded into California. For California's Indians, the legacy of this invasion was dreadful. Between 1848 and 1870, warfare and disease reduced their number from about 150,000 to just 30,000. In addition, many Californios lost their land to the newcomers.

The forty-niners also left a prosperous legacy. By 1850, California had enough people to become the first state in the far west. These new Californians helped to transform the Golden State into a diverse land of economic opportunity.

