

Manifest Destiny

Oregon

In the mid 1800s, many Americans felt it was the fate of their country to spread "from sea to shining sea." This belief was known as **manifest destiny**. During this period in history thousands of people packed up their families and belongings and moved west to new territories to gain land and to make a fortune-and those territories eventually became part of the United States.

The idea of manifest destiny played a huge role in the 1844 election. The democratic candidate, James Polk, favored expansion. He wanted to add California, New Mexico, Texas, and Oregon to the United States. Oregon was a big issue during his campaign. During this time the United States shared occupation of Oregon with Great Britain. In his campaign, Polk pushed for taking over all of this territory with his slogan "Fifty-four forty or fight!" This was the latitude line of the northern boundary. Instead of fighting for the territory, he settled for half. After Polk was elected President in 1844 the boundary between British Canada and the United States was permanently extended along the 49th parallel all the way to the Pacific Coast.

Now that the United States had rights to this territory, news started to spread of what this area had to offer. Stories spread to the east coast of wheat growing taller than a man and turnips that were five feet around. Obviously, these were tall tales, but the stories had people packing up their families and moving west on the many overland trails. The main route to Oregon country was the **Oregon Trail**. Families would meet up in Independence, Missouri to form wagon trains, because the trails were so dangerous. Before leaving the wagon train families would agree on rules and elect leaders to enforce those rules to ensure their survival. Even with the wagon trains, families still faced many hardships; such as, crossing rivers (especially during spring rains), the high temperatures on the Plains, snow in the mountains, illness (smallpox and cholera would often wipe out whole wagon trains), and Indian attacks.

Despite the many hardships, more than 50,000 people completed the journey and settled in the Oregon territory. By the 1840's, there were more Americans living in this territory than British. Americans now began to look towards the future of owning Oregon alone, and making it the next state in the Union. In the election of 1844 James K. Polk, the Democratic candidate, campaigned to make Oregon a permanent part of the United States. (It became a U. S. territory in 1848 and a state in 1859.)

Other trails were important to the settlement of the west. The **Santa Fe Trail** was a long trading route from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Thousands of traders would use this trail to carry manufactured goods west to trade for furs, gold, and silver.

Directions: Answer the following questions on loose-leaf paper. You are to write out the question, skip a space, and then answer it.

1. Define "manifest destiny".
2. Why did Americans want to move west in the mid 1800's? Give at least 2 reasons
in your answer
3. Most settlers moving west to Oregon traveled in wagon trains. Why?
4. What were the two main trails the wagon trains would use on their trip West?
5. What other country competed with the United States in claiming Oregon?
6. Where was the boundary set between the United States and land this other country owned?
7. For how long was this agreement and boundary to last (from question 5)?
8. Name and explain in several sentences three dangers faced by settlers moving west into Oregon.