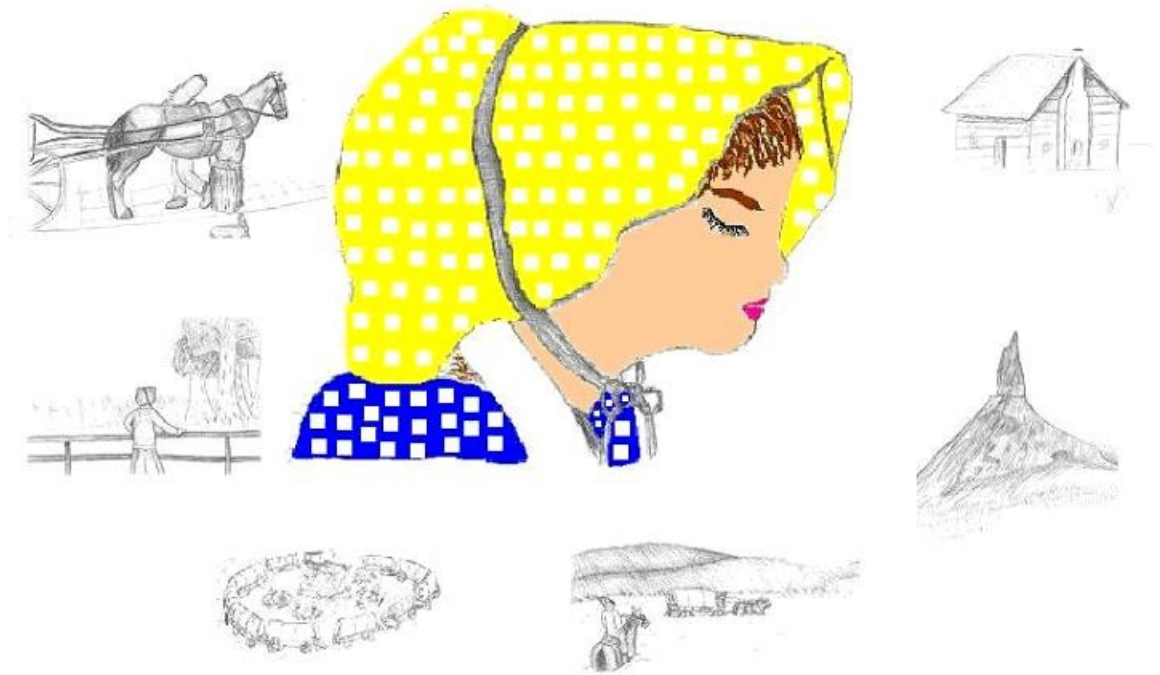


A Tale of the Oregon Trail



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CONTENTS: A Tale of the Oregon Trail

Introduction	5
Mountain Men Led the Way	6
Pioneer Dreams: A Second Chance	7
We Head West	8
Canal Boats West	9
Steaming to Cincinnati	10
St. Louis—Taking Stock	12
Taking Inventory: Supplies	13
Back on the River	14
Independence—The Real Journey Begins	15
Supplies	17
The Wagons	18
Group Security—Electing a Captain	19
Fort Leavenworth	20
Water, Water	21
Walking Better than Sitting	22
Fort Kearny and the Great Platte River Road	23
Rain, Minor Disasters and Indians	24
Night and Strange Fuel	26
Routine on the Trail	27

Sunday Rest	28
Recreation	29
Onward	31
Prairie Dogs and Buffalo	32
Tedium	33
Chimney Rock	34
Disease and Other Disasters	35
Heartbreak on the Trail	37
Fort Laramie	38
Hills and Independence Rock	39
Continental Divide to Fort Bridger	40
Fort Hall and Good-byes	41
Three Island Crossing	42
Fort Boise and Beyond	44
Wild River Ride	45
End of the Trail	46
Western History: Important Dates	47
Resources: Books	48
Internet Sources	50
Places to Visit	50

Introduction



My name is Sara Anderson and I am almost 18 years old. Last year my family and I made the long trip from Boston to Oregon. They estimate the trail is some 2,000 miles long from Independence. It took us over six months of travel from our home in Boston.

I didn't want to go, but the rest of the family had their own reasons, and Dad said he wouldn't leave me behind. Since other families keep coming west, I'm writing to let others know what this journey is really like. Certainly, it wasn't like anything we dreamed it would be.

Mountainmen Led the Way



My then 15-year-old brother Kyle read all those dreadfully written novels about the mountain men who'd gone west to hunt and trap beaver like Kit Carson and Jim Bridger. They lived and traded with the Indians. Even though the heyday of the mountain man is gone, I think Kyle thought he could become like one of them.

These men became scouts for the many pioneers traveling west.

Pioneer Dreams: A Second Chance

That's what Dad wanted, a second chance. After Dad's younger brother, Uncle Frank, Aunt Janie and my two-year-old nephew died of pneumonia, Dad lost heart in keeping the family farm we all worked together. He sold it for a nice profit. Mom wondered about the Indians. She'd been reading the Christian Advocate where a man named Fisk wrote, "Here! Here! Who will respond to the call beyond the rocky mountains?"

After dinner in the evenings, Dad read the pamphlet written by Boston Schoolmaster Hall J. Kelly, put out by the Oregon Colonization Society. Kelly claimed it was a manual, and in it, he encouraged colonization. He claimed the land was fertile, the climate healthful, and the scenery unbelievable.

I read those writers who talked about the horrors of crossing the great American desert, and read frightening stories of being scalped by the Indians.

I read about Nathaniel Wyeth who appeared to be more realistic than Kelly, at least until Kelly traveled west himself. Mr. Wyeth tended to think of Mr. Kelly as an idealist whose descriptions were more visionary than real. Mr. Wyeth's kinsman John traveled along with Nathaniel and wrote about that first expedition in rather unflattering terms. He said going west was not simple or the great adventure some portrayed. I tried to tell Dad, but he wouldn't listen. All winter he and Mom saved every penny.

