**The Oregon Trail**

The Oregon Trail opened in 1841 with 35 men, 5 women, and 10 children using it to make the trek from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City, Oregon. In 1842, 100 emigrants took that same westward trail. In 1843, the number of people traveling increased to 1000. During the late 1840s and early 1850s tens of thousands of settlers made the journey every year. From 1840 - 1860, approximately 300,000 to 600,000 emigrants traveled the Oregon Trail.

**Why do people Migrate?**

People have moved from their homes for centuries, for all sorts of reasons. Some are drawn to new places by ‘pull ‘ factors, others find it difficult to remain where they are and migrate because of ‘push’ factors. These have contributed to the recent movement of people here but are also the reason why people from here have emigrated to other countries. There are many Push and Pull factors that have effected immigration. To help push people towards the west, the conditions of their home and surrounds must be difficult to adapt fully to.



**Migration Westward**

During the 1840s and 1850s people read newspaper stories about a wonderful land in the Northwest called Oregon. Oregon was supposed to have mild weather and rich soil.  One of the first groups to migrate westward there were Missionaries. Missionaries had visited Oregon to bring Christianity to the Indians located in Oregon. Overcrowded cities in the East caused others to flee westward. One writer claimed that beets grew up to "three feet in diameter, while turnips were five feet around". Like this, people caught the ‘Oregon Fever’–a longing to go west and start a new life. Some hoped to find cheap fertile land while other settlers made money in the logging business. There were plenty of trees in the Pacific Northwest and great demand for them in the East. The emigrants, as they were called, came from every segment of American society. Many were farmers, cattlemen and homesteaders who went west to build a ranch or farm in this new land of opportunities. The emigrants also included tradesmen, businessmen, journalists, adventurers, missionaries, gamblers, and miners. They were motivated by a variety of reasons.

Another group, African American slaves, traveled West to get their freedom. Runaway slaves were given freedom if they made it to these new western lands. There, they could start a new life as farmers or loggers.

**Why did people move west?**

Throughout the nineteenth century, thousands fled from the East to the West of America, motivated for different reasons. The West became the place you could find your fortune, escape persecution and gain freedom.

In search of good, cheap farm land, the Oregon Pioneers travelled West in hope of a new, happier life. Rumors of the West and how beautiful and great is was spread throughout the towns of the East and so the huge trek West became something of a necessity. The trek West was hard and hundreds died due to starvation, the extreme weather conditions, attacks by the nomadic Indians or one of the many diseases that were rife at the time.

1848 brought the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill. Thousands fled West at the drop of a hat in hope they would strike lucky in the huge 1848 Gold Rush. Many followed, making money by selling food, water, equipment and sex to the young men desperate to find their fortunes.

Persecution was a large issue in nineteenth century America. Many religious groups were disliked for believing in things also believed by the Indians. The Mormons, a Christian group of people who believed in polygamy, were pushed out of the towns they once lived in as their banks failed. In 1846 **Brigham Young**, a Mormon leader, lead a group of Mormons to the West to escape the persecution and so found happiness on the Great North Plains.

The gold rushes and business opportunities West lead to the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, built as a means of travelling across America without the risk of death, disease or starvation. The US government ordered for the railroad to be built. Not only was it a great benefit to the many railway workers as they were given the land they constructed on, but the US Government benefited as more people travelled West, the **Manifest Destiny** was gradually being fulfilled.

Probably the most famous group of people who moved to the West were the Homesteaders. ‘The Homestead Act’, put in place by the US government, allowed hundreds of people a large area of the Great North Plains if they agreed to live there for five years or more. Despite the hardships they faced, such as the extreme weather conditions and lack of resources, hundreds of Homesteaders succeeded in reaching the West. **The Homestead Act** was designed to lure people to the West, which at the time was the home of the nomadic Indians.

The many groups of people that fled West were spurred to do so by the US Government. Trying to fulfill their belief of the **Manifest Destiny**, (the idea that white Americans should settle and govern all the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific), they introduced many Acts and Laws so that the whole of America could be claimed by them. The push and pull factors that motivated the White Americans to flee West were prominently persecution, the gold rushes and to gain freedom and land.

**Pros & Cons**

Reasons why pioneers chose to leave their homes and move to Oregon:

* ✓  Free Land! The Donation Land Act of 1850 allowed any unmarried male to claim 160 acres of land in Oregon for free. Married couples could claim 320 acres. The only stipulation was that they had to live and farm the land for 4 years.
* ✓  The Donation Land Act allowed women to have their name on a piece of land if she was married. Oregon was one of the first states in the United States to allow this.
* ✓  Any half-blood Native American was also allowed to claim free land. This was another first for this day and time.
* ✓  In 1844, Oregon’s Provisional Government enacted Oregon as a Slave-Free State. This meant slavery was illegal and anyone who owned slaves must free them in 3 years. Although this sounds like it helped the slaves, they were not allowed to live in Oregon past 18 years old.