

Archives Unbound: Overland Journeys: Travels in the West, 1800-1880



Archives Unbound

Archives Unbound answers the call within libraries and university departments to digitise small collections of primary source material. This new online resource digitises the most sought-after microfilm collections from Gale and Primary Source Media, capturing defining moments in history. Between 5,000 to 200,000 pages per title, these specialist collections act as small adjuncts to the large Gale digital collections making them an affordable option for libraries and departments.

Overland Journeys: Travels in the West, 1800-1880

Western settlers created what we think of as the American West. Explorers came and went, soldiers came and went, miners and others came and went. But the settlers came to stay. For settlers, the ways of reaching a destination in the frontier country were either wretched ordeals or wondrous adventures. Fortunately, many of these men and women recorded daily events and their thoughts with such picturesque zest that some accounts of westward journeys have elements of great literature within them.

Comprised of selections from the microfilm collections *Travels in the West and Southwest* and the *Plains @ Rockies*, this digital collection provides a unique window on Western History. An intuitive platform makes it all cross-searchable by subject or collection.

Selections within this collection are based on the bibliographies:

- *The Plains and Rockies: A Critical Bibliography of Exploration, Adventure, and Travel in the American West, 1800–1865*
- *The Trail West: A Bibliography-Index to Western American Trails, 1841-1869*

Westward settlers following trails west typically left from one of three “jumping off” points on the Missouri: Independence, Missouri, Saint Joseph, Missouri, or Council Bluffs, Iowa. The trails from these cities converged in central Nebraska, following the Platte, North Platte, and Sweetwater rivers westward across Nebraska and Wyoming, crossing the continental divide south of the Wind River Range in southwestern Wyoming. Although each trail had a main route, there were many cutoffs and alternative routes, some of them were notoriously ill-chosen while others provided significant savings of time and effort.

It is estimated by historians that up to half a million settlers crossed the West on these trails from the earliest wagon trains to the building of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The journey across overland trails took settlers 2,000 miles and around seven months to complete. Most groups traveled at a pace of fifteen miles a day. Few traveled the overland trails alone; most settlers traveled with their families. Large groups of settlers joined together to form “trains.” Groups were usually led by “pilots” who were fur trappers or mountain men that would guide them on the trails. Hostile confrontations with Native Americans defending their homelands, although often feared by the wagon trains, were actually comparatively rare. Many made the journey to California and Oregon because they saw these new lands as a place of endless opportunity. Once the first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, the wagon train era ebbed because settlers could now journey to the west coast safely in a fraction of the time.

Features:

- Intuitive searches that deliver organised results
- Highlighted keywords to facilitate research
- Flexible and accessible for the 24-hour researcher
- Subject-specific collections support multidisciplinary research in history, political science, hard science, ethnic studies and more
- Active publishing schedule, with multiple collections added annually
- Highly targeted at 5,000 to 200,000 pages per collection