

Section 1: Trails to the West

AMERICANS MOVE WEST

In the early 1800s trappers and traders known as **mountain men** worked to supply the eastern fashion for fur hats and clothing. **John Jacob Astor**, owner of the American Fur Company, sent mountain men to the Pacific Northwest region that became known as Oregon Country. At this time Oregon Country was inhabited by Native Americans. However, it was claimed by Russia, Spain, Great Britain, and the United States. In 1811 Astor founded Astoria, which was the first major non-Native American settlement in the region, at the mouth of the Columbia River. After a series of treaties, Oregon Country soon became jointly occupied by Great Britain and the United States. Many Americans began to move to the region, most of them following a challenging and dangerous route that became known as the **Oregon Trail**. It was common for families to band together and undertake the perilous six-month journey in wagon trains.

Another well-traveled route west, the **Santa Fe Trail**, was used mainly by traders. They loaded wagon trains with cloth and other manufactured goods that could be traded for horses, mules, and silver in the Mexican settlement of Santa Fe.

MORMONS TRAVEL WEST

One large group of settlers traveled west in search of religious freedom. Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830 in western New York state. Although church membership grew rapidly, the converts, known as **Mormons**, were dogged by local hostility. To protect his growing community from persecution, Smith led his followers to a series of settlements in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois.

When Smith was murdered by an anti-Mormon mob in 1844, **Brigham Young** led the Mormons to a desert valley near the Great Salt Lake in what is now Utah. There the Mormons planned and built Salt Lake City and settled in the area. By December 1860 the Mormon population of Utah stood at about 40,000.

Section 2: The Texas Revolution

AMERICAN SETTLERS MOVE TO TEXAS

In the early 1800s, the region we now know as the American Southwest was part of Mexico, which in turn was part of the vast Spanish empire in the Americas. Mexico struggled against Spanish rule. A revolt led by **Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla** in 1810 failed, but the rebellion he started grew. In 1821 Mexico became independent. In order to establish control of Texas, the new Mexican republic hired agents known as **empresarios** to bring settlers there. One of these, **Stephen F. Austin**, selected a site on the lower Colorado River and settled 300 families, mostly from the southern states. These settlers often ignored Mexican laws, including Mexico's law forbidding slavery.

Tension grew between Mexico's central government and the American settlers. Colonists were angry when **Antonio López de Santa Anna** came to power in 1830 and suspended Mexico's constitution. Austin was imprisoned for a year and a half. When he returned to Texas, he began urging Texans to rebel against Mexico.

TEXANS REVOLT AGAINST MEXICO

Hostilities began with a battle at Gonzalez in 1835. Santa Anna inflicted two brutal defeats on the Texans at the **Alamo** and Goliad. Within a month, however, Texas forces under Sam Houston had won a decisive victory over Santa Anna at the **Battle of San Jacinto**. Santa Anna signed a

treaty giving Texas its independence.

Most people in the new **Republic of Texas** hoped that Texas would join the United States. However, U.S. President Andrew Jackson was concerned about two factors. He was worried that admitting Texas as a slave state would upset the fragile balance between free and slave states in the Union. Also, Jackson feared that annexing Texas might lead to a war with Mexico.

As the annexation of Texas was delayed, more American settlers came from nearby southern states, often bringing slaves with them to work the land and to grow cotton. Tensions between Mexico and Texas remained high. After a few unsettled years, Texas President Sam Houston signed a peace treaty with Mexico in 1844.

Section 3: The Mexican-American War

MANIFEST DESTINY

The idea of **manifest destiny** loomed large in the election of 1844. The new president, **James K. Polk**, promised to annex both Texas and Oregon. In 1846 Britain and the United States signed a treaty that gave the United States all Oregon land south of the 49th parallel. This treaty drew the present-day border between the United States and Canada. In 1845 the congresses of both the Republic of Texas and the United States approved annexation of Texas. Since the early 1700s scattered settlements of Spanish colonists in the present-day Southwest had been engaged in farming and ranching, often using Native American labor. In California many of these settlers, known as **Californios**, profited immensely when Mexico won independence from Spain. American settlers began coming to California and calling for independence from Mexico.

MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

Since the Texas Revolution the border between Mexico and Texas had been in dispute. Mexico claimed the border lay along the Nueces River while the United States claimed the Rio Grande as the border. In 1845 President Polk sent troops to the Rio Grande. When Mexican soldiers attacked them, Congress declared war on Mexico. Although many Americans thought the war was unjustified, dangerous, and avoidable, U.S. troops pushed into Mexico, going from victory to victory until they finally captured Mexico City. A successful revolt against the Californios near Sonoma, known as the **Bear Flag Revolt**, proclaimed the independent Republic of California.

AMERICAN SETTLEMENT IN THE MEXICAN CESSION

The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, which ended the Mexican War in 1848, increased the land area of the United States by almost 25 percent. A few years later, in 1853, the **Gadsden Purchase** fixed the continental boundaries of the United States. As American settlers flooded the Southwest, cultural encounters often led to conflict and violence. New settlers usually ignored Mexican legal ideas, such as community property or community water rights. However, traditional knowledge and customs gradually shaped local economies, and new and mutually beneficial trade patterns began to emerge.

Section 4: The California Gold Rush

DISCOVERY OF GOLD BRINGS SETTLERS

Before 1840 few Americans settled in California, although there was a considerable trade there between merchants from Mexico and the United States. However, after Mexico allowed **John Sutter** to establish a colony in 1839, American settlers began arriving in greater numbers. In a tragic incident, heavy snows in the Sierra Nevada trapped a group of travelers known as the **Donner party**. Half of the travelers either froze or starved to death. When gold was discovered at **Sutter's Mill** in 1848, the news spread across the country. During 1849 about 80,000 **forty-niners** came to California hoping to strike it rich. Most of them arrived in the small port town of

San Francisco. Within a year, the population of San Francisco grew from around 800 to more than 25,000.

Mining methods varied by the time of year and the location of the claim. **Placer miners** would **prospect** by using pans or other devices to wash gold nuggets out of the loose rock and gravel. Richer miners established companies to dig shafts and tunnels. Many individual success stories inspired prospectors. However, the good luck that made some miners wealthy never came to thousands of gold seekers. Most of them found little except misery and debt.

Mining camps sprang up wherever enough people gathered to look for gold. Among the gold seekers were thousands of immigrants from Mexico, China, Europe, and South America. Many found that they could earn a living by supplying miners with basic services like cooking, washing clothes, operating boardinghouses, or even providing legal services. **Biddy Mason** and her family, slaves brought to California by a forty-niner from Georgia, gained their freedom and managed to buy some land near the village of Los Angeles. Soon Mason became one of the wealthiest landowners in California.

IMPACT ON CALIFORNIA

The forty-niners brought a population explosion and an economic boom to California. It became the 31st state of the Union in 1850. As the gold rush faded, many Californians took to farming and ranching. However, California remained isolated from the rest of the country until the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869.