

Summary: Moving West

Trails West

In 1843, about 1,000 people traveled west by wagon train. They wanted to find cheap land. They traveled on the Oregon Trail, which started in Missouri and went through the Rocky Mountains to what is now Oregon. The trip was hard, but by the end of the 1850s, thousands of pioneers had settled in Oregon. In 1846, Britain and the United States agreed on a border between the United States and Canada. The land south of this became the Oregon Territory.

A religious group, the Mormons, also traveled west. In 1847, the Mormons traveled to what is now Utah. They could settle and practice their religion freely there.

The California Gold Rush

Before the 1700s, American Indians lived in California. After Spain claimed California, the Spaniards forced Indians to live and work on their missions. In 1821, the Mexican government took over the California Missions. They gave mission lands to Mexicans in California, who were called Californios.

In 1848, California became part of the United States. Gold was discovered, and more than 250,000 people, called forty-niners, rushed to California to find it. The gold rush changed California. People built boomtowns near the gold mines. Merchants sold goods to the miners. Bankers and innkeepers opened businesses. Lawyers found jobs settling arguments.

The gold rush ended about five years later. Most of the miners did not find gold, but thousands of people stayed in California. Miners and farmers killed Indians and took their land. Other Americans took the Californios' land, forcing them to leave. Cities such as San Francisco grew. By 1850, only two years after becoming a territory of the United States, California had enough people to become a state.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

wagon train *noun*, a line of covered wagons that moved together

forty-niner *noun*, gold miner who went to California in 1849 during the gold rush

gold rush *noun*, many people hurrying to the same area to look for gold over a short time

boomtown *noun*, a town whose population grows very quickly



After You Read

REVIEW Why did the first large group of people set out on the Oregon Trail?

Circle the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW Who lived in the boomtowns around the gold mines? Draw a box around four words that name people who lived in the boomtowns and did business with the miners.