

*Thousands of pioneers moved west, adding their struggles and triumphs to the American story.*

## Rivalry in the Northwest

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.E.1.1, SS.8.G.5.1, SS.8.G.5.2, LA.8.1.6.1, LA.8.1.6.3

### ***Why did Americans want to control the Oregon Country?***

The Oregon Country was a huge area located north of California, between the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. It included all of what are now Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, **plus** parts of Montana and Wyoming. The region also contained about half of what is now the Canadian province of British Columbia.

In the early 1800s, four nations claimed the vast, rugged land known as the Oregon Country. The United States based its claim on Robert Gray's discovery of the Columbia River in 1792 and the Lewis and Clark expedition. Great Britain had explored the Columbia River. Spain controlled California, and Russia had settlements south from Alaska into Oregon.

### **Adams-Onís Treaty**

Many Americans wanted control of Oregon in order to gain **access** to the Pacific Ocean. In 1819 Secretary of State John Quincy Adams got Spain to approve the Adams-Onís Treaty. The Spanish agreed to set the limits of their territory at what is now California's northern border and to give up all claims to Oregon. In 1824 Russia also gave up its claim to the land south of Alaska.

Dealing with Great Britain was more complicated. In 1818 Adams worked out an agreement with Britain for **joint occupation**. This meant that people from both the United States and Great Britain could settle there. When Adams became president in 1825, he proposed that the two nations divide Oregon along the 49° N line of latitude. Britain refused, and the countries extended the joint occupation.

### **Mountain Men in Oregon**

Fur traders had been the first Americans to take up the challenge of living in the Oregon Country. They came to trap beaver, whose skins were in great demand in Europe. The British established trading posts in the region, as did merchant John Jacob Astor of New York. In 1808 Astor organized the American Fur Company. The country's leading fur company, it traded on the East Coast, in the Pacific Northwest, and in China.

At first the fur merchants traded with the Native Americans. Gradually others joined the trade. These tough, independent men spent most of their time in the Rocky Mountains and were known as **mountain men**. Many had Native American wives. They lived in buffalo-skin lodges and dressed in fringed buckskin pants, moccasins, and beads.

Over time, the mountain men could no longer make a living by trapping. Overtrapping limited the amount of pelts available, and changes in fashion reduced demand for pelts. Some moved to Oregon and settled on farms.

With their knowledge of the western lands, several mountain men, such as Jim Bridger and Kit Carson, found work as guides. They led the parties of settlers now streaming west. Beginning in the 1830s, the mountain men carved out several east-to-west passages that played a vital role in western settlement. The most popular route was the Oregon Trail. Others included the California Trail and the Santa Fe Trail.

**Identifying** What did America gain from the Adams-Onís Treaty?

## Oregon and Manifest Destiny

SS.8.A.4.1, SS.8.A.4.8, SS.8.G.4.2, SS.8.G.4.3, SS.8.G.4.4

### ***What is Manifest Destiny?***

In the 1830s, Americans began traveling to the Oregon Country to settle. Economic troubles in the East and reports of Oregon's fertile land drew many people.

### **Marcus and Narcissa Whitman**

Among the first settlers were Dr. Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa. They were missionaries who went to Oregon in 1836 and built a mission among the Cayuse people near the present site of Walla Walla, Washington. They wanted to provide medical care and convert the Cayuse to Christianity.

The new settlers unknowingly brought measles to the mission. Native Americans had never been exposed to this disease. An epidemic killed many of the Cayuse children. The Cayuse blamed the Whitmans. They attacked the mission in November 1847 and killed the Whitmans and 11 others.

## Along the Oregon Trail

The Whitman massacre was a shocking event, but it did little to stop the flood of pioneers on their way to Oregon. Drawn by reports of fertile Oregon land, and driven by economic hard times in the East, many Americans took to the trail. These pioneers were called **emigrants**—people who leave their country—because they left the United States to go to Oregon.

In 1843 about a thousand emigrants made the journey. Tens of thousands more would follow in the years ahead. Before the difficult 2,000-mile (3,219 km) journey, these pioneers packed all their belongings. They stuffed their canvas-covered wagons with supplies. From a distance these wagons looked like schooners, or ships at sea, and people called them **prairie schooners**. Gathering in Independence or other towns in Missouri, the pioneers followed the Oregon Trail across the Great Plains, along the Platte River, and through the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains. Then they turned north and west along the Snake and Columbia Rivers into the Oregon Country.

## America Seeks Its Manifest Destiny

Since colonial times, many Americans had believed their nation's mission should be to serve as a model of freedom and democracy. In the 1800s that vision changed.

Many believed that the nation's mission was to spread freedom by settling the entire continent. In 1819 John Quincy Adams expressed what many Americans were thinking when he said expansion to the Pacific was as certain as the Mississippi River flowing to the sea.

In the 1840s, New York newspaper editor John O'Sullivan expressed in more specific words the idea of a national mission. O'Sullivan declared it was America's "Manifest Destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us." O'Sullivan meant that the United States was clearly destined—set apart for a special purpose—by God to extend its boundaries all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

## "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight"

Many Americans wanted the United States to take over all of Oregon. In the 1844 presidential election, James K. Polk, the Democratic nominee, supported this desire. Democrats used the slogan "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight," referring to the line of latitude they believed should be the nation's northern border in Oregon.

Polk's Whig opponent, Henry Clay, did not take a strong position on the Oregon issue. Polk won the election because Whig support was not united behind Clay.

A firm believer in Manifest Destiny, Polk was focused on acquiring Oregon. Britain would not accept a border at 54°40' N latitude. In 1846 the two countries compromised. They set the border at 49° N latitude. It was the same boundary the British had rejected 21 years before.

**Summarizing** How did Polk's views differ from Clay's in the 1844 election?

### Thinking Like a HISTORIAN

#### Understanding Cause and Effect

Push-pull factors are reasons for people to leave one area and move to another area. Push factors—such as lack of economic activity or a natural disaster such as a hurricane or flood—drive people away from an area. Pull factors—such as a desirable climate or the opportunity to own land— attract people to an area. What were the push and pull factors affecting emigrants to Oregon? For more about understanding cause and effect, review *Thinking Like a Historian*.

## LESSON 1 REVIEW

### Review Vocabulary

1. Using the following words, write sentences that describe settlers traveling on the Oregon Trail.

- a. Manifest Destiny
- b. emigrant
- c. prairie schooner

LA.8.1.6.1

### Answer the Guiding Questions

2. **Specifying** Which nations claimed the Oregon Country? How did John Quincy Adams resolve the claims?

SS.8.A.4.1

**3. Explaining** In what way was the Oregon Trail part of Manifest Destiny?

SS.8.A.4.1

**4. Defining** What did "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight" mean?

SS.8.A.4.1

**5. Analyzing** During the 1840s, more Americans than British settled in the Oregon Country. How do you think this settlement influenced negotiations with the British over the territory?

SS.8.A.4.1

**6. PERSUASIVE WRITING** You are a scout in the 1830s who makes a living by guiding settlers to Oregon. Write a two-paragraph "advertisement" telling people why they should move to Oregon and why they should choose you to guide them.

SS.8.G.4.4