

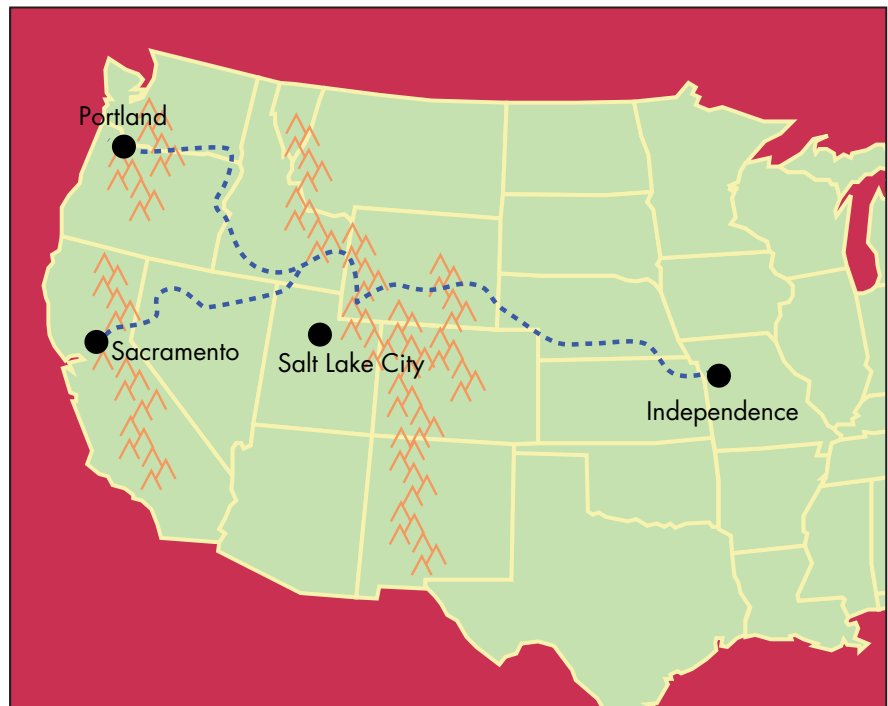
By the Kansas State Historical Society

## Traveling the Oregon-California Trail

### Why Travel the Trail?

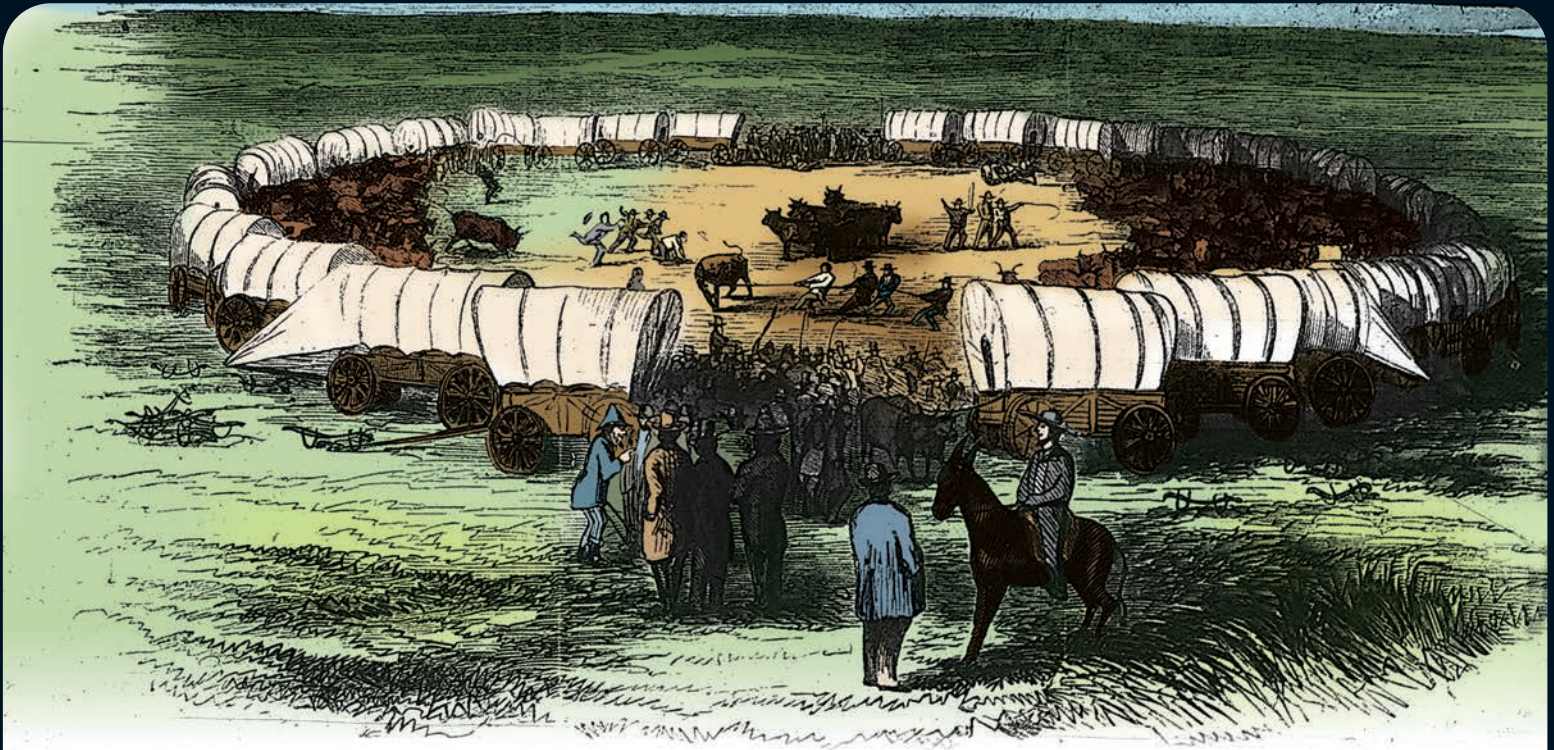
By the early 1840s many people knew that there was good land in the West. Gold was discovered in California in 1848. People wanted to go there. They wanted to start new businesses. They wanted good farmland. They wanted to go to California or Oregon or Washington. Travel by land was the cheapest way to get there. Many people used the Oregon-California Trail.

The trail began at Independence, Missouri. It ended near the Pacific Ocean. More than 140 miles of the trail was in Kansas. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman led the first wagon train west in 1843.



The Oregon-California Trail was about 2,000 miles long.





## What Did They Need for the Journey?

Covered wagons carried all of the things that settlers owned. The wagon could hold about 2,000 pounds. Most of the weight was food that people needed for the trip. The wagon also was packed with such things as clothing, extra wagon parts, and medicine. It carried everything the family would need on the trip. Oxen pulled most of the wagons. Oxen cost less than horses and they could graze on prairie grass.

The trip began around mid-April when the grass was beginning to turn green. It took about four to six months to make the journey. The wagon trains traveled about 15 miles a day.

## What Happened to the Trail?

More than 300,000 people traveled on the trail. Some people did not make it all the way. Some people died during the trip. Some people decided to go back home.

By the late 1860s railroads were being built. These railroads would help people travel west. On May 10, 1869, a very important event happened. The Central Pacific Railroad and Union Pacific Railroad were joined together in Utah. Now there was a railroad line from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. People could travel across the entire United States by train. The Oregon-California Trail no longer was needed.