

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 66: How the West was Really Won

How the West Was Really Won: Did You Know?

What a famous painting reveals about America's move west.



Did You Know?

As North and South clashed in the Civil War, Americans saw hope in one direction: West. This mural study was commissioned during the Civil War for the House Wing of the U. S. Capitol to reflect the country's optimism. (The mural itself, modified slightly from the original, was finished a year later.) The painter, Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, described his intention: "To represent as near and truthfully as the artist was able the grand peaceful conquest of the great West."

A sense of God's providential will—America's "manifest destiny"—infuses the painting. In his notes, Leutze described the emigrants catching their first view of the "'promised land' ... having passed the troubles of the plains, 'The valley of darkness' &c." Of the woman near the center of the composition, he wrote that she "has folded her hands thanking for escape from dangers past (religious feeling indicated)."

The western "conquest" Leutze noted was not always peaceful, which is hinted in the painting's top border, where Indians flee the descending eagle. An official, though incomplete, Army compilation shows 1,065 engagements between U. S. troops (and occasionally civilians) and Native Americans between 1866 and 1891.

The struggling wagon toward the back of the picture is a more accurate depiction of westward travel than the jubilant faces toward the top. The most challenging of early overland routes, the Oregon Trail, covered 2,000 miles of barren plain and steep mountains and required 150 to 180 days to traverse. Traffic along the route didn't really begin until the 1836 party that included missionaries Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spaulding (the first white women to cross the Rockies) demonstrated the trip was feasible.

Just ahead of the wagon train, beneath a shaded cross on the rock, a small group of pioneers buries one of their company. Overland travel was dangerous, as was life in the early West, where medicine and hospitals were in short supply.

Missionary Mary Walker, who went with her husband to Oregon in the 1840s, worried about her newborn son: "What is to become of him? His parents one or both may soon be taken away, and then who will care for my child? I hope I can, with some degree of faith and confidence, commit him to the care of his Maker."

Next to the wounded boy at the bottom is a woman who "hopes to meet the father of her child, who has preceded them." At least until rail travel and established roads made the trip easier, men outnumbered women in the West by a wide margin—eight to one in Idaho and Montana in 1870. When Wyoming became the first state to grant women's suffrage, in 1869, only about 1,000 white women over the age of 10 lived there. "Wyoming gave women the right to vote," a writer for *Harper's Weekly* quipped, "in much the same spirit that New York or Pennsylvania might vote to enfranchise angels or Martians."

The portraits in the lower margin represent two phases of America's westward expansion. Daniel Boone (1734-1820), at left, was already a legend for his explorations in and around Kentucky. William Clark (1770-1838), at right, had traveled with Meriwether Lewis from 1803 to 1806 to map the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase.

The main part of the lower margin, a panorama of the "Golden Gate," or entrance to San Francisco's harbor, is tied to the painting's manifest destiny theme and its title, found in the banner at the very top. The title comes from the final stanza of a poem by Bishop George Berkeley :

***Westward the course of Empire takes its way
The first four acts already past.
A fifth shall close the drama with the day
Time's noblest offspring is the last.***

"The drama of the Pacific Ocean closes our Emigration to the west," Leutze wrote. (The poem also prompted the University of California to name its town Berkeley.)

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See the painting and read more commentary here:

www.davidson.edu/academic/english/oldenglish/steiner3.html

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How the West Was Really Won: From the Editor - Unexpected Heroes

Unexpected Heroes

Mark Galli

In a story full of cowboys, sheriffs, saloon girls, outlaws, gunfighters, prospectors, and stagecoach drivers, the church was, at best, the place where frightened townspeople gathered to sing hymns and await rescue by the all-too-worldly hero ...," writes Patricia Nelson Limerick in a 1996 essay "Believing in the American West." "If one went in search of the classic heroes in the mythic turf of the Old West, one would not bother to look among the clergy."

Limerick's next sentence, though, is the most intriguing: "In the quest for western heroes, there is good reason now to look in unexpected, less explored places." Good reason indeed, and if you look in this issue of Christian History, you will find some of those unexpected heroes.

The topic—Christianity in the American West—is as big as the region, and as diverse. There is no one overarching narrative like the Puritan story that dominates early New England. There is no single figure whose presence is felt throughout the region, such as George Whitefield in the eighteenth-century colonies. Sheldon Jackson ("[Out Yonder, on the Edge of Things](#)") is one of the largest personalities of the West, and as such deserves the attention we give him. But others could have been singled out as well, like Bishop Daniel Tuttle, "Brother Van" Ordsel ("[Local Heroes](#)"), and many others.

All in all, local heroes and local stories dominate the West, and unfortunately, we can tell only a few of these stories.

Some stories we've consciously left out for lack of space. Roman Catholic missionaries like Franciscan Marcos de Niza, for example, were already evangelizing the West nearly a century before the Pilgrims landed at Jamestown in 1620. But you won't find much information on Catholic efforts in this issue.

Be that as it may, what you have in your hand is a pretty fair picture of Protestantism in the trans-Mississippi West from about 1840 to about 1910. Some of the heroes you'll encounter here are nameless; others are flawed. But overall, you'll see a diversity of men and women who brought the gospel to the West at considerable personal sacrifice, and who lived out their faith with immense courage—and thus shaped the region more than western mythmakers have led us to believe.

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Preparing a Way in the Wilderness

Though history has all but forgotten them, it was Christian preachers and teachers who really tamed the West.

Ferenc Morton Szasz

In 1890 William D. Bloys, a Presbyterian Army chaplain at Fort Davis, Texas, began a regular outdoor service in a pasture 19 miles from the fort. Officially the "Bloys Camp Meeting," his motley gathering of cowboys and ranchers became known as the "Spiritual Hitchin' Post of West Texas." Bloys never tried to force a man to accept a faith he didn't feel he needed, but many men in that wild country did accept—and cleaned up their lives. One observer remarked, "No boy raised up at Bloys ever ended in the Jeff Davis County Jail."

Though such signs of spiritual life appeared all over the western landscape, they are completely absent from most people's visions of the nineteenth-century American frontier. Names like Buffalo Bill, Sitting Bull, Annie Oakley, Calamity Jane, Billy the Kid, and Wyatt Earp are almost synonymous with the West, while names like William D. Bloys, Daniel S. Tuttle, Charles Sheldon, Sheldon Jackson, and Brother Van Orsdel ring few bells. Yet if one looks at actual accomplishments, the situation might well be reversed. Most western communities owe far more to these unheralded clerics than they do to the high-profile outlaws or icons.

From about 1840 to the end of the century, these largely anonymous ministers shaped the contours of western life in three major ways. They formed the first churches and Sunday schools, which promoted social stability while reining in local violence; they developed a distinctly western style of Christianity that emphasized a non-denominational message of salvation and personal ethics; and they helped lay the institutional foundations—orphansages, hospitals, and schools—for scores of western communities.

Into the fray

The American West of the Civil War era was full of violence. In 1859, for example, an observer noted that the only need El Paso, Texas, had for a minister was to bury the dead. Presbyterian minister Alexander T. Rankin described Denver of 1860 as a town of no laws, jails, or courts, and thus a land with "no restraint on human passion." The bodies of six recently hanged horse thieves greeted Episcopal rector John Cornell when he first stepped off the train in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1866. Even in the 1880s, Baptist James Spencer noted that he could postmark his letters from Butte, Montana, as sent "from Hell."

The clergy naturally hoped that by organizing fledgling churches they could stem this tide. Thus their initial response was to scour their area for enough people to found a "First" (Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, etc.) church. The mobility of both pastors and parishioners, however, meant that these "First" churches remained small for years.

Frontier clerics discovered that it was often easier to organize a Union (multi-denominational) Sunday school instead. Really a Bible class for adults, these Sunday schools often developed into genuine churches. In 1914 the Presbyterians estimated that about 80 percent of their new churches in western areas had originally begun as Sunday schools.

Modest though they might have been, these churches and Sunday schools served as bulwarks of social stability. Not only did they provide venues for regular services, their rooms held a variety of social

gatherings as well, thus functioning as training grounds for political democracy. The numerous church meetings introduced people to such basic democratic principles as how to conduct public meetings via accepted rules of order, how to speak to the issue at hand, and (usually) respect for majority rule. Thus, the church and political gatherings of the era overlapped and reinforced each other.

On rare occasions, the pioneer clergy actually brought order out of chaos. Famed Methodist itinerant John "Father" Dyer reportedly staved off an 1880 anti-Chinese riot in the mining town of Breckenridge, Colorado. When an angry mob began to shout, "The Chinese must go," Dyer mounted the nearest steps and began to sing "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." He paused after several verses to launch into an extemporaneous sermon, preaching that God's love was intended for all humanity and that all men were brothers. Eventually the mob dispersed.

Although there were exceptions, most western communities treated their ministers with respect. The more educated clergy were frequently called upon to deliver graduation addresses, preside at civic functions, and serve on local school boards. Realtors and civic boosters touted the presence of ministers and churches as a mark of a community's "maturity."

A gospel with grit

The major Protestant denominations moved West at approximately the same time, but none could claim dominance in any one region. Instead, a rough-hewn ecumenism emerged as both clergy and parishioners found themselves in a decidedly minority position. Consequently, many western clerics modified their gospel presentations, giving frontier Christianity a character distinct from its eastern incarnation.

Slighting denominational concerns, these western ministers generally sought out universal themes. Methodist William B. Goode, for example, resolved never to use his sermons to condemn but always to look for the good that he could find in a frontier situation. Congregationalist James Walker tried to temper the prevailing Colorado ethos of "self-made men" by noting that both success and failure were played out against a background of Divine Providence. Arizona Baptist Romulus A. Windes confessed that whenever he delivered a sermon, he simply tried "to get people to do better."

Improving behavior was often as lofty a goal as preachers dared aim for—and they weren't afraid to use an emotional appeal to reach it. When popular Montana Methodist minister William Wesley Van Orsdel ("Brother Van") preached to a tough crowd of miners or cowboys, he would often begin with the song "Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight," which contained these lyrics:

***O where is my wandering boy tonight,
The boy of my tenderest care,
The boy who owes me my joy and light,
The child of my love and prayer?***

At the end of his sermon, Brother Van would remind his listeners, "Now don't forget your Ma and Pa. There is a light shining in their window for you. At least write and tell them what you are doing. Do it before you pull off your boots tonight."

Many a western cleric proved quite creative in shaping his message to the circumstances at hand. When Reverend Melton Jones preached in a Clifton, Arizona, saloon in 1899, he compared the religious figures of the past to the images on a deck of cards. (Another version of this theme—the Ace, one God; the deuce, Adam and Eve; the trey, the three wise men; the four, the four evangelists, etc.—was later turned into a popular song.) A Southern Methodist preaching in Phoenix in August 1898 compared that desert climate with what sinners might expect in the next world.

The original WWJD

Perhaps the best example democratizing the western gospel message is the career of the Congregational minister Charles Sheldon, who first arrived in Topeka, Kansas, in 1888. To bolster his sagging Sunday evening services, Sheldon began reading to his congregation from a novel he had underway, and, like a movie serial, left his audience hanging in suspense when he broke off his narrative for the night.

In October 1896, he began reading from his seventh and most recent work, a study titled *In His Steps*. The book opens with the arrival of a poor wanderer, who is clearly not an ordinary tramp—"not more than 30 or 33 years old, I should say." The man collapses and dies before the astounded congregation of the fictional Reverend Henry Maxwell. The man's death so unnerves people, they vow for one year to ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" before acting. The book revolves around how a newspaper editor, businessman, singer, college president, and clergyman use their talents in this new light.

The book sold incredibly well. Due to a technical error by the publisher, *In His Steps* entered the public domain, where it is still in print in numerous editions. Sales estimates range from 6 to 23 million, and in common parlance, it became known as "the second best seller to the Bible alone." By condensing personal ethics into a single phrase, Sheldon's book serves as the ultimate embodiment of the western ecumenical experience.

Body and soul

Throughout the region, western clergy also helped lay the institutional infrastructure for their communities. Except for the territorial and state governments and the saloons—which received near-universal condemnation—the West lacked permanent institutions of any sort. Thus the ministers found themselves called upon to fill a genuine need by founding orphanages, hospitals, and schools.

Virtually all the early western hospitals (those of the U. S. Army excepted) had some sort of denominational affiliation. The makeshift hospital in the Catholic mining town of Price, Utah, drew its funds from a compulsory donation from every miner. The nursing nuns left only when the ores played out. The Protestant Episcopal Church established a small hospital in Indian territory to aid "Natives," miners, and railroad men, and also set up a larger facility on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. Brother Van led the Methodists in establishing at least nine hospitals in Montana.

Since these church-run hospitals in the rural and mining areas functioned on a modest scale, most of them eventually disappeared. But the clergy in the urban centers could draw on both a wider financial base and a larger number of patients. Many of these church-run health care institutions remain vital yet today: St. Anthony's hospital in Amarillo (Catholic); St. Luke's in Boise (Episcopal), and so on.

The fin-de-siecle concern over tuberculosis (TB) drew many western clerics into health care. Episcopal Bishop Leigh Richmond Brewer founded St. Peter's Hospital in Helena in 1884, and his Idaho counterpart, James B. Funsten, founded St. Luke's in Boise 18 years later. Baptists established TB hospitals in El Paso and Tucson, while the Methodists set up Good Samaritan in Phoenix, and the Episcopalians, St. Luke's in the Desert in Tucson. (Other religious leaders became involved in this work, too: the crowning accomplishment of Denver's leading Reform rabbi, Joseph Friedman, was the creation of the National Jewish Hospital, which provided free care for TB sufferers.)

The Reverend Hugh A. Cooper, who arrived in Albuquerque with TB, opened a five-room cottage for indigent health seekers, which later grew into the extensive Presbyterian Hospital system of New Mexico.

Though founding hospitals is hardly reflected in many popular accounts of how America "won" the West, nineteenth-century westerners took note. As Episcopal Bishop Daniel Tuttle remarked in his *Reminiscences*, "When the church takes the lead in beneficent activities for human welfare, sneering at or capricious criticism of her is never heard."

"Send us a teacher"

This same pattern can be seen in education. Ministers who arrived in the West were virtually expected, by believers and religious skeptics alike, to become involved with some form of education. In Cottage Grove, Oregon, a group of militant freethinkers encouraged Cumberland Presbyterian Will V. McGee to establish a school, reluctantly concluding that a church education was preferable to no education at all.

In areas with established public schools, ministers were encouraged to sit on local school boards or serve as superintendents. The first three territorial superintendents of public instruction in Nevada—a territory that insisted on no sectarian teaching in any public school—were all Protestant clergymen. Church leaders were instrumental in establishing school systems all across the West, from El Paso to Alaska. The motto of the Congregational Church in Dakota Territory reflected this emphasis: "Evangelism and education."

Because of limited budgets, many western local governments were unable to establish comprehensive public school systems until the early twentieth century. Thus, the educational network of the West from 1840 to 1900 remained a patchwork of public, Roman Catholic, and Protestant parochial education.

Western parochial schools, naturally, varied from place to place, but in two areas, New Mexico and Utah, the Protestant clergy turned education into a central feature of their mission. Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and especially Presbyterian clerics and laywomen erected entire school systems. They did so to instruct the "exceptional populations," as they politely termed the Hispanic Catholics and Latter-day Saints, in the manners and mores of mainstream America. By 1883, for example, the Presbyterian school system taught about 2,000 Utah children and perhaps a thousand New Mexicans.

Churches had already discovered that neither Hispanic Catholics nor Mormons would listen to traveling Protestant ministers. So while male ministers often supervised educational operations, middle- and upper-class women almost always taught the classes. As Presbyterian Sheldon Jackson (see "Out There on the Edge of Things," page 30) once observed, "They won't come hear preachers; send us a teacher." Another writer, expressing the biases of his time, penned, "Christ's command, 'Go preach,' is not more obligatory on man than his command 'Go teach' is on women."

The Protestant concern for education culminated in the establishment of numerous small denominational colleges all through the West. The Presbyterians founded Hastings College (Nebraska), Austin (Texas), and Occidental (California), while the Disciples of Christ established Pepperdine (California) and Texas Christian University. The Methodists founded Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Nebraska Wesleyan in Lincoln (for years known as "Northern Methodist"), and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The USC athletic teams were proudly called the "Methodists" until 1912, when a local sports reporter noted that the football team fought "like Trojans," and they assumed their current name.

These denominational colleges were especially important in the historically under-churched Pacific Northwest. At a time when the state schools, such as the University of Washington, Washington State, University of Oregon, and Oregon State, remained small, denominational colleges educated many a young northwesterner: Gonzaga (Catholic), McMinnville (Baptist), Whitworth (Presbyterian), Linfield (Baptist), Whitman (Congregational), Pacific Lutheran, and so on.

The Episcopal Church played a special role in the western Protestant educational crusade. Unlike the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, which established a range of primary schools, middle schools, academies (high schools), and colleges, the Episcopal bishops concentrated mostly on erecting academies, often directed toward educating young women. From 1870 to 1918, western missionary bishops established about 20 such academies throughout the region. Over time, most of these academies disappeared as nearby colleges flourished and people became more suspicious of schools with religious ties.

In the early 1900s, Idaho Episcopal bishop James B. Funsten found himself on the defensive. Critics began to question the need for church involvement in western health care and education. But Funsten vigorously defended the Episcopal institutions. As he saw it, the overall mission of the church was to treat the whole person, mind, body, and soul. In a sense, the schools, hospitals, and churches combined to do just that.

From the 1860s to about 1900, then, western Protestant ministers helped lay the institutional foundations for their regions. In truth, the various denominations were the only organizations that had the funds and personnel to do so. As a Denver observer noted in 1902, "If a new hospital is wanted or a new college is wanted, it is the church people of the locality who are called upon to meet the expense of it." This had been the case in the American West for almost half a century.

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Related Links:

Start your search for academic information on the American West here: www.academicinfo.net/amwest.html

Find articles on Charles Sheldon (***In His Steps***) from the ***Topeka Capital-Journal*** at: <http://cjonline.com/sheldon/>.

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A Church of Their Own

Ethnic congregations were essential for building community in the nation's most diverse region.

Carl V. Hallberg

As immigration boomed between 1840 and 1920, the central plains attracted Europeans from agrarian backgrounds, while the West Coast and the Rockies lured Europeans and Asians seeking opportunity. By 1870, nearly three in ten westerners were foreign-born—and many of these newcomers had strong religious ties.

Not unexpectedly, then, ethnic churches became the cornerstones of many immigrant communities. Traditional worship reminded newcomers of home and helped them reaffirm their cultural identity. More importantly, ethnic churches evoked a profound sense of spiritual fulfillment that other American churches could not provide. As an 1887 German Lutheran sermon from Missouri confidently affirmed: "Dear God, grant that the Word may also be preached pure and unadulterated among those who speak English, as it is among us."

As immigrants settled across the trans-Mississippi West, religious leaders attempted to keep pace by creating new parishes, dioceses, and districts. German Methodists, Dutch Reformed, Eastern Orthodox, and Icelandic Lutherans, among others, could be found from the Midwest to the Pacific Coast. Chinese and Japanese Christian churches dotted parts of the Mountain West and the Pacific Coast, notably California. Growing ethnic populations often retained their identity even within denominations. The Lutheran Church in America was not a singular institutional body but a composite of many ethnic synods, including Danish, Norwegian, Finnish, and Slovakian.

Ethnic clergy who had been hindered by state churches in Europe readily found an outlet for their evangelical energies in America. Fratisek Kun, a Protestant Czech minister, served rural communities in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Before coming to America, he was warned that the country offered "no promising opportunities whatsoever for a Czech preacher," but Kun proved his critics wrong and spread the gospel among his fellow Czech immigrants.

Distances between congregations, internal divisions, and insufficient funds unnerved many pastors but didn't necessarily dissuade them. Rev. Christian Scriver Thorpe, a German Lutheran minister in eastern Montana and western North Dakota in 1906, found his assignment troubling at first. He was "filled with foreboding" about his work on the frontier. "But I also felt," he recalled, "that God, who had called me to serve Him, would not let me down."

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No Rest for the Weary

Few pioneers possessed strong enough resolve to keep the Sabbath on the Overland Trail.

Winton U. Solberg

When William Clark of Freeport, Illinois, and his party participated in the westward movement that carried thousands of Americans to the Pacific Coast during the mid-nineteenth century, they demonstrated remarkable fidelity to a Christian institution. Leaving Leavenworth in 1857, Clark and three others joined up with a firm that was to haul freight to army posts in Utah. The four men contracted "with the express understanding that we should not be asked to drive Sundays, unless for the want of grass or water." The men pledged to each other to stand by their bargain.

Shortly after setting out, on a Sunday when the bullwhackers were resting after a hard week's work, Chatham Rennick, the train boss, directed the four to hitch up their cattle in order to drive the remainder of the day. The men refused. Rennick did not press the point. When this experience was repeated on the next Sabbath, the man declared, "drive Sunday we would not."

After another such encounter, Rennick discharged the four and refused to let them take their guns. A tense confrontation with guns drawn followed. Clark and his companions feared for their lives. Rennick had "men enough to massacre us," Clark retaliated, "but not enough ... to make us drive a single rod." Rennick pleaded with the men, who remained adamant. Never again were they asked to drive on the Sabbath.

This encounter might have been exceptional, but it illustrates that Sabbath observance was still important when Americans set out on the Overland Trail for the Pacific Coast. "He who starts across the continent," wrote one overland diarist in 1852, "is most sure to leave his religion on the east side of the Missouri river." This notion entered the history books. But first-hand accounts of the westward movement reveal a more complex reality.

Leaving faith in the East

Crossing the plains, the desert, and the mountains was a serious undertaking, and in 1849 and 1850 most emigrants traveled in organized wagon trains for mutual assistance and protection. Before jumping off, some companies drafted a constitution stipulating that the Sabbath was to be a day of rest except in cases of absolute necessity. The reasons for Sabbath observance were practical as well as religious. "Never travel on the Sabbath," advised Joseph E. Ware in *The Emigrant's Guide to California* (1849). "Those who lay by on the Sabbath, resting themselves and their teams," Ware added, "would get to California 20 days sooner than those who traveled seven days a week."

Sabbath observance was generally best during the early weeks on the trail, but even people reared under religious influences often lost their moral bearings once they entered a land where neither law nor common practice restrained. The issue caused dissension and split otherwise harmonious parties. In addition, the passion for speed fed on itself, fracturing companies into even smaller units that treated all days alike. Necessity ruled with an iron hand. Trains depended on campsites with water, grass, and wood. Each train competed with hundreds of others for these essentials.

Sixty-five diaries and reminiscences for the gold-rush years of 1849 and 1850 reveal diverse patterns of Sabbath observance on the Overland Trail. Eighteen diarists simply disregard the Lord's Day, while 23

described companies that traveled as readily on the Sabbath as on other days. George W.B. Evans, a devoted Presbyterian from Defiance, Ohio, characterized Sunday as "the day of rest, set apart for the good of mankind." Yet his company usually traveled on Sundays. Members did celebrate the Fourth of July, which Evans called the "great National Sabbath."

Charles C. Gray of New York describes his company's Sabbath observance with mocking irreverence. One Sunday the party stopped "out of respect for the Sabbath (thereby meaning we had some clothes to wash and some wagon repairs to do)." Charles R. Parke of Como, Illinois, crossed the plains with a party of nine men and three wagons. They drove on all or part of 13 Sundays, remaining in camp on four. Parke's company marched on the Sabbath immediately before and after the Fourth of July but remained in camp near South Pass on "the Nation's birthday." With plenty of milk and snow available, Parke made ice cream on "this Sacred day of the year."

Sabbatarian minority

A second pattern was that of travelers who desired to observe the Sabbath but found impediments in their way. Some Sabbatarians went along with a non-Sabbath-keeping majority out of expediency. James Abbey of New Albany, Indiana, was in a company that normally traveled on Sunday. Yet his journal stresses the holiness of the Sabbath and its sweet memories of home and family. The Sabbath was "the day our mothers charged us never to forget."

Solomon Gorgas left Ohio with a band that frequently traveled on the Sabbath. Gorgas denounced the practice as a desecration of the day, remembering the Sabbath as "the blessed day of rest and quiet." But on the trail there was no rest for man or beast: no preaching, no praying. "All respect for the sabbath of the Lord is here forgotten."

Some companies set out intending to observe the holy day but found it hard to do so. Ansel J. McCall of Bath, New York, who joined the Robidoux company west of St. Joseph's, proposed that the company rest on the Sabbath except in case of necessity. His motion failed, and at Salt Lake the assembly fell apart. McCall's group remained in camp on 11 of 17 Sabbaths on the trail.

Elisha D. Perkins, an Ohio journalist, left for California with the Marietta Gold Hunters. Members agreed to rest on the Sabbath, "an arrangement the policy of which is evident to those who know anything of frontier travelling, & very gratifying to those who have been taught to reverence the day at home." The company planned its Saturday travel with a view to camping on the Sabbath for the rest that the day afforded man and beast. In time, however, necessity obliged the ensemble to travel on the Sabbath. Members split into smaller groups so as to travel faster.

Catherine M. Haun of Clinton, Iowa, and her husband joined a caravan consisting of 120 persons and 70 wagons bound for California. "When the camp ground was desirable enough to warrant it," Haun wrote, "we did not travel on the Sabbath." The men spent the day mending wagons and the like, the women cooked and washed clothes and "all felt somewhat rested on Monday morning."

Divided camps

A third pattern of Sabbath observance was that of emigrant groups with a strong commitment to the Fourth Commandment. These companies generally set out by observing the Sabbath according to a written rule or a tacit agreement but found it difficult to realize their ideal. They divided over Sunday travel.

Elisha B. Lewis of Rock County, Wisconsin, went west with an outfit whose written rules prohibited Sunday travel. When the company made good distance all one week, Lewis thought it only reasonable that their teams and the men should rest on the holy day. But the majority ruled, "so there was no other

way but to go in contradiction to the constitution by which we professed to be governed and also to transgress the laws of God which some of us still hold more sacred."

Charles E. Pancoast, a Quaker druggist from St. Louis, went to California with a company of 200 that passed a resolution not to travel on the Sunday when it could be avoided. They lay over every Sabbath except two, when, because of necessity, they moved.

Augustus R. Burbank of Naples, Illinois, and his wife were staunch Sabbatharians. Their group was organized "expressly was a Sabbath observing company & all joined as such with this understanding." Soon, however, some members favored moving on the Sabbath. "There is but few men that will keep the Sabbath, " Burbank lamented, "where there is sacrifice to be made." Burbank's party, which split from the rest of the company over the issue of Sunday travel, achieved a nearly perfect record of Sabbath-keeping en route to Sacramento.

Samuel Rutherford Dundass, a deeply religious Presbyterian, joined an Ohio company whose members adopted a resolution to lie by on the Sabbath. After two weeks on the plains, the 60 men divided into several companies of ten in order to travel faster. Dundass's group, which struck out alone, soon teamed up with other pioneers. Through it all, Dundass faithfully observed the Sabbath, although on three occasions necessity compelled short moves to provide for the oxen. Dundass justified his observance on religious grounds. "This is the holy Sabbath," he wrote, "and in accordance with our custom we observe the day." A week later he vowed, "We wish to do as the Israelites did in the wilderness of Sinai, to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest, holy unto the Lord." The Sabbath was a day of rest, a time to read the Bible and engage in private religious exercises. "Welcome, even here in the wilderness, welcome sweet day of rest that saw the Lord arise!"

Ideally, the Sabbath was a day of rest for both humans and animals. When Joseph Warren Wood of Walworth, Wisconsin, and his company of 60 men rested one Sunday, a blast of the horn summoned members to hear a sermon by an old preacher. For some Argonauts a minister pro tem stood in the center of a corral, conducting a devotional service while everyone continued with his or her work. The rest day was not typically one of leisure. Routine chores that were regarded as unchristian at home—making repairs, rearranging loads, cooking, and washing clothes—had to be done.

A new Sabbath view

These accounts of Sabbath observance on the Overland Trail illuminate important aspects of American religious development. The trek westward was a mirror reflecting the character of the emigrants and the quality of the society from which they came. Almost certainly men and women who participated in this movement viewed the Sabbath in a new light when they reached the Pacific Coast.

Perhaps the larger significance of the events described here is their bearing on Sabbath-observance in later American life. In all likelihood, Americans who went overland to California in the years described never again viewed the Sabbath as they had before leaving home. Thus the experience of crossing the plains may be seen as a preview of the economic, social, demographic and secular forces that would contribute to transforming the place of the Sabbath in later American culture.

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The creators of the PBS documentary on the Oregon Trail present some of their findings here:

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 66: How the West was Really Won

Tested On All Sides

Excerpts from a wagon train diary reveal that traveling overland was much more than a physical challenge.

Mary Richardson Walker

In May 1838, Mary Richardson Walker was newly married, pregnant, and riding horseback in Missouri on her way to Oregon. She was traveling with her husband and three other missionary couples to take up ministry with Indians. The party journeyed with fur trading companies for protection and guidance. Her original spelling is retained.

[May] 5th.Saturday. Rose before sunrise. Left the camp at eight. Very cold. Did not dismount till about two. ...Baked some bread & assisted Mrs. Gray in making pot pie. Mr. Smith undertook to help Mr. W. correct me for dictating to Mr. Gray. I think the reproof quite unmerited. Feel so tried with Mr. W. I know not what to do. He seems to think more of Mrs. Smith than of me. Spends a great deal more time in her society than in mine. Do I deserve all this, or is not my dear W. to blame? I feel that I am cruelly neglected. I think I try to do all & the best I can.

6th.Sabbath. Last night a frost. Ice in the pail. Mr. W. rather sick. Travelled about 24 miles. Not a very pleasant way of keeping the Sabbath. Very cold, almost like winter. Had no idea that we were to experience so much wind & cold. Some of our company expressed regret that they have undertaken the journey. I suspect more from aversion to the toil than real dread of sin. ...

10th.Thursday. Killed a calf. I dressed the head. The other family [i.e., the Grays and the Eells who shared the other tent] was displeased because the calf was killed. Refused to eat of it. I felt exceedingly tried to have things go on in this way. Resolved to talk with husband; think he has done wrong. Had been too much influenced by Br. S. & upheld him when he ought to have reproved.

11th.Friday. Was gratified & pleased to find Mr. W. determined if possible to [effect] a reconciliation. I found it almost unnecessary to say what I had contemplated. Mr. S. & wife seem much less inclined to make concessions. I think S. is stubborn. ... It seems to me that he is more out of the way than Gray. He insisted in the first place that we should cook the veal for dinner, but we did not. ... At tea he insisted again on my cooking veal but I told him until there was peace I would not cook or eat of it. Mr. W. thought as I did, so though he looked cross, he said no more.

After the horses were picketed, we went in Mr. Gray's tent & a treaty of peace was negotiated. It was agreed that the past should be forgotten, that they would commence anew. Several resolves were passed, but the peace so far as it related to Mr. Smith, I fear was a forced point. He could not in any decency have helped falling in with the proposition. But I believe the same wrong spirit remains. ...

17th.Thursday. Last night had a pretty fair specimen of prairie shower. We were scarcely expecting rain & made no preparation. In the night, it stormed tremendously. Our tent scarcely screened us at all. Our bed was utterly flooded & almost everything wet. It was windy but cleared away so we traveled about 15 miles & encamped where there was no wood. ... Used prairie coal [dried cow chips] for cooking. Altho windy it was not very cold. Rode more comfortable than I have some other days. ... It was very pleasant & afforded us a good chance to get dry & prepare properly for another storm. For this, thankful.

[June] 10th.Sabbath. Today were designing to cross the Platte but the rain prevented. So we have for

the first time an opportunity to lay by on the Sabbath. I am not sufficiently well to enjoy it as much as I would like, yet, I am glad of rest. I have reflected much on the goodness & mercy of God. I think he has given me a good husband & trust he will grant me favor in his eyes. He treats me kindly & I can but believe loves me.

I, however, experience some anxiety on this account. But I think I am rather gaining ground. That he feels more confidence in me & sees more plainly the defects of others. My attachment to him does not in the least abate. I feel as much anxiety as ever to please him. I regard my husband as a special blessing conferred by Heaven & I am determined if possible that my life shall evince my gratitude.

My health at present is rather feeble & I find it difficult to keep up a usual amount of cheerfulness. If I were to yield to inclination, I should cry half the time without knowing what for. My circumstances are rather trying. So much danger attends me on every hand. A long journey yet before me, going I know not whither; without mother or sister to attend me, can I expect to survive it all? ...

Thus far I have been enabled to keep my temper on all occasions though my feelings have been tried exceedingly by some of the company. ...

11th.Monday. Rainy. The water comes into the tent. I was sick of diarreah. A little past noon, we were summoned to cross the Platte, just at that time the rain ceased. We crossed safely in boats constructed of Buffalow hides & the bottom of two waggons. In the forenoon, I cried to think how comfortable father's hogs were. In the afternoon, felt we were dealt with in mercy. The snow capped Mts. appeared.

15th.Friday. This morning, there being no dew, went in company with Mr & Mrs Gray to the top of the rock. It is, I should judge more than 100 ft. high & a half mile in circumference, elliptical in form. The rock is a coarse granite, in which quartz predominates. It appears as if it had been scraped by something. ...

The scenery has been beautiful & magnificent & with me the pleasure of beholding it has relieved in great measure the weariness of the way. Dear God, the mountains speak aloud thy powers, and every purling rill proclaims thy praise.

I wish Mr. W. would seem to feel as much interest in viewing the works of nature, as I do. I think the journey would be much less wearisome for him.

24th.Sabbath. Mr. S. has gone to living by himself. Query: does not the course he is pursuing cost him some misgivings? It will be pleasant not to hear so much fault finding. ... Mr. Walker preached in the A.M. on judgment, sitting in the open air in the shade of our beautiful grove. He had 18 hearers. We enjoyed the meeting much.

In the afternoon Mr. Eells preached. Had only our family. ... Read "Saints Rest" between & after meetings. Husband seems to like to stay in the tent now. We all put on our Sunday dresses & acted as much like Sabbath at home as we could. I think I am rather happy.

Related Links:

The creators of the PBS documentary on the Oregon Trail present some of their findings here:
www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Oregontrail.html

More from PBS here:
www.pbs.org/opb/oregontrail/.

And from the End of the Oregon Trail History Library:

www.teleport.com/~eotic/histhome.html.

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Yesterday's Christian Woman

Pioneer wives held their households together with a blend of grit and grace.

Diana Lynn Severance

When Nutter and Nancy Murphy and their family came to Shawnee, Kansas, in October 1859, the first thing they did after finding temporary lodging for the night was to hold family devotions. Daughter Lydia later remembered, "That night the family Bible rested in the center of the room. We gathered around the table, seated on boxes and improvised chairs while the usual evening family prayers were held after the reading of a chapter of Scriptures. During the 50 years of his Kansas citizenship, this morning and evening Scripture reading and prayer was not once omitted in my father's house."

For many pioneer families, Christian faith was an integral part of life. It formed the backbone of their values and sustained them through numerous hardships. When John Klein, who grew up on a Texas farm at the end of the 1800s, thought about all his mother Ida (see "[Religion—Sunday and Every Day](#)," below) did in a day to care for the family and help run the farm, he recognized, "Special strength provided by the Almighty must have made it possible for her to do all this."

Frontier farms were family farms, and the family was an economic as well as a social unit. Though most pioneers believed the woman's sphere was within the home, the shortage of manpower meant many women (and children) helped with the farm. They helped dig cellars, build cabins, plow, plant, and harvest, as well as tend to their "domestic" activities, such as cleaning, cooking, sewing, and caring for the children. To understand the lives of frontier Christian women, then, we must take a look at the toil that filled their days.

Clara Hildebrand, looking back on her own pioneer experience, described the woman's role:

"The pioneer Kansas woman shared her husband's work and interest in the garden, the orchard, the crops and animals of the farm; she worked in the garden and gathered its products. She knew just how each vineyard or tree in the young orchard was coming in. She shared in the hope for a beautiful crop as the field things sprouted and grew green and tall. Did a horse, dog or other farm animal get badly gored, cut or wounded, hers was the task to cleanse the wound and take the stitches that drew the torn edges together."

Besides outdoor responsibilities, a pioneer wife spent a lot of time in the kitchen. Sarah Hammond White explained the basics of fireplace cooking:

"We used kettles suspended from a wire across the fireplace and boiled most of our food; baking was done in an iron kettle about four inches deep and two and a half from the ground, supported by three iron legs. This baker, as it was called, was covered with an iron lid upon which coals of fire were placed, and the baker was placed on coals of fire too, and I want to say no malleable stores ever baked better biscuits."

One central Texas mother with an especially large family recalled that "breadmaking was much trouble and took so long. ... We had only three [dutch ovens], each one just large enough for one loaf at a time, and there had to be 20 loaves every day because there were so many of us."

Men and boys helped gather fuel for the fire and keep the wood box filled. On the treeless plains they collected dried buffalo chips in sacks and kept them for use as fuel for cooking as well as for warm fires in winter.

Cornbread and corn mush were standard fare in the beginning, but food usually became abundant as the family farm thrived. Gardens and orchards produced vegetables and fruits that women canned or dried for use in the winter. Several times a week, women baked bread. If the family had a good cow, butter was made every other day, both for family use and to be sold in town for extra money.

With flour and sugar often being scarce, the enterprising pioneer woman learned to make do. One woman wrote, "I came here willingly believing it to be for the best and am determined to try with the assistance of Providence to make the best of it."

Special occasions called for heightened creativity. Bessie Wilson remembered when a neighbor was returning to Kansas with a new bride in 1875:

"Mother was asked to bake a cake for the affair. In consequence, we ate bread without butter for several days in order that father might have enough to take to the store and exchange for the amount of sugar necessary to make a cake. This he did, covering 16 miles on horseback. Mother's was the only cake at this important gathering, and despite the fact that she had no recipe to go by, that she used sour milk and soda in the making, it was pronounced by those who partook as being all a bride's cake should be!"

Frontier women were also responsible for the family's clothing. Many families raised sheep for wool, which the women washed and the children carded for spinning. The wool was dyed with natural dyes — walnut bark for brown, osage bark for yellow, cochineal bugs for red. After spinning the yarn, women knitted socks, scarves, and sweaters. Clothing was simple and sewn at home. Fabrics such as calico and muslin had to be bought at stores, and some fabrics were recycled: flour sacks, for example, were often made into underwear.

For good stewardship, as well as necessity, clothes were repeatedly patched or re-sewn and given as hand-me-downs. Scraps of fabric were used in quilts with designs whose names often reflected the frontier life—turkey tracks, bear claw, butter churn, log cabin, wild goose chase. Sometimes the quilt's name referred to political issues—54° 40' or Fight, Bleeding Kansas, Texas Star. Still other designs proclaimed Christian themes—the Delectable Mountains (from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*), Jacob's Ladder, Cross and Crown.

On the frontier, where schools were often unavailable, both parents, but especially the women, homeschooled their children in the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Training in the Christian faith was also important. Rebecca Ebey, a pioneer from Virginia, wrote, "We ... spend our time in training the young minds of our children in the principles of Christ and creating within them a thirst for moral knowledge." The Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* became the primary textbooks for many. Teachers on the frontier were very often sent out by eastern missionary agencies, and when schools were established, they also inculcated a Christian moral education.

But most of the Christian education and character development took place in the faithful day-to-day fulfillment of farm responsibilities. One of a child's earliest chores was feeding the chickens. Later the child might be given a calf to care for. Parents expected their children to develop habits of industry and hard work, not just for the building of Christian character but for the family's very survival.

Diana Lynn Severance is the author of Deep Roots, Strong Branches, a history of the Klein family in Texas, and is a member of the Christian History advisory board.

Religion—Sunday and Every Day

John and Ida Klein lived in Texas in the late 1800s. They faithfully attended Salem Lutheran Church for years (often traveling Saturday evenings to make sure they were in time for the Sunday service), but their religion was hardly confined to Sundays. Family devotions were held daily, blessings were said before meals, and a prayer of thanksgiving after meals.

John and Ida's oldest daughter, Johanna, later summarized the important teachings her mother had passed on to her:

"To read the Bible and pray every day;

To right each wrong before the sun went down;

To count to ten before speaking when angry;

To give of my own spending money to God's work;

To call upon sick friends, and to carry flowers to them from my own garden;

To form habits of regularity, touching all phases of life;

To attend all services of the church;

To take Jesus with me wherever I chose to go, but to choose, therefore, only those places where Jesus would be loved;

To give service to Him in every way possible and to seek His guidance before any plan for personal action be carried out. Her favorite expression was 'The Lord willing.'

To be faithful and to love God and my neighbor;

To be true, and to be trustworthy;

My mother taught me these principles for Christian living."

—*Diana Lynn Severance*

Related Links:

For more information, see ***Women on the Western Frontier: A Selected Bibliography at www.kshs.org/library/bibwomen.htm***

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Forty-Niner Faith

Traditional Christianity didn't stand much of a chance in the California gold fields.

Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp

Standing on a hill overlooking San Francisco in 1849, adventurer Bayard Taylor saw scattered houses, a crowded harbor, distant mountains, and the "restless, feverish tide of life in that little spot." He added, "Every new-comer in San Francisco is overtaken with a sense of complete bewilderment. ... One knows not whether he is awake or in some wonderful dream."

What Taylor did not mention was the presence of churches or ministers in this busy scene. Evangelical religion, it seemed, did not figure in the community life of the thousands of forty-niners and others who flocked to the Pacific Coast between 1848 and 1856. Yet the California Gold Rush was one of the most morally significant events of nineteenth-century American life, and it had a lasting influence on the coast's religious expression.

Rocky spiritual soil

When Christians in the East and Midwest heard about the California gold strike, they invested it with great religious importance. To some it signaled the hand of Providence, dictating individual, family, and national destiny. Maine pastor George Shepherd asked, "Does it not seem as if Providence had been keeping these regions from the attention of the great nations until a thoroughly **Protestant** people could occupy them?" Ministers preached sermons to departing adventurers to stay true to their faith while mining. Mothers (like that of New Yorker William Swain, who left for California in April 1849), marked passages in their sons' Bibles to read while away.

Some Western migrants reveled in their newfound freedom from the discipline that had characterized life back home. But others lamented their inability to observe the Sabbath and take part in spiritual community. Methodist merchant Peter Decker complained one Sunday, "This is an unpleasant day to me; stores all open and is contrary to my feelings to do business on Sunday, but could not close here as this is the business day of all others. So I spend the day in the store."

California was a difficult place to preserve one's faith fully intact. The mix of peoples from all over the world, plus a common desire to "get rich quick and get out," made community life (religious or otherwise) exceedingly fragile. The earliest mining techniques required miners constantly to seek another site. Men moved with the seasons between the larger cities of San Francisco and Sacramento and the mining areas to the east.

The dearth of women was also a problem. Like most evangelical Protestants at mid-century, forty-niners saw women as "naturally" pious, invested with the task of keeping men on the straight and narrow path of righteousness. Without wives and mothers to urge them to attend church, miners, the majority of whom were under the age of 30, did not see the point of going to church—even if they could find one. "The miner has not the society of the home circle to cheer and enliven him," lamented one miner. "He has no longer the friends, the innocent recreation to which he has been accustomed. On the Sabbath morning, no church is open."

Established denominations sent only a few pastors to California, and those who arrived struggled to survive the high cost of living and rough forty-niner culture. C. M. Welles sized up one "dignified

young graduate of the eastern seminary—clad in garments of spotless black," noting, "The poor man was as helpless with his theology and his ways, as if he had come to swim in the ocean with fetters on."

The result was small, underfunded churches surrounded by a host of temptations unknown in eastern towns: saloons, brothels, and gambling houses, all open on Sundays and fueled by the wealth of those profiting most from the mineral rush. Evangelical leaders could hardly compete, either financially or psychologically, with the immediate allure of these attractions.

As one Baptist preacher observed, "I love my work but have never seen a harder task than to get a man to look through a lump of gold into eternity. It is more like beating the air, like contending with the elements, like confining the tide or stilling the tempest, than I have hitherto supposed could possibly exist."

Do-it-yourself religion

Despite their surroundings, most forty-niners were not irreligious men. They came to the Pacific Coast to make their fortunes and go home, not to stay and build a future. Thrust into a world that was unfamiliar, chaotic, and filled with new attractions, these argonauts often did their best to preserve evangelical values. Still, in a "world turned upside down," religious life looked different.

John Doble, a forty-niner from Indiana, was in his early twenties when he and a friend agreed to travel west. Although never much of a churchgoer, Doble worried constantly in his diary about the state of his soul and the moral value of his behavior. "I am not a church member," he wrote, "but never interfere with those who wish to be. ... I take for my religion the words of Christ, 'As ye would that others should do unto you, etc.' And I do try to live up to it, but I sometimes fail in it, which is nothing but human."

Doble and others like him had little interest in church buildings, or even in contributing to the development of local religious communities. Much to the chagrin of evangelical ministers, who tried to construct spiritual life during the gold rush on the model of midwestern and eastern small towns, the California forty-niners experienced religion as something private and intensely personal. Surrounded by people of different faiths, and in rapid motion themselves, they worried less about formal creeds and more about individual piety and spiritual experience—no matter the source.

In July 1853 Doble went to hear a Mormon speaker, attended an "exhibition of Spiritual Manifestations," and witnessed the performance of a traveling necromancer. He also had a phrenological examination that charted the contours of his head (a common form of therapy in the nineteenth century). None of these pursuits seemed at odds with his occasional churchgoing, which took him to all four churches in town, including the Catholic church. Doble felt all these activities contributed to his moral well-being.

By the 1860s, life in California began to stabilize. Women and families from the East joined their husbands, rudimentary mining gave way to mining techniques that rendered workers a steady wage, and ministers eventually built churches, schools, and congregations that became self-supporting. Protestant religious community was born, and clergy could return to preaching in churches rather than seeking souls in the gulches and riverbeds of the Sierra Nevada.

Yet the Pacific Coast remained religiously distinctive in both its perils and its promise. As one Methodist leader put it, "California is so full of contradictions in herself, so new, so gigantic, that none at a distance can comprehend the field."

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Heaven Can Wait

Methodist William Taylor was the best-known evangelist in early California. Author of Seven Years' Street Preaching in San Francisco, he eschewed offers to speak indoors, preferring to deliver his message from a platform of overturned crates within earshot of bars and brothels. His audiences were often less than receptive, as he noted in his 1858 volume California Life Illustrated:

I preached to a large assembly of miners one Sunday afternoon in the streets of Placerville, a flourishing mining city of 6,000 inhabitants. In front of my goods-box pulpit stood a stage-coach, which was crowded to its utmost capacity with as many of my auditors [hearers] as were fortunate enough to secure so good a seat. I endeavored to show the multitude before me their unfitness for heaven in their unregenerated state, their utter want of sympathy with God, or adaptation to the immunities of heaven.

To illustrate the truth of my position, I said, "If God should dispatch a rail-car train to the city of Placerville this afternoon to convey passengers direct to heaven, the conductor might whistle till the setting of the sun and not get one passenger. Heaven has no attractions for you. It is a place to which you don't want to go. Why, if the flaming steeds of Elijah's chariot of fire were hitched on to that stage-coach, and the driver cracked his whip for the heavenly country, every fellow in it would jump out."

And in a moment the coach was cleared, every man in it leaped for the street in an apparent fright, from the apprehension that, perhaps, Elijah's horses might be hitched to the stage, and they taken off to glory, a place to which they did not wish to go.

Related Links:

The Oakland Museum of California provides a virtual gold rush exhibit at:
www.museumca.org/goldrush/fever.html

For California Gold Rush links, see
<http://malakoff.com/cago.htm>

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Growth of the West

Population of the United States in 1850: 23,191,876

Center of population: 23 miles southeast of Parkersburg, western Virginia

Population of the United States in 1890: 62,947,714

Center of population: 20 miles east of Columbus, Indiana

Population of western states and territories in 1850 (including present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, and Utah): 179,000

Population of western states and territories in 1890: 3,134,000

Land area of the United States and its territories in square miles,

1840: 1,753,588

1860: 2,973,965

Miles of railroad

1840: 2,808

1890: 163,597

Timeline

1833 Four Flathead and Nez Percé Indians journey to St. Louis to inquire about Christian missionaries

1836 Missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman arrive in Walla Walla River valley, Washington

1837 Cherokees forcibly removed from Georgia to Oklahoma by U. S. government

1841 Migration begins along the Oregon Trail

1846 Mexican-American War begins; the first stage coach line west of the Missouri, Oregon's "Telegraph Line," established

1847 Mormons begin trek to Salt Lake City

1847 Cayuse Indians massacre the Whitmans and 12 others

1848 Gold discovered at Sutter's Mill in California

1856 Methodist bishop William Taylor publishes *Seven Years' Street Preaching in San Francisco*

1857 Dred Scott Decision prohibits banning of slavery in U. S. territories

- 1861** Civil War begins; completion of the first transcontinental telegraph makes the Pony Express obsolete
- 1862** Homestead Act offers 160 acres of land to anyone who will live on it for five years
- 1866** Episcopalian Daniel Tuttle named missionary bishop of Montana
- 1867** U. S. purchases Alaska
- 1869** First transcontinental railroad completed when east and west meet in Promontory Point, Utah
- 1871** Indian Appropriation Act makes tribes subject to federal law
- 1872** Itinerant preacher "Brother Van" (William Wesley Van Orsdel) arrives in Montana
- 1873** Jesse James robs his first train
- 1878** Taylor F. Ealy and his wife, Mary, attempt to conduct school and organize a church in the midst of the Lincoln County (N. M.) War
- 1881** Earps and McLaurys shoot it out near the O. K. Corral
- 1882** Endicott Peabody arrives to minister in Tombstone, Arizona
- 1883** Buffalo Bill Cody opens his Wild West show
- 1885** Sheldon Jackson named general agent of education in Alaska
- 1889** Oklahoma land rush begins
- 1890** Mormon "Manifesto" officially ends polygamy
- 1890** Army chaplain William D. Bloys starts camp meetings outside Fort Davis, Texas
- 1895** Federal Council of Churches in America founded
- 1896** Klondike gold strike attracts nearly 100,000 miners to Alaska
- 1897** Congregational minister Charles Sheldon publishes ***In His Steps***
- 1900** Western temperance crusader Carry Nation begins attacks on Kansas saloons
- 1905** Sheldon Jackson investigated for mismanagement of Alaska's schools and reindeer program
- 1906** Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, led by William Seymour, sparks worldwide Pentecostalism
- 1909** Henry Ford manufactures the Model T

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Out Yonder, on the Edge of Things

The most controversial, and most effective, missionary to the West and Alaska, Sheldon Jackson was always pushing the boundaries.

Randy Bishop

Before the automobile or airplane, Sheldon Jackson managed to log nearly one million miles from 1858 to 1908, primarily west of the Mississippi, as he served his Presbyterian denomination and the United States. Along the way, the five-foot, four-inch missionary managed to get a few things done:

He organized the first Presbyterian churches in Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Arizona, and Alaska (leaving 77,105 new communicants in his wake), and he started 53 schools in Alaska. He founded Westminster College in Salt Lake City in 1895, started two newspapers (the *Rocky Mountain Presbyterian* and Sitka's *North Star*), and organized an Alaska Society of Natural History and Ethnology in Sitka. Sheldon Jackson College (Presbyterian), also in Sitka, bears his name.

"I have never seen him idle for a moment," wrote fellow traveler Alice Palmer Henderson. "**He never hurries but just persists.**" Even through setbacks—poor health, one arrest and two legal trials—he persisted. Sheldon Jackson ranks as perhaps the most remarkable and controversial American missionary in the last half of the nineteenth century.

Searching out the land

Jackson's whirlwind life began quietly on May 18, 1834, in Minaville, upstate New York. His parents were staunch Presbyterians. He graduated from Union College in 1855, and in 1857, while studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, he wrote, "It was to be [for] the mission service that I was dedicated in infant baptism."

After graduation, he married Mary Voorhees and immediately applied to the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board to go overseas. The board turned him down, claiming he was not physically strong enough, and instead asked him to teach Choctaw boys in the Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). After 12 months of unpleasant duties and three bouts of malaria, he resigned.

Jackson next ministered to immigrants in La Crescent, Minnesota, then served as a Union Army chaplain during the Civil War, and then led a church in Rochester, Minnesota. But none of these fields could hold him. One of Jackson's friends said he could not resist "running ahead of the crowd, climbing a hill, scaling a mountain, following a valley, opening a schoolhouse ... constantly searching out the land."

His pioneering desires were fueled for a lifetime at a presbytery meeting in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1869. There, atop Prospect Hill, he had a vision of missionary service that spanned the West. Believing that the church must keep pace with the waves of people crashing westward, Jackson convinced the denomination to appoint him superintendent for Iowa, Nebraska, Dakota, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah—some 571,000 square miles. (Iowa, Nebraska, and Dakota were soon assigned to other missionaries, while Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona were later added to Jackson's responsibilities.) Though there was no money to pay him or to fund construction of churches, he accepted the position and began touring by rail and stagecoach.

Jackson and his family had lived on a meager income for years. Rather than complain, Jackson raised support by soliciting money from friends and fellow Presbyterians, much to the consternation of mission board officials. In his first two years as superintendent of the West, he raised \$10,000 for the church-planting work.

In his first year, Jackson started 22 churches and traveled 29,000 miles, primarily through Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nebraska. His journeys were long and arduous. He once spent four straight days and nights in a bumpy stagecoach, sleeping on a 4-and-a-half-foot board. Sometimes he rode with a shotgun on his knees for fear of Indian attack. According to his first biographer, friend Robert Laird Stewart, 12 revolvers once pointed at him during a stagecoach robbery, and, on another journey over the mountains, he had to jump from a carriage to escape plunging with it over a cliff.

"If any have ever tried the torture, the living martyrdom," Jackson wrote, "of riding in a stagecoach from Monday evening to Sunday morning, day and night, without stopping except for a few minutes at a time to change teams—sometimes with three meals and sometimes with only one in 24 hours—and even that so poor and dirty that only hunger forced eating, then you will have some conception of the amount of physical fatigue and suffering that is crowded into those trips." Nonetheless, he said he was "thankful for the privilege of laboring and suffering for Jesus." By 1877 Jackson had traveled 212,000 miles, organized 67 congregations, and built 36 churches.

The wilder West

Soon Jackson's heart began beating for new fields—the neglected tundra purchased for \$7.2 million, Alaska. Early in 1877, an army private stationed in Wrangell (about 100 miles south of Juneau) wrote his major a letter that was passed to a Presbyterian minister in Portland, Oregon, who passed it to a friend going to the Presbyterian General Assembly in Chicago. The friend passed it to Jackson, who was moved by it and had it published in *The Chicago Tribune*.

"Since the advent of the traders and miners among them [Alaska natives], lewdness and debauchery have held high carnival, and the decimation of their numbers is the result," the letter said. "If a school and mission were established at Wrangell there would, no doubt, be an Indian population of over 1,000 souls located within reach. ... Send out a shepherd who may reclaim a mighty flock from the error of their ways, and gather them into the true fold."

Alaska had no civil government, no enforceable laws, and no public education system. Congress had ignored the new possession, leaving a few United States military men to keep order amid brothels and bars. As a result, about 30,000 natives found themselves worse off under the Americans than they had been under the Russians.

Jackson longed to be the first to bring his denomination's work to Alaska, but his superiors wanted him in the Rockies. "We [the mission board] think you have never done any thorough work in Montana," his supervisor wrote. "You have dashed in and out again. The church has come to demand something better."

Jackson visited Alaska anyway. Though the board was not pleased, it eventually approved his new venture—after another man refused the assignment and Jackson said he would raise his own funds.

From 1877 to 1884, Jackson delivered 900 speeches across the contiguous United States in a crusade to introduce order, legal and moral, to Alaska. He went everywhere—except his assigned territory in the Rockies. The home mission board was forced to relieve him of his responsibilities in the West (except for New Mexico and Arizona) because Presbyterians there complained about his continual absence. Are our souls worth less than Alaskan souls? they asked.

An impossible assignment

Freed up to focus on Alaska, Jackson broadened his efforts beyond establishing churches. In April 1885, the federal government appointed him the territory's general agent of education, responsible for setting up a system of schools for whites and natives. The task was practically impossible. Only 2,000 of the 36,000 Alaskans spoke English, and the government allocated a meager \$25,000 per year for the project. A complete lack of infrastructure, a dearth of teachers, extreme weather, and a population uninterested in formal education further impeded Jackson's work.

He complained, "No one that has not tried building a thousand miles from a hardware store and a hundred miles from a saw-mill, in a community where there was not a horse, wagon, or cart, and but one wheelbarrow, can realize the vexatious delays incident to such a work."

Jackson's biggest problem was Alaska's corrupt government, which had been established in 1884. Instead of curtailing the sale of liquor to native Alaskans, officials greedily helped promote it, with destructive results: at least three villages starved to death because their men were too drunk to hunt. Officials also did little to stop the exploitation of native women or the Inuit practice of selling children into slavery.

Jackson, having "little sympathy for fellow Christians who left the narrow way," actively opposed the magistrates. They, in turn, had him arrested for an array of offenses, including building a road that partially blocked access to an Inuit burial ground. Jackson fought back by informing influential people, including President Grover Cleveland, of his accusers' incompetence and immorality. He wrote that one political enemy was "vulgar and obscene in his conversation, low in tastes ... a gambler and confirmed drunkard, with but little knowledge of the law." Cleveland quickly replaced the administrators, and though a new judge exonerated Jackson, the indictment forever marred his reputation.

Despite these setbacks, which Jackson described to his wife as "very, very hard," by 1893 Jackson had started 17 government schools in Alaska, including some for whites only, and 14 contract schools that were supported by a variety of denominations. Total enrollment reached about 1,800.

To trial court

The Klondike gold rush of 1896 attracted many more whites to Alaska, and Jackson's popularity and influence began to wane. According to historian Stuart Tompkins, settlers in the newer Alaskan towns felt ignored by Jackson "in favor of [the] Indians, who were the special objects of the solicitude of the evangelical mission."

Jackson's last years were plagued by investigations into his mission activities. In 1899, a grand jury led by former Alaska governor Alfred Swineford (who once described Jackson as "dictatorial, arbitrary, untruthful, and a persistent mischief maker") charged Jackson with falsifying education reports. Jackson's inattentiveness to the few white schools in southeastern Alaska (due to his efforts among Arctic natives) did not help his case. Nonetheless, he was not convicted of any wrongdoing.

He was re-investigated in 1905, this time for establishing deficient schools and for mismanaging a reindeer ranching program that was designed to help the Inuits become self-sufficient. Though Jackson was an imperfect administrator and a poor bookkeeper, he was acquitted of dishonesty or malfeasance. However, one charge stuck: his critics' complaint that the general education agent's salary was partially paid by the Presbyterian home mission board.

The financially strapped Interior Department had asked the mission board for help in 1888, so Jackson was a missionary while he worked for the government. This had never been a problem, as both the U. S. president and the governor of Alaska were Presbyterians, and the federal government had regularly partnered with mission groups for work with native Americans (many of the schools Jackson founded with federal funds were run by missionaries). After Jackson's case, though, the church-state connection had to

be reconsidered.

By 1900 the 16,000-mile annual round trips were taking their toll on Jackson. He turned over his work in northern Alaska to an assistant in 1901, and he made only two more trips to southern Alaska before an illness in 1903 kept him home permanently. He did not resign, however, until 1908, the year his wife died. The great missionary died the next year.

Though opponents describe him, not unfairly, as hard-headed, independent, and a workaholic who stretched himself too thin, many others recognized his greatness. As Frances Willard, leader of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, wrote to him in a congratulatory letter, "You have stood for all our gospel means, not in a luxurious parish or splendid college, but out yonder on the edge of things ... in an age that needs such men more than it needs gold or tariff."

If Jackson had come to Alaska for gold, the settlers and officials would not have opposed him so much. But he put service ahead of gain, which required great personal sacrifice but established an even greater legacy.

Randy Bishop is assistant editor of Christian Reader and Your Church magazines.

Trial by Water

In 1879, Jackson decided to leave Fort Wrangell and visit Methodist and Episcopal missions in Alaska to get ideas for his own work. He secured a "comfortable seat" in a canoe bound for Fort Simpson. His description gives a glimpse of the ordeals the missionary faced:

About six p.m. the canoe was run upon the beach, and an hour spent in supper, which, to the Indians, consisted of tea and salmon. Embarking at seven, they paddled until ten o'clock, when, finding an opening in the rock-bound coast, we put ashore, spread our blankets upon the sand, and were soon sound asleep. At three a.m. we were roused and were soon under way, without any breakfast. This, however, did not matter much, as my stock of provisions consisted of ship biscuit and smoked salmon. Biscuit and salmon for breakfast and supper, salmon and biscuit for dinner. The Indians upon the trip only averaged one meal the 24 hours.

During the morning, passing the mouth of a shallow mountain stream, the canoe was anchored to a big rock. The Indians, wading up the stream, in a few minutes, with poles and paddles clubbed to death some 30 salmon, averaging 25 pounds each in weight. These were thrown into the canoe and taken along. ...

Toward evening we passed Cape Fox and boldly launched out to cross an arm of the sea, and once out, it was as dangerous to turn back as to go forward. The night was dark, the waves rolling high, and the storm upon us. One Indian stood upon the prow of the canoe watching the waves and giving orders. Every man was at his place, and the stroke of the paddles kept time with the measured song of the leader, causing the canoe to mount each wave with two strokes; then, with a click, each paddle would, at the same instant, strike the side of the canoe and remain motionless, gathering strength for the next wave. As the billows struck the canoe it quivered from stem to stern.

It was a long, tedious night, as in the rain and fog and darkness we tossed in a frail canoe upon the waters, but daylight found us near Fort Tongas.

Related Links:

Find the Sheldon Jackson Museum online at:

www.educ.state.ak.us/lam/museum/sjhome.html

Read a brief bio here:

www.netstate.com/states/peop/people/ak_sj.htm

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 66: How the West was Really Won

Alternative Religions

Many non- and semi-Christian groups also laid claim to the West, but none more successfully than the Mormons.

Elesha Coffman

As a young girl, Katherine Westcott (later Tingley) dreamed of leaving New England to build a White City in the golden West. Nearly 50 years later, in 1897, Tingley was presiding over the Point Loma (California) Theosophical Colony, where she sought to lead humanity—which had been "hemmed in by the false teachings of the past"—on the path toward truth and light.

The West was immensely attractive to people like Tingley, whose ideas chafed well-churched eastern and midwestern communities. Freethinkers established western settlements, including Liberal, Kansas, and a few institutions, like the short-lived Liberal University in Silverton, Oregon. Socialist utopias sprang up in California and the Puget Sound. New Thought, an offshoot of Christian Science, found footholds in Los Angeles, Denver, and Kansas City.

The most successful religious experiment by far was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), which began with the visions of New York native Joseph Smith. Smith and his small but devoted coterie of followers attempted to establish communities in Ohio and Illinois but were driven out by hostile locals. When a mob killed Smith in 1844, his successor, Brigham Young, knew the church had only one chance for survival: move west.

As Mormon hymnist William Clayton wrote in 1846, "We'll find the place which God for us prepared, / Far away in the West; / Where none shall come to hurt, or make afraid: / There the Saints will be blessed."

The Mormons' goal was to establish an LDS-run state that would eventually become part of the United States. They called their territory "Deseret," after a Book of Mormon word for "honeybee," to symbolize cooperative industry. It was a vast, largely uninhabited territory, which allowed the Mormons to expand and govern as they pleased.

Deseret was a paragon of organization and ambitious growth. The church's Perpetual Emigrating Fund paved the way for Saints from eastern and midwestern states, as well as converts from European mission fields, to join the Great Basin community. As the population grew (thanks, in part, to the practice of polygamy), family groups were commissioned to establish towns throughout the region. By 1877, the year Young died, more than 135,000 Saints had settled in the western "promised land."

Non-Mormons, however, disdained the LDS church, mostly because it sanctioned that "relic of barbarism," polygamy, but also because it was so powerful and growing so quickly. Mainstream Protestants were troubled by Mormon theology and Mormon resistance to conversion: Presbyterian and Congregational schools erected to turn children away from Mormonism ("To educate the children and youth is to emancipate them," wrote one teacher) garnered few converts.

Under heavy pressure from the U. S. government, Mormons formally ended the practice of polygamy in 1890, and Utah was granted statehood in 1896. Still, most Americans remained highly suspicious of the group. But western America proved big enough to embrace the Latter-day Saints—and Theosophists, Christian Scientists, and other sects—along with mainstream Christian denominations.

Elesha Coffman is assistant editor of Christian History.

Related Links:

Find official LDS history at:

lds.org

For a non-LDS perspective on Mormon history, see:

www.xmission.com/~country/reason/reason.htm

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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The West That Wasn't Won

Protestant missions to Native Americans had few shining moments.

Bonnie C. Harvey

The Cherokees are nearly all prisoners. They have been dragged from their houses and encamped at the forts and military posts all over the nation." Thus Baptist missionary Evan Jones described the beginning of the forced removal of the Cherokees in June 1837.

By the early 1800s, the Cherokees of northern Georgia had a highly developed culture. Their legal system was patterned after that of the United States, and they printed their own books and newspapers. White missionaries—Moravians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists—mingled among them to share the gospel and inculcate Christian values.

Then gold was discovered in the north Georgia mountains, and white settlers looked longingly at the Cherokees' land. The eventual outcome: the government's decision to move the Cherokees beyond the Mississippi.

Though some white missionaries objected fiercely to the government's action, most acquiesced to the order. Jones further described the outcome: "In Georgia especially, multitudes were allowed no time to take anything with them except the clothes they had on. Well furnished houses were left a prey to plunderers who, like hungry wolves, followed in the train of the captors . . . Many of the Cherokees, who a few days ago were in comfortable circumstances, are now victims of abject poverty. Some who have been allowed to return home under passport to inquire after their property have found their cattle, horses, swine, farming tools and house furniture all gone."

By March 1838 the last group had arrived in Oklahoma, their new home, but at least one-third had died along the way.

This is one of the saddest chapters in American history. It helps explain why white attempts to evangelize American Indians in the West met with so much resistance, and why missionaries had relatively little to show for their efforts.

Civilizing the natives

From the beginning, Christians had mixed attitudes toward Native Americans. Puritan Cotton Mather called them "the veriest Ruines of Mankind" and believed that first they "must be civilized e'er they could be Christianized." Even early missionaries to Indians, like John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, Jr., believed that Indians must, in Eliot's words, "have visible civility before they can rightly enjoy visible sanctities in ecclesiastical communion."

This attitude was shared by the U. S. government, which in the early nineteenth century worked hand-in-hand with churches to "civilize" the natives. In 1819 Congress passed a bill establishing a Civilization Fund, making \$10,000 available annually for instructing Indians in agriculture, literacy, and other such pursuits. Much of the money was given to church agencies that worked with Native Americans.

The dilemma of churches, and of the country, was whether to assimilate the Indians into the prevailing

culture or simply remove them to other areas when they got in the way of the country's westward movement. The latter course of action eventually prevailed—often with missionary approval. Isaac McCoy, for example, a Baptist missionary to Native Americans in Kansas, favored not only removal but complete separation from whites for the security of Native Americans against white abuse.

Choctaw success

Though most missionaries could not see beyond their cultural assumptions, some made efforts to move at least part way toward the people to whom they ministered. One example is Cyrus Byington, who, along with some colleagues, organized the Presbyterian Mission to the Choctaw Indians in 1818. Like Eliot and Mayhew before him, Byington laid great emphasis not only on preaching the gospel but on teaching Native Americans to adapt to white culture and learn the English language.

In 1821 Byington began his missionary term as a classroom teacher in Mississippi. The Indian students were given American names and issued clothing suitable to their new lifestyle. In outdoor classrooms, the male students learned agriculture, dairying, horticulture, and animal husbandry. The girls were taught the duties of the kitchen and dining room, and they learned to sew, mend, and wash clothing. Byington was pleased with the youngsters' progress and wrote to a friend, "The children are docile, obedient, and ready to perform any kind of labor. They are active and useful."

But Byington also devoted himself to mastering the Choctaw language, and in time, wrote several books in Choctaw. Eventually, Byington began to preach in Choctaw, and many were converted.

Tunnapinchuffa, an adult male, was the first Choctaw to respond to the gospel message in his own language. Tunnapinchuffa became concerned about his spiritual condition in late 1827 and spent much time in fervent prayer. He described himself and his people in deprecating words and urged his family and friends to throw away their "black and dirty garments." He also worked earnestly at transforming his own "bad thoughts" and overcoming the temptation of strong drink. By March 1829 he was accepted as a member of the Presbyterian mission church.

One missionary wrote that Tunnapinchuffa "adorns his profession being a man of prayer; very industrious, meek and humble." Tunnapinchuffa managed to retain some of his Choctaw identity (he never learned to speak English, for example) while maintaining a Christian commitment until his death in 1834.

In 1833 the United States government ordered the removal of the Choctaws to southeastern Oklahoma; by 1835, Byington arrived there to take up his responsibilities with them again. He organized a church at Eagletown and preached there regularly. Soon, five other churches sprang up. The missionary continued to study Choctaw, writing books and even translating the Bible into the language.

During Byington's lifetime, at least 2,700 Choctaws "accepted Divine Grace," and by 1860 more than 10 percent of the Choctaw tribe had united with a Presbyterian congregation. An additional 10 percent became members of other churches. Unfortunately, Byington's successes were the exception rather than the rule for Protestant missionaries.

In 1925, after three centuries of missions, the Native American Christian community stood at a meager 35,000. Mistreatment by the U. S. government and lack of understanding by white missionaries were simply too much to overcome. In the twentieth century, however, missionaries of all denominations proved more culturally sensitive, with the result that the Protestant community grew to an estimated 120,000 by 1979.

Bonnie Harvey earned her Ph.D in English at Georgia State University. She has written a number of nineteenth-century biographies including Fanny Crosby (Bethany), Charles Finney (Barbour), and Jane Addams (Enslow).

Related Links:

Find an Indian Missions & Missionaries Bibliography here:

www.kshs.org/library/bibmissn.htm

A Catholic history of missions to American Indians can be found at:

www.newadvent.org/cathen/07745a.htm

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Dying To Save

The Whitman Massacre reveals much of what was noble and flawed regarding missions to Native Americans.

Mark Galli

Some say the sorrow began when Narcissa Whitman, just after lunch on November 29, 1847, went to the mission's kitchen. She found the room full of raucous Cayuse Indians, one of whom demanded the milk she was retrieving. No, she replied sternly, not until she gave some to her baby. When the Indian tried to follow her into the sitting room, she shut the door in his face and bolted it.

In a moment, one of the Indians began pounding on the door, asking medicine from her husband, Marcus. He retrieved the medicine and, as he sat at the kitchen table, a Cayuse stepped behind him, drew a tomahawk from under his blanket, and struck the doctor's head. A second blow brought him to the floor. Another Indian then put a bullet into Marcus's neck.

Hectic and violent events unfolded over the next hour, and by the end of two days, Marcus, Narcissa, and a dozen other whites were dead. One of the Whitmans' adopted children later recalled her mother's death: "The terror of that moment cannot be expressed. There were no tears, no shrieks."

The newly married Whitmans had reached the Oregon Territory's Walla Walla River on September 1, 1836. With no training, but ardent hope, they founded a mission (sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) to the Cayuse Indians at Waiilatpu in the Walla Walla Valley. As Narcissa put it, "Our desire is to be useful to these benighted Indians, teaching them the way of salvation." Marcus held church services, practiced medicine, and built the mission complex; Narcissa ran the household, assisted in services, and taught in the mission school.

However, the Whitmans' sense of cultural superiority seeped through as they ministered to the "benighted" Cayuse—which may be when the sorrow really began. They condemned Cayuse cultural practices like gift-giving; though an essential feature of Cayuse life, the Whitmans called it extortion. For the Cayuse, religion and domestic life were bound together, but when some Cayuse suggested they wanted to worship in the Whitman home, Narcissa scorned the idea.

With Oregon's immigrant population exploding (thanks, in part, to the successful pioneering of the Whitmans), the Cayuse grew increasingly resentful of the Whitmans, whom they called "haughty." When a measles epidemic swept the area, killing many more Indians than whites, a small band of Cayuse took matters into their own hands, as described above. Eventually, five Cayuse were tried and executed for the killings. One of them announced on the gallows, "Did not your missionaries teach us that Christ died to save his people? So we die to save our people."

There is no question of the Whitmans' sincerity and sacrifice—they are, at many levels, missionary heroes who deserve honor for giving their lives for the gospel. But Protestant missions was still in its infancy in the mid-nineteenth century, and few missionaries to Native Americans understood the complexity of cross-cultural ministry. The irony is that many such missionaries were benighted in their own way—sometimes with tragic consequences.

Mark Galli is editor of Christian History.

Related Links:

PBS presents the Whitmans' story here:

www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/wpages/wpgs400/w4whitma.htm

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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How the West Was Really Won: A Gallery of Local Heroes

The wide-open West was served, state by state, by brave and sometimes beleaguered ministers and missionaries like these.

Mark Ammerman

MONTANA'S EVANGELIST-AT-LARGE

Brother Van (William Wesley Van Orsdel)

1848-1919

After stepping off the steamboat at Fort Benton, Montana, on a June Sunday in 1872, this penniless, sandy-haired, Methodist "evangelist-at-large" was ready to preach. When his impromptu Sabbath service at the Four Deuces saloon came to an end, listeners didn't want to let him go. They asked his name, but since it was a mouthful, they dubbed him "Brother Van." Practically everyone in Montana would know that name before long.

William Wesley Van Orsdel's parents died before he turned 13. An aunt raised "Willie" and his siblings on a small Pennsylvania Dutch farm near Gettysburg. At 15 Van Orsdel was soundly converted at the little Methodist prayer meeting the family attended.

Sometime in the next few years, he was roused by "a mighty vision." He later recalled, "I could see the miners, stage drivers, freighters, cowboys, and here and there among them a copper-colored native, beckoning and calling. To me these were Macedonian cries, and with the all-impelling word 'go' locked up like fire in my bones, I felt like Paul—'woe be unto me if I go not.'"

At 22 he retired the plow, packed up his Bible and carpetbag, bid Pennsylvania farewell, and headed for Montana.

In his 47 years of ministry there, he helped convert Indians, miners, farmers, drunkards, brothel keepers, and saloon owners. He was once shot at by Indians and another time mistaken for a horse thief and nearly hanged. He gained a reputation for caring about his listeners, so that even when he preached uncompromisingly to hardened "sinners," he often managed to win them over.

From 1892 to 1918, as superintendent of the Methodists' North Montana Mission, he built 100 churches, 50 parsonages, six hospitals, a school for orphans, and Montana Wesleyan college. He never married, and upon "retirement" at age 68, he continued to preach every Sunday and speak at missionary conferences across the country.

At 71 he suffered a paralytic stroke and lay in a coma. A few days later, he suddenly awoke and began to sing and converse with old friends long dead. Near the end, he said, "I haven't an enemy. Only friends. Tell the people of Montana that I love them all."

DOCTOR TO NEW MEXICO OUTLAWS AND INDIANS

Taylor Filmore Ealy

1848-????

On April 1, 1878, the sheriff of Lincoln, New Mexico, was shot dead in the street. The man who dashed out to pick up the sheriff's gun and turn it on the assassins was shot, too, but he managed to get himself

over to Dr. Taylor Ealy's house. Ealy wrote:

"The report was that he shot him through the bowels, but it was a mistake. ... The ball passed through his left thigh. I drew a silk handkerchief through the wound, bound it up and he was taken charge of by [a friend]."

Though Ealy never mentioned his patient's name, the only man reported wounded in the gunfight was Henry McCarty, alias William Antrim, alias William Bonney, alias Billy the Kid.

Ealy, a Presbyterian educated at both seminary and medical school, had arrived in Lincoln with his family at the onset of the infamous Lincoln County War. The man who'd requested a Presbyterian presence in town, lawyer Alexander McSween, led the faction that included Billy the Kid. The Ealys ministered as best they could in the bullet-ridden town until McSween was murdered. The lawyer's enemies then targeted the preacher, who barely escaped with his life.

In the fall of 1879, the Ealys took an assignment from Sheldon Jackson to start a school among the Indians at Zuni Pueblo. But after two grueling, frustrating years, Taylor was discouraged. A son had been born and died there, and the Indians were so deeply entrenched in their cultural and spiritual traditions that they wanted little to do with the white man's school or his religion.

In the end, the West proved to be poor match for the Ealys, and in June 1881, they returned to their native Pennsylvania, where Taylor lived out the rest of his life as a country doctor.

"Father's work may appear to many unimportant," said Ealy's daughter Ruth after his death. "He was always, though, a fighter for the cause of righteousness. Wherever he went, in the West, on the mission field, in his home in Schellsburg [Pennsylvania], he worked faithfully to advance the cause of the great Master, under whom he enlisted."

TOMBSTONE'S REFEREE

Endicott Peabody

1857-1944

The story is told that when the Reverend Endicott Peabody was raising funds for his new church in Tombstone, Arizona, he entered one of the town's saloons and walked up to the table at which sheriff Wyatt Earp was playing poker. Earp had been winning, and a pile of chips lay before him. When Peabody asked for a donation, Earp pushed a stack of chips his way. "Here's my contribution, Mr. Peabody." Then Earp turned to the other players and announced, "Now each of you has to give the same." Peabody's St. Paul's Church stands in Tombstone today.

"Cotty" Peabody was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family in Salem, Massachusetts. He was educated in England, excelled in academic and religious studies, and was so taken with athletics, it was said that Peabody "made a sacrament of exercise."

Upon returning to America, he enrolled in the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While still a student, he accepted a pastoral call to the now famous silver-mining town of Tombstone.

"I bought a little horse," he said, "and with a broad brimmed white felt hat, a grey flannel shirt, riding breeches with yellow gaiters, and blankets strapped on behind and a gun hung on the pommel of the saddle, you would have taken me for the worst kind of a western rough instead of a quiet man of peace."

His arrival in Tombstone on January 29, 1882, came a few relatively peaceful months after the infamous shootout at the O. K. Corral. He wrote home that "the ordinary citizen is unmolested and the only danger

is from a stray shot from [the feuders] or some incensed gambler ... but in my circumstances ... there is little cause for anxiety and I feel ... it is best to leave it all to him for whom I am trying to work."

Peabody stayed in Tombstone only six months, but he made a favorable and lasting impression upon the community—from the mining magnates and city officials to the miners, muckers, saloon keepers, and gamblers. His candor and his love of sports won him the role of referee in all outdoor games played by Tombstone's young men. He loved a good horse race, attended the gymnasium religiously, and never refused a challenge to strap on boxing gloves.

And the church he built (debt-free) was the territory's first Protestant church.

He returned to Massachusetts to complete seminary, after which he founded, in 1883, a boy's prep school in Groton dedicated to cultivating "manly, Christian character, having regard to moral and physical as well as intellectual development." Groton's most illustrious graduate was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

WYOMING'S KINGDOM CRUSADER

Josiah Strong

1847-1916

On a cold night in 1873, the town of Cheyenne, Wyoming, was set afire. The arsonists were the town's former brothel-keepers, who had been forced out of business by Pastor Josiah Strong's call for a moral cleanup. The flames did nothing to melt Strong's resolve.

Strong had been just a greenhorn graduate of Cincinnati's Lane Theological Seminary when he married Alice Bisbee on August 29, 1871. Ten days later, the newlyweds were setting up house in Cheyenne, where Strong was ordained and installed as pastor of a Congregational church. He stayed long enough to lead the anti-prostitution crusade (and suffer the consequences mentioned above), but he soon headed back east to take a chaplaincy at Western Reserve College in Ohio.

As the years passed, Strong's passion for societal reform grew. In 1885 he published his most famous and influential book, ***Our Country***. By 1916 it had sold over 125,000 copies. The book drew heavily on his western experience but also recalled the ideals of his Puritan ancestors. He challenged the nation and the church to transform society with biblical principles and thereby establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

"Free institutions are safe only when the great majority of the people have that reverence for law which can spring only from reverence for God," he wrote. "The most striking defect of young America is the lack of reverence." To remedy this, he exhorted the church to roll up its sleeves, work hard, pray always, and seize the day for Jesus Christ.

After the initial success of ***Our Country***, Strong dedicated himself fully to biblical social reform, first in America and then in Britain and in South America. His efforts gave birth to the "Safety First" movement, the American Institute for Social Service (and its British counterpart), and the Federal Council of Churches in America.

Mark Ammerman is author of The Rain From God, The Ransom, and The Longshot (all Horizon Books), a historical fiction series set in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England.

Related Links:

For an interesting history of Christian missionaries in the West, see:

www.insiders.com/yellowstone/main-worship2.htm

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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How the West Was Really Won: Christian History Interview - Land of Crumbling Myths

Why the twentieth-century West—urban and explosive—ain't what it used to be.

conversation with Richard Etulain

So far we've focused primarily on how the Christian church came to the American West in the nineteenth century, but what has it been up to since then? To find out, we talked to Richard Etulain, a historian and literary scholar at the University of New Mexico who wrote on western religious history in The American West: A Twentieth Century History (University of Nebraska, 1989), which he co-authored with Michael P. Malone. He's also interested in how the West has been perceived, a topic he explored in Reimagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art (University of Arizona, 1996). He helped us see how the region has changed during the past decades, often in surprising ways, and how the church has responded.

What forces have been most important in shaping the culture of the West?

It's been said that if you were to choose two remarkable turning points in western history in the last 200 years, they would be two events a hundred years apart—the Gold Rush and the Second World War, one in the 1840s and one in the 1940s. They each brought large numbers of people into the American West, new people with religious affiliations, new people who could be converted to religious affiliations.

Let me give you an example. I live in Albuquerque. In 1940 it had 30,000 people. In 1950 it had 100,000 people. In 1960 it had 200,000 people. And now it has 500,000. That big boom in population would be the same for Tucson, Phoenix, San Diego, and Seattle. Now Las Vegas is really the growth spot.

This has led to a situation most people are unaware of: the West is the most urban part of the United States. In 1900 California was an urban state, meaning that more than 50 percent of the residents lived in incorporated areas of 2,500 and higher population. The United States as a whole was not urban until 1920. California is still the most urban state, as well as the most populous—one out of nine Americans lives in California.

That doesn't sound much like the classic "wild West."

People often imagine the West as an open and individualistic frontier. A lot of western historians say that's an old-fashioned idea, more myth than reality. But it is at least part of the American intellectual landscape.

In fact, the West is a series of urban oases, meaning that we live in urban centers, but we have all that open space in between. The most excessive example is Nevada, which has a population of nearly two million, almost all of whom—probably 90 percent—live in two urban centers, the gambling towns, Reno and Las Vegas.

Though the West is urban, the open spaces have created a sense of isolation and distance, especially in the first half of the twentieth century and in more agricultural areas, like Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas. Those areas had small populations and few large churches, and it was difficult for them to get pastors. But those populations are a small part of the total, so you have to make a distinction. Isolation and distance are there for the rural areas, but increasing numbers of people are living in cities.

When we think of urban areas, we usually think of ethnic populations. Is this true in the West?

Definitely. The West is the most ethnically diverse region in the country. Americans think of four main groups of minorities: African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American, and Native American. Most Hispanics, most Asian Americans, and certainly most Native Americans live in the West. Increasing numbers of African Americans are there, too, especially since the Second World War, when there was a gigantic influx of blacks coming to work at military installations.

How is diversity reflected in western churches?

Churches in the West haven't been as divided by race as, say, churches in the South, especially in the first 50 years of the twentieth century. For example, large black denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church and some Baptist groups are not very strong west of Texas. That's in large part because western churches weren't divided. It's not that there were no racists in the American West, just that many western churches were started after the divisions of the Civil War period.

Other types of diversity are present in the western church as well. To me, Southern California is probably the most exotic mix of Christianity in the American West, and maybe in the United States. Any kind of Christian group, or group that calls itself Christian, you can find in southern California. And that includes everyone from the most traditional fundamentalists to New Age churches.

Who would you say are some of the most extraordinary Christian leaders of the early twentieth century West?

Of the many I could mention, I'll focus on just a few—some famous and some lesser-known, but all fitting the mold of larger-than-life figures with diverse and often urban-centered ministries.

Mark Matthews, for example, was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Seattle in the teens and '20s, and he built it into the largest Presbyterian church in the United States at the time. The congregation topped 9,000 members, which is very unusual in that denomination. He was also an outspoken reformer, taking on bootleggers and calling for city reform.

Even more sensational was J. Frank Norris, the Baptist pastor in the Fort Worth-Dallas area. He was even too conservative for the Southern Baptists! He was involved in a controversy when he shot a man in his office. They called him the "Texas tornado."

Bob Shuler (not the Crystal Cathedral Bob Schuller) was another feisty pastor. Somebody referred to him as the "Czar of Christendom" in Los Angeles. He was ministering there as a southern Methodist at the same time Sister Aimee Semple McPherson was there, and she was his main object of criticism.

Sister Aimee represents another tradition, Foursquare Gospel Pentecostalism. She was attractive, vivacious, and controversial, but she first became well-known because she found a wide audience among the people streaming into Los Angeles. She said she was not called to preach to the poor—The Salvation Army was. Her calling was to preach to the people who had moved from Iowa to California and were trying to find themselves in the new urban West. It was the middle class Sister Aimee appealed to, and she did a tremendously good job of it.

William Jennings Bryan was the outstanding fundamentalist layman of the early twentieth century. He was from Nebraska, and his political career reflected a lot of not only his Nebraska background but also a social conscience that evangelicals of his time often didn't exhibit. People pick on Bryan for the Scopes Trial, when he was not at his best, but they need to think about all of the helpful reforms he sought in the United States.

What were the most significant challenges western churches faced in the twentieth century?

The largest challenge of the twentieth century was trying to keep up with the rapid, persistent change. The West as a whole was predominantly urban from 1930 on, but churches, evangelical and even mainline, tended to be rural in their outlook. A lot of churches kept this focus up to the 1960s, both in the way they preached and the types of churches they formed, even though the majority of westerners were living in cities.

More recently, too many churches have been giving up on inner-city westerners by moving to the suburbs. This is a national problem, but it's certainly true of the West. The people and the money are in the suburbs, but if we just focus on that culture, we're going to lose the central cities. With that, we'll lose most of the minorities, who make up 20 to 30 percent of the American population—perhaps reaching as high as 50 percent, if we project out 50 years.

Ferenc Szasz and others who write about American religious history between about 1880 and 1920 talk a lot about what happened when evangelicals said, "You've got to be born again," while proponents of the social gospel said, "You've got to deal with these social problems." From the 1920s to about the 1960s, western evangelicals didn't make a lot of effort to bridge that divide.

However, I think evangelicals are starting to do better. I've recently seen a lot of churches reaching out to Asian immigrants, particularly those leaving desperate situations in southeast Asia. Many of these immigrants are settling in western cities, and many churches are sponsoring them. It's a great example of Christians responding to real needs in the diverse, rapidly growing West.

Related Links:

Read more about Richard Etulain's work here:
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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 66: How the West was Really Won

How the West Was Really Won: Recommended Resources

How the West Was Really Won

The American West is such a vast topic, you need a general reference (or several) within arm's reach. We found these especially helpful: Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (Yale, 1998); Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor and Martha A. Sandweiss, eds., *The Oxford History of the American West* (Oxford, 1994); and Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma, 1991).

For insight into the West's religious landscape, Ferenc Szasz ("[Preparing a Way in the Wilderness](#)") is a top authority. He wrote *The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and Mountain West, 1865-1915* (University of New Mexico, 1988); edited *Religion in the West* (Sunflower University, 1984); co-edited (with Richard Etulain) *Religion in Modern New Mexico* (University of New Mexico, 1997); and has written and contributed to numerous other works on the subject.

Primary Sources

Primary sources are especially remarkable for bringing the West to life, and there are dozens and dozens available. Here are some we found most helpful in preparing this issue:

Sheldon Jackson, *Alaska and Missions on the North Pacific Coast* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1880).

William Taylor, *Seven Years Street Preaching in San Francisco* (Carlton & Potter, 1857) and *California Life Illustrated* (Phillips & Hunt, 1858).

Clifford Merrill Drury, ed., *On to Oregon: The Diaries of Mary Walker & Myra Eells* (University of Nebraska, 1963).

J. S. Holliday (based on the diary of William Swain), *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (Simon and Schuster, 1981).

Cathy Luchetti (based on the diaries of frontier evangelists), *Under God's Spell* (HBJ, 1989).

Biographies

Another key to comprehending the West is to examine individual lives. Some people mentioned in the issue:

Sheldon Jackson: Norman J. Bender, *Winning the West for Christ* (University of New Mexico, 1996); J. Arthur Lazell, *Alaskan Apostle* (Harper & Brothers, 1960); and Robert Laird Stewart, *Sheldon Jackson* (Revell, 1908).

Taylor F. Ealy: Norman J. Bender, *Missionaries, Outlaws, and Indians* (University of New Mexico, 1984).

Endicott Peabody: William M. Breakenridge, *Hellorado* (Lakeside Press, 1982).

"Brother Van": Alton Jesse Smith, ***Brother Van: A Biography of the Rev. William Wesley Van Orsdel*** (Abingdon-Cokebury Press, 1948).

Narcissa Whitman: Julie Roy Jeffrey, ***Converting the West: A Biography of Narcissa Whitman*** (University of Oklahoma, 1991).

The Klein family: Diana Severance ("[Yesterday's Christian Woman](#)"), ***Deep Roots, Strong Branches*** (Historical Publishing Network, 1999).

Movements and Events

Finally, books that helped us think about significant aspects of the American West:

Mormonism: Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, ***The Mormon Experience*** (Knopf, 1979); Jan Shipps, ***Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*** (U of Illinois, 1985); and Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, ***Mormon America*** (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999).

Missions to Native Americans (particularly the disturbing aspects): George F. Tinker, ***Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*** (Fortress, 1993).

California and the gold rush: Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp ("[Forty-Niner Faith](#)"), ***Religion and Society in Frontier California*** (Yale, 1994).

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