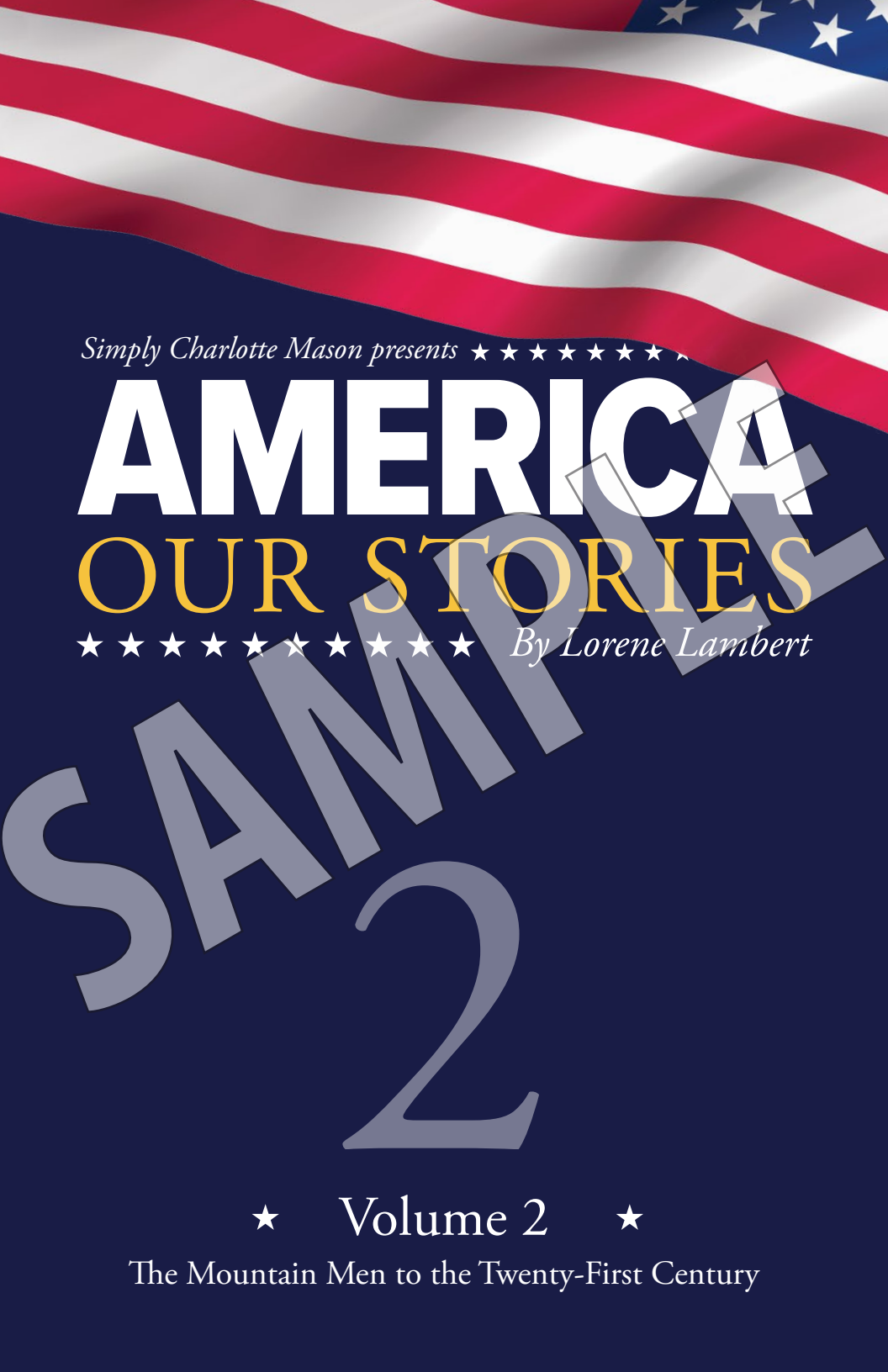


The background of the entire cover is a waving American flag. The top portion shows the red and white stripes, while the bottom portion is a solid dark blue field containing the white stars.

Simply Charlotte Mason presents ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AMERICA

OUR STORIES

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *By Lorene Lambert*

SAMPLE
2

★ Volume 2 ★

The Mountain Men to the Twenty-First Century

The top of the page features a stylized American flag with red and white stripes on a dark blue background.

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America: Our Stories

Volume 2
*The Mountain Men to the
Twenty-First Century*

by Lorene Lambert

America: Our Stories, Volume 2: The Mountain Men to the Twenty-First Century

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Chapter 1

Dancing at the Rendezvous

The Mountain Men

We live in a mighty country. The United States of America is a beacon for liberty and justice. Its strong and noble Constitution governs a nation of people drawn from all over the world. In industry, in art, and in science, the United States stands tall.

And, of course, our nation is also mighty in size.

From Boston to Los Angeles, from the Dakotas south to Texas, from the rainforests of Washington to the beaches of Florida, America is a vast land. If you were to drive from Maine to California, you would travel over 3,000 miles.

All this began with 13 English colonies, huddled together along the eastern edge of the continent. When those colonies gained their independence in 1783, they became the first states. The new nation's borders extended from the Atlantic Ocean westward to the Appalachian Mountains.

Almost at once, the United States of America began to grow. By 1803, four more states—Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio—had joined the original 13. Then, President Thomas Jefferson expanded the nation's reach across the continent when he purchased the Louisiana territory from France: all of the land

from the western bank of the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and northward to Canada.

The Louisiana Purchase did not form the United States into the familiar shape that we know today, spread between Atlantic and Pacific. Parts of the continent still belonged to other nations. The Southwest and California had been governed by Spain since the 1500s, when Spanish explorers wandered its far reaches searching for cities of gold. And in the continent's upper left corner lay Oregon Country, which was made up of the land between California and Alaska. Great Britain claimed control of that region, because it had been explored and charted by Captain James Cook in 1778.

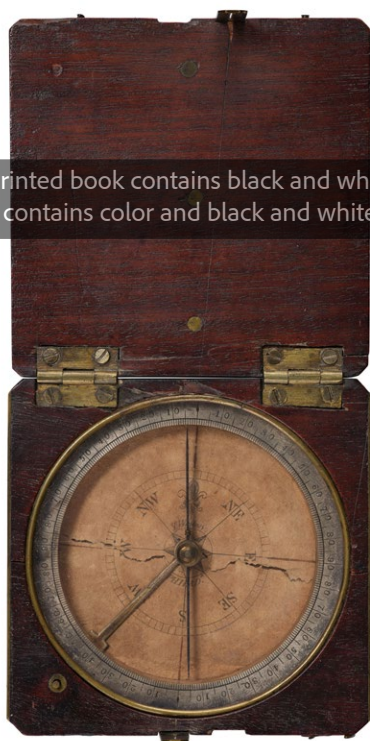
The first route across the Louisiana Purchase was mapped by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. They were sent by President Jefferson with the mission of seeking a trail westward to the Pacific Ocean. Setting out in 1804, Lewis and Clark followed the Missouri River through the land that would one day become the states of North Dakota and Montana. They found their way over difficult, dangerous paths in the Rocky Mountains and along the Columbia River until they reached the Pacific coast. Even though much of their journey was a painful struggle, Lewis and Clark marveled at the beauty and richness of the land they crossed. When they returned to the east, in 1806, they shared stories of the wonders they had seen, stories that included a small detail that would soon grow in importance: the rivers and ponds of the West were teeming with beavers.

A beaver, as I'm sure you know, is a clever creature who gnaws through the trunks of trees and uses them to construct a dam across a swiftly flowing stream. In the pond that forms behind the dam, the beaver builds a dome-shaped lodge with an underwater entrance. There, he rears his family in safety and warmth.

But, in the 1800s, the beaver was valued not for his skill as an architect, but rather for his soft, thick, waterproof fur. It

was shaped into tall, glossy hats for fashionable gentlemen. The world's hatmakers needed beaver fur, and lots of it. When Lewis and Clark brought back the news that beavers could be found in almost every western stream, fur traders struck out into the wilderness, setting up forts and trading posts. They bargained with Native Americans, who would bring in beaver pelts to exchange for knives and gunpowder, tools and cooking pots.

Note: The printed book contains black and white pictures.
The e-book contains color and black and white pictures.



Pocket Compass from the Lewis and Clark Exhibition

In 1822, a businessman from St. Louis named William Ashley placed an advertisement in the St. Louis newspaper, asking for “enterprising young men” who would be willing to “ascend the river Missouri to its source, there to be employed

for one, two, or three years.” And what was this employment? Hunting beavers, of course. The young men hired by Mr. Ashley would live like the Natives out in the wild and spend most of the year gathering beaver fur. Then, in the warmest part of the summer, they would bring the pelts to Mr. Ashley at a prearranged time and location. There they would receive pay for the year’s work and gather new supplies to head out again. The fur trappers called this annual meeting the *Rendezvous*, which is a French word that means “a set appointment.”

The young men who answered Mr. Ashley’s advertisement and many others like them—men willing to brave the wilderness for years at a time, to learn the ways of the wild from the Natives who lived there, to suffer through bitter cold, searing heat, violent storms and attacks by wild animals, to find their way through trackless forests and boulder-choked rivers—were the mountain men, the first wave of America’s westward flood.

The mountain men became legends.

Let us consider Jedediah Smith, one of the young men who answered William Ashley’s call. Dressed like a Native in fringed buckskin jacket and trousers, with deerskin moccasins on his feet, he guided a party of trappers into the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1823. There he was attacked by a grizzly bear, thrown to the ground and left bleeding and mangled, with one ear hanging askew. He calmly ordered his companions to find some thread and a needle and stitch it back on. After recuperating in a tiny tent for a week or so, he rose, shouldered his pack, and continued on his way. For the rest of his life, his face told the story of that bear attack: a missing eyebrow, a vivid red scar across his cheek, and one ear crooked and lower than the other.

At the *Rendezvous* of 1825, Jed Smith brought in so many beaver pelts that Mr. Ashley offered him a partnership in his fur-trading company. Smith accepted, but he was more interested in exploration than business. In 1826, he led a small party of men into the unknown country southwest of Utah. They wandered

through the red rock canyons and baking heat of the Mojave Desert, until they stumbled, barely alive, into California. The Mexican governors there were startled by, and very suspicious of, the sudden arrival of these rough-hewn, ragged adventurers. No party of White men had ever before managed to cross the Mojave. The Mexicans suspected that Smith was a spy, scouting out the land in preparation for an American invasion of Mexican California. They locked him in jail and left him there for weeks as they debated what to do. Finally, they reunited him with his men and ordered him to leave California and never return.

Unwilling to face the Mojave Desert again, Smith instead trekked to the north, into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. There, he and his men found beavers in abundance, and set about trapping, collecting over 1,500 pounds of fur. But it was May; the Rendezvous was only two months away. To reach it, Smith and his followers needed to cross over the Sierra Nevada, but the mountains were so laden with snow that the journey proved impossible. Smith was forced to turn south. He and his men found themselves back in a desert, this time the Great Basin that lies between California and Nevada. They trudged onward. Smith would not allow the group to give up, even though the men had to bury themselves in the ground during the day for protection from the blazing sun. When they finally appeared at the Rendezvous, Smith wrote that their arrival caused “considerable bustle in camp, for myself and my party had been given up for lost.” The mountain men saluted his return with lusty cheers and a blast from a cannon.

Jed Smith had walked over 1,500 miles in 11 months, across deserts and high mountains. And he was ready to do it all again. Over the next few years, he returned to California, narrowly avoiding those same officials who had warned him to stay away. From there he journeyed hundreds of miles north into Oregon Country, and then ventured deep into the uncharted wilds of Montana and Wyoming. Everywhere he

went, he trapped beavers, and every summer he ambled into the Rendezvous with heavy bales of fur, ready for a few weeks of relaxation and celebration.

Indeed, the Rendezvous had become more than merely a meeting; it was the West's biggest party. After months alone in the wilderness, the mountain men were eager to have some fun, to play games and run footraces, to dance and sing and feast, and, most of all, to compare adventures and swap stories.

The finest of the storytellers was Jim Bridger. Like Jedediah Smith, he had been one of Mr. Ashley's "enterprising young men." He faced the wilderness fearlessly, because he was a crack shot with a rifle and he had astonishing powers of memory. It was said of Jim Bridger that, after seeing a path or a landmark along the trail, he would remember it perfectly for the rest of his life. He was always certain, always cheerful, and always ready with a story to tell. Gathering the younger men around him, he would launch into his tales: of finding a petrified forest filled with stone trees, where petrified birds sang petrified songs. Of a certain special canyon where he could shout at bedtime and go to sleep secure in the knowledge that the returning echo would wake him eight hours later. Of a mountain made of clear glass. Of springs of water boiling hot and sudsing with soap.

Jim Bridger's stories made him a favorite of all. At one Rendezvous, a visiting Scottish nobleman was so enthralled that he gave Jim a full suit of armor and a dashing plumed helmet. Jim paraded through the gathering like a knight of old, as the mountain men laughed and cheered.

At the Rendezvous of 1832, more than 1,000 trappers gathered. Jedediah Smith was not among them; he'd been killed by Comanche warriors in New Mexico the year before. The relationship between mountain men and Natives was sometimes friendly and mutually helpful, and sometimes hostile and filled with conflict. Many of the mountain men took Native wives and lived among the Native tribes for years at a time, but Jedediah

Smith was not the only mountain man whose life was ended by Native spears.

By 1840, the time of the mountain men was over. The beavers were disappearing, so many of them trapped and hunted that they were harder and harder to find. And the need to trap them faded away: fashionable gentlemen in Paris and New York City began wearing tall, glossy hats made of Chinese silk rather than beaver fur.

But though the age of the mountain men was short, it was important. These solitary trappers forged the trails that would soon be rumbling with the clatter of wagon wheels, as thousands upon thousands of Americans lifted their eyes to see, far to the West, the green dream of Oregon Country.

Chapter 2

Westward Ho!

Pioneers on the Oregon Trail

Americans have always looked westward, from the earliest days of our country's history. At first, led by *pioneers* such as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, settlers crossed the Allegheny Mountains into Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. From there, they pushed on into the "Northwest Territory"—the land that would one day become the states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. And far to the west, the sunset gleamed over California and Oregon Country.

Oregon Country!

The reports from Lewis and Clark and the mountain men who followed them made it clear that it was a green land, wide and open. It was blessed with rich soil for farming, with towering forests and deep rivers. Along the coast, on the Pacific Ocean, ships could anchor and ports could be built.

Unfortunately, 2,000 miles of parched deserts, wind-scoured plains, and wild rivers lay between Oregon Country and any settler who might be dreaming of building a home there. There were no roads, no trains, no easy pathways. And, ominously, frowning across the span of the continent like a giant's fortress wall, there were the Rocky Mountains. Beyond those peaks, Oregon Country glowed like a forbidden jewel, beautiful and unreachable.

Of course, the Native Americans had been traveling back and forth across the mountains for centuries, using memories of trails passed down from father to son and traded from clan to clan. But the Natives traveled swift and light, taking what they needed from the land. An American farmer, seeking a future in Oregon Country, must bring his whole life with him—his family, his livestock, his farming tools. He would need a horse-drawn wagon to carry his goods, and a way to take it over the mountains.

In 1812, a way was found.

In the autumn of that year, a party of seven fur trappers, led by a Scotsman named Robert Stuart, set out from their hunting grounds in Oregon Country for St. Louis, Missouri. At first, they traveled in canoes, rowing up the Columbia River. But as they paddled eastward, the Rocky Mountains reared up before them. Robert Stuart hesitated, and then made a fateful decision. Following the advice of some Native men that he had met along the way, he abandoned the canoes and turned to the south, where he found an old Indian path. It led him to a low, open valley in Western Wyoming, a *pass* so wide and gently sloped that even the heaviest-laden cart could cross it.

Robert Stuart had discovered South Pass, the only gap in the Rocky Mountains' mighty wall where a wheeled wagon or cart could travel. From there, Stuart and his companions made their way down onto the Great Plains and trekked eastward until at last, in March of 1813, they reached St. Louis, Missouri. They had blazed a trail through the fearsome heart of the Rocky Mountains.

Their arrival caused a stir of excitement. The St. Louis newspaper published an account of their journey, which concluded with this thought: "By information received from these gentlemen, it appears that a journey across the continent of North America might be performed with a wagon."

But, exciting as it may have been, Robert Stuart's discovery went unrecognized. The United States was just then entangled in the War of 1812, which smothered any ideas of exploration,

trade, and settlements in the wide, wild West. South Pass was forgotten.

Twelve years later, in the early spring of 1824, Jed Smith, whom we met in the last chapter, was deep in the wilderness of Wyoming. Along with a party of fellow fur trappers, he had spent the winter as a guest in a Native camp. Now, with a hint of spring in the air, he was eager to cross over the mountains into the rich valleys, swarming with beavers, on the other side. But how to get there? The mountains were robed in thick snow.

His Native hosts indicated that there was a way through, but neither the trappers nor the Natives could speak enough of each other's language to describe it. Then one of Jed Smith's companions had a wonderful idea. Seizing a nearby buffalo skin, he spread it on the ground and covered it with sand. He molded heaps and valleys to make a model of the surrounding mountains, and, on this rough map, the Natives were able to mark the path that the trappers should take. Like Robert Stuart before him, Jed Smith followed the Natives' advice, and rediscovered the location of South Pass.

This time, the knowledge was not laid aside and forgotten. South Pass became the gateway into the west for settlers with the courage to step through it.

The first to come were the missionaries.

In 1831, a group of Natives arrived in St. Louis, curious about the country of the White men. In particular, they had heard stories about "the Book of Heaven"—the Bible—and asked that someone come to Oregon Country and tell them about it. This appeal was published in a Christian newspaper in March 1833, and one of the first of many to answer this call was a doctor named Marcus Whitman. Along with their fellow missionaries, Henry and Eliza Spalding, Marcus and his wife Narcissa joined a caravan of fur traders bound for Oregon in 1836. As they made their way through South Pass, Narcissa and Eliza became the first White women to cross the Rocky Mountains.

The Whitmans set up their mission church in eastern Oregon. In letters to friends and family, Narcissa described the gentle beauty of her new home. She warned that the journey to get there was long, dangerous, and difficult, but it could be done. Narcissa had managed the journey, and so could others.

Many such stories began to be published in American newspapers. They were read by thousands of people, and a wave of “Oregon fever” swept the United States. Oregon seemed like a promised land, an American paradise. Of course, much of the West was still controlled by other powers—California and most of the Southwest were part of Mexico's land, Great Britain insisted that it owned Oregon Country, and all of these lands had been home to Natives for centuries. But despite this, as Americans learned more about the West, they looked on it as theirs to claim. This idea was given a voice in a newspaper article published in 1845 by a man named John O’Sullivan, who wrote, “It is our Manifest Destiny to overspread the continent.”



Wagon Train in Nevada

“Manifest destiny”? Do you understand what he means? When something is *manifest*, it is plain and obvious and clear. Mr. O’Sullivan was saying that the United States would one day stretch across North America from coast to coast: this was its obvious and certain future and nothing would hinder it. Great Britain might claim ownership of Oregon Country, but Americans would settle and tame it. President James Polk declared as much in 1845: “Our title to the country of Oregon is clear and unquestionable. Already our people are preparing to perfect that title by occupying it with their wives and children.” In 1846, the United States agreed to a treaty with Great Britain and gained the lands that would one day be the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Oregon Country became an official U.S. territory, its arms open to welcome thousands of new pioneers.

Many Americans longed to accept this invitation. But to do so meant that they must leave their comfortable homes in the United States and endure the long journey into the West. They must follow the Oregon Trail, that same route discovered by Robert Stuart in 1812. The Trail began in Independence, Missouri. There, the pioneers gathered in the springtime. They were often called *emigrants* because they were leaving behind the settled United States and *immigrating* to the new territory of Oregon. Each emigrant family sold almost everything that they owned. What was left was packed into a wagon pulled by mules or oxen: three or four precious books, a gun with its bullets and gunpowder, the necessary farm tools for their new life in Oregon. Fastened to the sides of the wagon was the food for the trail: barrels of flour, cornmeal, sugar, and coffee.

Once they were ready to begin the long journey, the family joined a group of other wagons. It was almost impossible to travel alone; by gathering into “trains,” the emigrants could help each other through the dangers.

And those dangers were many. In the 2,000 miles of the Oregon Trail, the emigrants had to ford many rivers, where swift currents could sweep them away or quicksand could swallow them. They had to cross barren plains, where hunger and thirst were ever-present. They had to follow steep trails, risking injury from overturned wagons or falling rocks. No matter what happened, they had to cross the mountains before autumn descended with howling snowstorms and icy winds. And, always, along the whole length of the trail, they traveled under the ever present shadow of sickness. One illness, called cholera, caused a fever that could take a person's life in less than a day. Cholera killed more people along the Oregon Trail than any other threat.

Bravely, swallowing these fears, pioneer families set out from Missouri, walking alongside their wagons, moving together in a slow train. It was easy to keep up: the oxen pulled with dogged steps, traveling only 2 miles every hour. At the end of each day's walk, the wagons gathered in a circle, forming a tight wall that would protect the animals inside from predators or cattle thieves or raids by Natives. Bonfires blossomed as each family cooked an evening meal and then crept into bed. The nights were short. At 4 A.M. the next morning, a trumpet blew and the weary travelers rose to prepare the wagons and themselves for another day.

Every day was the same: awaken early, hitch the oxen to the wagon, and walk toward the West. And yet each day brought new joys and sorrows. They might be forced to begin the morning with a burial when cholera claimed a victim during the night. They would pass scattered belongings dumped along the trail by other emigrants who had found their wagons too heavy. But they would see amazing wonders: an endless herd of bison wandering across the plain, the brilliant glint of an eagle's feathers as it swooped over an untamed river, wildflowers flowing like a vast carpet toward the far horizon.

As the Oregon Trail traces the course of the North Platte River in Nebraska, there appears on the horizon a towering rock

spire, rising 350 feet above the plain: Chimney Rock. It is visible for miles in every direction, described in hundreds of emigrant diaries, the most-mentioned landmark along the Trail. For the Oregon-bound settlers it was a sight to inspire both hope and fear. Behind lay hundreds of miles of walking and the old lives that they had abandoned. Ahead lay South Pass and the Rocky Mountains, and beyond that a fresh new life in Oregon. From Chimney Rock, they could look both ways, back into their past and ahead into their future.

An American poet and writer named Henry David Thoreau said this: “Westward I go free. This is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. . . We go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure.”

And that was certainly true of the brave, steadfast pioneers as they walked the Oregon Trail.

