

Setting the Stage - An Expanding Nation

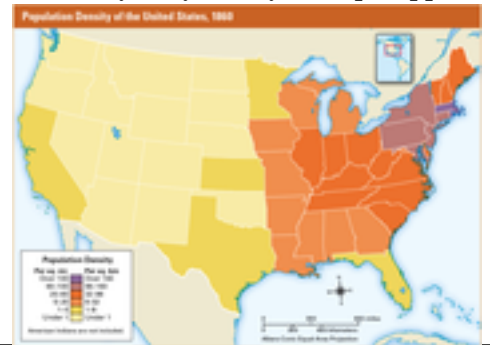


In this unit, you will learn about the growth of the United States from about 1800 to the early 1850s. In 1800, the United States was bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Mississippi River to the west. Farther west lay regions claimed by Great Britain, Russia, France, and Spain. By the 1850s, the United States had acquired these lands, more than doubling its size, and extended its western border to the Pacific Ocean. The map on opposite page shows the steps by which the nation's growth took place.

Picture yourself moving west along a trail pioneers used—the Oregon Trail or the Santa Fe Trail. The first half of your journey will cross a vast, treeless plain. On a good day, your wagon train might travel 20 miles. Rivers slow you down, though, as crossing them is dangerous.

Several weeks on the trail will bring you to an even greater obstacle—the ranges of the rugged Rocky Mountains. Here your progress will slow from 20 miles per day to 20 or so miles per week. Timing is everything on this part of your journey. The high mountain passes are open for only a short time each year. If you reach the mountains too late in the year, you may end up trapped by snow—which will likely mean your death.

Despite such challenges, thousands of settlers made this journey in the 1840s and 1850s. The map on the opposite page shows the nation's pattern of settlement in 1860. As the map below shows, the plains and mountains the pioneers crossed remained largely unpopulated by U.S. citizens, although American Indians had lived on those lands for thousands of years. Before long, however, that situation would change.



Section 1 - Introduction

More than 150 years ago, the phrase *manifest destiny* inspired great hopes and dreams among many Americans. It led to a war with Mexico. And it changed the map of the United States.

Manifest destiny means “obvious fate.” John O’Sullivan, a New York newspaper editor, first used the phrase in 1845. O’Sullivan wrote that it was the United States’ “manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent.” Looking at the land beyond the Rocky Mountains, he argued that Americans had a **divine [divine: heavenly or godlike]** right to settle this area and make it their own.

The fact that Great Britain claimed part of this land—a huge area known as Oregon—made no difference to O’Sullivan. After all, the United States had stood up to Great Britain in the War of 1812.



Nor was O’Sullivan impressed by Mexico’s claims to much of the West. Like many Americans of the time, he believed that the United States had a duty to extend the blessings of democracy to new lands and peoples. It was God’s plan, he wrote, for Americans to expand their “great experiment of liberty.”



When Americans began their “great experiment” in 1776, the idea that the United States might one day spread across the continent seemed like a dream.

By 1848, however, the dream was a reality. In this chapter, you will learn how the United States tripled its size in a little more than a single lifetime.

Manifest destiny took many forms. The United States expanded through treaties, settlement, and war. As you read, think about how each new area was acquired and whether the decisions that led to U.S. expansion across North America were **justifiable [justifiable: done for a good reason]** .

Section 2 - The Louisiana Territory



The nation's first opportunity for expansion during the early 1800s involved the vast **territory [territory: a region of land; also, a region designated by Congress and organized under a governor]** to the west of the Mississippi River, then known as Louisiana. The United States wanted possession of the port city of New Orleans, near the mouth of the Mississippi River. By 1800, thousands of farmers were settling land to the west of the Appalachian Mountains. To get their crops to market, they floated them down the Mississippi to New Orleans. There the crops were shipped to Europe or to cities on the East Coast.

The farmers depended on being able to move their crops freely along the Mississippi. "The Mississippi," wrote James Madison, "is to them everything. It is the Hudson, the Delaware, the Potomac, and all the navigable rivers of the Atlantic States formed into one stream."

Louisiana Across the Mississippi River lay the unexplored territory of Louisiana. This immense region stretched from Canada in the north to Texas in the south. From the Mississippi, it reached west all the way to the Rocky Mountains. First claimed by France, it was given to Spain after the French and Indian War. In 1800, the French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte convinced Spain to return Louisiana to France.

Napoleon had plans for Louisiana. He hoped to settle the territory with thousands of French farmers. These farmers would raise food for the slaves who worked on France's sugar plantations in the Caribbean.

Napoleon's plans alarmed frontier farmers. New Orleans was part of Louisiana. If Napoleon closed the port to American goods, farmers would have no way to get their crops to market.

"A Noble Bargain" President Thomas Jefferson understood the concerns of American farmers. In 1803, he sent James Monroe to France with an offer to buy New Orleans for \$7.5 million. By the time Monroe reached France, Napoleon had changed his plans. A few years earlier, a slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture [too-SAN loo-ver-TEER] had led a slave revolt in the French Caribbean colony known today as Haiti. The former slaves defeated the French troops who tried to take back the colony. As a result, Napoleon no longer needed Louisiana.

In addition, France and Great Britain were on the brink of war. Napoleon knew that he might lose Louisiana to the British. Rather than lose Louisiana, it made sense to sell it to the United States.

Napoleon's offer to sell all of Louisiana stunned James Monroe. Instead of a city, suddenly the United States had the opportunity to buy an area as big as itself.

It didn't take long for Monroe to agree. On April 30, 1803, he signed a treaty giving Louisiana to the United States in exchange for \$15 million. Said the French foreign minister, "You have made a noble bargain for yourselves, and I suppose you will make the most of it."

The Purchase Debate To most Americans, the Louisiana Purchase looked like the greatest land deal in history. The new territory would double the country's size at a bargain price of just 2 to 3 cents an acre.



Still, not everyone approved. Some people worried that such a large country would be impossible to govern. Politicians in the East fretted that they would lose power. Sooner or later, they warned, Louisiana would be carved into enough new states to outvote the eastern states in Congress.

Others objected to the \$15 million price tag. “We are to give money of which we have too little,” wrote a Boston critic, “for land of which we already have too much.”

Opponents also accused Jefferson of “tearing the Constitution to tatters.” They said that the Constitution made no provision for purchasing foreign territory.

Jefferson was troubled by the argument that the Louisiana Purchase was unconstitutional. Still, he believed it was better to stretch the limits of the Constitution than to lose a historic opportunity.

Late in 1803, the Senate voted to ratify the Louisiana Purchase treaty. Frontier farmers welcomed the news. “You have secured to us the free navigation of the Mississippi,” a grateful westerner wrote Jefferson. “You have procured an immense and fertile country: and all these great blessings are obtained without war and bloodshed.”

Section 3 - Florida



Having acquired Louisiana through **diplomacy [diplomacy: the art of conducting negotiations with other countries]**, President Jefferson turned next to Florida. Spain had colonized Florida in the late 1500s. By the 1800s, Florida had a diverse population of Seminole Indians, Spanish colonists, English traders, and runaway slaves. In 1804, Jefferson sent two diplomats to Spain to buy Florida. Spain’s answer was “no deal.”

Many white Americans in the Southeast wanted the United States to take over Florida. Slave owners in Georgia were angry because slaves sometimes ran away to Florida. (Seminole Indians welcomed some of the escaped slaves.) In addition, white landowners in Georgia were upset by Seminole raids on their lands.

Over the next few years, Spain’s control of Florida weakened. The Spanish government could do nothing to stop the raids on farms in Georgia by Seminoles and ex-slaves.

Andrew Jackson Invades Florida In 1818, President James Monroe sent Andrew Jackson—the hero of the Battle of New Orleans—to Georgia with orders to end the raids. Jackson was told that he could chase raiding Seminoles into Florida. But he did not have the authority to invade the Spanish colony.

Despite his orders, Jackson marched into Florida with a force of 1,700 troops. Over the next few weeks, he captured Spanish military posts and arrested, tried, and executed two British subjects for stirring up Indian attacks. He also replaced the Spanish governor with an American. Spain demanded that Jackson be called back to Washington and punished for his illegal invasion.

“Govern or Get Out” Fearing war, President Monroe asked his cabinet for advice. All but one of his cabinet members advised him to remove Jackson and apologize to Spain. The exception was Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. Rather than apologize, Adams convinced Monroe to send a blunt message to Spain. The message was this: govern Florida properly or get out.

Equally fearful of war, Spain decided to get out. In 1819, the Spanish government agreed to yield Florida to the United States. In exchange, the United States agreed to pay off \$5 million in settlers’ claims against Spain. The United States also agreed to honor Spain’s longtime claim to Texas.

Not all Americans were happy about leaving Spain in charge of Texas. One newspaper declared Texas was “worth ten Floridas.” Even so, the Senate ratified the Florida treaty two days after it was signed.

Section 4 - Texas

There was a reason many Americans felt that Texas was so valuable. Much of this region was well suited for growing cotton, the South’s most valuable cash crop. Many southerners hoped that one day Texas would become part of the United States.

Americans Come to Texas The story of Texas begins with Moses Austin, a banker and business owner who dreamed of starting a U.S. colony in Spanish Texas. In 1821, Spanish officials granted Austin a huge piece of land. After Moses Austin died that same year, his son Stephen took over his father’s dream.

Stephen F. Austin arrived in Texas just as Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Now Texas was a part of Mexico. Mexican officials agreed to let Austin start his colony—under certain conditions. Austin had to choose only moral and hardworking settlers. The settlers had to promise to become Mexican citizens and to join the Catholic church.

Austin agreed to Mexico’s terms. By 1827, he had attracted 297 families—soon known as the “Old Three Hundred”—to Texas.

Rising Tensions The success of Austin’s colony started a rush of settlers to Texas. By 1830, there were about 25,000 Americans in Texas, compared to 4,000 Tejanos (tay-HA-nos), or Texans of Mexican descent. Soon tensions between the two groups began to rise.



The Americans had several complaints. They were used to governing themselves, and they resented taking orders from Mexican officials. They were unhappy that all official documents had to be in Spanish, a language most of them were unwilling to learn. In addition, many were slaveholders who were upset when Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829.

The Tejanos had their own complaints. They were unhappy that many American settlers had come to Texas without Mexico’s permission. Worse, most of these new immigrants showed little respect for Mexican culture and had no intention of becoming citizens.

The Mexican government responded by closing Texas to further U.S. immigration. The government sent troops to Texas to enforce the immigration laws.

The Texans Rebel Americans in Texas resented these actions. A group led by a lawyer named William Travis began calling for revolution. Another group led by Stephen F. Austin asked the Mexican government to reopen Texas to immigration and to make it a separate Mexican state. That way, Texans could run their own affairs.

In 1833, Austin traveled to Mexico and presented the Texans’ demands to the new head of the Mexican government, General Antonio López de Santa Anna. The general was a power-hungry **dictator [dictator: someone who rules with absolute power, often harshly]** who once boasted, “If I were God, I would wish to be more.” Rather than bargain with Austin, Santa Anna tossed him in jail for promoting rebellion.

Soon after Austin was released in 1835, Texans rose up in revolt. Determined to crush the rebels, Santa Anna marched north with some 6,000 troops.

The Alamo In late February 1836, a large part of Santa Anna’s army reached San Antonio, Texas. About 180 Texan volunteers, including eight Tejanos, defended the town. The Texans had taken over an old mission known as the Alamo. Among them was Davy Crockett, the famous frontiersman and former congressman from Tennessee. Sharing command with William Travis was James Bowie, a wellknown Texas “freedom fighter.”

The Alamo's defenders watched as General Santa Anna raised a black flag that meant "Expect no mercy." The general demanded that the Texans surrender. Travis answered with a cannon shot.

Slowly, Santa Anna's troops began surrounding the Alamo. The Texans were vastly outnumbered, but only one man fled.

Meanwhile, Travis sent messengers to other towns in Texas, pleading for reinforcements and vowing not to abandon the Alamo. "Victory or death!" he proclaimed. But reinforcements never came.

For 12 days, the Mexicans pounded the Alamo with cannonballs. Then, at the first light of dawn on March 6, Santa Anna gave the order to storm the fort. Desperately, the Texans tried to fight off the attackers with rifle fire.

For 90 minutes, the battle raged. Then it was all over. By day's end, every one of the Alamo's defenders was dead. By Santa Anna's order, those who had survived the battle were executed on the spot.

Santa Anna described the fight for the Alamo as "but a small affair." But his decision to kill every man at the Alamo filled Texans with rage.

Texas Wins Its Independence Sam Houston, the commander of the Texas revolutionary army, understood Texans' rage. But as Santa Anna pushed on, Houston's only hope was to retreat eastward. By luring Santa Anna deeper into Texas, he hoped to make it harder for the general to supply his army and keep it battle-ready.

Houston's strategy wasn't popular, but it worked brilliantly. In April, Santa Anna caught up with Houston near the San Jacinto (san ha-SIN-to) River. Expecting the Texans to attack at dawn, the general kept his troops awake all night. When no attack came, the weary Mexicans relaxed. Santa Anna went to his tent to take a nap.

Late that afternoon, Houston's troops staged a surprise attack. Yelling, "Remember the Alamo!" the Texans overran the Mexican camp. Santa Anna fled, but he was captured the next day. In exchange for his freedom, he ordered all his remaining troops out of Texas. The **Texas War for Independence [Texas War for Independence: the 1836 rebellion of Texans against Mexican rule that resulted in Texas becoming an independent nation]** had been won, but Mexico did not fully accept the loss of its territory.

To Annex Texas or Not? Now independent, the Republic of Texas earned the nickname Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag. But most Texans were Americans who wanted Texas to become part of the United States.

Despite their wishes, Texas remained independent for ten years. People in the United States were divided over whether to **annex [annex: to add a territory to a country. Such an addition is called an annexation.]** Texas. Southerners were eager to add another slave state. Northerners who opposed slavery wanted to keep Texas out. Others feared that annexation would lead to war with Mexico.

The 1844 presidential campaign was influenced by the question of whether to expand U.S. territory. One of the candidates, Henry Clay, warned, "Annexation and war with Mexico are identical." His opponent, James K. Polk, however, was a strong believer in **manifest destiny [manifest destiny: the belief that it was America's right and duty to spread across the North American continent]**. He was eager to acquire Texas. After Polk was elected, Congress voted to annex Texas. In 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state.

Section 5 - Oregon Country



Far to the northwest of Texas lay Oregon Country. This enormous, tree-covered wilderness stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. To the north, Oregon was bounded by Alaska, which belonged to Russia. To the south, it was bordered by Spanish California and New Mexico.

In 1819, Oregon was claimed by four nations: Russia, Spain, Great Britain, and the United States. Spain was the first to drop out of the scramble. As part of the treaty to purchase Florida, Spain gave up its claim to Oregon. A few years later,

Russia also dropped out. By 1825, Russia agreed to limit its claim to the territory that lay north of the 54°40′ parallel of latitude. Today that line marks the southern border of Alaska.

That left Great Britain and the United States. For the time being, the two nations agreed to a peaceful “joint occupation” of Oregon.

Discovering Oregon The United States’ claim to Oregon was based on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Between 1804 and 1806, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had led a small band of explorers to the Oregon coast.

Lewis thought that many more Americans would follow the path blazed by the expedition. “In the course of 10 or 12 Years,” he predicted in 1806, “a tour across the Continent by this rout [route] will be undertaken with as little concern as a voyage across the Atlantic.”

That was wishful thinking. The route that Lewis and Clark had followed was far too rugged for ordinary travelers. There had to be a better way.

In 1824, a young fur trapper named Jedediah Smith found that better way. Smith discovered a passage through the Rocky Mountains called South Pass. Unlike the high, steep passes used by Lewis and Clark, South Pass was low and flat enough for wagons to use in crossing the Rockies. Now the way was open for settlers to seek their fortunes in Oregon.



Oregon Fever The first American settlers to travel through South Pass to Oregon were missionaries. These missionaries made few converts among Oregon’s Indians. But their glowing reports of Oregon’s fertile soil and towering forests soon attracted more settlers.

These early settlers wrote letters home describing Oregon as a “pioneer’s paradise.” The weather was always sunny, they claimed. Disease was unknown. Trees grew as thick as hairs on a dog’s back. And farms were free for the taking. One man even joked that “pigs are running about under the great acorn trees, round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry.”

Reports like these inspired other settlers who were looking for a fresh start. In 1843, about 1,000 pioneers packed their belongings into covered wagons and headed for Oregon. A year later, nearly twice as many people made the long journey across the plains and mountains. “The Oregon Fever has

broke out,” reported one observer, “and is now raging.”

All of Oregon or Half? Along with Texas, “Oregon fever” also played a role in the 1844 presidential campaign. Polk won the election with such stirring slogans as “All of Oregon or none!” and “Fifty-four forty or fight!” Polk promised he would not rest until the United States had annexed all of Oregon Country.

But Polk didn’t want Oregon enough to risk starting a war with Great Britain. Instead, he agreed to a compromise treaty that divided Oregon roughly in half at the 49th parallel. That line now marks the western border between the United States and Canada.

The Senate debate over the Oregon treaty was fierce. Senators from the South and the East strongly favored the treaty. They saw no reason to go to war over “worse than useless territory on the coast of the Pacific.” Senators from the West opposed the treaty. They wanted to hold out for all of Oregon. On June 18, 1846, the Senate ratified the compromise treaty by a vote of 41 to 14.

Polk got neither “fifty-four forty” nor a fight. What he got was a diplomatic settlement that both the United States and Great Britain could accept without spilling a drop of blood.

Section 6 - The Mexican-American War

You might think that Texas and Oregon were quite enough new territory for any president. But not for Polk. This humorless, hardworking president had one great goal. He wanted to expand the United States as far as he could.

Polk's gaze fell next on the huge areas known as California and New Mexico. He was determined to have them both—by purchase if possible, by force if necessary.

These areas were first colonized by Spain but became Mexican territories when Mexico won its independence in 1821. Both were thinly settled, and the Mexican government had long neglected them. That was reason enough for Polk to hope they might be for sale. He sent a representative to Mexico to try to buy the territories. But Mexican officials refused even to see Polk's representative.

War Breaks Out in Texas When Congress voted to annex Texas, relations between the United States and Mexico turned sour. To Mexico, the annexation of Texas was an act of war. To make matters worse, Texas and Mexico could not agree on a border. Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its border on the south and the west. Mexico wanted the border to be the Nueces (new-AY-sis) River, about 150 miles northeast of the Rio Grande.

On April 25, 1846, Mexican soldiers fired on U.S. troops who were patrolling along the Rio Grande. Sixteen Americans were killed or wounded. This was just the excuse for war that Polk had been waiting for. Mexico, he charged, "has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil." Two days after Polk's speech, Congress declared war on Mexico. The **Mexican-American War [Mexican-American War: the war with Mexico from 1846 to 1847 that resulted in Mexico ceding to the United States a huge region from Texas to California]** had begun.

The Fall of New Mexico and California A few months later, General Stephen Kearny led the Army of the West out of Kansas. His orders were to occupy New Mexico and then continue west to California.

Mexican opposition melted away in front of Kearny's army. The Americans took control of New Mexico without firing a shot. "Gen'l Kearny," a pleased Polk wrote in his diary, "has thus far performed his duty well."

Meanwhile, a group of Americans launched a rebellion against Mexican rule in California. The explorer John C. Frémont heard about the uprising and gave his support to the Americans. The Americans arrested and jailed General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo (vuh-YAY-oh), the Mexican commander of northern California. Then they raised a crude flag showing a grizzly bear sketched in blackberry juice. California, they declared, was now the Bear Flag Republic.

When Kearny reached California, he joined forces with the rebels. Within weeks, all of California was under U.S. control.

The United States Invades Mexico The conquest of Mexico itself was far more difficult. U.S. troops under General Zachary Taylor battled their way south from Texas. Taylor was a no-nonsense general who was known fondly as "Old Rough and Ready" because of his backwoods clothes. After 6,000 U.S. troops took the Mexican city of Monterrey, an old enemy stopped them. General Santa Anna had marched north to meet Taylor with an army of 20,000 Mexican troops.



In February 1847, the two forces met near a ranch called Buena Vista (BWEY-nuh VIS-tuh). After two days of hard fighting, Santa Anna reported that "both armies have been cut to pieces." Rather than lose his remaining forces, Santa Anna retreated south. The war in northern Mexico was over.

A month later, U.S. forces led by General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz (ver-uh-CROOZ) in southern Mexico. Scott was a stickler for discipline and loved fancy uniforms. These traits earned him the nickname "Old Fuss and Feathers." For the next six months, his troops fought their way to Mexico City, Mexico's capital.

Outside the capital, the Americans met fierce resistance at the castle of Chapultepec (chuh-PUHL-tuh-PEK). About 1,000 Mexican soldiers and 100 young military cadets fought bravely to defend the fortress. Six of the cadets chose to die fighting rather than surrender. To this day, the boys who died that day are honored in Mexico as the *Niños Héroes* (NEEN-yos EHR-oh-ace), the boy heroes.

Despite such determined resistance, Scott's army captured Mexico City in September 1847. Watching from a distance, a Mexican officer muttered darkly, "God is a Yankee."

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Early in 1848, Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (gwa-duh-LOO-pay hih-DAHLgo). Mexico agreed to give up Texas and a vast region known as the Mexican

Cession. (A cession is something that is given up.) This area included the present day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

Under this agreement, Mexico gave up half of all its territory. In return, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million. It also promised to protect the 80,000 to 100,000 Mexicans living in Texas and in the Mexican Cession. Most of these promises, however, were not kept.

In Washington, a few senators spoke up to oppose the treaty. Some of them argued that the United States had no right to any Mexican territory other than Texas. They believed that the Mexican-American War had been unjust and that the treaty was even more so. New Mexico and California together, they said, were “not worth a dollar” and should be returned to Mexico.



Other senators opposed the treaty because they wanted even more land. They wanted the Mexican Cession to include a large part of northern Mexico as well. To most senators, however, the Mexican Cession was a manifest destiny dream come true. The Senate ratified the treaty by a vote of 38 to 14.

The Gadsden Purchase A few years later, the United States acquired still more land from Mexico. In 1853, James Gadsden arranged the purchase of a strip of land just south of the Mexican Cession for \$10 million. Railroad builders wanted this land because it was relatively flat and could serve as a good railroad route. The acquisition of this land, known as the Gadsden Purchase, created the present-day border of the southwestern United States with Mexico.

Most Americans were pleased with the new outlines of their country. Still, not everyone rejoiced in this expansion. Until the Mexican-American War, many people had believed that the United States was too good a nation to bully or invade its weaker neighbors. Now they knew that such behavior was the dark side of manifest destiny.

Summary

In this chapter, you read about how Americans extended their nation to the west and the south. The idea of manifest destiny fueled many of the events that led to expansion.

The Louisiana Purchase In 1803, the United States added the vast territory known as Louisiana. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the nation’s land area.

Florida A treaty with Spain added Florida to the United States in 1819.

Texas In 1836, Americans in Texas rebelled against the Mexican government there and created the Lone Star Republic. In 1845, Congress admitted Texas into the union. The Lone Star Republic was formally dissolved in 1846.

Oregon Country A treaty with Great Britain added Oregon Country in 1846.

War with Mexico In 1846, the United States went to war with Mexico in the Mexican- American War. In an 1848 treaty with Mexico, the United States acquired the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Five years later, the Gadsden Purchase completed the outline of the continental United States.



Below is a drawing of John Gast's painting American Progress. Annotate the drawing by adding a speech or thought bubble for four elements in the painting—people, animals, or objects. In each bubble, write a one- or two-sentences to express how that person, animal, or object might respond to the Essential Question: *How justifiable was U.S. expansion in the 1800s?* Include as many of the Key Content Terms as possible in your sentences.



Reading Further - Westward on the Santa Fe Trail

“Calling all adventurers!” the signs might have said. “It’s 1821, and the Santa Fe Trail is open for business.” And business it was. Traders loaded their wagons in Missouri and crossed plains, deserts, and mountains to sell their goods in Mexico. The action lasted about 60 years before the railroads came. But in its brief history, the Santa Fe Trail became the stuff of legend.

On June 11, 1846, newlywed Susan Shelby Magoffin left Independence Missouri. She was headed for Santa Fe, then part of Mexico. Just 18 years old, Susan Magoffin was very excited about her upcoming honeymoon adventure. “My journal tells a story tonight different from what it has ever done before. The curtain rises now with a new scene,” she wrote as she and her husband set out on their journey, part of a wagon train on the Santa Fe Trail.

Susan’s husband Samuel was 27 years older than his bride. He had been traveling and trading on the Santa Fe Trail for nearly 20 years. The couple’s honeymoon trip was also a business trip: Samuel was overseeing 14 wagonloads of American goods. He planned to sell his cargo in Mexico, at the towns of Santa Fe and Chihuahua.

Over the years, Samuel Magoffin had made a fortune on the Santa Fe Trail. Like other businessmen of his day, he had seen possibility in trading with Mexico. In search of profit, these entrepreneurs had charted a course from the western edges of what was then the United States to the lands beyond. And when Santa Fe became part of the United States in 1848, after the Mexican War, the booming business did not stop.

The trips were risky. Dust storms, illness, possible attacks by hostile Indians, and lack of water all threatened their efforts. But for nearly 60 years, men like Samuel Magoffin took those risks. In the process, they helped expand the United States’ southwestern border. Fortunately for historians, people like Susan Magoffin kept detailed journals of their experiences. Their accounts bring to life a time of adventure on the American frontier.



The Path West

In the 1800s, several trails left the United States heading west. Settlers, farmers, ranchers, and miners took the Oregon Trail toward new lives in the Pacific Northwest. Families traveled along what became known as the Mormon Trail, looking for religious freedom in the desert. And across the California Trail, prospectors and others marched toward what they hoped would be great wealth.

The Santa Fe Trail was different. Its main purpose was trade. Political events made that trade possible. In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. Spain had prohibited trade with the United States, but Mexico welcomed it. With the door open, American businessmen like Samuel Magoffin and his brother James headed west.

The Santa Fe Trail began in Missouri and spanned 900 miles across North America. Traders braved bad weather, hostile Indians, dangerous animals, and lack of water. They were in search of profits, and they found them. In 1822, trade on the trail totaled \$15,000. By 1860, it had reached \$3.5 million. When the railroad ended trade on the Santa Fe Trail in 1880, as many as 6,000 wagons were using the trail every year.

If money was important to Santa Fe traders, so was adventure. Many traders and other travelers loved the excitement of life on the trail. Some simply loved the beautiful outdoors. One wrote, “The air . . . is many times clearer and incomparably drier than in the eastern part of the United States, and the heavens burn nightly with millions of magnified stars which the people of the East never dreamed of.”

On the trail, Susan Magoffin appreciated being free from the strict rules of society. In her diary, she wrote,

There is such independence, so much free uncontaminated air, which [fills] the mind, the feelings, nay every thought, with purity. I breathe free without that oppression and uneasiness felt in the gossiping groups of a settled home.



Joy and Hardship on the Trail

When Samuel Magoffin set off to Santa Fe with his young wife, he was determined that she travel in comfort. So, he hired servants and outfitted carriages to make his first home with Susan as nice as possible. The Magoffins slept in a tent, but not in sleeping bags on the ground. No, they slept in a bed that the servants put up every night. There were sheets on the mattress, plus blankets, pillows, and mosquito netting. Tables, cabinets, and carpets added to the luxury.

Their meals were often equally elegant. Susan and Samuel brought chickens with them so that they could have fresh eggs. They also ate ham, fresh buffalo, and sometimes even one of the chickens. They might top off a good meal with gooseberry tarts. “It is the life of a wandering princess, mine,” Susan wrote in her journal.

During the days, Susan wrote, sewed, studied Spanish, and knit. When she wanted flowers but didn’t want to climb out of her carriage, “servants riding on mules pick them for me.” Her devoted greyhound, Ring, kept her company. Ring also helped her feel protected by barking at the wolves and coyotes. “I felt safe with this trusty soldier near me,” she wrote.

But life on the trail wasn't all luxury, even for wealthy travelers like Susan and Samuel Magoffin. Difficulties abounded. Dust storms and prairie fires plagued travelers. Rattlesnakes frightened them. And then, there were the mosquitoes. "Millions upon millions are swarming upon me," Susan wrote, "and their knocking against the carriage reminded me of a hard rain."

Fear of hostile Indians also troubled the travelers. At Pawnee Rock, Susan stopped to carve her name on the sandstone, as others had done. Samuel and Susan's servant, Jane, kept watch because the rock was the site of Pawnee attacks. From the rock, the hostile Indians could "dash down upon the Santa Fe traders like hawks, to carry off their plunder and their scalps," wrote one traveler.

Susan didn't encounter any Indians at Pawnee Rock, but she did have a terrible accident as the caravan moved on. The wagon she was riding in went over the edge of a river bank. She described what happened.

*We were whirled completely over with a perfect crash.
One to see the wreck of that carriage now with the top and sides entirely
broken to pieces, could never believe that people had come out
of it alive. But strange, wonderful to say, we are almost entirely unhurt!*

That wasn't quite true. Susan was knocked unconscious during the crash. Pregnant at the time, she lost the baby due to the accident.

It took 11 weeks for the Magoffins to reach Santa Fe, partly because travel was difficult and partly because Susan's ill health required them to spend nearly two weeks at Bent's Fort, an important stopping point along the trail. When they arrived in Santa Fe, they met up with Samuel's brother James and joined in the high society life of the village, such as it was. Susan attended a nearby church, practiced her Spanish, and spent time with the local people.

Over the next 10 years, Susan and Samuel Magoffin had three children. Eventually, the family settled in St. Louis, where Susan Magoffin died in 1855. She was only 29 years old.

Preparing to Write: Taking Notes on Details

In her journal, Susan Magoffin recorded descriptions and details about her travels along the Santa Fe Trail. Because of this record, readers today can share her experiences. Take notes about the trip based on the descriptions in the reading.

- 1) When and where did the expedition begin?
- 2) Describe how the Magoffins outfitted themselves for the trip.
- 3) What happened at Pawnee Rock?
- 4) Describe Susan Magoffin's accident.
- 5) Explain why the Magoffins stopped at Bent's Fort.

Writing a Postcard

Suppose you were part of the Magoffin expedition. What if you could have sent a message home during your journey on the Santa Fe Trail? Write a postcard to someone you have left behind in the United States. On your postcard, include

- 1) descriptions and details about what you are seeing.
- 2) a description of what you like and dislike about the trip.
- 3) the date, a greeting, a closing, and your signature.

Use this rubric to evaluate your postcard. Make changes in your postcard if you need to.

Score

Description

3

The postcard has accurate descriptions and details. It is well constructed. There are no spelling or grammar errors.

- 2 The postcard has descriptions and details. It is well constructed. There are some spelling or grammar errors.
- 1 The postcard does not have descriptions and details. It is not well constructed. There are many spelling or grammar errors.