

## Beginnings of the Oregon Trail 5-30-18

The historic Oregon trail stretched 2,170 miles connecting various towns from the Missouri River to Oregon's Willamette Valley. Pioneer settlers were drawn to the west in search of a better life and prosperity. Some had received letters from family or friends who had already moved west telling of the good life that they were experiencing on the new frontier. But by far the biggest factor that drove this westward migration was the availability of land and a promise of a new life for the future.

The Oregon Trail was laid by fur traders and traders from about 1811 to 1840, and was only passable by foot or by horseback. In 1843 the first major group of settlers numbering over one thousand departed. U.S. sovereignty over the Oregon Territory was not clearly established until 1846, American fur trappers and Mormon missionary groups had been living in the region for decades. Starting in 1847, after 17 months and so many miles of travel, Brigham Young led 148 Mormon pioneers into Utah's Valley of the Great Salt Lake. Gazing over the new territory of this remote location, Young announced; "This is the place," and the pioneers began preparations for the thousands of Mormon migrants who were to follow.

Signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on May 20, 1862, the Homestead Act encouraged Western migration by providing settlers 160 acres of public land. In exchange, homesteaders paid a filing fee and were required to complete five years of continuous residence before receiving ownership of the land.