

Long ago, when people settled the United States, most lived in the East, and it was hard to travel west. There were no planes, trains, or automobiles. People traveled by wagon or boat, and it took many days to reach a destination.

Although it was difficult, in the 1840s, many people traveled far across the United States from the East to the West. They were pioneers. They would settle in the western part of the country after a challenging journey to a new life.

Getting to the West was very difficult because there were no roads and there were many obstacles to travel. People traveled in groups, and each family would buy a covered wagon, which is a big wooden wagon with a kind of tent on it. It was small, about the size of an automobile, but it would be home for the whole family while they traveled to their new home. Each family would pack the tools and supplies they needed to build a new life in the West. They would have to fit all they took in their wagon, so they would bring only the items that were essential.

It was dangerous to try to travel west without protection, so families would travel together, combining their wagons into what was called a wagon train. It was a group of wagons all going the same way. To prepare, they would meet with other families to plan their trip, choosing a route based on the travels of others.

When the families started the trip, they did not know each other, they only had in common that they were leaving the East to start a new life in the West. They met when the trip began, and they would spend more than a year together, so they got to know each other well. Sometimes they would borrow tools from each other, and sometimes they shared food. When the wagons encountered a problem, such as a storm that caused wagons to stick in muddy holes, they would solve it together.

It would take more than a year to reach the West, and many things happened along the route. The families sometimes had babies along the way, which delayed the progress as the wagon train would stop for a few days to help the mother with the baby. Then they would keep going, persisting whatever the weather, because they knew they had a long way to travel and could not delay long.

When the wagon train got to the West, the families would settle there, building homes, starting farms. They would create communities, and instead of being partners in a trip they were collaborators in community. Those communities would grow into towns, and then some would expand into cities, from a wagon train to a metropolis.

In the next century, people built a railroad that crossed the United States. By 1900, there were many more people in the West, and thousands of people came west by train. A trip that had taken months now took passengers a few days of comfortable transit. The railroad brought many changes, and the pioneers became legends as the country developed into the nation of today.