The Oregon Trail & Oregon Pioneer History

Overview:

It has been said that every Oregon teacher has a lesson unit on The Oregon Trail that they personally cherish. We wouldn’t ask you to give it up! However, please be aware of all the related content available online on Historic Oregon Newspapers: there are articles your class can read and images you can share, in order to further enrich the learning opportunities.

Here are links to some of the best Oregon Trail content available through our website:


“Early Days In Oregon: Policy of the Hudson Bay Company,” from the Astoria *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 2, 1883. Earliest mention of the ‘Oregon trail’ (by name) in the digitized newspapers. Details efforts by the British Hudson Bay Company to discourage American settlers from travelling overland to Oregon.

“From Maine to Oregon: Early Days Traveling from Coast to Coast,” from the Astoria *Daily Morning Astorian*, December 6, 1889. Remembrances of R.S. Thurston’s transcontinental trip from Brunswick, ME to Oregon in 1844. Thurston later served as Oregon’s congressman.

“Today Celebrates Her Ninetieth Birthday,” from Portland Morning *Oregonian*, February 28, 1905. Recounts the 1852 pioneer experiences of Sophrona Gibson, a long-lived Oregon Trail veteran. With a photo of the birthday gal, this story is a good way to “put a face” on the pioneer experience (i.e. personalize it) for students.

These stories relate to Oregonians’ initial efforts to commemorate and mark the original route of the Oregon Trail, beginning around 1900:

“The Oregon Trail: Project to Mark It With Monuments From Missouri to This State,” from Pendleton *East Oregonian*, April 25, 1900. Details the Oregon Historical Society’s first plans to commemorate the trail.

“Trip Over Oregon Trail,” from Portland Morning *Oregonian*, September 17, 1900. Professor F. G. Young’s account of retracing the 600-mile journey in 1900.
“Will Retrace The Old Oregon Trail,” from Portland Sunday Oregonian, September 17, 1905. Story about Ezra Meeker, an original Oregon Pioneer of 1852, who plans to retrace the trail in his old age, installing commemorative markers along the route. Includes a map of the Oregon Trail from Missouri to the Northwest.

“Great Fair in 1905: Oregon Historical Society Starts the Movement,” from Portland Sunday Oregonian, December 16, 1900. Reports initial planning that would lead to the great Lewis & Clark World’s Exposition in Portland in 1905.

The remaining links are to stories that are perhaps only partially, or indirectly, concerned with the Oregon Trail. However, they present fascinating perspectives on other aspects of early pioneer history in Oregon:

“Joaquin Miller Writes on Oregon for the Chicago Times,” from Jacksonville Oregon Sentinel, September 25, 1886. Known in his day as the ‘Poet of the Sierras’ and the ‘Bard of Oregon,’ here Miller writes a prose overview in praise of our state. In this article he coins a nickname that would become popular: “The Emerald Land.” This piece was reprinted in many papers back east, helping to form Oregon’s image with the rest of the country.

“One Hundred Years In Oregon,” from Portland Morning Oregonian, January 1, 1903. Condensed (1 page) history of Oregon’s first Century of Anglo-American settlement and development. Well illustrated.

“Beginnings of Oregon: Explorations and Early Settlement at the Mouth of The Columbia River,” from Portland Morning Oregonian, April 19, 1901. With illustration, “Astoria As It Was In 1813.”

“Early Local Government in Rhode Island and Oregon,” from Astoria Daily Morning Astorian, November 18, 1884. Fascinating piece details Oregon’s remarkable early history of political organization, and compares it with similar developments during the ‘pioneer’ settlement of an Eastern state nearly 200 years earlier.