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Oregon Trail



WESTWARD HO! From the painting by E. Leutze in the National Capitol, Washington

A PLAN TO HONOR THE PIONEERS

*"Whose stern, impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!"*

FROM AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL,
by KATHARINE LEE BATES

Issued by the Oregon Trail Memorial Association
95 Madison Avenue, New York City



Oregon Trail Memorial Association, Inc.

Founded by Ezra Meeker

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Our Heritage

"I am not quite ready to go; my work is unfinished." These words, whispered to his daughter, were the last that Ezra Meeker uttered.

For more than a score of years this intrepid old pioneer had carried on almost single-handed his dominant purpose to memorialize the Oregon Trail. With the help of interested groups of citizens and bands of school children he had succeeded in raising nearly a hundred monuments and markers at various historic spots on the famous Trail. Reinforced by some good friends he had won the support of Congress in his venture. A bill providing for the coinage of six million memorial half-dollar coins was passed unanimously and signed by President Coolidge. Here at last the means seemed in hand with which to achieve the goal of his ambitions. Through the sale of these coins monuments might be placed at every strategic point along the Trail and a memorial fraught with educational significance be erected at Washington.

The campaign was launched in a modest way. Prominent Americans began to respond helpfully in promoting the cause. Gifts began to come. Among them one greatly prized was a chassis from Henry Ford on which a replica of the old covered wagon or "prairie schooner" was built. In this "oxmobile," as Uncle Ezra christened his modernized pioneer conveyance, the courageous old scout, though nearing his ninety-eighth birthday, set out on his sunset trek over the long, long trail.



He first made a trip into our Northeast to remind the New Englanders that they had played a significant rôle in the winning of our Northwest. Meeting Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford at the old Wayside Inn, Mr. Meeker was invited to bring the "oxmobile" on to Detroit that it might be made still more comfortable. But he arrived in Detroit so ill that only through the prompt care of the physicians and nurses at the Ford Hospital was his life saved. The moment he was able to get on his feet he expressed his determination to go on with his trip in the "oxmobile" back home. Kind friends, however, finally persuaded him to make the trip by train. Arriving among his children and friends in Seattle, he gave promise for a time of regaining his usual vigor and living on as he had hoped to round out a full century. This was not to be, however. On December third, 1928, he passed peacefully over the great divide.

His parting words, "I am not quite ready to go; my work is unfinished," were at once a benediction and a bequest. They reflect the inner spirit of the founder of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association. At the same time they lay sacredly upon us the great cause for which he "gave his last full measure of devotion."



*In front of the Henry Ford executive building, Dearborn, Michigan,
September, 1928*

What the Cause Means to America

Ezra Meeker's successor, Dr. Howard R. Driggs, in his memorial address, part of which is here quoted, tells us the meaning of the cause to which the Oregon Trail Memorial Association is dedicated.

"And what is that work Ezra Meeker has bequeathed to us? Briefly and outwardly it is the planting of markers and memorials of an artistic and educative nature at historic spots on the old trails along which our America was carried from the Mississippi to the Pacific. The inner, the more vital significance of this work is far deeper; it means the saving of one of the most thrilling of the epics in the great story of the making of America.

"The cause is all-American in its scope and spirit. It touches closely every part of our country—North, South, East, and West. Every state in the Union has some heroic son or daughter who has played a valiant part in the trail-blazing, home-building story of the Far West.

"What is the West? It is merely the transplanted East. It is the blended North and South. We sometimes hear the song, *Out Where the West Begins*. Frankly, I do not know where the West begins, but I do know where it began. It began along the shores of the stormy Atlantic. Our American pioneers were descendants of those who planted our thirteen American colonies and who afterward fought to establish the nation dedicated to freedom. They followed the Indian trails through the passes of the Alleghenies along the old national highways to the Mississippi; thence wended their way over prairies and plains and mountains and deserts to the shores of the Pacific. Fully three hundred fifty thousand Americans took these trails during the days of the covered wagon—from 1836 when Marcus Whitman and his wife first made their way to Oregon, to 1869 when the Golden Spike linking the Union

Pacific and the Central Pacific was driven at Promontory Point at the north end of the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

“We are brought a little closer to the tragic cost of it all when we realize that fully twenty thousand lost their lives in the effort to reach the Golden West. They had no means of marking the graves of the dead in those prairie stretches. Only one grave out of all the twenty thousand, so far as we know, is surely marked. I refer here to the grave of the pioneer mother near Scotts Bluff, Nebraska. When Rebecca Winters passed away, one of the company had the forethought to pick up an old wagon tire that lay along the trail. Bending it into an oval he set the tire



within the grave. On the top of the tire was chiseled the mother's name and age. A party of surveyors laying out a railroad along the old North Platte happened by mere chance to run their line right over the mother's grave. Then the surveyors, with a touch of sympathy that is beautiful to think upon, went back for twenty miles and changed the line of survey that it might miss the mother's grave.

“Some years ago I was in the Museum in Portland, Oregon, listening to George Himes, Secretary of the Oregon Historical Association, tell the story of the coming of the pioneers into what was then the territory of Washington. Mr. Himes showed me relics that had come from every state east of the Mississippi River. ‘Here,’ said he, ‘is a clock that used to tick time in Vermont; here is a Franklin stove with which they used to warm themselves in Pennsylvania; here is a cradle with which they rocked the baby across the plains from

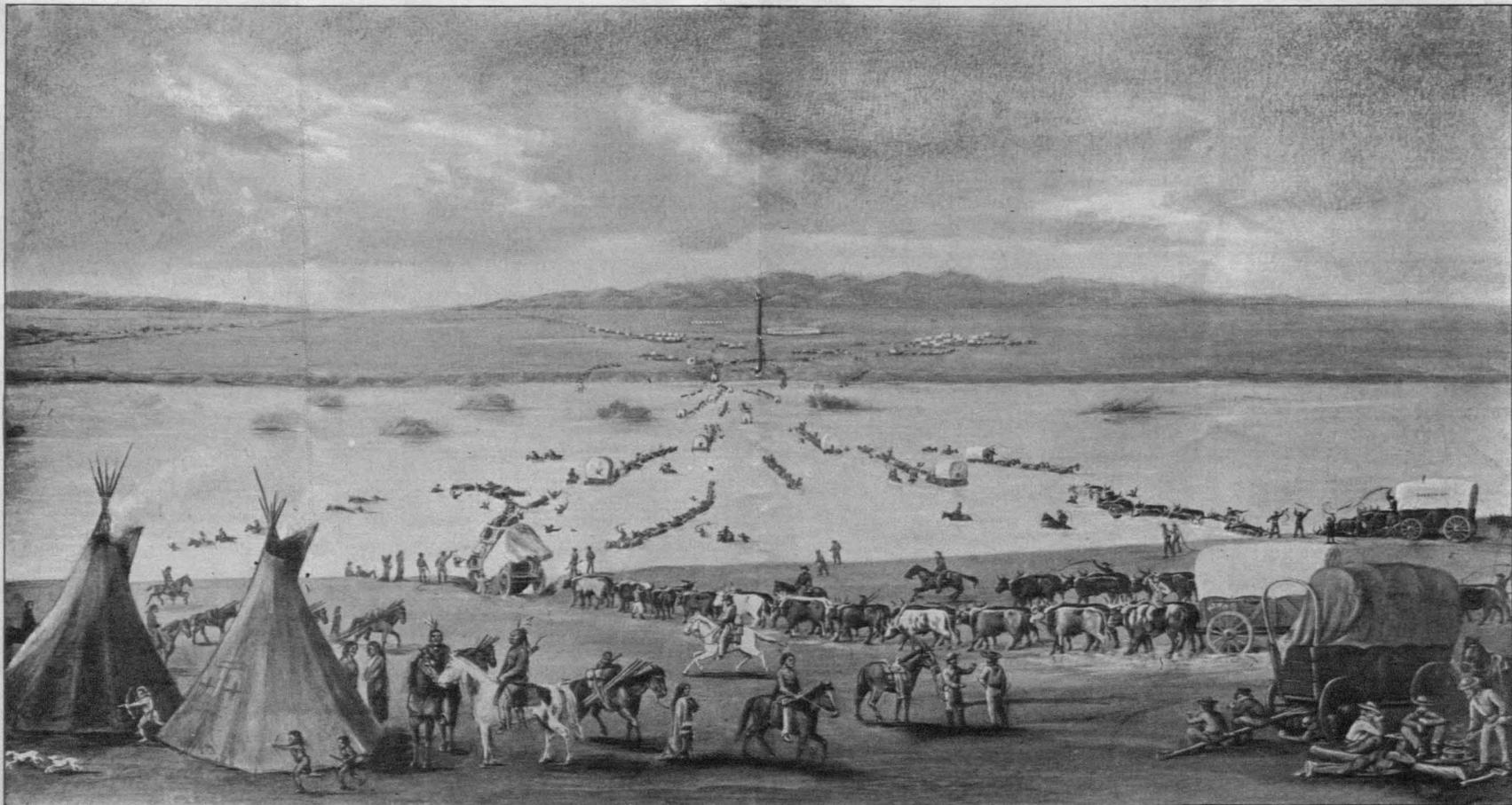
Indiana; and here is a scythe with which they mowed blue grass in Kentucky.'

"'Yes, Mr. Himes,' said I, 'these people came bearing not only their scythes and their stoves, their clocks and their cradles; they came carrying America across our continent; they came sprinkling the names of American towns and cities dear to their hearts upon the map of every state that they crossed; they came telling their children of the making of America; they came with American ideals throbbing in their hearts. They came, if you please, stretching the warp of our national life from one end of our country to the other. They stretched it stout and taut and true.'

"The vital question with you and me and with every American now is, 'Will the warp hold?' It will hold, provided we can keep alive the sacred stories of the pioneer builders of this nation in the hearts of American boys and girls. If we would save our country we must see to it that we save this invaluable heritage.

"The cause for which Ezra Meeker has given so magnanimously aims at just this splendid result. Its central purpose is to lift into the clear in humanized forms the true story of the winning of the great West for America. By doing this we shall stir the heart of every son and daughter of America with renewed pride and faith in our country. There is no higher tribute that we here assembled in honor of our fallen leader can pay to his memory than to pledge in our hearts that this great cause shall be carried on to a glorious consummation."





CROSSING OF THE PLATTE

Painted by William H. Jackson from a sketch made by him on July 25, 1866, on the South Fork of the Platte River near Julesburg. Mr. Jackson crossed the plains as a bullwhacker in 1866. He later joined the Hayden Expedition as official photographer. This pioneer photographer is now actively engaged in research for the Oregon Trail Memorial Association.

Carrying On

The passing of Ezra Meeker brought the Association face to face with the problem of choosing new leadership and reorganizing for the work ahead. By unanimous vote the Board of Directors selected as the new leader Dr. Howard R. Driggs, Professor of English Teaching, New York University, who had been chosen by Ezra Meeker to act as vice-president of the Association. Dr. Driggs made his acceptance contingent upon the platform which he laid down. The principal planks of that platform are as follows:



HOWARD R. DRIGGS

1. Every dollar received from the sale of the memorial coins shall go directly to the central purpose of the organization, namely, the erecting of monuments and markers in honor of the western pioneers.
2. The general officers including the President and the members of the Board of Directors are to serve without compensation.
3. The organization shall be promoted entirely from an educational and a patriotic standpoint. It shall be strictly on a non-commercial basis and all-American in spirit and purpose.
4. The central purpose of the organization shall be to teach in vitalized and humanized forms with due respect to truth and fact the great story of the westward march of America.
5. The Board of Directors shall undertake to provide through voluntary contributions from patriotic citizens the funds needed for the maintenance of the home office, for research, and for the promotion of the movement.

This platform was unanimously adopted and Dr. Driggs was elected President of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association to succeed Ezra Meeker.

An indication of the spirit in which his election was received is to be found in the following editorial from the *Morning Oregonian*.

EZRA MEEKER'S SUCCESSOR

"Direction of the movement to preserve the historical aspects of the Old Oregon Trail which the late Ezra Meeker did so much to promote has apparently been assigned to capable hands. Professor Howard Roscoe Driggs, new president of the Memorial Association, is a Utahn by birth, and though his calling is the teaching of English, his avocations are those of the frontier. His *Ox-Team Days on the Oregon Trail*, *Frontier Law*, and *Hidden Heroes of the Rockies* are marked by sympathy and understanding.

"The Association's pledged program is well-balanced and thoughtful, and in all probability does not attempt too much. It will endeavor to restore the Whitman Mission, the significance of which as a landmark, geographical and historical, cannot be overemphasized. It will seek to establish an aviation beacon on the site of old Fort Hall, which constituted a romantic chapter in the struggle for possession of the Oregon Country in which defeat for the American forces was only temporary; and it plans a monument which will perpetuate the union of ox-team and water transportation which was a striking feature of the final stage of the great immigration. It is probably safe to assume that continued support will be given to the marking of the trail with due respect to the verities.

"It is not such a job as will be finished in a day. Nor is it one whose interest is confined to the West. The importance of the acquisition of Oregon to the entire nation is only now coming to be appreciated by students of history."



SCOTTS BLUFF. From painting by W. H. Jackson

Plan of Action

Coincident with the election of the officers of the Association and the adoption of the platform already outlined, the Board of Directors also determined the following as basic lines of action for the guidance of the movement:

1. The mapping and charting of the trails themselves, together with the determination of points along them that are fraught with historic significance.
2. The planting of enduring markers and monuments at these strategic points which will give in essence the stories they commemorate and stimulate further study of our history.
3. The promotion, especially among the communities most closely connected with the old trails, of a systematic saving of precious historical documents, relics, pictures, and other first-hand data on which history of the true-to-fact and literature of the true-to-life kind is based.
4. The restoration of historic landmarks that may be deemed of such significance as to warrant their preservation in replica.
5. The erection of a fitting memorial to the pioneers in the national capital at Washington, D. C.

A Hundredth Anniversary

It was also decided that the year 1930 be chosen as the time for the holding of celebrations in honor of the memory of the western pioneers along the whole length of the Oregon Trail and its allied branches. This decision was made for two very vital reasons: 1. It marks the hundredth birthyear of Ezra Meeker, the founder of the Association; 2. If the few remaining covered-wagon pioneers are to have a share in this great honor, we must move quickly before they all pass away.

What the Plan of Action Involves

It will be readily seen that to bring this magnificent plan to a splendid consummation there must be speedy action of a reliable kind. This involves several important things:

1. RESEARCH

Gathering of definite data which will enable us to speak with sureness as to the old trails themselves, the exact spots to be monumented, the legends to be inscribed, the names deserving of recognition, all requires historical research of a high class.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE FORCES ALONG THE TRAIL

Certain states through which the historic highway runs are most vitally interested in the cause. The organization of local chapters of the Association in these various states to assist in the promotion of the movement is one of the definite objectives immediately to be achieved by our organization. Preliminary steps toward the establishment of these chapters have been taken. The intention of the officers is to carry this work on with renewed force during the immediate future.

3. PUBLICATION

In order to keep the various forces informed of the progress of the movement as well as to disseminate reliable information to the schools and to the country in general, bulletins dealing with different phases of the work will be regularly issued.

All the foregoing purposes and plans are of course contingent upon the immediate securing of the necessary funds with which to carry on the cause.



Financial Plan

In order to make a careful businesslike study of the funding of our enterprise, the Board of Directors at the outset appointed a responsible financial committee. This committee, after making a painstaking study of the needs, laid before the Board of Directors the following report:

"The Committee has given its sole thought to the financial aspects of the worthy intents and purposes of our Association as outlined in our Articles of Incorporation:

'To acknowledge the heroism of the fathers and mothers who traversed the Trail with great hardships, daring, and loss of life, which not only resulted in adding new states to the American Union but earned a well-deserved and imperishable fame for the pioneers.

'To honor the twenty thousand dead that lie buried in unknown graves along two thousand miles of that great highway of history.

'To rescue the various important historic points along the old Trail from oblivion; and to commemorate by suitable monuments, memorial or otherwise, the tragic events associated with that emigration—erecting them either along the Trail itself or elsewhere in localities appropriate for the purpose, including the City of Washington.'

"This embodies, as we see it, two distinct, though coördinated working units:

"1. A Central Organization properly sponsored and properly financed so that the spirit and intent of our organization will be accepted with proper creditability by the large number of citizens whose assistance we need.

"2. A Field Organization as an integral part of the Central Organization to distribute six million coins and to handle the requirements where monuments or other memorial work is to be done. The fifty cents returned to the Association from the sale of each coin is to be entirely applied to the expense of monuments, etc."

The Vital Need

The vital need at this time is funds to carry on the work so well begun.

Already a number of generous-minded Americans who are standing sponsor for the movement have made initial subscriptions to the cause. The major work of raising the necessary funds remains yet to be accomplished.

We have presented our cause frankly with confidence that American citizens everywhere will respond with substantial contributions to enable those who are giving freely of their time to the leadership of this movement to carry it through to splendid success.

Map of the OREGON TRAIL 1852

From the Missouri River to the Pacific Northwest
with the principal connections, the forts, along
the line, and the Territorial Divisions of

- Oregon Trail
 - Mormon Trail
 - Overland Mail
 - Stage Road
 - other trails
- The names of the rivers and
of 1852, and have been used
by others for travelers

