Westward Migration, The

The series of state quarters, which began in 1999, were produced at the rate of five states per year, beginning with Delaware, the first state to ratify the new constitution, and ending ten years later with Hawaii. If you followed the unveiling of this series, you had by default followed the westward expansion of our nation. The five states that were featured in 2003 began with Illinois, admitted into the Union in 1818. This is a particularly significant date for the United States, as we will show. Illinois was followed by Alabama in 1819; Maine (which had been part of Massachusetts), 1820; Missouri, 1821 and Arkansas, 1836. 1818 was an important year in the expansion of the United States; two important boundary lines were agreed on while Monroe was president. The boundary between the United States and British America west of the Great lakes was fixed in 1818. From the Lake of the Woods the forty-ninth parallel was made the boundary westward to the summit of the Rocky Mountains. West of this lay the Oregon country extending to the Pacific and claimed by both the United States and England, and it was initially decided that both should occupy it jointly for ten years; but twenty-eight years elapsed before the ownership was settled.

In 1819 the United States purchased East and West Florida from Spain for $5,000,000, although the United States did not take possession of Florida until 1821, when Andrew Jackson became the first governor. Before this the United States had claimed that Texas was a part of the Louisiana Purchase; but this claim was now given up and the boundary decided on was as follows: The Sabine River (now the boundary between Louisiana and Texas), from the Gulf of Mexico to thirty-two degrees north latitude and then northward to the Red River (near Texarkana), up the Red River to the one hundredth meridian, north to the Arkansas River (at the site of present-day Dodge City, Kansas), up this river to the crest of the Rocky Mountains (at the town of Climax, Colorado), north to forty-two degrees north latitude, and west on this parallel to the Pacific. (This today is the California-Oregon boundary.) As a point of interest, the forty-second parallel also bisects the Town of Colebrook, the reason all of our topographic maps show either the northern or southern half of town. One location where a highway crosses this parallel is on Sandy Brook Road near the sharp bend by Jerry Peters' home. Before the road was resurfaced, there used to be a culvert at this point that passed under the road, giving a pronounced bump when driven over. I used to tell my grandson that it was caused by the forty-second parallel, and if he didn't believe me, I could show it to him in the atlas as soon as we got home! But to return to our story:

This 1819 line drawn along the forty-second parallel did not define a U.S. boundary; it merely separated the contested Oregon country from Mexican Territory.

A significant movement of the population to the west began soon after the War of Independence had closed in 1783. Every road leading westward from the East was covered with lines of moving wagons, mostly drawn by slow, plodding oxen, and by these means they wended their way over hills and mountains, streams, rivers and valleys. At Easton, Pennsylvania, 511 wagons, bearing over 3,000 passengers, passed in one month. Those were moving to the great

valley of the Ohio River, and in the South, a similar movement to the new states of Alabama and Mississippi was going on.

A farmer, such as Colebrook's Seth Hurd, who undertook this journey in 1805, can be seen as a typical immigrant. He sold all his holdings, for which he received about $1,000 and placed his worldly possessions in his wagon, leaving just enough room for his wife and younger children. After weeks of trekking westward, they finally arrived in northeast Ohio, where they took up residence in the new lands. Exactly how they accomplished this is not clear, as the $1,000 he had received from the sale of his Colebrook lands was all used up on his journey west, but somehow they were successful, as their descendants live there today, more than 200 years later.

Sometimes whole communities went together and settled in the same neighborhood in the West; but more frequently they moved as isolated families. Arriving in the western wilderness, the pioneer would purchase a quarter section of land from the government, or from some land company, or perhaps some settler who had preceded him and failed, paying two or three dollars per acre, on the installment plan. If the land was wholly unimproved, the family would continue living in the wagon that brought them, until a cabin could be built. The cabin was made of logs, notched at the ends so as to fit at the corners, and laid one above another until the house was about ten feet high. There was but one room, one door and one window. The door was made of rough boards swung on leather hinges, and opposite the door was left an open space on the ground for a fireplace, the chimney being built outside of the flat sticks, like laths, and heavily plastered with mortar more often than not consisting of native clay and mud. The floor was made of planks hewn out with an adz and broadax, and the roof of lighter planks resting on rafters made of saplings. In such a home many a family lived for ten or twenty years, and became the ancestors of many of the leading men of the nation today.

The cabin built, the pioneer would begin battling with the forest, clearing a few acres each year, carrying his grain perhaps twenty miles on horseback to the nearest mill. Soon his land would become more productive; and finally, if thrifty and industrious, he would build a good house and abandon the cabin. New arrivals would settle near, then a town would be founded, and more settlers arrived, and another and another, until eventually a railroad would be built through the new settlement. The community would be transformed in about twenty-five years; the markets are near, the comforts of life have multiplied, the farm of the first settler is now worth thousands of dollars, and he has added other hundreds of acres to it. His children settle on the farm or enter the business or professional world, and the "old settler" spends his declining years amid peace and plenty; and he gathers his grandchildren about him and tells of the days of long ago, or the long journey in the covered wagon, and of the time when the forest frowned on every side and the wolves howled about his lonely cabin in the wilderness.

The quarter series is complete now, but if you happened to save an example of each, it is possible to reflect on the hard work and the difficulties that had to be overcome by our pioneering forefathers, many from our area, in order to eventually create the United States of America.


NORTH AMERICA
GREENLAND
RUSSIAN POSSESSIONS
MEXICO
GULF OF
ATLANTIC OCEAN