

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

# Stories of America

**Volume 2**  
From The Oregon Trail to the Present Day  
(1850—2012)

*Settle back with this delightful narrative of American history.*

Just think of it! All that we see around us is the work of less than three hundred years! The story of this great work is called the "History of the United States of America." This story you have before you in the book you now hold. It is written for the boys and girls of our land, but many of their fathers and mothers may find it pleasant and useful to read.

There are hundreds who do not have time to read large histories, which try to tell all that has taken place. For those, this little history will be of great service, in showing them how, from a few half-starved settlers on a wild coast, this great nation has grown up.

But I need say no more. The book has its own story to tell. I only lay this introduction before you as a handy stepping-stone into the history itself. By its aid you may cross the brook and wander on through the broad land which lies before you.

*Consisting of original and revised material from The Child's Story of America (1901), by Charles Morris, and additional material by other authors.*

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*Charlotte Mason*  
*.com*

# *Stories of America*

Volume 2: From The Oregon Trail to the Present Day

Consisting of original and revised material from *The Child's Story of America* and other books by Charles Morris, originally published in the early 1900s, and additional material contributed by

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## A Talk with the Young Reader about the History of Our Country

If any of the readers of this book should have a chance to take a trip over the vast region of the United States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, they would see a wonderful display of cities and towns, of factories and farms, and a great multitude of men and women actively at work. They would behold, spread out on every side, one of the busiest and happiest lands the sun shines upon. Here and there, amid the miles on miles of farms, they might see a forest, here and there a wild beast, here and there an Indian, one of the old people of the land; but these would be almost lost in the rich and prosperous scene.

If our young traveler knew nothing of history, he might fancy that it had been always this way, or that it had taken thousands of years for all those cities to be built and those great fields to be cleared and cultivated. Yet if he had been here only three hundred years ago, he would have seen a very different sight. He could not then had gone over the country by railroad, for such a thing had never been thought of. He could not have gone by paved road, for there was not a road of any kind in the whole length and breadth of the land. Nowhere in this vast country would he have seen a city or town; nowhere a plowed field, a farm-house, or a barn; nowhere a horse, cow, or sheep; nowhere a man with a white or a black face. Instead of great cities he would have seen only clusters

of rude huts; instead of fertile farms, only vast reaches of forests; instead of tame cattle, only wild and dangerous beasts; instead of white and black men, only red-skinned Indians.

Just think of it! All that we see around us is the work of less than three hundred years! The story of this great work is called the "History of the United States of America." This story you have before you in the book you now hold and in the first volume by the same name. It is written for the boys and girls of our land, but many of their fathers and mothers may find it pleasant and useful to read.

There are hundreds who do not have time to read large histories, which try to tell all that has taken place. For those, this little history will be of great service, in showing them how, from a few half-starved settlers on a wild coast, this great nation has grown up. But I need say no more. The book has its own story to tell. I only lay this introduction before you as a handy stepping-stone into the history itself. By its aid you may cross the brook and wander on through the broad land which lies before you.



## Chapter 1

# Heading West on the Oregon Trail

**T**his country of ours is ever so large. It extends from gray ocean to blue ocean, over snow-capped mountains and hot sandy deserts, across thick green forests and low flat grasslands where the sky looks like an enormous blue tent with its sides tied down all around you.

I imagine my young readers' homes are spread across thousands of miles of this great country. If you wanted to visit each other, you could find a paved highway nearby on which you could travel clear to the other end of the state, or even across many states—over mountain and plain—to the far end of the country. But it was not always like that.

When our country was young, most of its citizens lived on one end only, on the edge nearest the Atlantic Ocean. As the country grew bigger, you will remember, Lewis and Clark explored the new territory and brought back exciting tales, colorful descriptions, and little pieces of what lay out there. That was enough! Those Americans with a heart for adventure started packing up their belongings and heading westward to explore for themselves. When they found an area that suited them, they settled in and built a new house from whatever wood or rock or sod they could find nearby.

Now, I am sure all my readers know how a trail is made. First, one person walks a certain direction and tramples down

the grass a bit. Then another person or two follows the first one and tramples the grass a little more, making the trail easier to see. More people follow, and soon the trail is as plain as day.

This is how the Americans traveled into the new territory. The explorers and settlers made several trails as they headed out West. One of the most used trails was called the Oregon Trail, because that is where it would guide its travelers, to Oregon.

If you were to look at a map of the United States, you would find Oregon way on the western edge with one side touching the sparkling Pacific Ocean. Then if you would trace with your finger from Oregon back across the country to the Missouri River, you would be able to see what a long trail that would be. Indeed, it was about two thousand miles and took many months to travel.

The settlers had to start planning during the winter before they left. Each mother and father and girl and boy had to decide what they would bring on the journey to their new home. I wonder what my readers would think important to bring—important enough to be pushed, pulled, and carried for two thousand miles. Quilts and blankets, pots and pans, and farming tools were packed into the wagon, along with items to sell or trade with other people along the way. Food was needed for the entire time they would be traveling; that meant enough food to feed the family for five or six months. Of course, fresh fruits and vegetables would spoil before long, so most families packed flour, cornmeal, bacon, sugar, coffee, salt, tea, rice, and beans. Some families decided to take extra cattle to butcher for fresh meat or milk cows for fresh milk.

Come April or May, once the grass had grown enough to feed the cattle along the journey, excitement began to build as the wagons were loaded. The fathers fastened tall arches of wood onto the wagon box and stretched a huge piece of canvas over the top, covering the contents like a white tent. The oxen were harnessed to the front, the family climbed in with everything that had been packed, and off they went.

As the Oregon Trail became more frequented, families

followed it in groups rather than alone. If you were to watch one of these groups set out on the trail, their covered wagons would make quite a long train. If you close your eyes, you can picture the sight.

First came a few men on horseback, riding out before the wagon train to scout the trail and bring back word of what was ahead. Next came the long line of wagons, slowly rolling along the wheel-tracks in the grass. A man or a boy walked beside each wagon, prodding the oxen to keep them going. The girls and women rode in the wagons, occasionally getting out to walk along beside and stretch their legs. Children ran and skipped from wagon to wagon, visiting friends and playing in the grass between. More men on horseback stationed themselves alongside the wagon train to keep watch, and still more men on horseback rode in the back of the line, herding the extra horses and cattle. It was quite a sight!

The lumbering oxen and plodding travelers covered only 15 miles each day. Some of my readers may be thinking, “But 15 miles takes only 15 minutes in our car.” That is true, but how long would it take you to walk those same 15 miles? The wagon trains on the Oregon Trail moved at a slow pace—slow but steady and always westward through good weather and bad.

A family named Knight traveled the Oregon Trail in 1853. Mrs. Knight’s diary describes their eventful trip.

Tuesday, May 17th—We had a dreadful storm of rain and hail last night and very sharp lightning. It killed two oxen for one man. We have just encamped on a large flat prairie, when the storm commenced in all its fury and in two minutes after the cattle were taken from the wagons every brute was gone out of sight, cows, calves, horses, all gone before the storm like so many wild beasts. I never saw such a storm. The wind was so high I thought it would tear the wagons to pieces. Nothing but the stoutest covers could stand it. The rain beat into the wagons so that everything was wet, in less than 2 hours the water was a foot deep all over our campgrounds. As we could

have no tents pitched, all had to crowd into the wagons and sleep in wet beds, with their wet clothes on, without supper. The wind blew hard all night, and this morning presents a dreary prospect surrounded by water, and our saddles have been soaking in it all night and are almost spoiled. Our cow Rose came up to be milked; had little or nothing for breakfast. The men took the cow's tracks and found the stock about 4 miles from camp. Start on and travel about 2 miles and come to Dry Creek, so called because it is dry most of the year. I should call it Water Creek now, as it is out of its banks and we will have to wait until it falls. No wood within 8 miles. Raining by spells.

After one month of traveling on the Oregon Trail, the wagon train arrived at Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Here was a military post with a trading store that some earlier travelers had built. Extra supplies were available in the store, but they cost ever so much more than back home. The wagon train full of settlers stayed at the fort for several days to rest their weary oxen and empty their wagons of extra items that they had discovered they didn't need. They realized that unnecessary items simply made the wagons too heavy. The mothers eagerly used this time to wash clothes and give their children nice warm baths. The fathers carefully repaired their wagons, greasing the wheels to get them ready for the next stage of the journey. They knew they had come only five hundred miles and still had many a mile to go, much of it through Indian Territory.

Everyone stayed on the alert, keeping an eye out for Indians as the wagon train rolled out of the fort. Some tribes were friendly and welcoming. With those Indians the settlers could trade, replacing their worn-out shoes with new, soft moccasins or other items they needed.

Mrs. Knight wrote about one of their trades with some Indians:

Tuesday, June 7th—Rained some last night; quite warm today.  
Just passed Fort Laramie, situated on the opposite side of the

river. This afternoon we passed a large village of Sioux Indians. Numbers of them came around our wagons. Some of the women had moccasins and beads, which they wanted to trade for bread. I gave the women and children all the cakes I had baked. Husband traded a big Indian a lot of hard crackers for a pair of moccasins and after we had started on he came up with us again, making a great fuss, and wanted them back (they had eaten part of the crackers). He did not seem to be satisfied, or else he wished to cause us some trouble, or perhaps get into a fight. However, we handed the moccasins to him in a hurry and drove away from them as soon as possible. Several lingered along watching our horses that were tied behind the wagons, no doubt with the view of stealing them, but our folks kept a sharp lookout till they left. We had a thunderstorm of rain and hail and a hard blow this afternoon. Have traveled 18 miles and are now camped among the Black Hills. They are covered with cedar and pine wood, sandstone, limestone and pure water.

Each night the settlers formed a kind of round fort by pulling their wagons into a circle with the tongue of each wagon placed on the hind wheel of the one in front of it. The men took turns standing guard during the night hours, watching over the cattle and horses to prevent any Indians from stealing them.

Crossing rivers was always a challenge. At the wide rivers, the travelers usually found a ferry boat waiting to carry the wagons across, one by one. Mrs. Knight wrote:

August 5th—We have just bid the beautiful Boise River, with her green timber and rich currants; farewell, and are now on our way to the ferry on Snake River. Evening—Traveled 18 miles today and have just reached Fort Boise and camped. Our turn will come to cross sometime tomorrow. There is one small ferry boat running here, owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. Have to pay three dollars a wagon. Our worst trouble at these large rivers is swimming the stock over. Often after swimming half way over the poor things will turn and come out again. At this place, however, there are Indians who swim the river from morning till night. There is many a drove of cattle that

could not be got over without their help. By paying them a small sum, they will take a horse by the bridle or halter and swim over with him. The rest of the horses all follow and by driving and hurraing to the cattle they will almost always follow the horses, sometimes they fail and turn back.

But farther down the trail, at smaller rivers, not as wide but still too deep to walk the oxen through, they had no flatboat ferry to help with the crossing. So the men selected a few of the wagons to become little boats. They took off the canvas tent coverings and removed the wheels, then they covered the wagon boxes with rawhide animal skins to make them waterproof. All the rest of the wagons were carefully taken apart, the pieces piled onto the boat-wagons, ferried across the river, and then put back together on the other side. River-crossings required several days of hard work, but the hearty travelers did not back down. They were on their way to a new home and a new life, and they would not turn back.

As they neared the halfway point, towering, snow-capped mountains loomed on the horizon. These were the massive Rocky Mountains. But there was a gap in the mountains that the wagon train could travel through. Snow Pass was a broad gap, but the travelers needed to get through before the snows came and filled it. So they could not rest long in any one place. They must keep moving, as Mrs. Knight described:

Monday, August 8th—We have to make a drive of 22 miles, without water today. Have our cans filled to drink. Here we left, unknowingly, our Lucy behind, not a soul had missed her until we had gone some miles, when we stopped a while to rest the cattle; just then another train drove up behind us, with Lucy. She was terribly frightened and so were some more of us when we learned what a narrow escape she had run. She said she was sitting under the bank of the river, when we started, busy watching some wagons cross, and did not know we were ready. And I supposed she was in Mr. Carl's wagon, as he always took charge of Francis and Lucy and I took care of Myra and

Chat. When starting he asked for Lucy and Francis said ‘She is in Mother’s Wagon,’ as she often went there to have her hair combed. It was a lesson to all of us. Evening—It is near dark and we are still toiling on till we find a camping place. The little ones have curled down and gone to sleep without supper. Wind high, and it is cold enough for a great coat and mittens.

At last, after the long and perilous journey on the Trail, the wagon train arrived near Millwaukie in Oregon Territory. The mothers and fathers and boys and girls had reached the end of the Trail, but still had to find or build their new house. Mrs. Knight’s family traded for theirs:

Saturday, September 17th—In camp yet. Still raining. Noon—It has cleared off and we are all ready for a start again, for some place we don’t know where. Evening—Came 6 miles and have encamped in a fence corner by a Mr. Lambert’s, about 7 miles from Millwaukie. Turn our stock out to tolerable good feed. A few days later my eighth child was born. After this we picked up and ferried across the Columbia River, utilizing skiff, canoes and flatboat to get across, taking three days to complete. Here husband traded two yoke of oxen for a half section of land with one-half acre planted to potatoes and a small log cabin and lean-to with no windows. This is the journey’s end.

And while the Knight family settled into their new home in the West, another family back East started planning what they would put into their wagon when they would travel the Oregon Trail next spring.





## Chapter 2

# The California Gold Rush

**T**here are few things more interesting than the story of gold. It has given rise to no end of adventures, men have hurried from end to end of the earth to obtain it, even wars have sprung from it. I must certainly tell you of a wonderful find of gold in America.

You may remember how the United States went to war with Mexico and defeated that country. As part of the spoils of war, it held on to the large province of California, which lay along the Pacific Ocean and ran back to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Mexico had owned that country for several hundred years, but found it of little more use than as a place to feed sheep in. No one dreamed that it was paved with golden sands.

One day in 1848 some workmen were digging a mill for a Mr. Sutter in the Sacramento Valley in California, and one of them saw sparks of shining yellow in the dirt thrown out. He washed some of this out, and to his delight he found it to be gold. There was no more use for mills or mill work after that, as you may well imagine. People thought of nothing but gold. The news spread as if the birds were carrying it on their wings and scattering it down as they sped onward. The people of San Francisco dropped everything and ran to the hills, hungry for gold. To the right, to the left, they dug and found the shining yellow grains. Gold was everywhere—in the soil, in the river sand, in the mountain rock.

Soon the people of the eastern United States and Canada heard the news and set out in multitudes to the golden realm. Some of them went by ship; some crossed the Great Plains in slow teams, fighting with the Indians as they went. They followed the Oregon Trail to Fort Hall, Idaho, then they branched off to head south to California.

All over America you could hear the Forty-niners singing Stephen Foster's song: "Oh, Susanna, now don't you cry for me, For I'm off to California with a washbowl on my knee." You may wonder why they were called Forty-niners; it was because most of them came in the year 1849 and immediately started digging for gold.

Then Europe got the news, and the thirst for gold spread there. California filled with people from around the world—Germany, Peru, Hawaii, China, Scotland, France, Sweden; its sands were dug and washed, its old river beds excavated, its very rocks torn to pieces.

San Francisco used to be a town of about 1,000 residents. Once news of the gold was shared on its streets, the town emptied like a balloon that had lost all its air. All of the residents were out looking for golden nuggets. But then the balloon refilled to an enormous size. With all the new people rushing to California to pan for gold, San Francisco soon reached 25,000 new residents!

It was not only gold hunters who came to California. Oh my, no. Others came to get rich off the gold hunters. Men arrived with shovels and wheelbarrows and washpans and other digging equipment to sell. Other storekeepers brought shirts and boots and fancy trinkets to sell to the diggers who had come back into town with their bags full of gold, looking for ways to spend it. Cooks charged outrageous fees for meals, and tricksters tried to entice gold diggers to play games for money.

Sadly, with gold fever in everyone's hearts, San Francisco became an unruly place in which to live. I imagine none of my readers would have wanted to live there, for the police were all

out looking for gold and none stayed in town to protect its citizens and uphold the law. If a person stole from someone else, there was no police officer to call for help. The gold diggers and the shopkeepers and the tricksters set their own laws and enforced them with their guns.

The half-crazy gold hunters seemed as if they would like to tear out the heart of the earth in their search for the golden metal. In seven years, gold was obtained to the value of nearly \$500 million.

When the sands were emptied of their gold, many of the hunters drifted away. Some of the more business-minded men bought heavy digging equipment to dig deep into the mountains, tunneling and mining for any gold that might be hiding down there. They willingly hired miners to work for them, but most of the men did not want to work deep in the dark earth for daily wages. In just five years, by 1854, the gold rush was over and most of the hunters settled on their own farms or found jobs in the cities. But many a man went back East and never tired of telling about his adventures as a Forty-niner in the California Gold Rush.



## Chapter 3

# The Sad Story of Slavery

All of my young readers must know what a wonderful age this is that we live in, and what marvelous things have been done. Some of you, no doubt, have read the stories of magic in the “Arabian Nights,” and thought them very odd, if not nonsensical. But if anyone, a hundred years ago, had been told about the railroad, the telephone, submarines that run beneath the surface of the water, computers, and dozens of such inventions, I fancy they would have called all this nonsense and “Arabian Nights” magic. Why, to think of it, a space shuttle is as magical, in its way, as Aladdin’s wonderful lamp.

But while you know much about these things I have mentioned, there has been one great step of progress which, I fancy, you know or think very little about. I do not mean material but moral progress, for you must bear in mind that while the world has been growing richer, it has also been growing better in some ways.

Two hundred years ago many millions of men and women were held as slaves in America and Europe. Some of these were black and some were white, but they could be bought and sold like so many cattle, could be whipped by their masters, and had no more rights than so many brute beasts.

Today there is not a slave in Europe or America. All these millions of slaves have been set free. Do you not think I am right

in saying that the world has grown better as well as richer? Why, one-hundred fifty years ago there were millions of slaves in our own country, and now there is not one in all the land. Is not that a great gain to mankind? But it is sad to think that this slavery contributed to a terrible war. I shall have to tell you about this war, after I have told you how slavery played a part in it.

I am sure you know the story of how white men first came to this country. Well, I have now to tell you that black men were brought here almost as soon. In 1619, just twelve years after Captain John Smith and the English colonists landed at Jamestown, a Dutch ship sailed up the James River and sold them some black men to be held as slaves.

You remember about Pocahontas, the Indian girl who saved the life of Captain John Smith. She was afterwards married to John Rolfe, the man who first planted tobacco in Virginia. John Rolfe wrote down what was going on in Virginia, and it was he who told us about these black men, or negroes, brought in as slaves. This is what he wrote: "About the last of August came in, a Dutch marine-of-war, that sold us 20 Negars."

These twenty "Negars," as he called them, grew in numbers until there were four million black slaves in our country in 1860, when the war began. There are many more black people in the country today, but I am glad to be able to say that none of them are slaves.

"Where did all these black men come from?" I am sure I hear some young voice asking that question. They came from Africa, the land of the Negroes. In our time, merchant ships are used to carry goods from one country to another. In old times, many of these ships were used in carrying Africans to be sold as slaves. The wicked captains would steal the poor black men in Africa, or buy them from the chiefs, who had taken them as prisoners in war. Some of them filled their ships so full of these miserable victims that hundreds of them died and were thrown overboard. Then, when they got to the West Indies or to the shores of our country,

they would sell all that were left alive to the planters, to spend the rest of their lives like oxen chained to the yoke.

It was a very sad and cruel business, but people then thought it right, and some of the best men took part in it. That is why I say the world has grown better. We have a higher idea of right and wrong than those men had.

Slaves were kept in all parts of the country, in the North as well as the South. There were more of them in the South than in the North, for they were of more use there as workers in the tobacco and rice and cotton fields. Most of those in the North were kept as house servants; not many of them were needed in the fields.

The North had not much use for slaves, and in time laws were passed, doing away with slavery in all the Northern states. Very likely the same thing would have taken place in the South if it had not been for the discovery of the cotton-gin. What a change this great invention made! Before that time it did not pay to raise cotton in our fields. After that time cotton grew to be a very profitable crop, and the cultivation of it spread wider and wider until it was planted over a great part of the South.

This made a remarkable change. Slaves were very useful in the cotton fields, and no one in the South now thought of doing away with slavery. After 1808 no ships could bring slaves to this country, but there were a great many here then, and many others were afterwards born and grew up as slaves, so that the numbers kept increasing year after year.

There were always some people, both in the North and the South, who did not like slavery. Among them were Franklin and Washington and Jefferson and other great men. In time there got to be so many of these people in the North that they formed what were called Anti-slavery Societies. Some of them said that slavery should be kept where it was and not taken into any new states. Others said that every slave in the United States ought to be set free.

This brought on great excitement all over the country. The people in the North who believed in slavery were often violent. Now and then there were riots. Buildings where anti-slavery meetings were held were burned down. One of the leaders of the Abolitionists, as the anti-slavery people were called, was dragged through the streets of Boston with a rope tied round his body, and would have been hanged if his friends had not got him away.

But as time went on, the Abolitionists grew stronger in the North. Many slaves ran away from their masters, using the Underground Railroad. This Railroad was not a train trip with a locomotive; rather it was the name given to a secret journey through homes where slaves were hidden by their white friends until they could get to Canada, where they were safe.

In time it began to look as if war might come. I do not think many of our people expected their actions to bring about a cruel war. If they had, they might have been more careful what they said and did. But for all that, war was close at hand, and two things helped to bring it on.

There had been fighting in Kansas, one of the territories that was to be made into a state, and among the fighters was an old man named John Brown, who thought that God had called him to do all he could for the freedom of the slaves.

Some people think that John Brown was not quite right in his brain. What he did was to gather a body of men to take possession of Harper's Ferry, on the Potomac River, where there was a government army. He thought that the slaves of Virginia would come to his aid in multitudes and that he could start a slave war that would run all through the South.

It was a wild project; not a slave came. But some troops came under Colonel Robert E. Lee, and Brown and his party were forced to surrender. Some of them were killed and wounded and the others taken prisoner. John Brown and six others were tried and hanged. But the half-insane old man had done his work. That fight at Harper's Ferry helped greatly to bring on the war.



I said there were two things. The other was the election of Abraham Lincoln as President.

For a long time, as I have told you, the Abolitionists were weak. When they got stronger they formed a political party. In 1856 a new party, called the Republican Party, was formed and took in all the Abolitionists. It was so strong that in the election of that year eleven states voted for its candidate, John C. Fremont, the man who had taken California from Mexico.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln, a Western orator of whom I shall soon tell you more, was the candidate of the Republican Party, and was elected President of the United States.