



# The Promise of the West: Young Pioneers on the Overland Trails

*Mary Barmeyer O'Brien*

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Driven by the promise of prosperity and opportunity on the frontier, thousands of men and women traveled west in the mid-1800s to forge a new life. Accompanying them were their children, wide-eyed and excited about the adventures that awaited them as they headed toward the setting sun. Little did they know how treacherous and grueling the trip would be.

The toil and danger of overland travel forced parents to depend on their children to assist in their ultimate survival. Girls were called upon to help cook, set up and break camp, and mind younger siblings. Boys were called upon to help drive the wagons, herd the oxen and horses, assist with wagon repairs, and guard the camp at night. Even with their endless chores, many pioneer boys and girls found time to record the details of their journeys in letters and diaries. This collection of short episodes from the lives of these children on the trail offers fresh perspectives on the experience.

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