

A Garden to Rival Eden

For so many who traveled overland to the Oregon Territory, hardships along the way were endured only by the persistence of a dream to find their own personal Garden of Eden at the end of the long dusty trail. History often imparts the dire stories of the more unfortunate emigrants, yet many did indeed find the promised land of Oregon to fulfill their dreams of happiness, home and health. In recalling her childhood as an early resident of western Oregon, Alice Revenue Webster says:

I should like to correct the impression that pioneer days were hard. That is not true. We had a happy time, with an abundance of food, though it was simple...

My father and mother came to Oregon in 1853. They stopped on the Sandy river because the oxen were tired, the river abounded with fish, and the forest with game. It was a good place to spend the winter, and by spring they saw possibilities of a home there. Father started a trading post on the Barlow road. Mother planted [a] garden, and as the nine children began to grow up, we had a good life.

The streams were teeming with salmon and trout. We had elk, deer, and an occasional bear. As the years passed, father began raising hogs to sell around to the neighbors... People were dependent on one another and had to get along. One never knew when he would need help, and no one could afford to get mad or to be dishonest. Father never refused to help people, and he was always repaid. That old feeling of tolerance and friendship still exists among the families who lived together.

Yes, it was a good life.

Catherine Thomas Morris, a ten-year old Oregon Trail pioneer in 1851, recalls those early years after her family moved their home from Missouri to Linn County, Oregon.

Each generation thinks that it is a great improvement on past generations. In a way I suppose this is true or we would make no progress, but in some ways I cannot help thinking that, as busy as they were, the pioneers of Oregon had more time to be kindly, thoughtful, and considerate than the people of today. When I was a girl, if a woman got sick she didn't have to hire a trained nurse. Her neighbors came in, did the housework, took her children to their homes to care for till she was well, brought her home-made bread and jellies and other things, and if a man met with an accident or was sick, all the men in the neighborhood would put in his crop for him or reap his grain, making it a day's picnic, just as if they were going to a house-raising. If he was out of wood they would haul wood and cut it up, and in every way the neighbors showed a spirit of helpfulness and service.

In these days many families have no children and others have one child. In those days there were usually from ten to fifteen in the family so that children had no chance to grow up spoiled and selfish. They had to learn to share their things and to help each other.

Source: Webster: *With Her Own Wings: Historical Sketches, Reminiscences, and Anecdotes of Oregon's Pioneer Women*, by Helen Krebs Smith / Wildside Press; Thomas: *Conversations with Pioneer Women*, Fred Lockley p. 143