

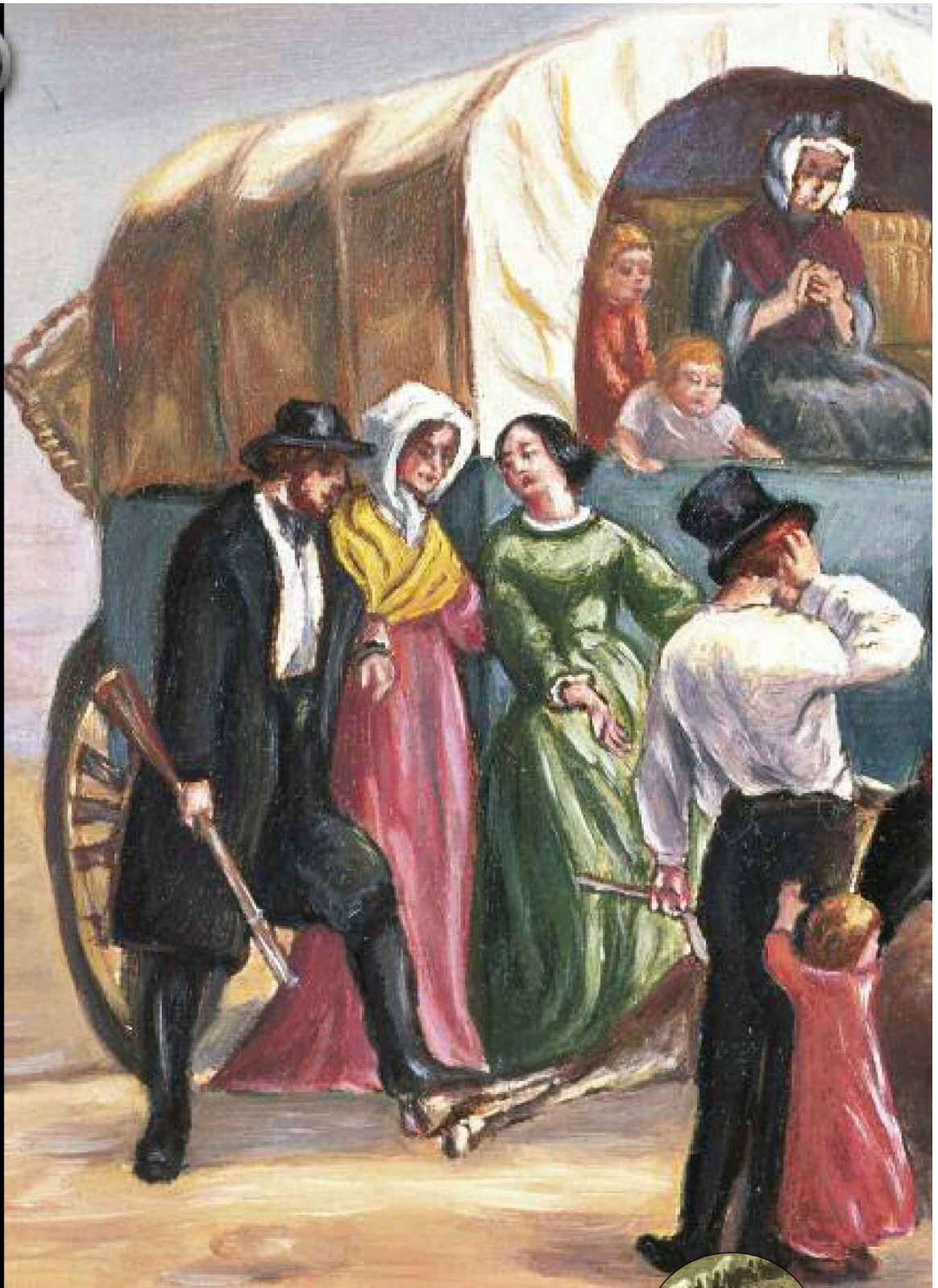
PEOPLE TO KNOW

- Bidwell-Bartleson party
- Bryant party
- Kit Carson
- Donner-Reed party
- John C. Fremont
- Miles Goodyear
- Lansford Hastings
- Mrs. Kelsey
- Lienhard party

WORDS TO UNDERSTAND

- desolate
- pioneer
- replenish

The Donner family started their trek to the West with many of the comforts of home, including furniture and books. After crossing the Great Salt Lake Desert, however, they were forced to throw out most of their supplies to lighten the load for starving oxen. Some animals finally gave up after trudging on with no food or water.



1841
The Bidwell-Bartleson party takes the first wagon train across northern Utah to California.

Timeline of Events

1840

1841

1842

1843



1843
John C. Fremont's second expedition enters Utah. Fort Bridger is built in Wyoming.

Passing Through the Great Basin

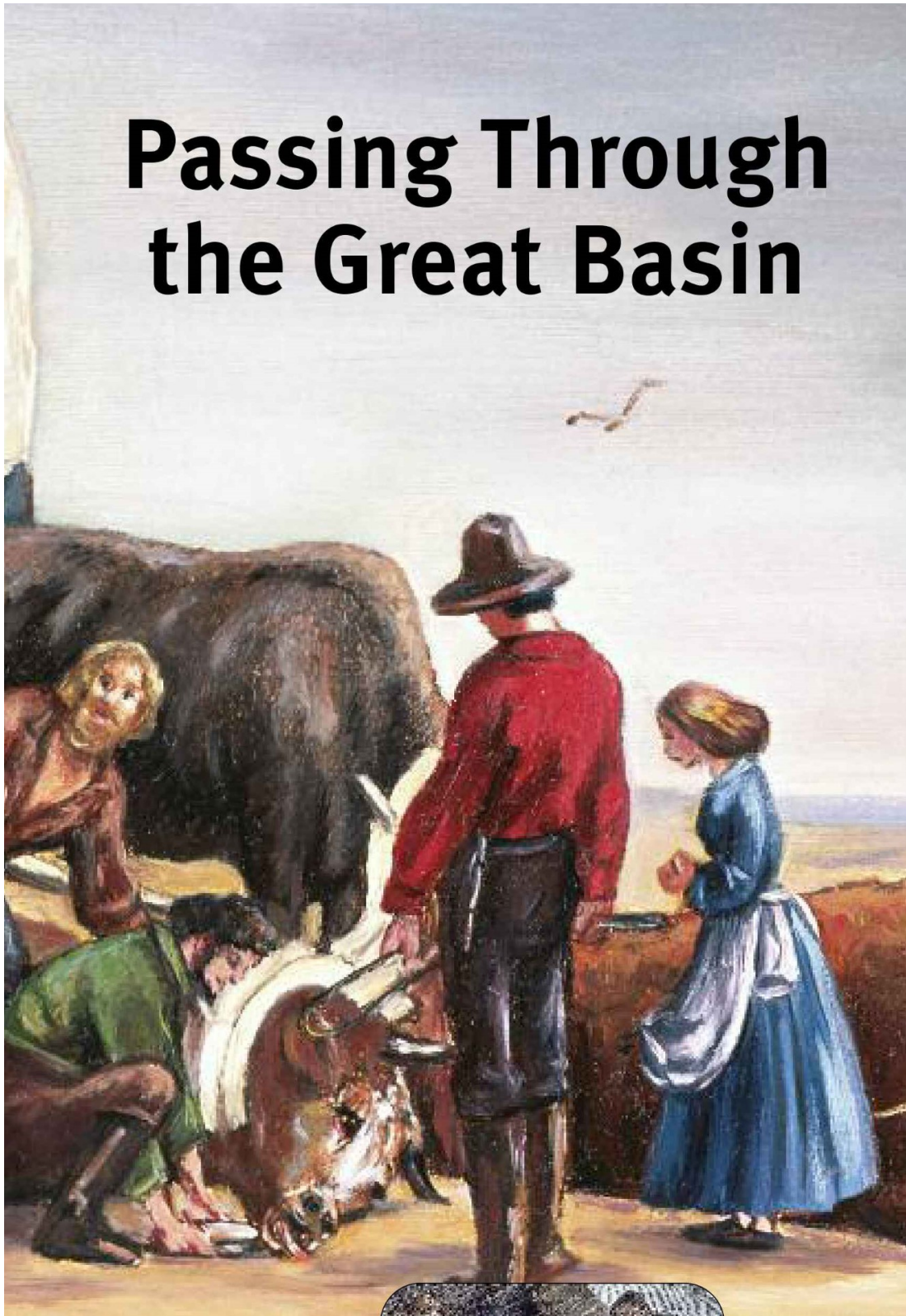
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Chapter

SETTING THE STAGE

During the early 1840s, two kinds of people came through the Utah region. U.S. government explorers were sent to describe plant and animal life and make maps to Oregon and California.

At least five groups of home-seekers heading for California and Oregon, including the now-famous Donner party, passed through today's Utah. They never planned to stay in the Great Basin, but they blazed a trail through Utah's mountains. Without them, the Mormon pioneers who came the next year would have had a much harder time getting through the mountains and may not have arrived early enough to plant crops that summer.



1845
Fremont's third expedition enters Utah.

1853
Fremont again travels through Utah.

1844

1845

1846

1847

1848

1849

1846
Five pioneer groups, including the Donner party, take Hastings Cutoff through Utah.
Miles Goodyear builds a trading post near today's Ogden.



1847
Mormon pioneers first come into the Great Basin.



Manifest Destiny

From news accounts, letters, and reports by explorers and mountain men, people in the East heard about California and Oregon Country. Oregon Country included today's Washington and Oregon and parts of Montana and Idaho. It was a huge land region heavily populated by many different groups of American Indians.

In the East, editor John O'Sullivan wrote, "It is the manifest destiny of the United States to spread across the continent." He meant that North America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, including Canada and Mexico, should be in the hands of the United States. Americans became excited by this thought, and the growth of the United States eventually spread west to the Pacific Ocean. However, Canada and Mexico never became part of the country.

*The first people to enter or settle a region are called **pioneers**.*

Thousands of pioneers from many places settled the West.

Linking the Past to the Present

At the time, Americans believed their culture was superior to all others. They thought the country could settle, buy, get by treaty, or win in war, any land it wanted. This thought has been a powerful force in history. What evidence of this idea do you see in the world today?

The Oregon Trail was a constant stream of wagons and animals. At one point, some travelers went on to Oregon Country and others turned to California.

Trails to Wagon Roads

Through the years, American Indians had made many trails through the place we now call Utah. The mountain men followed these trails and made a few new ones. Eventually, these trails were used by wagon trains.

Bidwell-Bartleson Party, 1841

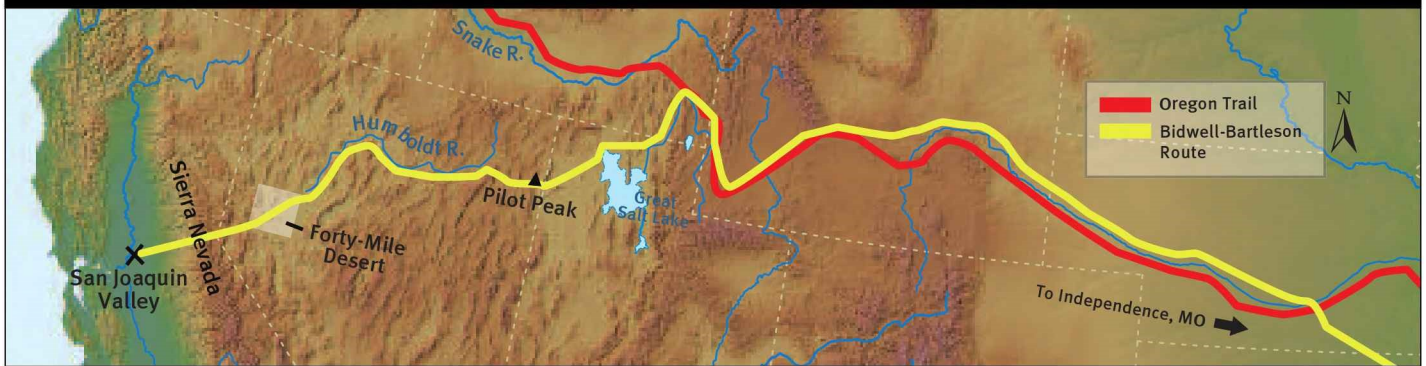
The first known wagon train to cross northern Utah was the Bidwell-Bartleson party. In the spring, a group of pioneers gathered at Independence, Missouri. They wanted to get to California by wagon. John Bidwell, a teacher, and John Bartleson led the group. They had little knowledge and no maps of the route west. Fortunately, they joined three priests who were being guided by a fur trapper, "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick. He guided them as far as the Great Salt Lake.

The first known white woman to enter northern Utah, nineteen-year-old Nancy Kelsey, was part of the group. She traveled with her husband, Ben, and their two-week-old baby daughter.

“Our ignorance of the route was complete. We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge.”

—John Bidwell

Bidwell-Bartleson Route



Crossing the hot, dry Great Salt Lake Desert, the group suffered from heat and lack of water, but they finally reached Pilot Peak. Later, they found the life-giving Humboldt River in Nevada and followed it until it disappeared into the ground. Their wagons still had to cross forty miles of desert before reaching rivers near the Sierras. By then it was October, and the mountains were covered with snow. The wagons were too heavy to get up the steep mountains, so they were left behind. Pushing through the mountains with a lighter load, the brave group walked into California.

No one was to travel this same route again. It did prove, however, that pioneers could reach California by land. The trip was promoted as being "so easy a woman could do it."

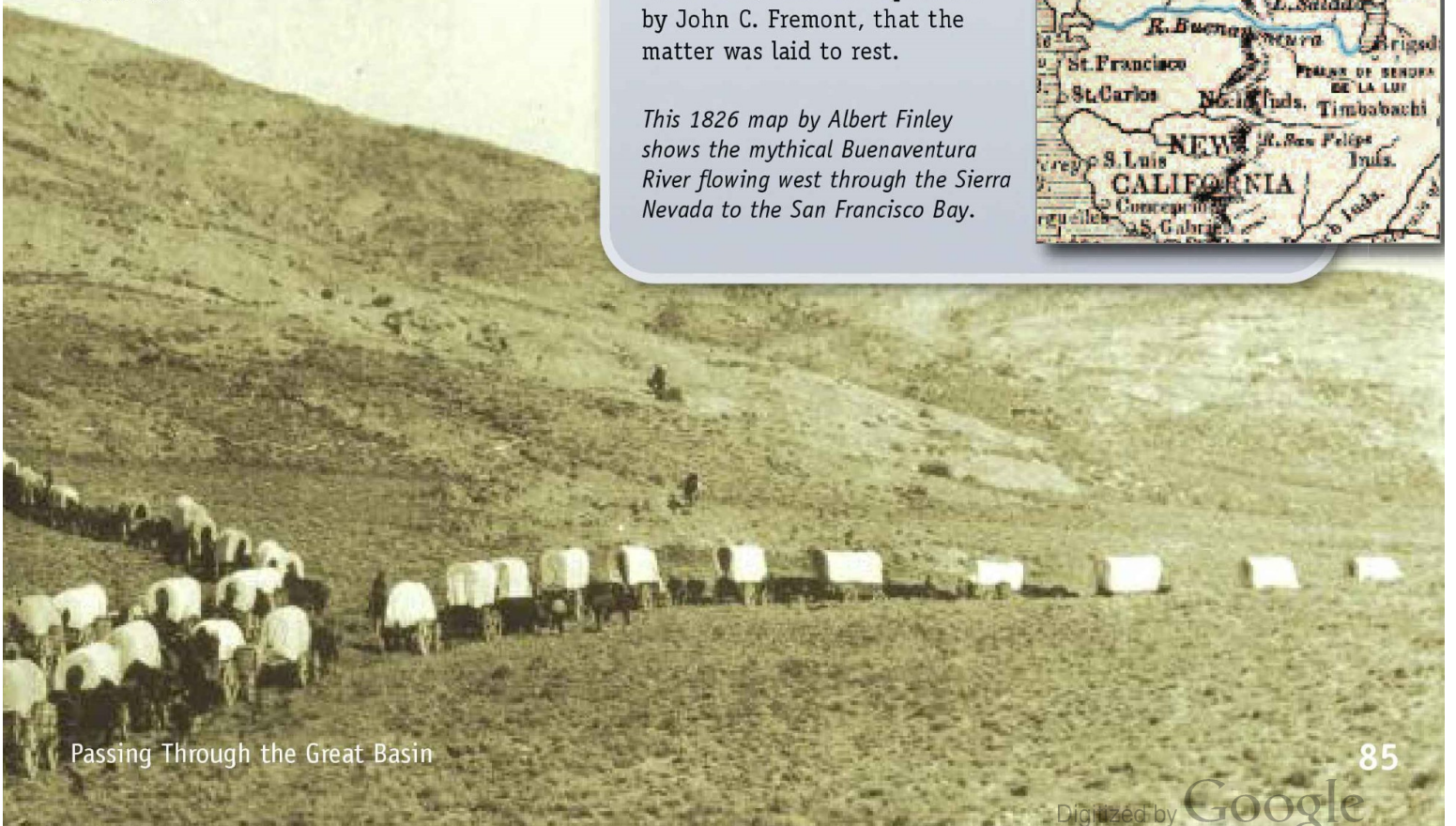
A Mythical River

Early Spanish explorers mistakenly believed Utah's Green and Sevier Rivers were connected, flowing from the Rocky Mountains all the way to California. They called the river Buenaventura. Later groups thought the river could be used as a water route from the Great Salt Lake to the San Francisco Bay.

Because the Buenaventura River was published in maps of the day, the Bidwell-Bartleson party was convinced it existed. They brought carpentry tools to build canoes, hoping to float the rest of the way to California. But as the group made its way west of the Great Salt Lake, they found only a vast desert.

The myth of the Buenaventura persisted, despite the claims of explorers that they had found no such river. It wasn't until 1844, after an expedition by John C. Fremont, that the matter was laid to rest.

This 1826 map by Albert Finley shows the mythical Buenaventura River flowing west through the Sierra Nevada to the San Francisco Bay.



Passing Through the Great Basin