



# EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

## OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

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### Biography

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- Born: 1813, Savannah, Georgia
- Died: 1890, New York, New York
- Married: Jessie Ann Benton, 1841
- Explorer, politician, author, military officer

### Achievements

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- Led five explorations of the American West during the 1840s, resulting in his nickname of "The Pathfinder."
- Headed revolt in Alta California leading to California's admission to the Union.
- Civil War general.
- One of the first two United States Senators from California, 1850; candidate for President of the United States, representing the newly formed Republican Party, 1856; Territorial Governor of Arizona Territory, 1878-1881.

## John C. Frémont

As a military officer, in 1838 Frémont took part in an exploration of the area between the Upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers, becoming learned in astronomy, geology, and topography.

He led his own military survey of the Des Moines River in 1841. That fall he married Jessie Benton, daughter of United States Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a strong proponent of Manifest Destiny. Through Benton's influence, Congress sponsored surveys of the Oregon Trail, the Oregon Country, the Great Basin, and California's Sierra Nevada.

His five-month-long first expedition (1842) explored the Oregon Trail to South Pass and the Wind River Mountains. Along the way, he surveyed suitable sites for forts. His second expedition in 1843-1844 sought to find an alternate route to South Pass and map the western half of the Oregon Trail and the Great Basin. The third expedition in 1845 sought to explore the Central Rockies, Great Salt Lake region, and part of the Sierra Nevada. While in California, he helped secure California for the United States.

Frémont's fourth expedition (1848-1849) was privately funded with the aim of defining a suitable southern railroad route along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, connecting St. Louis and San Francisco. Heavy snows prevented successful completion and resulted in the death of ten men. The fifth expedition (1853-1854), also privately funded, was a follow-up to the unsuccessful fourth exploratory trip to find a transcontinental route along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Frémont and wife Jessie's written description of his first expedition was printed in newspapers across the country.

*Frémont's Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842 and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-'44*, detailed "The Pathfinder's" first two western journeys, proving the Oregon Trail was not difficult and the West contained fertile land for settlement. The government ordered 10,000 copies published to facilitate pioneers' use as a guide for westward expansion. Charles Preuss (1803-1854), a surveyor and cartographer, participated in the expeditions and prepared maps accompanying the report which became widely recognized as the definitive maps of the Oregon Trail that enabled the migration and expansion.