



EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

Irene Dakin Paden



Biography

- Born: 1888, Santa Cruz, California
- Died: 1974, Oakland, California
- Married: William G. Paden, 1908
- Historian, author, editor

Achievements

- Author of three trail history books, best known for *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner*.
- Guggenheim Fellow, 1955

Irene Dakin Paden studied the history of the American West for more than 40 years. With her husband, Dr. William G. Paden, the superintendent of schools in Alameda County, California, and their young son, she spent nine summers traveling and tracing the Oregon and California trails in the 1930s and 1940s.

Her first book was *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner*, published in 1943. Mrs. Paden kept voluminous notes during the summer trips and spent winters researching in California libraries. She also made frequent stops at public libraries while traveling. Her husband, who had an interest in geography and mapping, provided many of the maps in the book.

"Hers is no armchair journey," wrote an early reviewer. "She has followed the great trails, not merely on paper, but over dust and mud and sand. This procedure not only brings the vividness of contrast between past and present to her narrative, but also furnishes gleanings from the first-hand interviews and thrill of finding by the wayside many relics of the great trek."

In 1949 she published *Prairie Schooner Detours*, an examination of the Hastings Cutoff and the Applegate-Lassen Cutoff. In 1955, she co-authored, with Margaret Schlichtmann, *The Big Oak Flat Road*, a history of the route between Stockton and Yosemite. In addition, she edited *The Journal of Madison Berryman Moorman, 1850-1851*. Moorman was a member of a party that journeyed from Tennessee to the California gold fields in 1850.

Paden wrote a number of articles for historical journals and lectured throughout the West on the emigrant experience. In 1955 she was awarded a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for bibliographical and historical studies of the settlement of California and Oregon.

OCTA benefactor Malcom E. Smith, Jr. purchased California Hill, a major landmark on the Oregon-California Trail near Brule, Nebraska in memory of Paden and donated it to OCTA in the 1990s. The organization later transferred ownership to the Nebraska State Historical Society, and a state historical marker at the site commemorates Paden.