

The Oregon Trail

In the 1840s, thousands of people traveled across the Rocky Mountains to settle in the Oregon Territory. Among those treading the Oregon Trail were a number of United Brethren.

In the distant Northwest, they were sheep without a shepherd. One of them, George Bethers, began writing letters to the *Religious Telescope*, the denominational periodical, begging for a preacher. In 1852, the church came through. In a big way.

In June of 1852, Rev. T. J. (Thomas Jefferson) Connor, a minister in Indiana, was appointed to lead a wagon train of UBs to Oregon, where they would organize churches. Rev. Jeremiah Kenoyer, a 33-year-old preacher who began his ministry in frontier settlements in Illinois and Wisconsin, was appointed as a second missionary in January 1853. They were joined by three lay ministers.

Instructions in the *Religious Telescope* told prospective colonists to meet in Council Bluffs, Iowa. All told, 98 people showed up, 29 of them from the same church.

The trip took seven months, and turned out to be fairly uneventful. Only one person died. Soon after arriving, they held Oregon's first United Brethren church meeting in a schoolhouse near Philomath. The first UB church was organized near there in January 1854. Today, interestingly, our *only* church in Oregon is located at Philomath.

Most of the colonists settled near what is now Corvallis, Oregon. After staking claims and building homes, Connor and Kenoyer divided the Willamette Valley into two fields of labor. Connor took the south part, Kenoyer the north.

The Oregon Mission Conference organized in 1855 with 17 preaching appointments and 120 members. By 1861, there were 42 preaching points and 565 members. The 1869 minutes record 1051 members.



Jeremiah Kenoyer

When Jeremiah and Elizabeth Kenoyer committed themselves to the 2000-mile trek, they had seven children, ages 12 to a few weeks. They were broke when they reached Oregon. They reportedly left one or two milk cows with a ferryman because they couldn't pay the toll. Jeremiah split rails and chopped wood to earn a living, and preached every night of the week and twice on Sunday.

T. J. Connor once wrote, "I will put Jeremiah Kenoyer against any man I ever saw for the ability to call seekers to the altar or bring members into the church."

Around 1868, Kenoyer and his family — now 11 children, soon to be 13 — moved to Washington Territory, where he continued as a pioneer preacher until old age. He led United Brethren efforts to establish what became Walla Walla Conference, and was instrumental in sending workers to Idaho Territory in the 1870s.

In that way, Jeremiah Kenoyer helped start United Brethren work in three future states — Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. One grandson was Fermin L. Hoskins, who served as bishop 1905-1933.

Jeremiah Kenoyer died on August 17, 1906, in the state of Washington.