



# American Heritage History of the Pioneer Spirit

*Richard M. Ketchum*

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America's story is made up of many elements, but through it have coursed two main streams that have nourished and carried a people forward to a destiny that was beyond all imagining when the story began.

One of these is an idea that goes back to the rim of recorded time. It was first a dim, gnawing hope that the future lay in a magic land off to the west. Once that land was found, it drew people to it like a magnet.

It is easy to say that it was gold or precious stones or land that led them on, for it was all of these. Yet, it was more - and here was the second great stream of American history. There was something that literally drove people westward, goading them across the endless mountains, through steep passes, across searing plains and desert into the face of terrors known and those unguessed. It was vision. It was courage. It was, at times, the sheer joy of overcoming fantastic obstacles.

And it was also the conviction that what they were doing was different from anything that had happened before, that nothing would ever be quite the same again, and that the world would be a better place for what they had accomplished. "Eastward I go only by force," Henry David Thoreau said, "but westward I go free." The sleep of 100 centuries was stirred up in that surge toward the sunset, for out of it emerged not only a new people and a new nation but a force that changed the globe.

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