

Away, I'm Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement

Between the end of the American Revolution and the beginning of the Civil War, more than one million Virginians picked up, took off, and laid down roots somewhere new. Who were these people and why did they leave? They were Virginians of all sorts – wealthy and poor, men and women, black and white, free and enslaved. Many left in search of economic opportunity – by the early 1800s tobacco production had depleted the soil of eastern and central Virginia, and many Virginians moved westward or farther south in search of better land to farm. Some left in search of freedom, attempting to escape to states and territories where slavery was outlawed. And many hundreds of thousands of enslaved men, women, and children also left Virginia against their will, sold to the Deep South for work on plantations or taken with their owners to new lands, as was the fate of Dred Scott and Elizabeth Keckley.

Future presidents William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, and Woodrow Wilson left Virginia during these years. Jim Bridger, a famous mountain man, was the son of tavern keepers in Richmond. He was eight when his family took him to Missouri. African Americans, both free and enslaved, left Virginia. Austin Steward, George Teamoh, Henry “Box” Brown and Anthony Burns were among the thousands of enslaved people who escaped from Virginia in pursuit of freedom. Some free black members of the population also left, such as John Mercer Langston. He chose to leave Virginia rather than live in the perpetual fear of enslavement. Some, like Joseph Jenkins or Lott Cary, went east to Africa and helped establish the colony of Liberia.

Elizabeth Ann Cooley McClure’s is a typical story of a white woman leaving Virginia at this time. She was born Elizabeth Ann Cooley in Carroll County on July 21st, 1825. Her father, Benjamin F. Cooley, was a man of some prominence, serving in the General Assembly and as sheriff of the county. As a young woman, Elizabeth attended school and dreamed of becoming a teacher. On March 15th, 1846, Elizabeth Cooley married James McClure and within three weeks, the couple was on the road for Texas. In her diary, Elizabeth records her hopes for the future and her sadness about leaving home. The McClures traveled to Texas, where they found a difficult environment and unwelcoming community. Shortly, they left for Independence, Missouri, where Elizabeth McClure’s brother was living. She longed for home, but was able to fulfill her ambition of becoming a teacher. Unfortunately, Elizabeth McClure died of typhoid fever on March 28, 1849 – less than two years after leaving Virginia, and at the young age of twenty-two. Had Elizabeth McClure lived until twenty-five, she would have been listed in the 1850 census as one of the 388,000 Virginians who resided in other states. She did not. The census figure does not include her or the thousands of other Virginians who died before 1850. Nor does it include the children and grandchildren of many of these Virginia emigrants. The true number of Virginians who left between the American Revolution and the Civil War is likely much higher than one million.

In a partner packet, you will find a transcript of portions of Elizabeth McClure’s diary, where she detailed the ups and downs of her life in Virginia, marriage, and journey westward. Below you will find a variety of interdisciplinary activities that use McClure’s account as a jumping off point for historical analysis, science, math, writing, and general critical thinking. Happy exploring!

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The activities below are geared towards a 4th – 6th grade audience, based on Virginia Department of Education’s Standards of Learning. However, many of the exercises can be scaled to a general 4th – 12th grade audience, whether that be in public schools, private schools, or homeschools. You can find the transcript in the paired packet, and answers and templates in the paired Teacher Packet.

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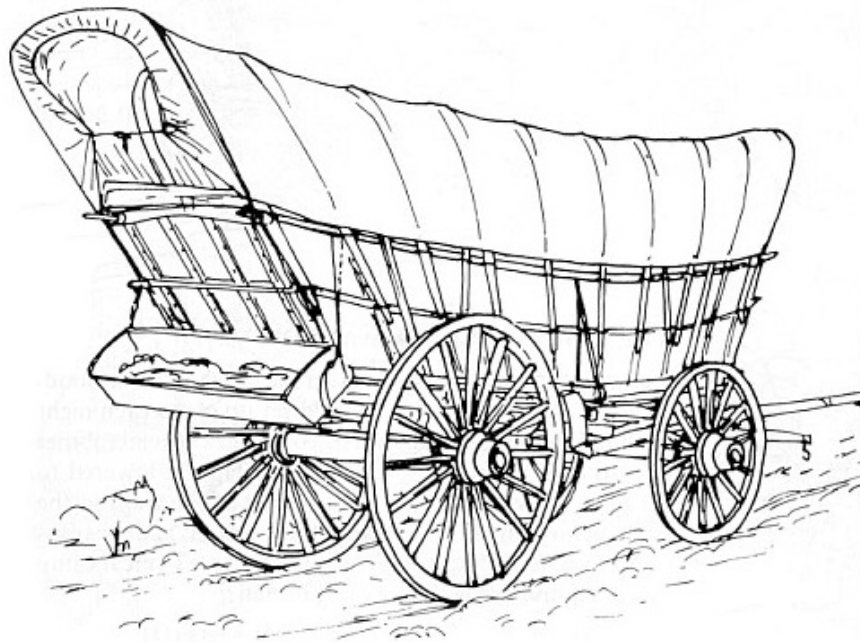
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Primary Source Analysis

Read the transcript of Elizabeth Ann Cooley McClure’s diary to familiarize yourself with her voice and writing style. Answer the questions below to understand more about her life – remember, a diary is usually a casual and personal record, and can help us understand the true feelings and personalities of people who lived in the past.

1. What do you notice about the types of events and thoughts Elizabeth chooses to record?
2. What activities and responsibilities does Elizabeth write about doing in her day to day life?
3. What is a hope that Elizabeth has for her future? What is a worry?
4. How does she feel about being married?
5. Why did Elizabeth and her husband, James, decide to move to Texas immediately, instead of waiting a few years?
6. Elizabeth first writes about wanting and loving to travel, but later says that they “rue the day we ever thought of Texas.” Why doesn’t she like Texas?
7. The pages you have been given from this diary are only a few of Elizabeth’s entries – what emotions does she feel throughout her writing?
8. What are the two methods of travel Elizabeth uses through the course of this journey?
9. Do you have any questions about the diary? Was anything difficult to understand?
10. Why do you think she might have used abbreviations and incorrect grammar?

History

Elizabeth Ann Cooley lived from 1825 – 1848, a time of great tension and change in the United States of America. Use our templates in the teacher packet to create a timeline of major events, important social changes or technological inventions, and prominent people in Virginia and United States history from 1825-1848.

1. **Virginia Studies Students** – Use the timeline template to plot key moments in Virginia’s history from 1825-1848. Be prepared to explain why you think what you chose is important to Virginia’s history.
2. **US History Students** – Use the column template to compare key moments in Virginia’s history with key moments happening in other parts of the United States. Be prepared to explain why you chose the events, people, or places that you did.

English Language Arts

1. **Research and Writing Skills** - Imagine you are starting a journey westward in the early 1800s. Create a persona and research the route of your journey. What would you need to take with you? What difficulties might you face? Who might you meet? How might you feel throughout the journey?
2. **Spelling and Grammar Skills** - Highlight some of the words, abbreviations, or sentences that are misspelled or used differently than you might today. How would you rewrite those sentences or words? Why do you think they are written the way they are in this journal?

Mapping

Geography Skills:

1. Use our map template to draw the route of Elizabeth's journey. Read her diary carefully and highlight or circle any place she talks about traveling through on her journey. Start with Carroll County, her birthplace, and make a mark for every place she mentions traveling to in her journal. Is every place named or spelled the same today? Are there any places you had questions about?
2. After creating your map, use Google Maps to compare the differences in routes between walking, public transportation, flying, or driving. How long would each leg of the trip take using a car? How long did it take Elizabeth to get from her home to Memphis? How long did it take her to get from Memphis to Harrison City, TX? How long did it take her to get from Harrison City, TX to Independence, Missouri?

Math Skills:

1. An article in the Missouri Gazette in 1847 listed the types and amounts of goods to pack for people making a westward journey, including foodstuffs like flour, bacon, and sugar. They recommended taking 12 pounds of coffee per person. If the group traveling was four adults, how much coffee would they need? If the group traveling was three adults and one child, who only needed half as much coffee, how much coffee would they need? Show your work.
2. Wagons could carry supplies for four or more people. But, these wagons were pulled by mules or oxen, and if pioneers loaded their wagon too heavily it could injure the animals. If they had multiple wagons and a lot of animals, they would need to make sure to pack enough food for all of the animals, which took up extra space – so travelers had to make decisions on what they could bring with them. Use the template and instructions in the teacher packet to pack up to 2,400 pounds for your wagon of four people. Be prepared to explain your choices.

Science

A major reason for Virginians moving westward was the search for more fertile lands after the exhaustion of Virginia's soil due to the overplanting of tobacco. However, as millions of people headed west, they brought that environmental impact with them. Think about how the movement of people from Virginia westward might have impacted the living and nonliving aspects of various ecosystems across the United States of America.

1. Elizabeth traveled through a variety of landscapes, which provided a variety of habitats for different life forms. A habitat must be able to provide food, water and shelter for a living organism – often times the dominant physical characteristic is what an environment ends up being named. For example, the eastern part of Virginia is called the Coastal Plain or Tidewater, acknowledging the importance that water plays in region. Some organisms can survive in many types of habitats – some can survive in only one type. Choose two of the landscapes that Elizabeth would have traveled through below and use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast their habitats. What types of animals or insects lived there? What natural resources existed?
 - a. Southwest Virginia Mountains
 - b. Middle Tennessee
 - c. Mississippi River Delta
 - d. Texas Deserts
 - e. Missouri Plains

2. As Elizabeth, along with millions of other settlers, traveled westward, they had a major impact on the environment around them. As they moved into areas once inhabited only by wildlife, the animals that existed there had to either adapt or move to prevent from dying. Humans can also impact the environment and plant life around them through pollution and destruction of natural resources. Consider the scenarios below to understand how the movement of people from Virginia westward might have impacted the living and nonliving aspects of various ecosystems across the United States of America.
 - a. As settlers crossed the country, they often had to hunt and fish along the way to survive. Imagine millions of settlers hunting and fishing – how might this affect the wildlife across the United States?
 - b. Elizabeth talks about the boats on the Mississippi “rushing, sputtering, blowing, belching along.” The boats were powered by burning huge amounts of wood and coal, and blowing smoke and ash into the water and air. How do you think this pollution affected the river's habitats? Can you think of anything that causes pollution today?
 - c. As more and more people settled in the middle and western part of the country, they built larger cities, which required more and more resources to construct – how do you think this affected the natural environment around them?

Critical Thinking and Decision Making

1. Virginians who chose to go westward had to make difficult decisions about what items to take with them. Without hotels or grocery stores they needed to have camping, food, and hunting supplies. With the challenges of weather, disease, and unknown obstacles, they had to be creative and flexible to find solutions to their needs. Answer the questions below by thinking about how these problems might have been solved by travelers in the past vs. how you might solve them today.

Then: Travelers did not have as good ways to preserve or refrigerate food, and few places to purchase food along the way. How is this different today? How might Virginians in the past solved this problem?

Then: If the mules or oxen pulling the wagon were injured or sick, pioneers would have to stop. What would you do today if you were stranded? What do you think people in the past did?

Then: Virginia pioneers were often a long way from any towns while traveling – the only way to communicate was to hold messages until they reached towns or forts or ask someone else to take it with them. How do you think this affected how mail was delivered? How do we communicate long distance today?

Then: Many travelers' clothing, tools, or furniture was handmade or very expensive. If something was lost or broken along the way, it could be difficult or impossible to replace. What do you think they did in the past to deal with this issue? What do we do with something lost or broken today?

Then: Traveling day after day was often boring, and pioneers didn't always have their toys or games from home. What do you do to entertain yourself today? Could they have done that back then? Why or Why not?