



The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California

Lansford W. Hastings

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A notorious bit of historical esoterica, this 1845 handbook for travelers heading westward from the civilized United States for the freedom of the wild, unsettled frontier is remembered today mainly for its small role in one of the most horrific stories of the American West: it suggested the untried "shortcut," now known as the Hastings Cutoff, through Utah that led the Donner Party to its dreadful end. Absent the book's footnote position in the history of the West, this would still be a remarkable document of mid-19th-century America and the machinations and politicking that went into the American expansion across the continent. Written and published by Ohio-born lawyer LANSFORD WARREN HASTINGS (1819-1870), it sets out glowing, idyllic descriptions of the bountiful landscapes of California and Oregon, offering almost irresistible enticements to settlers looking to make a new start. Hastings' motives were less than noble, however: he hoped to establish an independent Republic of California... with himself as its ruler. He failed in his efforts, but the evidence of his ambition, in the form of this fascinating work, remains must reading for anyone looking for a deeper understanding of what drove the settling of the frontier.

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