

Exploration in the period 1835-50 was largely dominated by the search for adequate emigration routes through the West to Oregon and California. At the same time, this era also marked the opening phase of what might be called the Great Reconnaissance Period, during which troops of the U.S. Army were sent out by the Government to explore the West and to gather information about its natural resources. Much of this exploration was stimulated by the Mexican War of 1846-47.

By 1835, the trail to Oregon was relatively well known, but the trail to California was not. In 1833, the mountain man Joseph Reddeford Walker, operating under orders from Capt. Benjamin Bonneville, first marched west from Great Salt Lake via the Humboldt River and over the Sierra Nevada. Walker and his men located several passes over the Sierras and probably were the first U.S. explorers to see the wonders of present-day Yosemite National Park. The Bartleson-Bidwell party of 1841 was the first important party of emigrant-explorers to locate a trail to California. Other trails were laid out by J. B. Chiles, Peter Lassen, and the temporarily lost 49'ers who discovered Death Valley. An excellent southwestern trail to California was laid out by Lt. William H. Emory, a topographical engineer who accompanied Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny's army on its march west to California from New Mexico during the Mexican War. Capt. Philip St. George Cooke and a battalion of Mormon volunteers followed Kearny's army and laid out an improved trail suitable for wagons. This trail was used by

thousands of emigrants and was followed part way by the Butterfield stagecoach line.

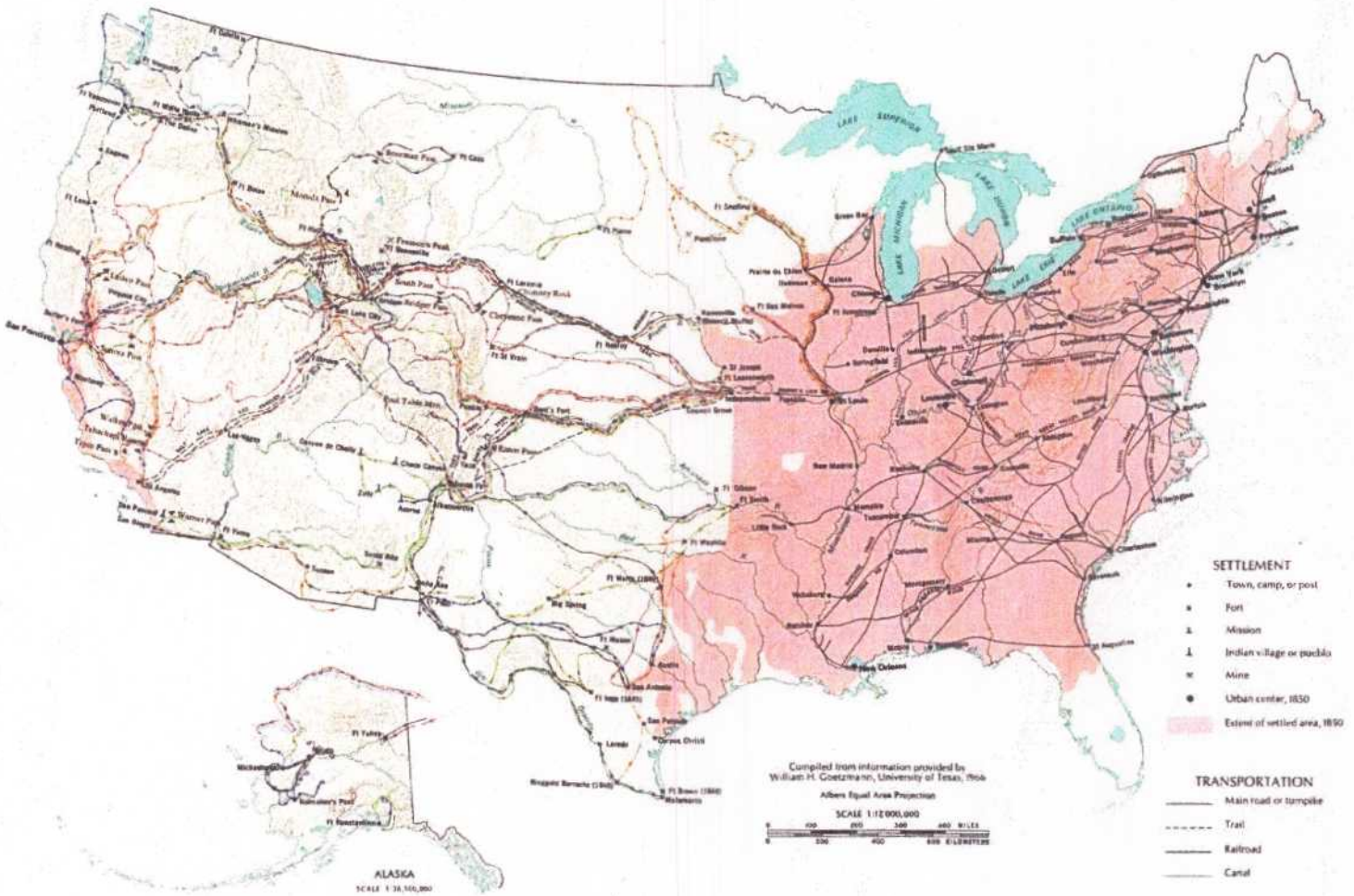
The most spectacular and important explorer of the period, however, was Lt. John C. Frémont whose work epitomized that of the Great Reconnaissance Period. Frémont, a U.S. Army topographical engineer, made several trips into the West. In 1842, he marched west to examine South Pass. In 1843-44, he made a grand reconnaissance around the whole West from South Pass to Oregon, thence south through the Great Basin over the Sierras to California, and then a return via Las Vegas and the south central Rockies. His report and map, published the year after his expedition, were among the most important American publications of the 19th century. In 1845, Frémont led another expedition through the West to California where he took part in the Bear Flag Revolt and the fighting against Mexico. Three years later, in a spectacular effort to locate a railroad route through the Southern Rockies, Frémont suffered a disaster as his men froze to death in the Colorado Rockies and some resorted to cannibalism. This disaster was unfortunately followed by another in the same area in 1853, and Frémont turned to politics as the first Republican presidential candidate in 1856.

Frémont was not the only Army explorer in the West during this period. Excellent work was also done by Lt. J. W. Abert in New Mexico; Lts. Nathaniel Michler, F. T. Bryan, M. L. Smith, and Capt. W. H. Whiting in Texas; Lt. Robert Williamson and

Capt. George Warner in California; Capt. Randolph B. Marcy and Lt. James H. Simpson on the Staked Plain; and Capt. Howard Stansbury and Lt. John W. Gunnison in Utah. Lt. George Horatio Derby explored and mapped parts of California and also became its first American writer under the pen name of "John Phoenix, Esq." All of these Army men engaged in a great reconnaissance of the West and began the all-important geographical mapping of the region which brought it within the purview of public knowledge.

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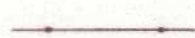





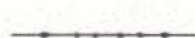


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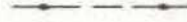



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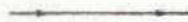
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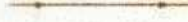
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