“Papa says my arrival in this mortal world was a new beginning. Papa says that every day is a new beginning and every day is heralded by the dawn. Thus he chose to name me Aurora as the daughter of the dawn, for Aurora is the goddess of the dawn. But Papa is a Christian man and leads his own flock of believers so he did not want my name to be seen as some pagan symbol. Rather he wants my name and my presence here as a mortal to be a symbol of new beginnings. I like that and my life has been very full of new beginnings.” — from Aurora

As she lies ill from smallpox in 1862, thirteen-year-old Aurora records in her journal the important events of her short life: her early memories of Missouri, where she was the seventh of nine children; her family’s adventures on the Oregon Trail; and their hopes for a new beginning in Oregon.

Aurora is a novel based on the life of Aurora Keil, whose father William founded one of the more successful American utopian communal societies in the nineteenth century. The Aurora Colony, located on the Pudding River in western Oregon’s Marion County, grew to a population of more than six hundred people, almost all German and Swiss emigrants, who followed Keil’s basic Christian beliefs. The Aurora Colony became known for its orchards, food, music, textiles, furniture, and other crafts as well as its communal lifestyle and German traditions. Readers of all ages, from middle school students to adults, will appreciate this intimate and personal glimpse into a compelling chapter in Oregon history.

J. J. Kopp is the pen name for James J. Kopp (1952-2010), former director of the Aubrey R. Witzek Library at Lewis & Clark College and author of Eden Within Eden: Oregon’s Utopian Heritage.

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