

Americans Move West

Mining in the West

- Mining became big business with discoveries of large deposits of precious metals, such as the Comstock Lode in Nevada
- Miners from all over the world came to work in the western mines
- Boomtowns grew quickly when a mine opened and disappeared quickly when the mine closed
- Mining was dangerous
 - equipment unsafe
 - Dirty air caused lung disease
 - Cave-ins killed and injured miners
 - Fires

Cattle Kingdom on the Great Plains

- Increasing demand for beef helped the cattle industry grow
- Cattle ranchers in Texas drove herds to Abilene, Kansas to be shipped East
- Cattle ranching spread across the Great Plains, from Texas to Canada
- Ranchers grazed huge herds on public land called the open range
- Competition, the invention of barbed wire, and loss of prairie grass brought an end to the Cattle Kingdom

Cowboys

- Cowboys were workers who took care of ranchers' cattle
- They borrowed many techniques from vaqueros, who were Mexican ranch hands
- One of their most important duties was the cattle drive
- The Chisholm Trail was a popular route for cattle drives
 - Went from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas
- Life in cattle towns was often rough and violent

Growth of West created need for communication

- The Pony Express carried messages on a route 2,000 miles long
- Telegraph lines put the Pony Express out of business

- Demand for a transcontinental railroad grew
- Congress passed the Pacific Railway Acts of 1862 and 1864
 - Gave railroad companies loans and land grants
- The railroads agreed to carry mail and troops at a lower cost

The Great Race

- The Central Pacific started in San Francisco and worked east
- The Union Pacific started in Omaha and worked west
- Large numbers of Irish and Chinese immigrants worked on the railroads
- Geography and weather posed challenges to building the railroads
- May 10, 1869, the railroad lines met and joined the two tracks with a golden spike at Promontory, Utah
- Companies continued building railroads throughout the West

Results of the Railroad

- Economic growth and population in the West increased
- Railroads provided better transportation for people and goods
- They encouraged people to move west
- Railroads became one of the country's biggest industries

Plains Indians

- After the Civil War, many people moved to the Great Plains
- Plains Indians lived by hunting buffalo
- Buffalo were used for food, shelter, clothing, and utensils
- Treaty of Fort Laramie recognized Native American claims to the Plains
 - It allowed the U.S. to build forts and travel across the lands
- In 1858 gold was discovered at Pike's Peak
- Miners went onto the land promised to the Indians
- Indians attacked trains, burned homes, and killed miners and soldiers

Sand Creek Massacre

- Colonel John Chivington and his soldiers attacked a Cheyenne village
- This group had a peace treaty with the U.S. government
- The Indians were told to raise a white flag if the army approached, which would indicate they were under U.S. protection

- Chivington ordered his men to destroy the village and take no prisoners
- The soldiers slaughtered 150 people, mostly women and children
- The Chivington Massacre outraged Native Americans and they went to war

New Treaties

- U.S. government negotiated new treaties with the Native Americans
- The treaties created reservations, areas of federal land set aside for Native Americans
- The Indians were expected to stay on the reservation, which made buffalo hunting difficult
- In 1874 gold was discovered in the Black Hills region of the Sioux reservation
- Prospectors came onto the Indian lands
- Indians attacked the miners and army

Little Big Horn

- In 1876 General George Custer's troops are surrounded by Sioux forces led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull at Little Big Horn
- All 264 of Custer's men are killed
- It was the worst defeat the U.S. army suffered in the West
- Sitting Bull and others escape to Canada

End of the Buffalo

- Hired hunters killed thousands of buffalo to provide food for railroad workers
- Later buffalo hunting became a fashionable sport
 - Animals were shot from the comfort of railroad cars
- Finally, buffalo hide blankets became popular and commercial hunters shot 100 animals an hour
 - They would take only the hide and leave the rest to rot
- The number of buffalo dropped from 13 million in 1860 to a Few hundred in 1900

Ghost Dance

- Many Indians wanted their lost way of life back
- Turned to a religious ceremony called the Ghost Dance

- A vision by a prophet told of a land where the buffalo would come back and all white men would disappear
- To achieve this the Indians did the Ghost Dance
 - The dancer would wear the sacred shirt that would protect the wearer from all harm
- Settlers expressed concern, so the government outlaws the Ghost Dance
- Soldiers sent to reservations to enforce
- Sitting Bull found on a reservation and will be shot and killed

Wounded Knee

- Indians upset by Sitting Bull's death Fled the reservations
- Army pursued them and caught them at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota
- Indians agree to surrender
- Shots ring out as they are turning over their guns
- Army opened fire and 300 men, women, and children killed
- Wounded Knee marked the end of the Indian wars and the Ghost Dance

Farming in the West

- Two important land-grant acts helped open the West
- Homestead Act gave government land to farmers
 - Gave 160 acres of land
 - Agreed to live on and work the land for 5 years
- The Morrill Act gave federal land to states to sell in order to fund colleges to teach agriculture and engineering
- Breaking up tough grass on the Plains earned farmers the nickname "sodbusters."

Sod Houses

- Homesteaders who settled on the Great Plains found few trees with which to build homes, and lumber was scarce and too expensive for the average homesteader to purchase
- These settlers built their homes out of the one material that was in great supply: sod
- Thousands of settlers built sod houses, usually with the help from their neighbors

Walls

- Settlers cut the sod into bricks -- 3 feet long, 1½ feet wide, and 4 inches thick
- For the walls, the sod bricks were laid grass side down in staggered double rows

Roof

- Was composed of a ridge pole and rafters of rough split logs, on which are laid corn stalks, sorghum, willow switches, or anything that will prevent the two layers of sod on the roof from Falling between the rafters. The roof has a very slight pitch, for if it had more, the sod would wash off when there is a heavy rain

Construction

- Since wood was scarce wagons would be taken apart to provide the wood needed for the roof
- A typical sod house was 18 feet by 24 feet
- It would take about one week to build
- It would require about 1½ acres of sod
- It would cost about \$ 10
- Building this type of house was hard work

Fuel and Water

- A substitute for Firewood was also a necessity
- People used the following as fuel
 - Buffalo and cow dung
 - Corn cobs
 - Corn husks
 - Tightly bundled dry grass
- Water was often far from the homestead and rainfall was not plentiful
- Wells had to be dug deep, so soon windmills were built for pumping

The National Grange

- More farms and greater productivity led to over production, which led to lower prices
- Farmers formed associations to protect their interests

- The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry was a social and educational organization for farmers
- It called for laws to regulate railroad rates
- The Farmers' Alliances were political organizations formed by farmers to elect candidates that would help them

Western frontier comes to an end

- Only small portions of the Great Plains remained unsettled by 1870
- U.S. officials allowed homesteaders to settle the Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma in 1889
- The frontier had ceased to exist in the U.S. by the early 1890s