



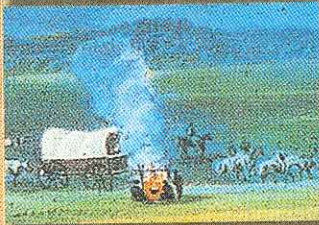
The Granger Collection, New York



What do you think this man is doing?



What kind of animal is pulling the wagon?



What do you think this fire is being used for?



What might these American Indians think about the newcomers?



# The Diverse Peoples of the West

# 17

*What drew new settlers to the western part of the United States in the 1800s?*

## 17.1 Introduction

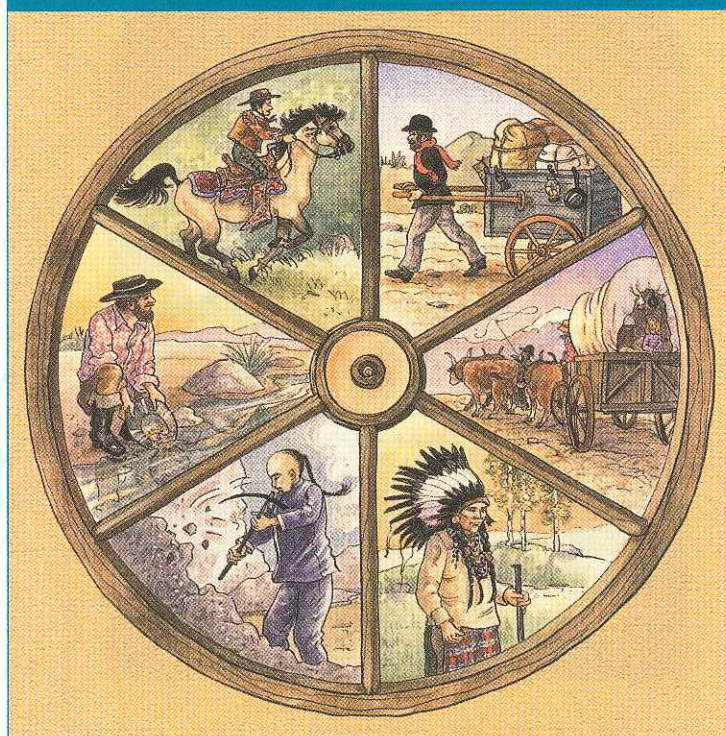
In Chapter 16, you learned how the United States expanded west across North America. In this chapter, you will learn about four groups of people who moved to the West during the mid-1800s. You will also read about two groups who were already living there at this time.

People moved to the West for different reasons. Thousands of **pioneers**, or early settlers, were attracted by cheap land. One group wanted to start a new religious community. Other groups were drawn by the discovery of gold in California.

Many new settlers did not care how their actions affected the people who already lived in the West. In this chapter, you will read about what happened to people from Mexico, called **Mexicanos** (MEH-hee-KAH-nohs). You will also read about an American Indian group called the **Nez Percés** (nehz pers).

Look at this drawing of a wagon wheel. This illustrated spoke diagram is a way to organize information. The diagram shows six groups of people who lived in the West. The pictures in the chapter will show you which group is represented by the image in each segment. The hub, or center, of the wheel reminds you that all six groups lived in the same region. The segments illustrate that each group had its own experiences. As you read this chapter, think about how you can use the diagram to record information about the six groups. Which groups were helped as the United States expanded westward? Which groups were harmed?

People in the West in the 1800s





## 17.2 The West in the Mid-1800s

After the American Revolution, people from Europe continued to arrive in U.S. cities along the East Coast. Many Europeans then headed west in search of land. Some settlers traveled over-land in wagons along the Wilderness Road. From Virginia, this route led settlers across the Appalachian Mountains. They went through the Cumberland Gap in present-day Tennessee. They made their homes in the Ohio and the Mississippi river valleys. Other settlers moved west along water routes. They used canals built in the early 1800s or took steamboats along the rivers.

By the mid-1800s, writers were publishing stories that invited Americans to move farther west. Western land was cheap. Even families with little money could own ranches or farms.

Then, in 1848, news spread that gold had been found in California. Fortune seekers from around the world raced to the West Coast. Many came from the eastern United States.

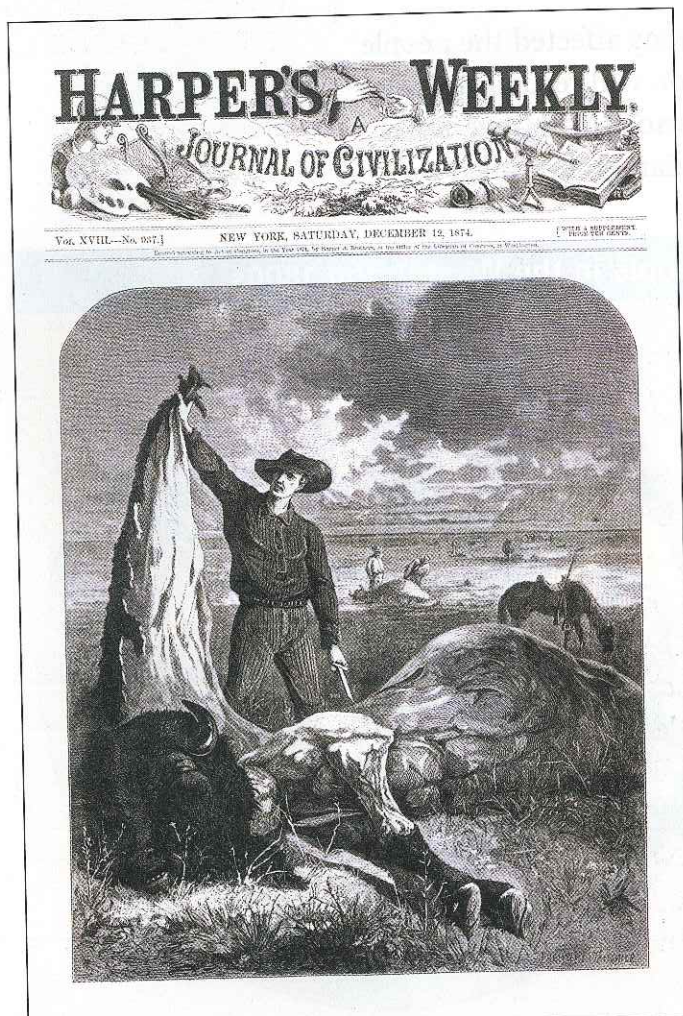
To reach California, some Americans sailed around South America. Others went by boat to the east coast of Panama, in Central America. There, they crossed to the west coast and boarded ships to California.

Most Americans went by land. To get as far west as California, these travelers had to cross hot deserts and climb over steep mountains. In 1849, more than 5,000 people had died along the way, mostly from disease.

Many Spanish-speaking people already lived in the western areas that were once controlled by Spain and then Mexico. Most newcomers had little respect for these people or for their property. Sometimes, the new settlers took land away from families who had lived in the West for 100 years or more.

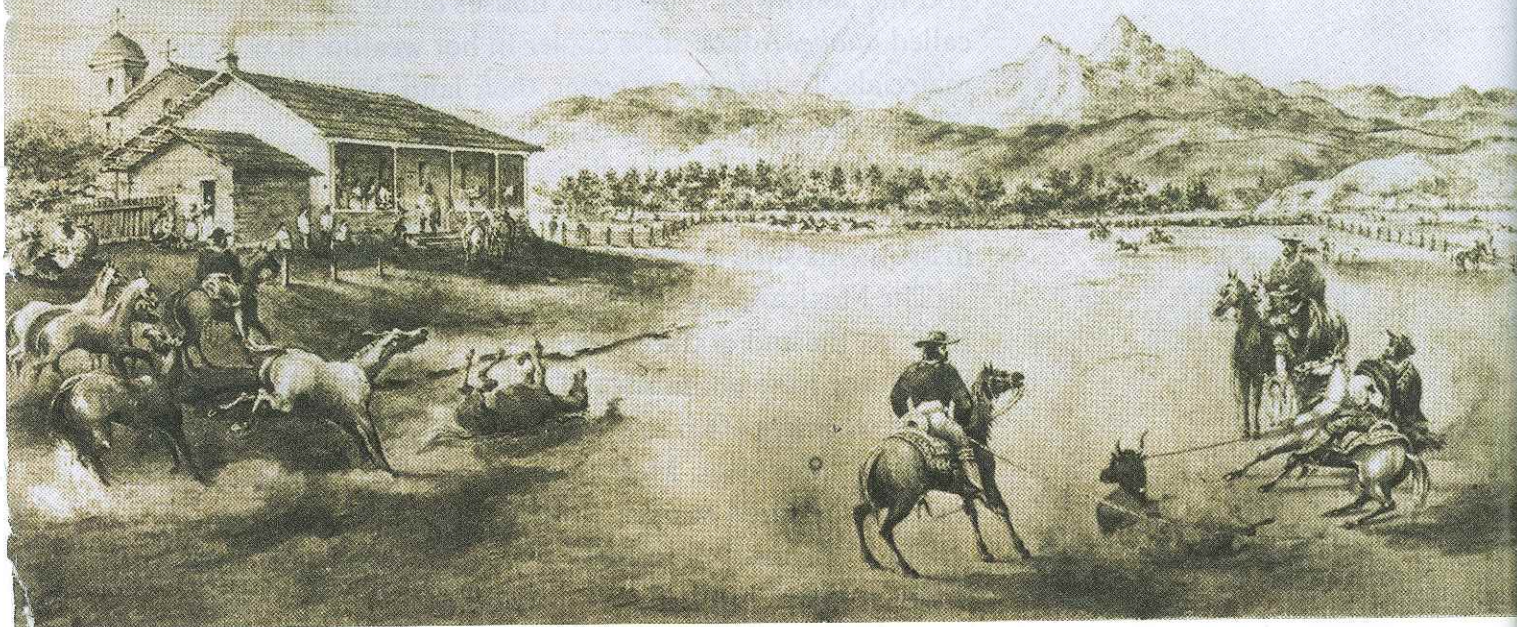
The U.S. government signed treaties with American Indian tribes to gain tribal lands. Settlers often broke these agreements. And sometimes, without any treaty, the newcomers just took land from American Indians. In these ways, the tribes that had lived in the West for hundreds of years lost their homelands.

Magazines told of adventure and cheap land in the West. This issue of *Harper's Weekly* shows a buffalo hunt, but does not mention that white settlers were killing off some American Indians' main source of food, clothing, and shelter.



The Granger Collection, New York





### 17.3 Mexicanos

One group of people who lived in the West in the mid-1800s was the Spanish-speaking Mexicanos.

In the 1830s, the Mexican government granted huge plots of land called **ranchos** to many wealthy Mexicanos living in California. Most ranchos were devoted to raising cattle. Mexicano ranchers traded cattle hides and tallow, or fat, for other goods.

Skilled *vaqueros* (vah-KAYR-ohs), or cowboys, looked after the cattle. These vaqueros used special clothing and tools. Soon, English-speaking newcomers learned to use these as well. One tool was a rope called *la reata* (lah ree-AH-tah). New settlers called it a lariat. To protect their legs from thorny bushes, vaqueros wore leather coverings called *chaparreros* (chah-pah-RAY-hose). English speakers called them chaps. Vaqueros also wore wide-brimmed hats called *sombreros* (sohm-BRAYR-ohs) to protect their heads from the sun.

Mexicanos grew their own food. They grew fruits and other plants that had first come from Spain. These included olives, oranges, figs, and grapes. Mexicanos also grew North American crops such as corn, squash, and beans.

Vaqueros took care of cattle on California ranchos. English-speaking cowboys learned important skills from these Mexicanos.

**rancho** an area of land, usually for raising cattle, granted by Mexico to Spanish and Mexican citizens who lived in North America



Mexicanos loved to make a rich beef stew called *carne asada* (KAHR-nay ah-SAH-dah). And they enjoyed a flat corn bread called *tortillas* (tor-TEE-uhs).

Mexicanos adapted well to the hot, dry climate of the West and the Southwest. They built houses out of thick clay bricks called *adobe*. Adobe stays cooler in hot weather than other materials. To irrigate, or water, their land, Mexicanos dug ditches and shared the water collected in them.

Mexicanos told stories about current events in songs called *corridos* (koh-REE-dohs). They made music with European instruments such as guitars, violins, and trumpets.

The Mexicanos of the West were citizens of Mexico until 1848. At the end of the Mexican War, they became U.S. citizens. Soon, they were outnumbered by gold-seekers and new settlers. The newcomers often saw Mexicanos as foreigners rather than as fellow Americans. Many white settlers had little respect for them and ignored Mexicanos' rights as landowners.

The U.S. government did not protect Mexicanos' property. Many new settlers claimed rancho land for themselves. They burned Mexicanos' crops and shot their cattle. The new culture of the West and the Southwest included many things learned from Mexicanos. But the rancho way of life soon disappeared.

## 17.4 Forty-Niners

In January 1848, gold was discovered near California's Sierra Nevada. By 1849, news of the discovery had spread across the United States and to Europe and Asia. Suddenly, **forty-niners** were leaving their families, farms, and jobs behind to race to the goldfields. The gold rush was on!

Forty-niners hoped to get rich quickly. Some of them were former slaves or slaves who had run away. These African Americans were seeking freedom as well as gold. The luckiest ones sent money home to buy freedom for relatives.

Miners found much of the gold in rivers. Sometimes, they used knives and spoons to scrape gold from river rocks. Miners also learned to pan for gold. First, they used a pan to scoop up dirt from the riverbed. Then, they swished the pan around in the river. Lighter materials washed away, leaving the heavy gold in the pan.

To get more gold, miners used a cradle, a wooden box on rockers. First, they shoveled the riverbed dirt into the cradle. Then, they poured water over it and rocked the cradle to wash away the lighter material.

**forty-niner** a gold-seeker in the California gold rush of 1849





Two forty-niners, one African American and one white, shovel gravel into a sluice. The water running through the sluice will separate the gold from the dirt.

Many miners ended up working in groups. They put several boxes together to make a long, narrow box called a sluice (SLOOS). Men on both sides shoveled dirt into the sluice while water ran steadily through it. The water washed away the lighter particles, and the gold remained.

Miners had a hard and lonely life. They lived in leaky tents and shacks far from their families. In the early days of the gold rush, there were few women in the mining towns and camps.

Storekeepers made more money than most miners. Shops sold food, tools, and supplies at high prices. But many miners could eat cheaply by making their own sourdough bread.

There was no government in the goldfields. Miners elected their own officials and made their own rules to protect their belongings and **claims**. Arguments over claim boundaries were often settled with guns. A man who stole a miner's horse or gold was likely to be hanged.

In time, gold became harder to find. The gold rush did make some people millionaires. But most forty-niners went home no richer than before. Some stayed in California and started businesses and farms.

**claim** a piece of land worked by a miner seeking valuable minerals



**immigrant** a person who comes from his or her homeland to settle in another country

**transcontinental** extending across a continent

## 17.5 Chinese Immigrants

News of California gold reached China about 1851. Within a year, 25,000 Chinese **immigrants** sailed to California, looking for the “Golden Mountain.”

Most of these Chinese hoped to earn money for their families and then return home. Many people in China were too poor to afford food or farmland. Local wars and crop failures made life even harder.

But by the time Chinese immigrants arrived in California, most of the gold that was easy to mine was gone. So the newcomers worked together in mines that earlier miners had given up on. The Chinese miners developed new ways of finding gold by using various tools and machines that they designed.



**Chinese workers dug tunnels in the Sierra Nevada for the Central Pacific Railroad Company. They earned less, worked more hours, and did more dangerous jobs than other workers.**

American miners were jealous. They convinced the state government to place a tax on foreign miners. American miners also used threats and violence to push the Chinese away from the mines.

Many Chinese found work helping to build the first **transcontinental** railroad. The Central Pacific Railroad Company was laying track east from Sacramento, California. The Union Pacific Railroad Company was building west from Nebraska. In time, nearly all the Central Pacific’s workers were Chinese, who were skilled

at laying track. One crew boss reported that Chinese workers always laid more track than other crews.

Yet, Chinese railroad workers earned less than other workers. The Chinese also had to work longer hours and do riskier jobs. Sometimes they had to carve tunnels through solid rock. Using wicker baskets fastened to ropes, they lowered themselves down the sides of cliffs. Then they drilled holes in the rock and set gunpowder and fuses in the holes. This was very dangerous work.



The basket ropes could break, or the gun powder could explode too soon. Both types of accidents killed workers. And in winter, many workers froze.

The transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. The Chinese then had to find new ways to earn money. Some opened stores. Others worked as farmers and fishermen. But many white Americans still saw the Chinese as foreigners because the Chinese looked different, had different customs, and spoke a different language. Some Americans accused Chinese workers of taking jobs away from them for less pay. Some Chinese workers were forced to leave their towns. Some were even killed.

In 1882, Congress responded to this anger toward the Chinese, by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. Exclusion means keeping someone out. The law stopped most Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. Many years passed before Chinese citizens were allowed to enter the United States as freely as they had before.

## 17.6 Mormons

Most people in the United States went west to get rich. The **Mormons**, however, were looking for religious freedom.

In New York in 1830, a man named Joseph Smith founded the Church of Christ, the Mormon religion which would later be called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. An inspiring preacher, Smith attracted thousands of followers. Many of them joined Smith in heading west.

The Mormons settled in Ohio and Missouri. But other Americans attacked them in their new communities. They objected to Mormon beliefs and the way that Mormons lived apart from their neighbors.

The Mormons were forced to move their settlements from Ohio and Missouri to an Illinois town they called Nauvoo (na-VOO). Non-Mormons in Illinois feared that the Mormons were becoming too powerful. Some Mormon men were accused of having more than one wife, a practice called polygamy. Joseph Smith and his brother were arrested. On June 27, 1844, a mob broke into the jail and killed both of them.

In 1846, the Mormons left Illinois. They fled to Nebraska. Their new leader, Brigham Young, said that they could only be safe if they moved farther west.

**Mormon** a person who is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints





The European Mormons above were too poor to buy wagons. Instead, they used handcarts to carry their belongings across the deserts and mountains.

**missionary** a representative sent by a religious organization to try to persuade other people to adopt that religion

Brigham Young organized thousands of people for the journey and led the first group west in 1847. Along the way, the Mormons built cabins, dug wells, and planted crops for later followers. When they reached Great Salt Lake in Utah, Young said, "This is the right place."

Great Salt Lake is located on a dry, empty plain. The Mormons irrigated their new land by digging ditches and building dams in mountain streams. The group also planted crops and built a well-planned city.

More Mormon groups followed by wagon train. Each morning, a member of the Church awakened the travelers with the sound of a bugle. After doing chores, the Mormons began another long day on the trail. They left messages in animal skulls for other Mormons to find.

Meanwhile, Mormon **missionaries** gained new followers in Europe. These European Mormons who then came to the United States were too poor to buy wagons for their journey west. Instead, they pushed and pulled their belongings in handcarts across the deserts and mountains.

The Mormons settled the territory of Utah. They organized their own political party and made their own laws. They would not be forced from their homes again.



## 17.7 Oregon Pioneers

In the 1840s, news of Oregon Country spread to the East in several ways. Fur traders told of thick forests and good farmland. Religious leaders sent letters urging settlers to move there. Newspapers and books described a good life of farming, fishing, and trading.

In 1843, a thousand people in Missouri organized a wagon train headed for Oregon. The pioneers loaded the canvas-covered wagons with supplies for their journey. For food, they packed flour, salt, sugar, coffee, and dried fruit. They took cookware, clothing, rifles, tools, spare parts, and medicines. Then they set out on their 2,000-mile journey along the Oregon Trail.

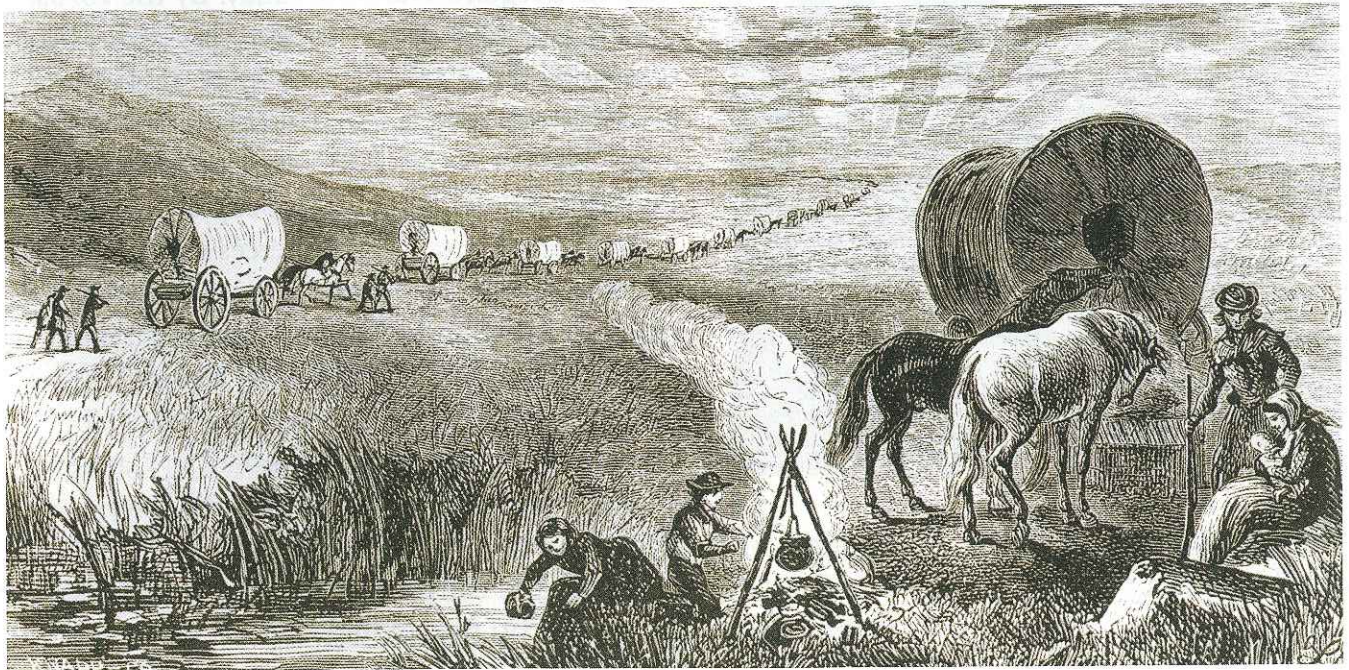
Every day was filled with hard work. Men drove wagons, herded cattle, found campsites, and guarded the wagon train at night. Women set up camp, cooked, and washed clothes. They put the heavy **yokes** on the oxen that pulled the wagons.

Women also cared for the sick. Travelers caught diseases from living close together. They also suffered from hunger, the heat and the cold, and poisoning from bad water. Many pioneers died along the trail.

On the prairies, the pioneers found plenty of grass for their animals to eat. The wagon trains tried to follow rivers from which they could get water. But crossing rivers with the wagons was difficult and dangerous. Hundreds of people drowned trying to cross rivers. Traveling over steep mountains and hot, dry deserts brought new challenges.

**yoke** a wooden frame that fastens around an animal's neck and is then attached to a wagon or other vehicle

Women played a key role on the trip across the Great Plains to Oregon. They set up tents, cooked, washed clothes, and tended to the children.





The Oregon Trail passed through American Indian lands. Some tribes were friendly. They traded horses with the pioneers or showed the pioneers where to safely cross rivers. Tribes rarely attacked the wagon trains. But American Indians on the plains depended on buffalo for their food. Pioneers were hunting buffalo, and their cattle were eating the buffalo's grass. American Indians living on the plains worried that the buffalo would be killed or frightened away.

For the pioneers who survived the trip, all the hardships were worth the chance for a new life. Each year, more wagon trains came. By 1845, thousands of Americans had traveled the Oregon Trail.



Chief Joseph was a leader of the Nez Percés.

### 17.8 Nez Percés

The Nez Percés were American Indians who lived in northeastern Oregon, central Idaho, and southeastern Washington. There, they roamed peacefully with herds of prized horses. The tribes ate salmon, wild berries, and root plants. The Nez Percés treasured their relationship with nature.

In the 1840s, white settlers began farming on Nez Percé land. The U.S. government made treaties promising the Nez Percés certain lands, while buying other land for settlers.

Chief Joseph was the leader of the Nez Percé tribe in Oregon's Wallowa Valley. By the 1870s, settlers and gold miners wanted this land. They persuaded the government to force the Nez Percés onto a reservation. Chief Joseph refused to go. The government threatened to send soldiers to force him and his people.

To avoid war, some Nez Percés started toward the reservation. But then angry young warriors killed some white settlers who had mistreated American Indians. Chief Joseph feared that the U.S. soldiers would now attack his tribe. He decided to lead his people to safety in Canada.

Soldiers chased Chief Joseph and several hundred of his followers for more than 1,000 miles. The Nez Percés hid in mountains and canyons, or deep, narrow valleys. Several times, they fought off the soldiers.



At last, the Nez Percés reached the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana, about 40 miles from Canada. They hoped to cross the border the next day. But the soldiers found them. For five days, the Nez Percés fought bravely. Many died. They were cold, hungry, and exhausted. Finally, Chief Joseph surrendered.

“I am tired of fighting,” Chief Joseph stated. “Our chiefs are killed. The old men are all dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food.... I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.”

U.S. army leaders had promised that the Nez Percés could return to their home country. Instead, the soldiers took the Nez Percés to a reservation in far-off Oklahoma. At least half of the tribe died from disease on the way there and once in their new home.

Eventually, some of the Nez Percés were allowed to return to reservations in Idaho and Washington. But Chief Joseph and his people never lived in their beloved valley again.

### Summary

In this chapter, you learned about four groups who moved to the West in the 1800s. You also read about two groups who already lived there. You used a spoke diagram to focus on all of these groups.

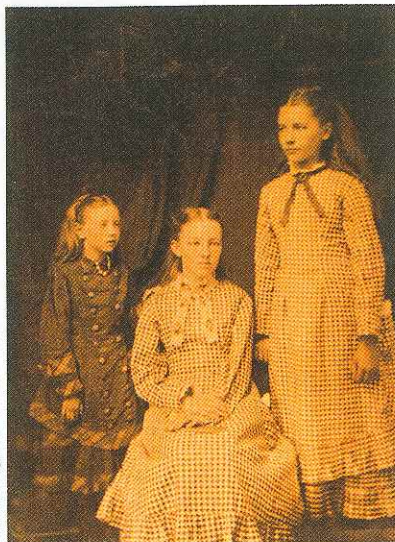
Most people came to the West in search of land and wealth. These groups included the forty-niners, Chinese immigrants, and Oregon pioneers. The Mormons moved west for religious freedom. All groups faced hardships. Their arrival was also hard on those already in the West, such as Mexicanos and the Nez Percés. Thousands of these people lost their homes, and many lost their lives.

During the 1800s, settlers moved from the eastern part of the United States, through the central plains, to the Pacific coast. This movement brought new resources and chances for many Americans. In the next pages, you will learn about one family who settled on the prairie. What hardships did family members face? How did their journey end? And how did we find out about them? Read on to discover the answers.



## Laura Ingalls Wilder on the Prairie

Many people settled west of the Appalachian Mountains in the mid-1800s. As this land grew more crowded, some pioneers chose to move west again. Among them was the family of Laura Ingalls Wilder. She recorded her childhood memories in a series of books. What do her stories tell us about the hopes, dreams, and challenges of these settlers?



Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association

Laura Ingalls stands next to her older sister Mary (center) and her younger sister Carrie (left) in this photograph from about 1880.

Laura Ingalls Wilder is a beloved American writer. She wrote a series of books based mostly on her own life as a child in a pioneer family. One of these books is called *Little House on the Prairie*. It tells of a family's move to a new home in Kansas, which the author calls Indian country. This is how the story begins:

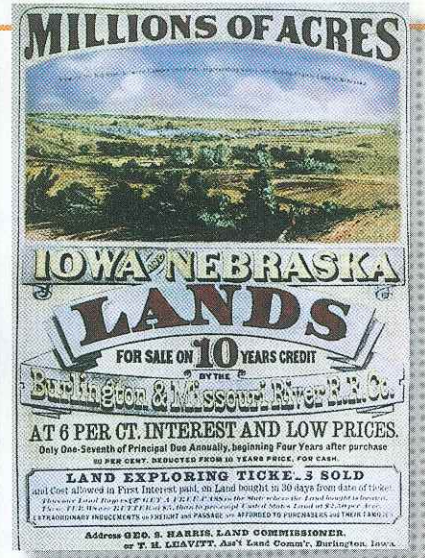
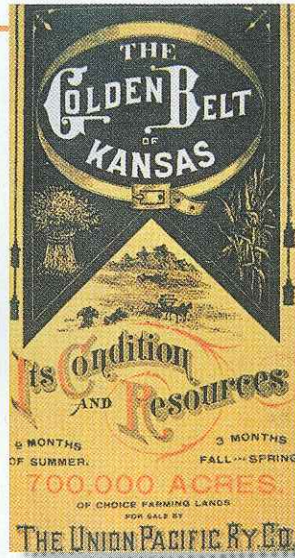
"A long time ago, when all the grandfathers and grandmothers of today were little boys and little girls or very small babies, or perhaps not even born, Pa and Ma and Mary and Laura and Baby Carrie left their little house in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. They drove away and left it lonely and empty in the clearing among the big trees, and they never saw that little house again. They were going to the Indian country.

Pa said there were too many people in the Big Woods now. Quite often Laura heard the ringing thud of an ax which was not Pa's ax, or the echo of a shot that did not come from his gun. The path that went by the little house had become a road. Almost every day Laura and Mary stopped their playing and stared in surprise at a wagon slowly creaking by on that road.

Wild animals would not stay in a country where there were so many people. Pa did not like to stay, either. . . .

In the long winter evenings he talked to Ma about the Western country. In the West the land was level, and there were no trees. The grass grew thick and high. There the wild animals wandered and fed as though they were in a pasture that stretched much farther than a man could see, and there were no settlers."





### Seeking Land

As a young boy, Laura’s father had moved west from New York with his parents. As a man, he relocated his family often, in search of a good farm. The trip to the grasslands of the Great Plains was one such move.

Other people also headed for the wide-open prairie. Many, like the Ingalls, wanted land. And there was lots of it available. In fact, the U.S. government was practically giving land away. Under an 1862 law called the Homestead Act, a settler could pay a small fee and receive a 160-acre piece of land. If the settler lived on the land and farmed it for five years, that land then belonged to him or her. People who got land under this law were called homesteaders.

Why was land so important? At that time, many people made their living by farming. A farm of 160 acres was not large by western standards. It would not make a person rich. But it did give many people a start in life.

Settlers could buy low-priced land from railroad companies. The government gave railroad companies huge parcels of land to encourage them to build railroads in the West. The railroads then sold these lands at low prices.

The promise of land drew many Americans. It also appealed to immigrants from Europe. The Homestead Act made land available even to people who were not yet U.S. citizens. Many Europeans first came to the United States for the chance to get a farm at little cost. In some areas, people born outside the United States made up a large share of the population. For example, nearly half the people living in North Dakota in 1890 were born outside the United States.

These three railroad posters advertise cheap land for sale in the West.





One hardship that threatened homesteaders was fast-moving prairie fires.

### Hardships on the Prairie

But once on a piece of land, the life of a homesteader was by no means easy. In fact, it was both difficult and dangerous. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote vividly about these challenges.

To begin with, new settlers had to build everything from scratch. In *Little House on the Prairie*, Laura tells of her Pa's labors. The family lived in a tent while he worked on their home. Wood was scarce on the Kansas prairie. Pa had to cut and haul trees from a creek bottom to their home site. Next, he had to chop and split logs to build the house. Then, Pa had to dig a well by hand so they could have fresh water.

In addition to the hard work, there were many dangers. One was the wild animals. Laura's family had run-ins with packs of wolves and with panthers and other animals. These wild animals were capable of killing other animals, children, and even unwary adults.

Laura's family also tried to keep up good relations with the American Indians in the area. But this was not always easy. Now and then, the Ingalls were troubled by unwelcome visits from American Indians, who took the family's food and other belongings. But the Ingalls knew that their arrival on the prairie had brought hardship for the local tribes. They also knew that their safety depended on getting along with these tribes.



The weather could also be a hazard. Severe cold, tornadoes, lack of rain, dust storms—at different times, each of these could be a danger to homesteaders. Fast-moving prairie fires threatened to burn them out. Hailstorms ruined crops.

Illness was another threat. In Laura's first year on the prairie, her family nearly died from a fever. Later, when Laura had grown up and married, her husband lost the full use of his legs from a serious illness.

Sometimes it is hard to see just what it was that kept Laura and her fellow homesteaders going. In her book *The First Four Years*, an adult Laura, along with her husband, struggles to build a life in what is now South Dakota. Disaster after disaster strikes the young family. Finally, fire destroys their home. After four years, they have little to show for their work. They are deep in debt. They are not even sure they will be able to gain ownership of their homestead. Yet, even in the face of these troubles, Laura and her husband, Manly, are upbeat.

"Was farming a success?

'Well, it all depends on how you look at it,' Manly said when Laura asked him the question.

They had had a lot of bad luck, but anyone was liable to have bad luck even if he weren't a farmer. There had been so many dry seasons now that surely next year would be a good crop year....

It would be a fight to win out in this business of farming, but strangely she felt her spirit rising for the struggle.

The incurable optimism of the farmer who throws his seed on the ground every spring, betting it and his time against the elements, seemed inextricably to blend with the creed of her pioneer forefathers that 'it is better farther on'—only instead of farther on in space, it was farther on in time, over the horizon of the years ahead instead of the far horizon of the west."

Many homesteaders shared such views. They did not expect easy success. They were ready to work hard to make their futures. All they wanted was a chance. And thousands found that chance on the prairie.



The Granger Collection, New York

Laura Ingalls Wilder poses with her husband, Manly.