

# Tracing Your Ancestors on the Move in America

## *Westward Migration, 1783-1900*

August 2022

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER



American Ancestors®  
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

# Meet today's presenter



Hallie J. Borstel

Genealogist

# OVERVIEW

- **Presentation (60 mins.)**
  - Push/pull of migration
  - Federal policies and other stimulants
  - Advances in transportation
- **Q&A (30 mins.)**



*Voice of*  
Hallie J. Borstel  
Genealogist

# Push & Pull Migration Factors

# Manifest destiny?



- Term coined in 1845
- “Inevitability of the continued territorial expansion of the boundaries of the United States westward to the Pacific and beyond.”

# Push/Pull of Migration

- The decision to migrate depends on factors pushing your ancestor out of the current location and pulling them to a new location
- What pushed your ancestors out?
  - Urbanization and overpopulation
  - Lack of opportunities
  - Crop failure
  - Financial disaster



# Pull Factors, 1783-1900

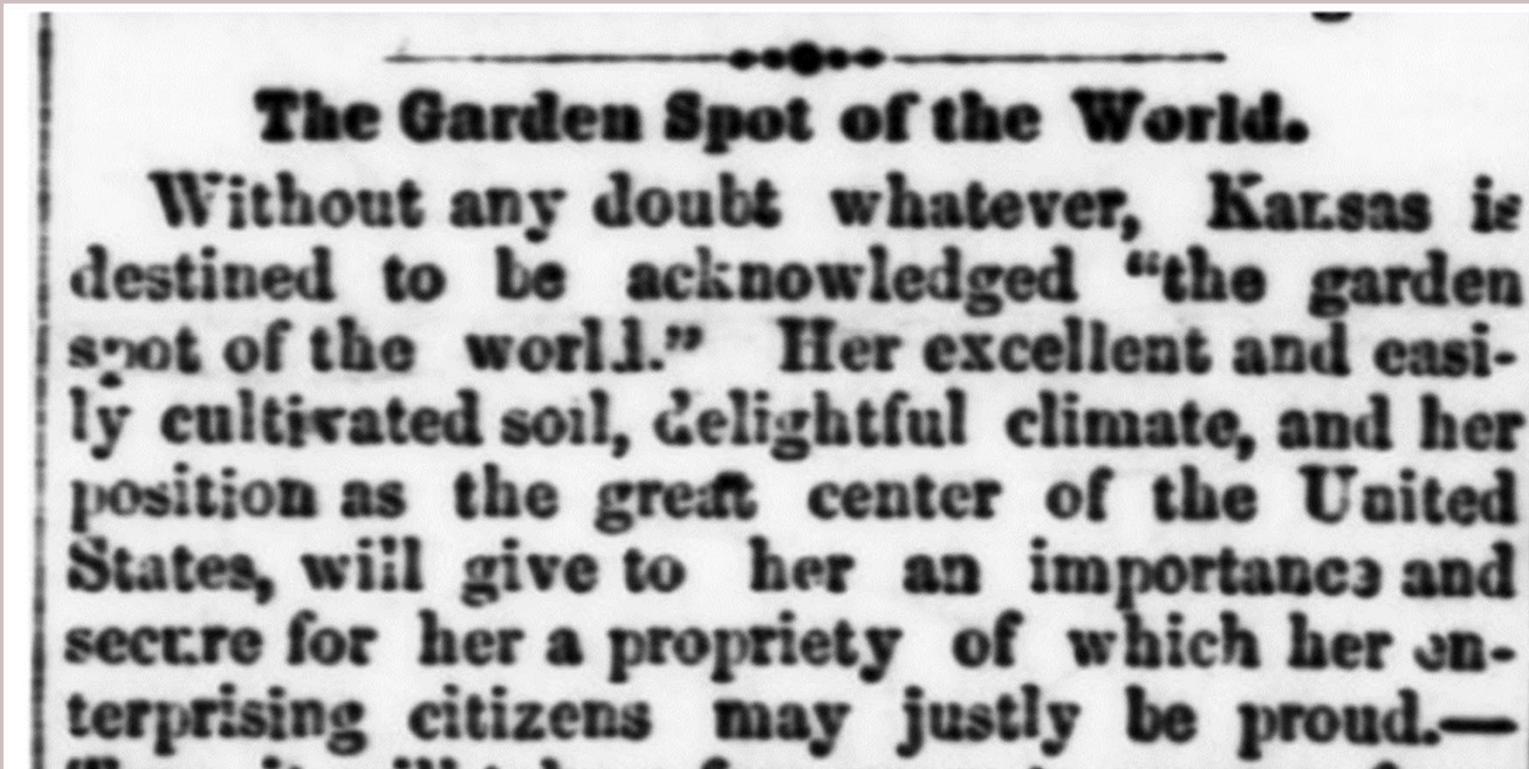
- Land
- Opportunity
- Ease of getting there
- Gold or natural resources
- Employment
- Newspaper accounts
- Family



# Financial Panics

- Easterners lose jobs and move west; farmers lose crops and move west
- Panic of 1819 - Global economic downturn after the Napoleonic Wars and War of 1812, land speculation in the south and west
- Panic of 1837 - Lasted six years and stimulated many midwestern farmers to seek land in the west
- Panic of 1857 - Triggered by speculation in railroad companies
- Panic of 1873 - Drop in prices impacted America's farm economy, causing great poverty in rural America
- Panic of 1893 - Unemployment spread until one in six American men lost their jobs

# Newspaper Promotion, 1861



Council Grove Press, 1861

# Gold in the Hills

- James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill, California on January 24, 1848
- Attracted over 300,000 opportunists, miners as well as businessmen



# Employment Opportunity

- Railroads
- Mining (not just gold, also copper and silver)
- Teaching (for women!)
- Construction of new towns
- Trading posts and general stores

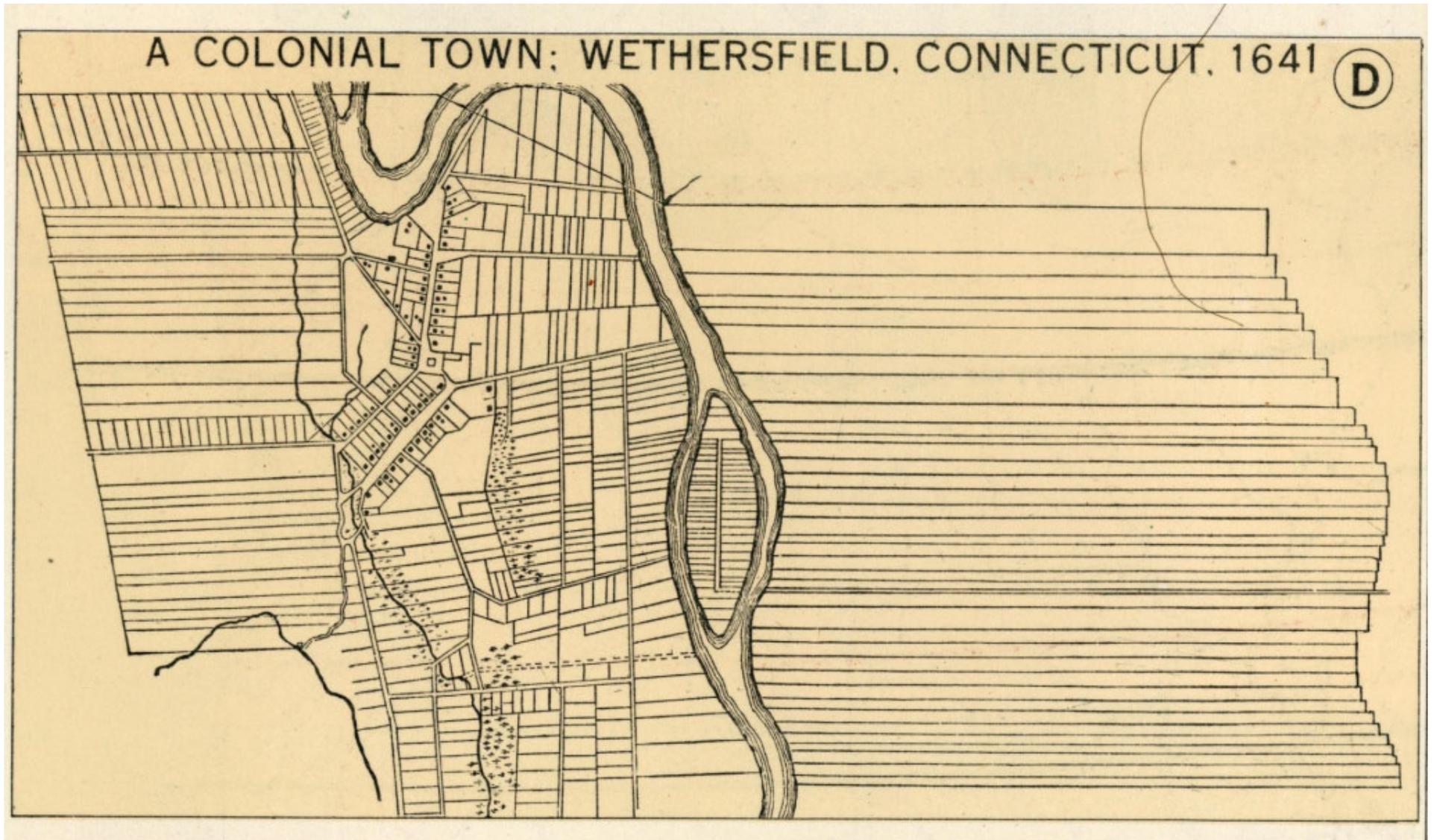
# Migration Challenges

# Barriers to Migration

- English settlers by and large not experienced with forest dwelling – came from settled villages and towns
  - Initial settlements along waterways - ocean or rivers
- Geography
  - Mountains
- Physical barriers/infrastructure
  - Dense undergrowth
  - Narrow roads/footpaths
  - No bridges
  - Slow rates of travel
- Potential for conflict
  - Native American tribes lived West of Anglo/European settlements



# English Village System



# In the Beginning



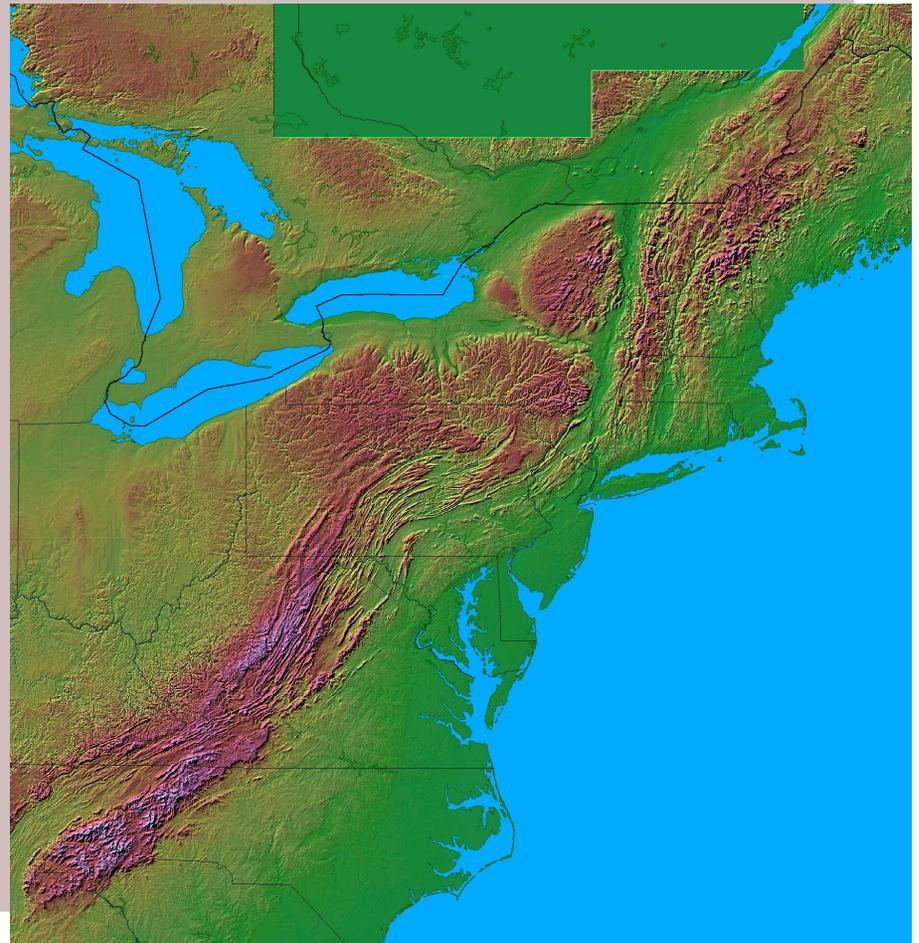






# Crossing the Mountains

- Very few natural breaks in Appalachian Mountain chain:
  - Hudson River
  - Mohawk River
  - Cumberland Gap
  - Passes in Pennsylvania
- Wilderness Road (1775) at Cumberland Gap



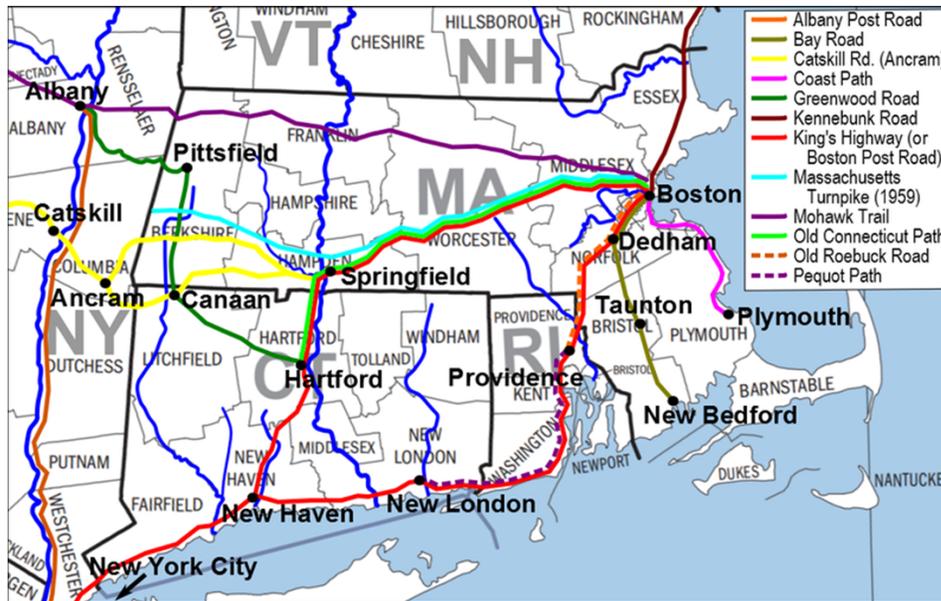
# Colonial Roads

- Early roads
  - Widening of Native American paths
  - Construction of military roads, e.g., Braddock's Road and Forbes Road
- King's Highway, built 1673-1735
  - Boston, MA to Charleston, SC
- Fall Line Road
  - Geographic fall line – marks as far inland as you can get a ship or boat that has come in from the ocean
  - Augusta, Raleigh, Richmond, DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Trenton
- Upper Road/Carolina Road
  - Virginia to South Carolina
- Mohawk Trail
  - Albany to Lake Erie

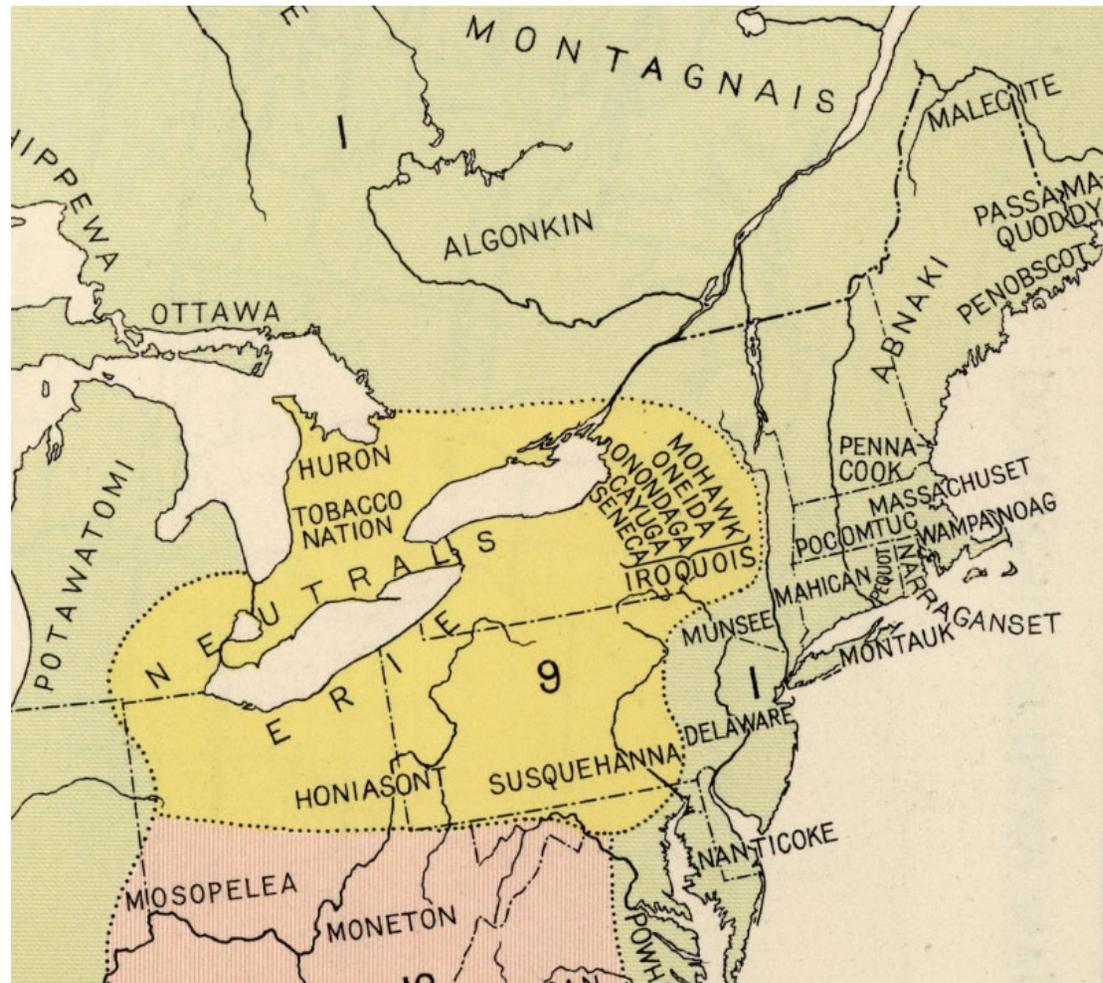
# Kings Highway



# Colonial Roads



# Native Tribes



Charles Paullin: Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States, 1932.

# Indian Reserve Land, 1763



Charles Paullin: Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States, 1932.



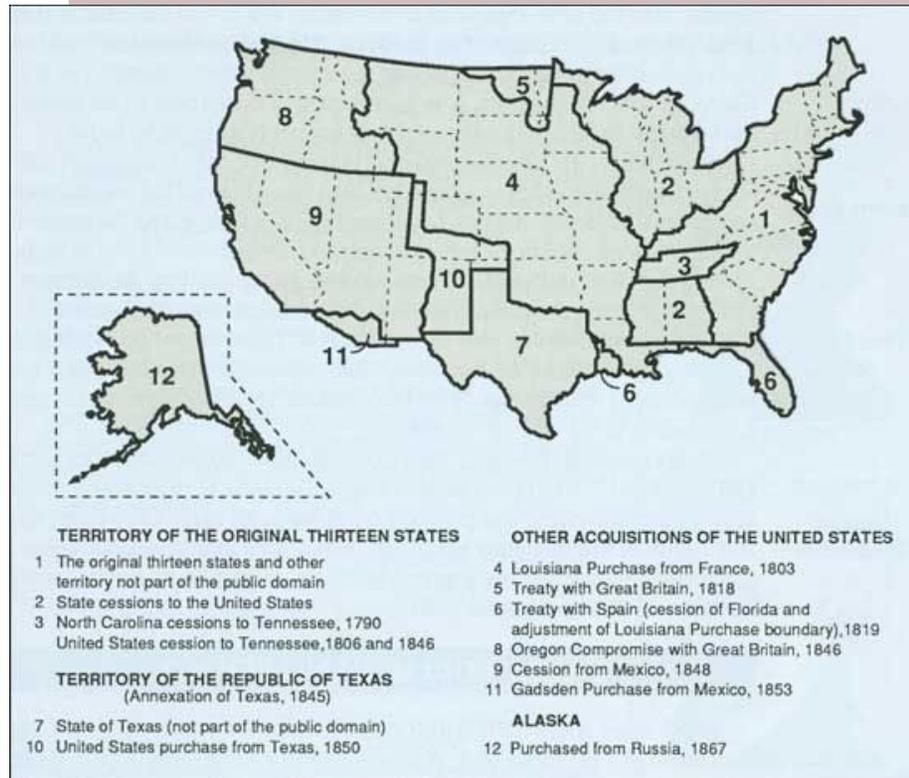
# Population Distribution, 1790



# QUESTIONS?

# Opening the West

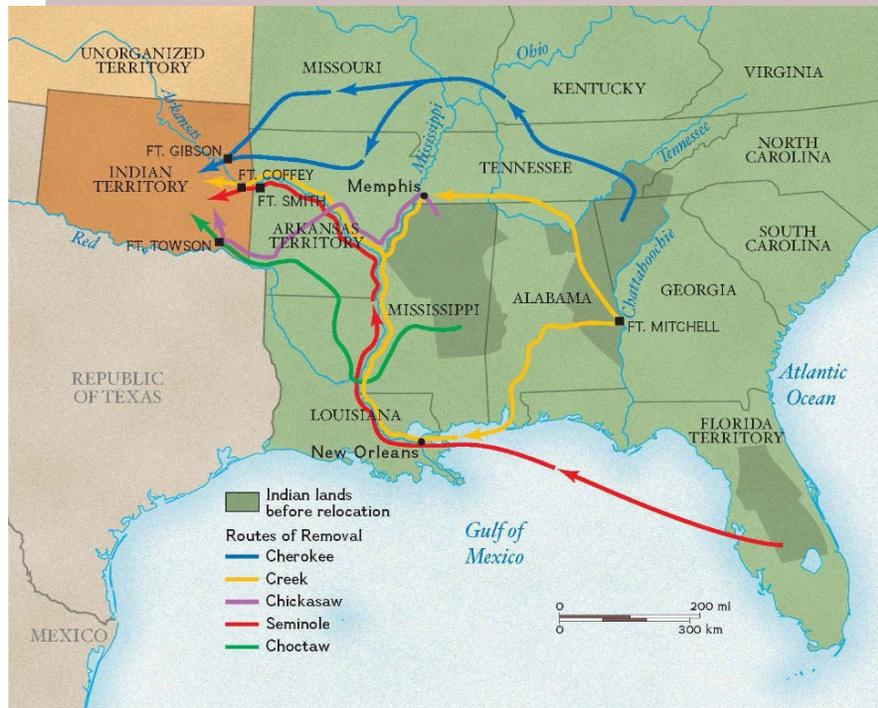
# Public Land/Public Domain



- In the beginning: territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River
  - British land but not belonging to any particular colony/state
- Increase in available land with the 1803 Louisiana Purchase
- Expansion across the continent during the 19th century

[https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/blm/history/chap1.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/blm/history/chap1.htm)

# Shrinking Native Tribes' Land



National Geographic:  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/may28/indian-removal-act/>

- Movement on land belonging to native tribes
- Georgia Compact of 1802
  - Relinquishment of claims to western lands in exchange for removal of Cherokee tribes
- Louisiana Purchase, 1803
  - Jefferson suggests relocation of tribes to west of the Mississippi
- Indian Removal Act, 1830
  - Trail of Tears

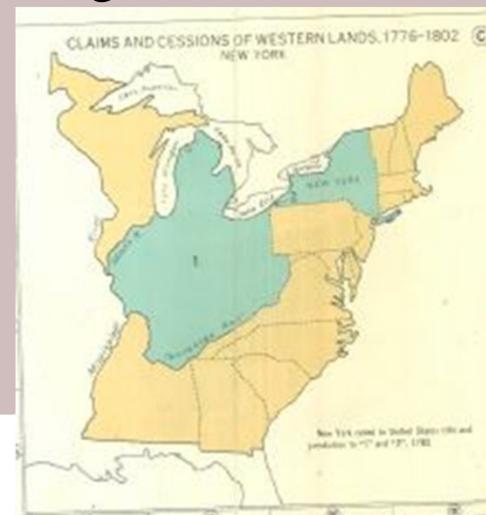
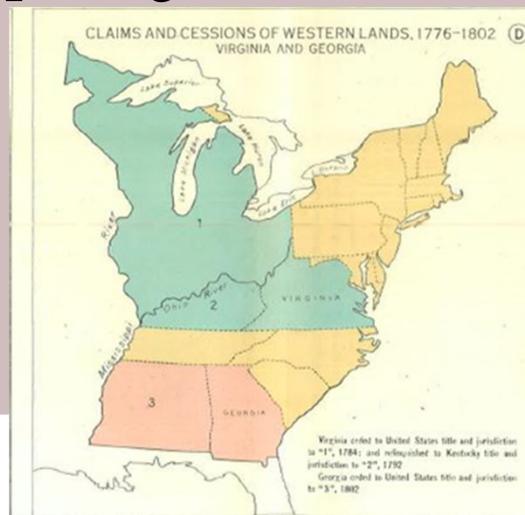
# Land: An Incentive

- Military bounty land
  - Revolutionary War
  - War of 1812
  - Mexican War
  - Indian Wars
- Growth of land speculation
  - Land companies purchase large tracts, survey them, and subdivide into lots
- Federal incentives
  - Land Act of 1820
  - Preemption Act of 1841
  - Oregon Donation Act
  - Homestead Act of 1862

# Bounty Land

# Introduction of Bounty Land

- To entice soldiers to fight, the Continental Congress in 1776 promised land in exchange for service
- After the war, states had to cede land to federal government
  - Competing land claims among states



# Key to Bounty Land: Northwest Territory

- 1780 – Continental Congress declares Northwest Territory is public land
- 1785 – Land Ordinance establishing the six mile square township
- 1787 – Plan for creating states in the NW Territory

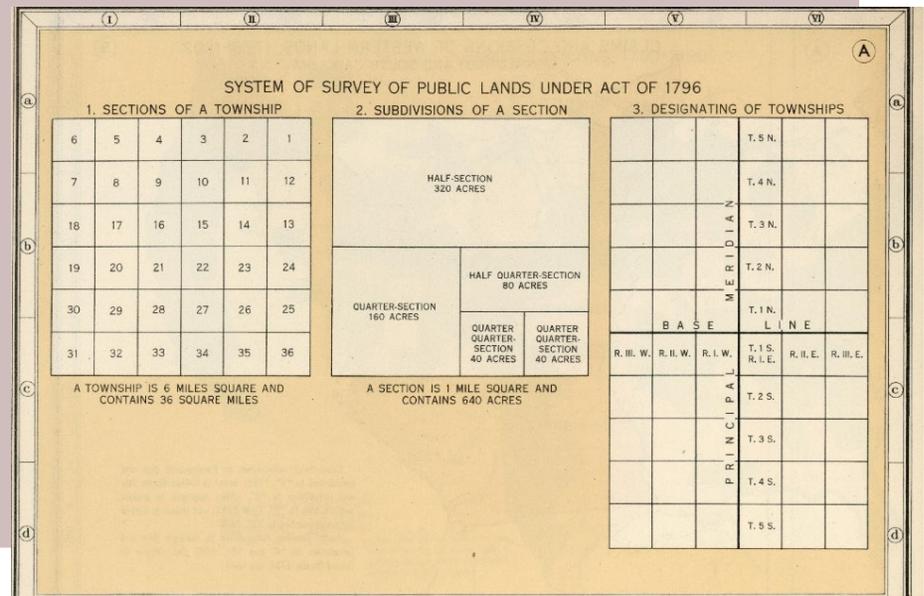
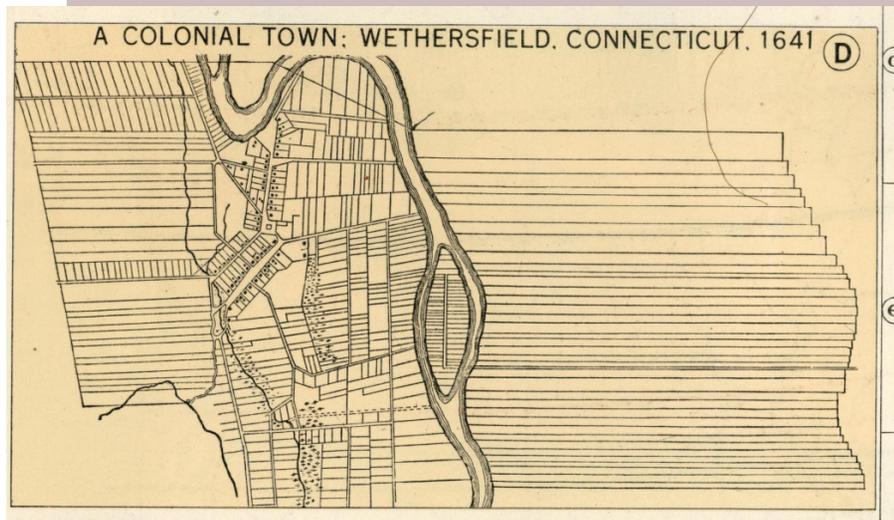


# Land Survey Systems

## Colonial

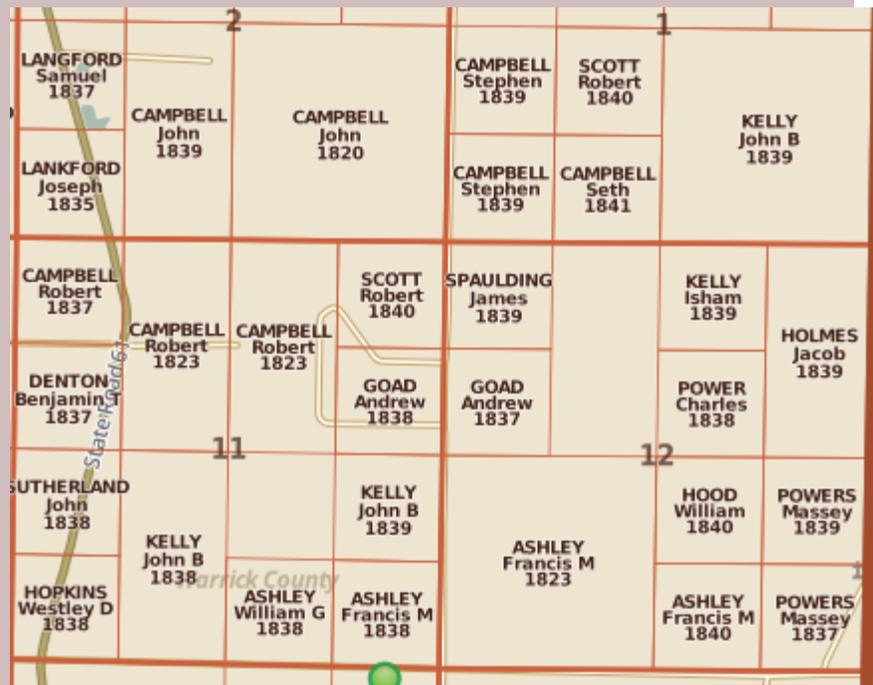
## Post-1796:

## Rectangular Survey System



# Post-1796 Federal Survey System

- Based on a grid
- Township – six square miles, measured N/S from base
- Section – one sq mile in a township
- Range – distance E/W from referenced meridian
- Quarter – NE, NW, SE, SW portion of township



Warwick County, Indiana

# Bounty Land – Federal

- Revolutionary War
  - Beginning in 1788 soldiers from the Continental Line could apply to the Treasury Department for a land warrant
  - Amount of land depended on rank and length of service
- War of 1812 through the year 1858
  - Non-commissioned officers and soldiers who served at least 5 years

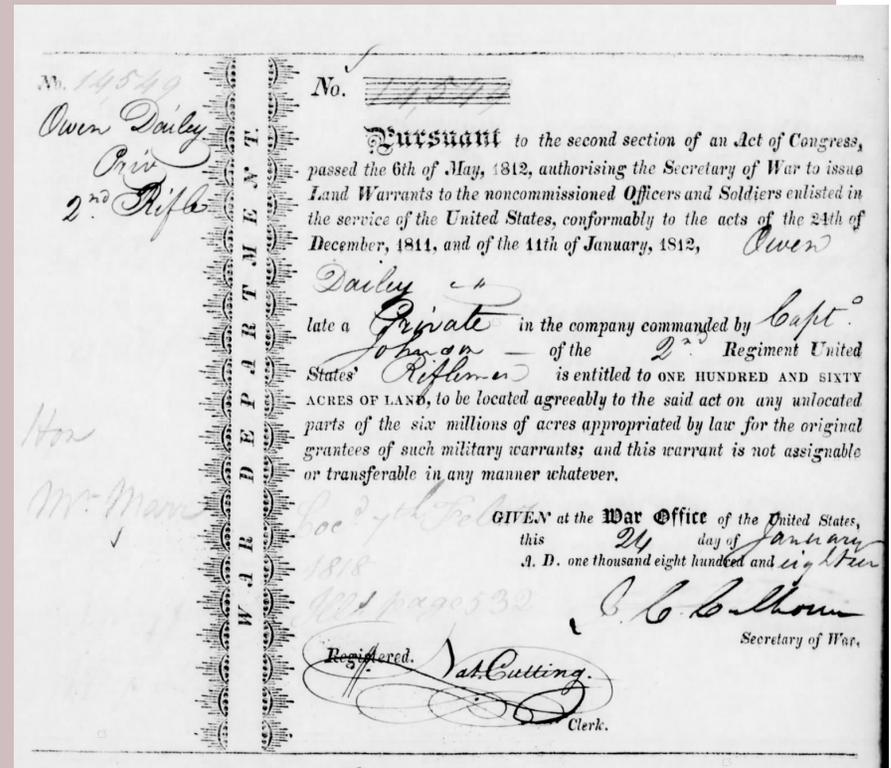
See Clifford Neal Smith, *Federal Land Series*, Chicago: American Library Association, 1973

## Bounty Land – State (Rev War)

- For **military service**: Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia
- For **damage inflicted** by British: Connecticut
- For **neutrality (or military service)**: Georgia
- Soldiers could “double-dip,” federal and state
- See Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck, *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants*, Genealogical Publishing Company, 1996.

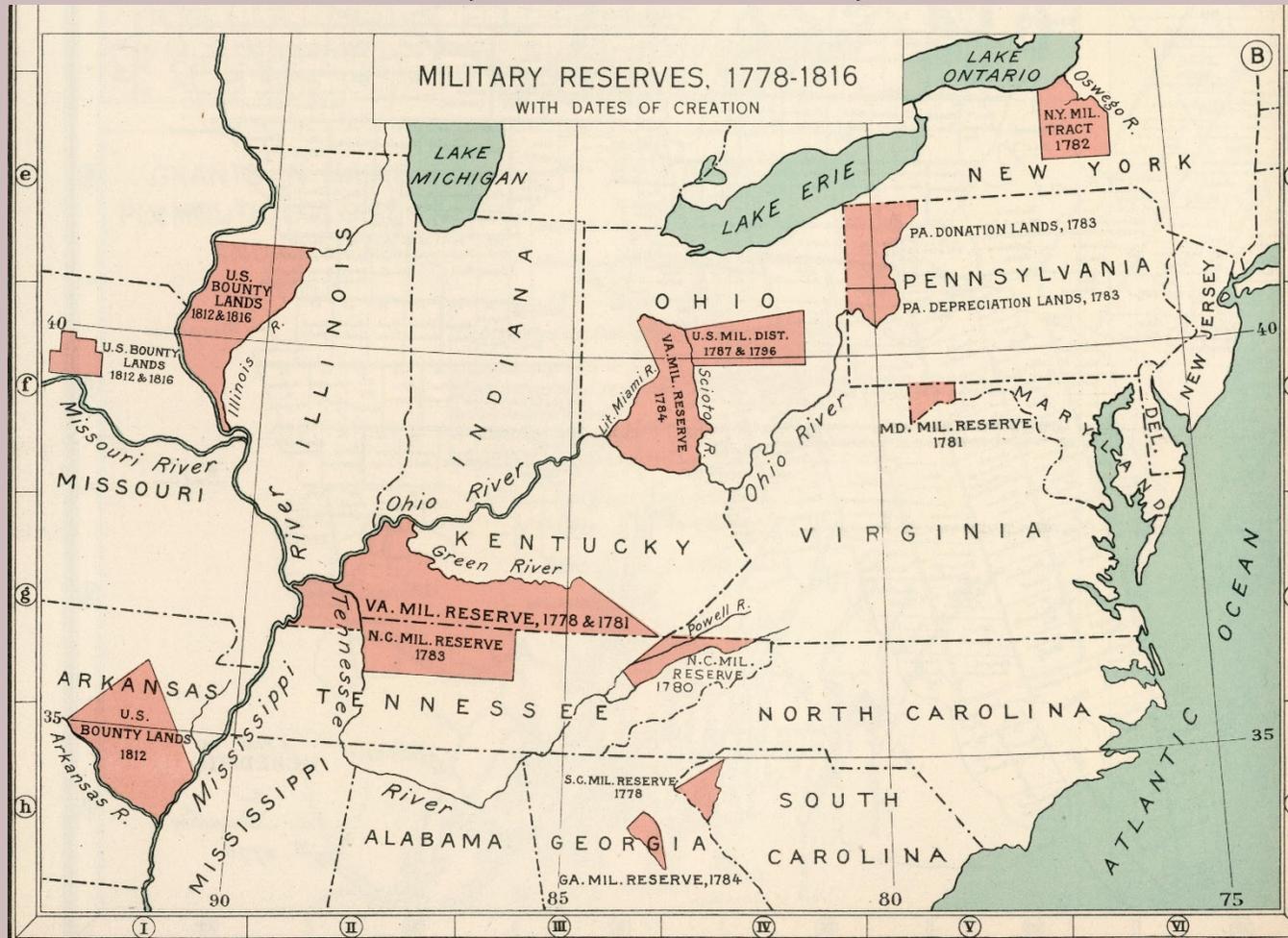
# Paperwork to Claim Land

- Process (generated lots of paper trail)
  - Application
  - Warrant issued – date of issuance, name and rank of veteran, state from which he enlisted and name of heir
  - Survey conducted
  - Land parcel patented



Owen Dailey, War of 1812 Bounty Land Warrant

# Military Bounty Land



Charles Paullin: Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States, Washington DC and New York: 1932.

Search > [Wills, Probates, Land, Tax & Criminal](#)

## U.S., War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858

Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)  Last Name

Year

Military

Keyword

e.g. pilot or "Flying Tigers" ▾

Warrant Number

Year

Warrant Year



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### Source Information

Ancestry.com. *U.S., War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc. 2007

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# Ancestry.com: U.S., War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858

# Growth of Land Speculation

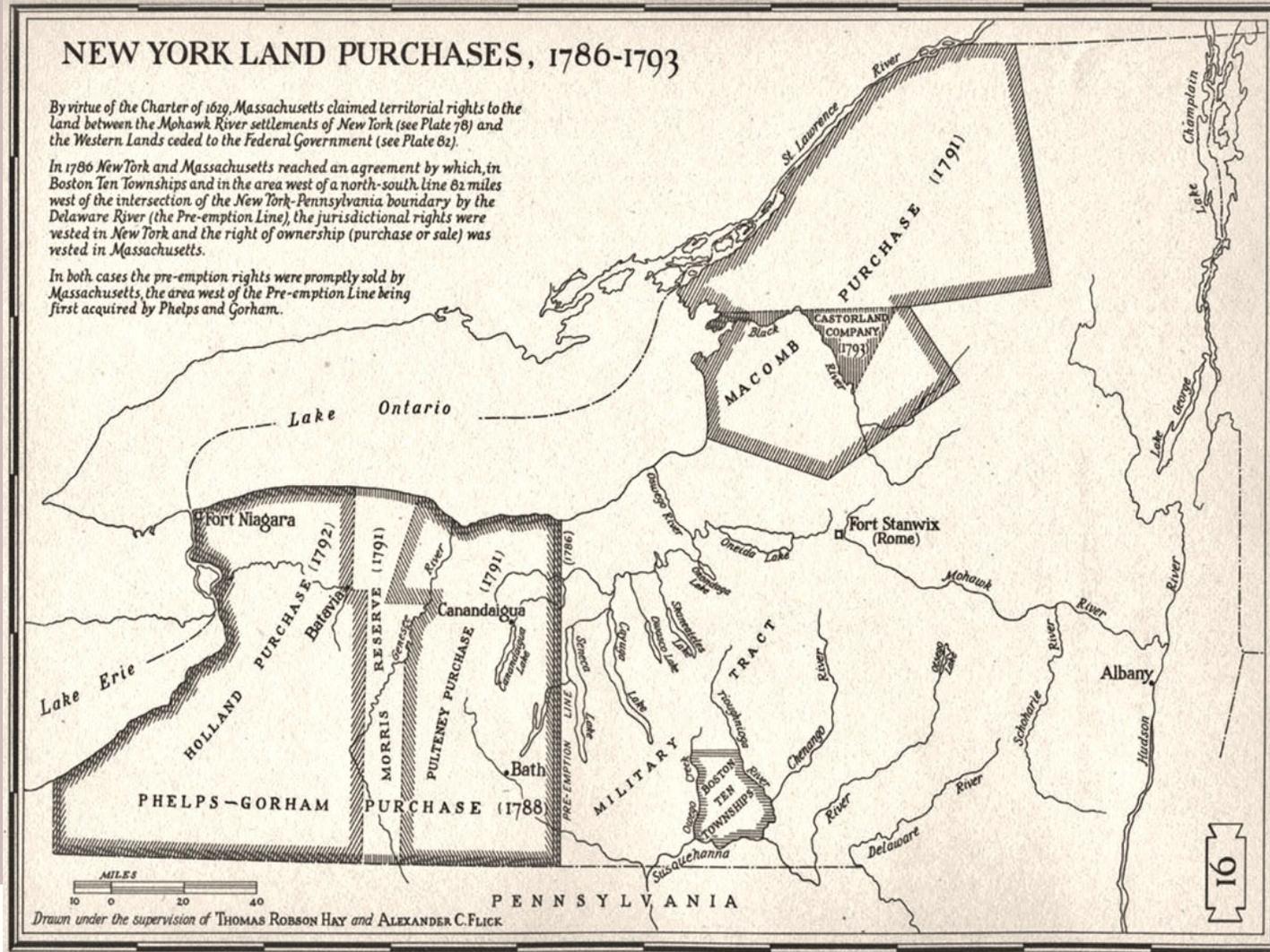
# Speculative Land Companies

- Sale of public lands
  - Starting in the late 1700s
  - Earliest tracts were sold for pennies per acre to land companies, but generated necessary revenue for the U.S. government
- Series of land laws allowed for sale of territorial land for a minimum of \$2/acre
- Land companies
  - Purchased large tracts for low cost, surveyed, built roads and canals, divided into lots, sold to individuals

# Land Companies

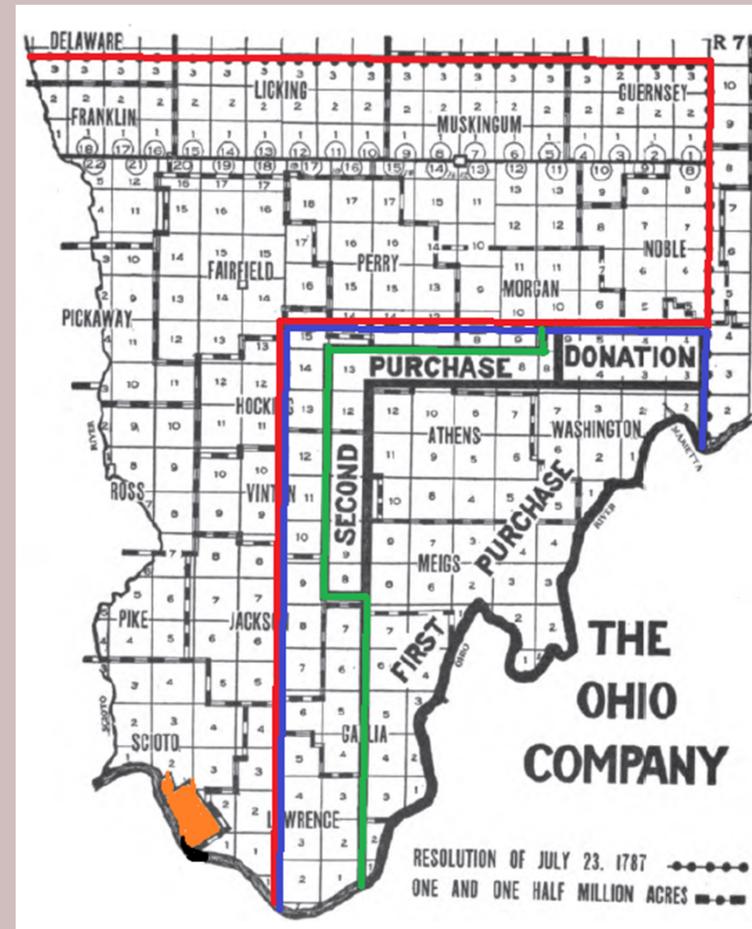
- Particularly important in the settling of western New York and Ohio
- New York – Holland Land Company
- Ohio – mix of federal and state bounty land and private companies
  - Virginia Military District (1784)
  - Seven Ranges (1785)
  - Ohio Company 1787 (Marietta)
  - Symmes Purchase (1794)
  - Western Reserve (Conn. Land Company, 1796)
  - U.S. Military District (1796)

# Holland Land Company



# Ohio Company

- 1787 - Ohio Company of Associates purchased land from the new federal government.
- Founded Marietta, Ohio
- 1792 - Second purchase funded by exchanging military land warrants.
- Land then surveyed and distributed to 817 shareholders.
- Conditions of purchase required the Ohio Company to set aside land for educational and religious institutions.
- Scioto section (red outline) mismanaged, and purchase failed. Company ceased operations in 1796 due to losses from Scioto.



# Response to Rampant Speculation

- After the Panic of 1819, driven partly by the proliferation of speculation, the government introduces the Land Act of 1820
- Not the end of speculation – happens later as new territories open up in the west

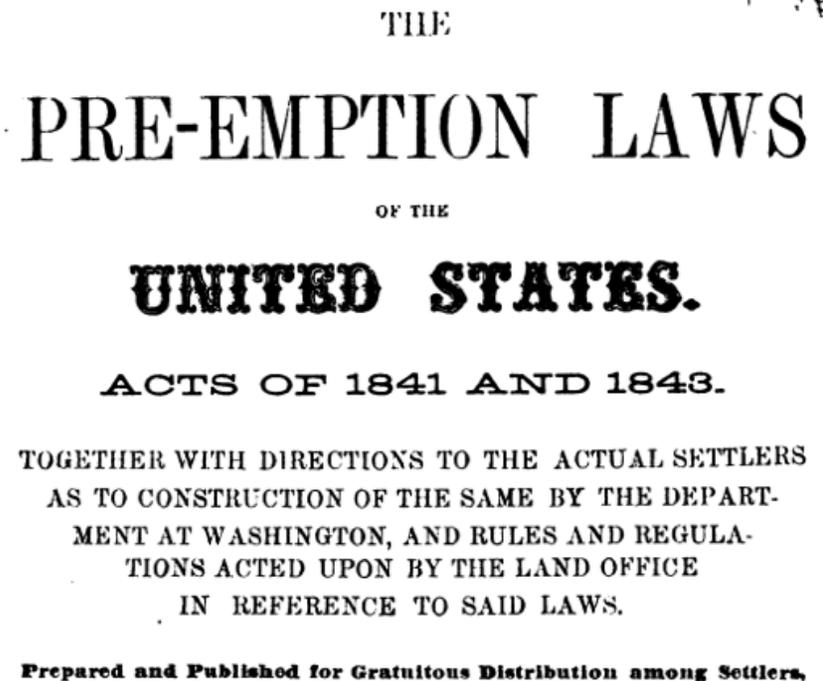
# Federal Incentives

# Land Act of 1820

- Reduced cost per acre to \$1.25 (from \$2)
- Tracts as small as 80 acres, no maximum size
- Full payment required at time of purchase (no purchases on credit)
- Decreased land speculation but did not eliminate it completely

# Preemption Act, 1841

- Squatters living on federal land could purchase 160 acres for \$1.25 per acre before the land was offered to the general public
- Requirements:
  - Head of household OR
  - Single man over 21, or a widow
  - Citizen or an immigrant intending to become a citizen
  - Living on claimed land for a minimum of 14 months
- Much of Kansas and Nebraska settled on preemption claims



# Oregon Donation Act, 1850

- Forerunner to the Homestead Act of 1862
- Applied to land in the Oregon Territory
  - Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and parts of Wyoming and Montana
- Allowed men to claim land in the territory after working it for four years
- Expired in 1855

# Homestead Act of 1862

“Charles, I don’t know,” she said. “It does seem providential, fifty dollars a month. But we’re settled here. We’ve got the farm.”

“Listen to reason, Caroline,” Pa pleaded. “We can get a hundred and sixty acres out west, just by living on it, and the land’s as good as this is, or better. If Uncle Sam’s willing to give us a farm in place of the one he drove us off of, in Indian Territory, I say let’s take it. The hunting’s good in the west, a man can get all the meat he wants.”

Laura wanted so much to go that she could hardly keep from speaking.

“How could we go now?” Ma asked. “With Mary

*By the Shores of Silver Lake, p. 4*

# Homestead Act of 1862



- Receive up to 160 acres of land – for free
- Any adult citizen over the age of 21 who had not borne arms against the U.S. could apply
- Process
  - File application for \$18
  - Improve the land for 5 years
  - Build a house
  - File for deed of title
- After six months residency could purchase land for \$1.25 per acre

# Female Homesteaders

- **Any adult citizen** over the age of 21 who had not borne arms against the U.S. could apply
- 10-12% of homesteaders were women
- Applied to both unmarried women and widows

**Martha Stoecker, homesteader  
in Stanley County, SD**





U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PRIVATE CLAIMS

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

### General Land Office Records

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**Location**

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County:  ▼

**Names**

Last Name:

First Name:

Middle Name:

search patentees  search warrantees

**Land Description**

Township:  -- ▼ /  ▼

Range:  -- ▼ /  ▼

Meridian:  ▼

Section #:

**Miscellaneous**

Land Office:  ▼

Document #:

Indian Allot. #:

Survey #:

Authority:  ▼

Issue Date: -- ▼  to -- ▼

Militia:

Tribe:  ▼

Geo. Name/  
Mining Claim:

**To search for land patents:**

1. Start by selecting the State.
2. **You do not have to fill in all fields**, but provide *at least* one additional field.
3. Click the **Search Patents** button.

**Search Tips:**

- Hover your mouse over a field to get a brief description.
- Get detailed information by checking the [Glossary](#) in the Reference Center.
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Search Patents

*Note: This site does not cover every state, but we do have [resource links](#) for most states.*

# https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/search/default.aspx

# U.S., Homestead Records, 1863-1908

Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)  Last Name

Birth Day Month Year Location  
— —

Any Event

Keyword   
e.g. pilot or "Flying Tigers"

Range

Land Office

Section

Township

Final Certificate Number



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Final Certificate Year

1873

Township and Range

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- [068 North, 029 West](#)
- [069 North, 031 West](#)

# Ancestry.com: U.S., Homestead Records, 1863-1908

# Decline of the Public Domain

- By the 1890s, available public land is decreasing
- Conservation movement begins
  - Public Lands Reform Law, 1891
  - Forest reserves
- Homestead Act land still available, but not as popular
  - Ends officially in 1976
  - Last claim in Alaska in 1988

# QUESTIONS?

# Getting There: Trails & Transportation

# Post-Revolutionary War Innovations

- Turnpikes
  - Toll roads, first built in 1792 in PA
- National Road
- Canals
  - Open new markets for farm and manufactured products



# National Road



- Built with Congressional Funds
- Begun in 1811 in Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, West Virginia by 1818 and Vandalia, Illinois by 1837 – money ran out
- Huge economic boon: one tavern every ten miles

# Erie Canal



George Harvey, Pittsford on the Erie Canal 1837

- Begun in 1817
- Opened in sections:
  - 1819 Rome to Utica
  - 1820 Utica to Syracuse
  - 1823 Brockport to Albany
  - 1825 remaining sections completed

# Canal Construction

1813-25

1837-53

Significant Transportation Canals in the United States

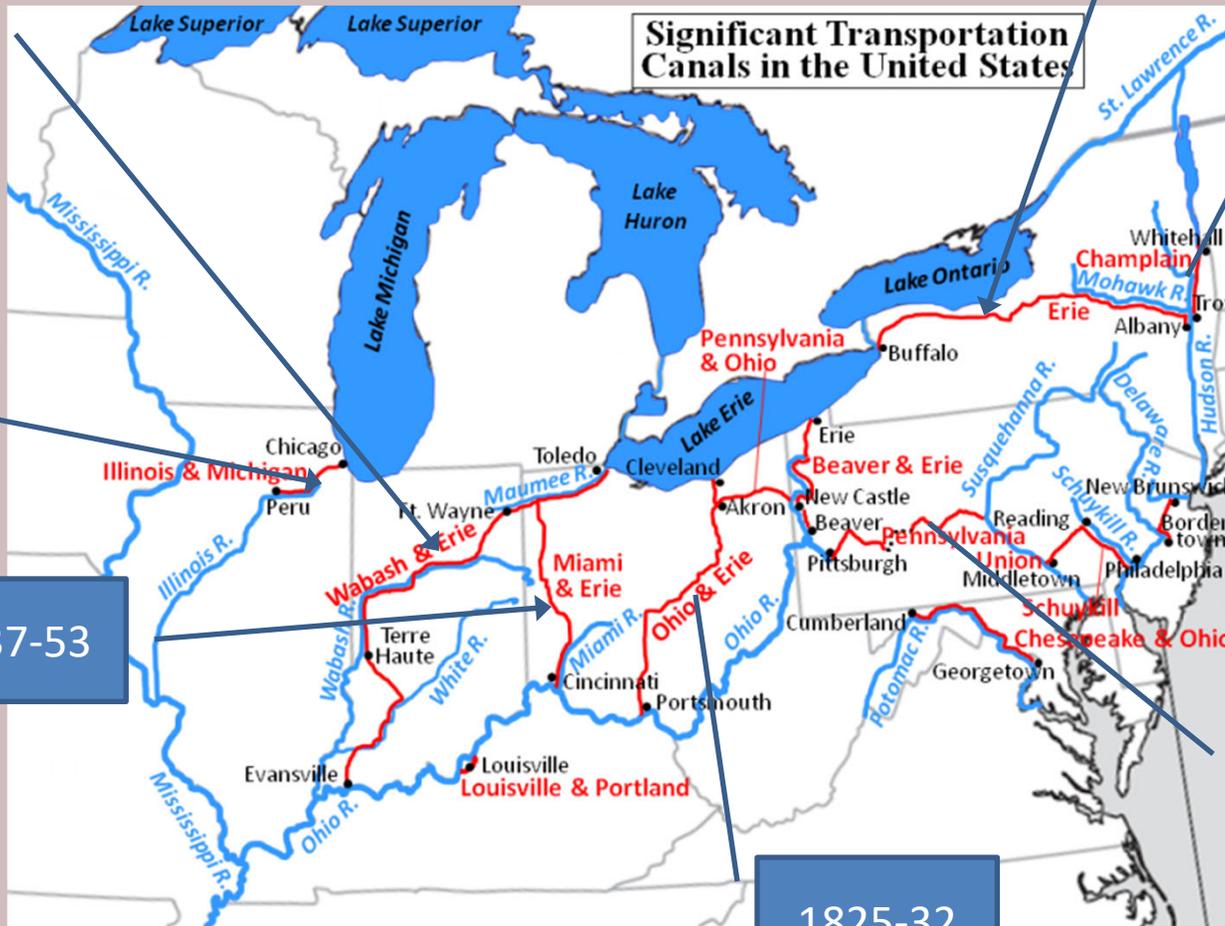
1818-23

1836-48

1837-53

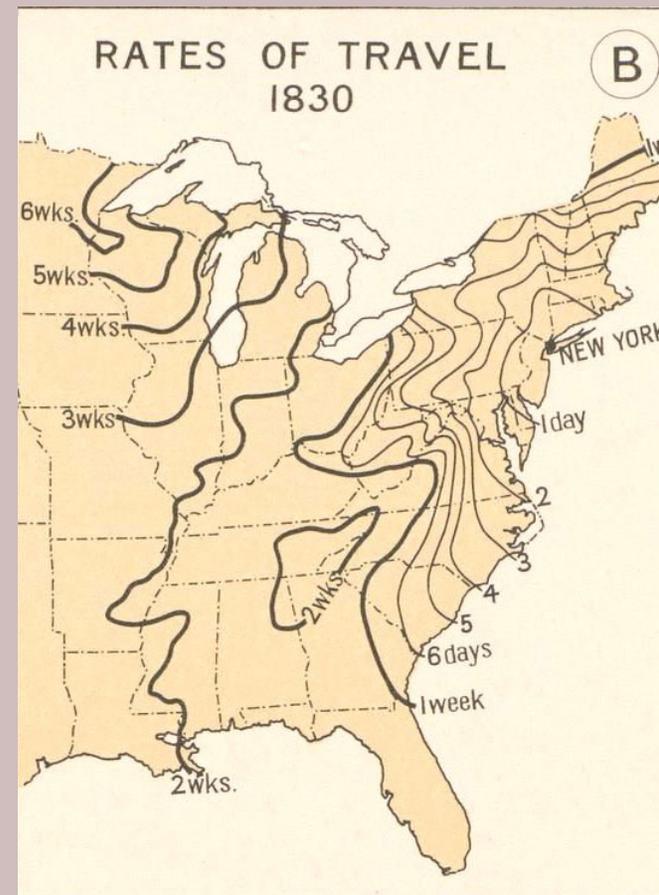
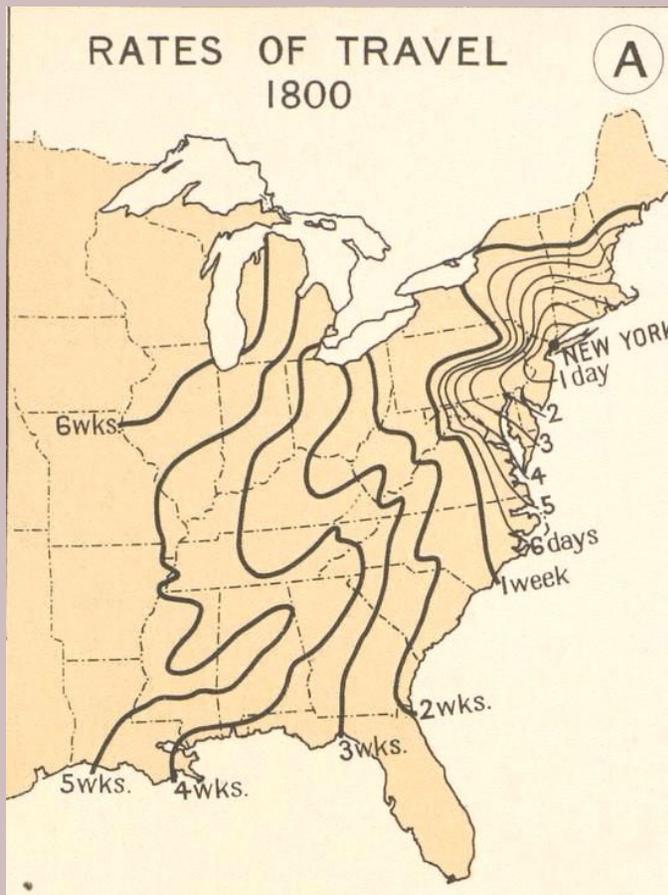
1828-50

1825-32



FamilySearch.org

# Post-Revolutionary War Rates of Travel



# Overland Travel

## “Prairie Schooner”



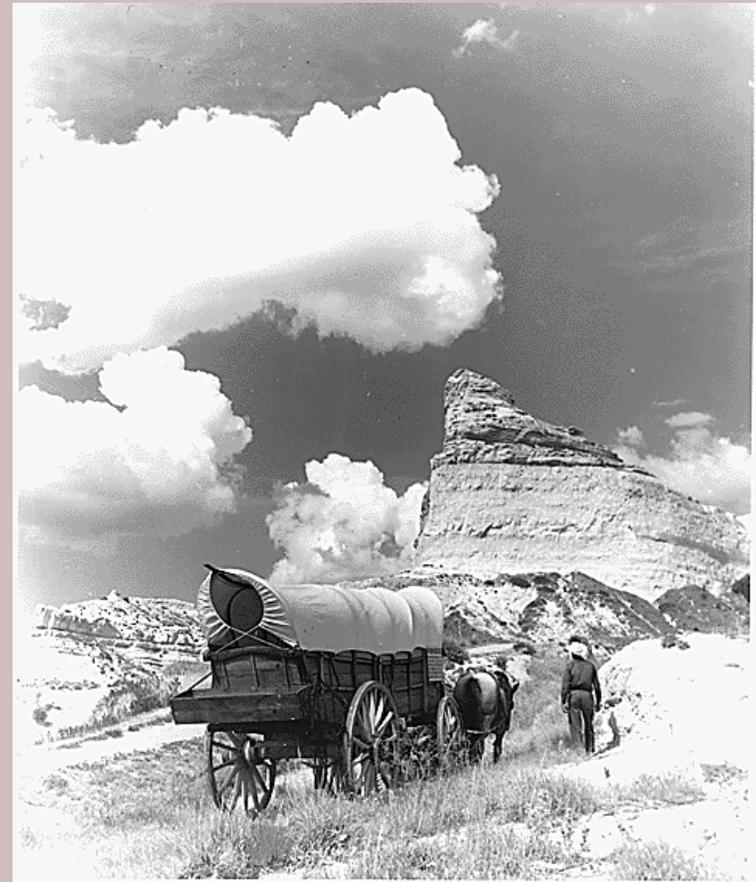
Edward Roper, A Prairie Schooner on the Cariboo Road or in the vicinity of Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains, c. 1887

## Major Trails, 1840-1900

- Oregon Trail
- Mormon Trail
- California Trail
- Santa Fe Trail

# Oregon Trail

- First laid out 1811 by trappers – only a footpath
- By 1836 – wagons could travel to Fort Hall, Idaho
- 1843 – 1,000 settlers left Elm Grove, Missouri for Oregon



Scotts Bluff, Nebraska



# Mormon Trail

- Migration begun in 1846
- From Nauvoo, Illinois to Salt Lake City, Utah



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# Mormon Migration Database, 1840-1932

Index of pioneer immigrants with image links to journals, autobiographies, letters, and other narratives. The immigrants were from the British, Scandinavian, Swedish, and Netherlands Missions. Images of the materials are found on the Brigham Young University website at [mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu](http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu).

HOW TO USE THIS COLLECTION

First Names  Last Names

Place  Year

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# FamilySearch: Mormon Migration, 1840-1932

Search > [Immigration & Travel](#)

# Utah, U.S., Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Records, 1847-1868

Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)  Last Name

|           | Day                            | Month                          | Year                 |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Birth     | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| Death     | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| Arrival   | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| Departure | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text"/> |
| Any Event | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text" value="v"/> | <input type="text"/> |

Keyword   
e.g. pilot or "Flying Tigers" v

Business Name

Gender

## Related data collections

[U.S., Mormon Migration Records, 1840-1932](#)

This is an index of pioneer immigrants with image links to journals, autobiographies, letters, and other narratives.

[Members of the Mormon Battalion](#)

Army strong. The Mormon Brigade of the Army of the West formed in 1846 and traveled 2,000 miles to aid emigrants and help secure the West.

[Salt Lake City, Utah, U.S., Cemetery Records, 1847-1976](#)

This collection contains cemetery records from Salt Lake City, Utah, 1847-1976.

[Salt Lake County, Utah, U.S., Militia Records, 1895](#)

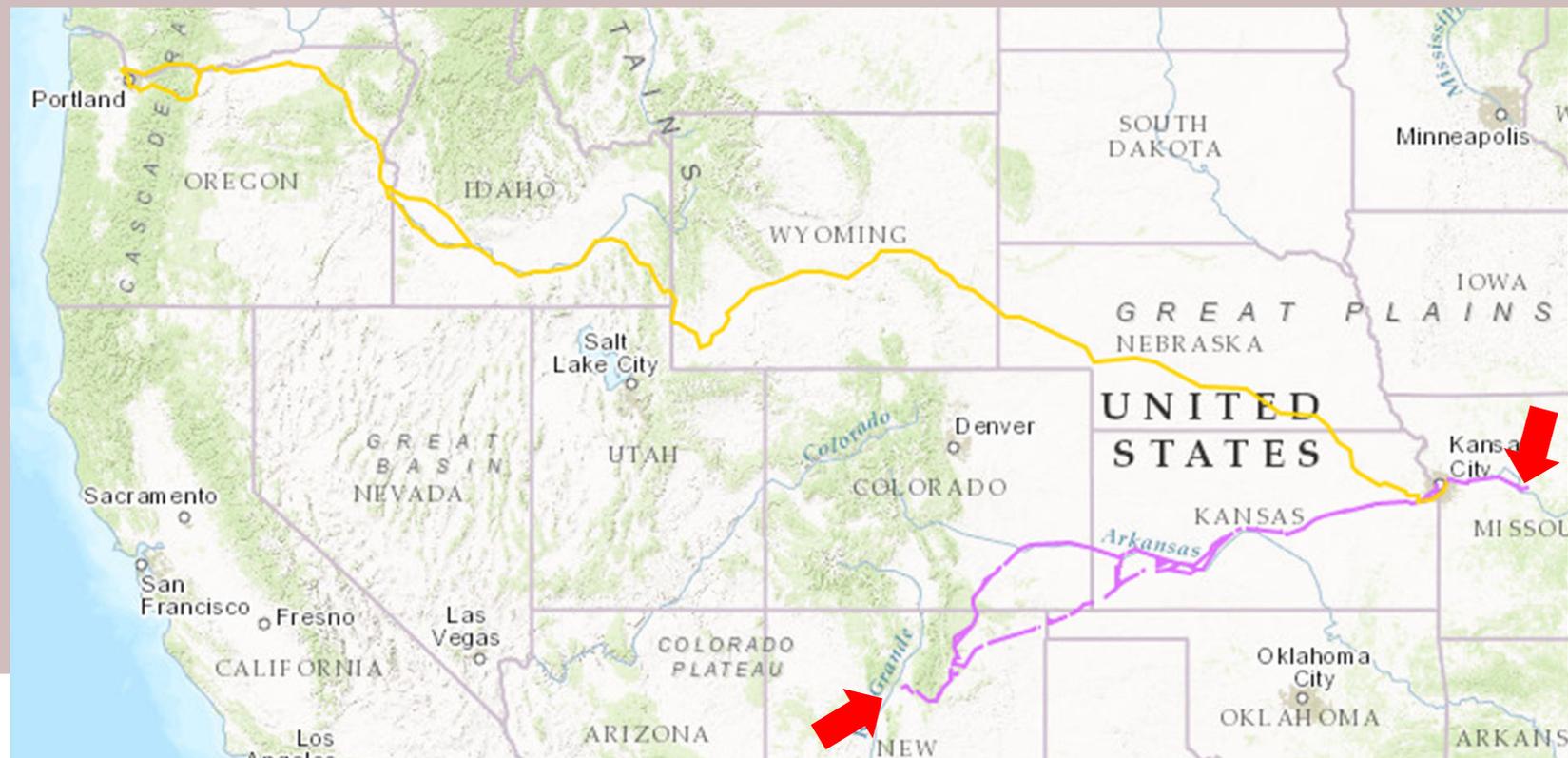
This collection contains militia service information for Salt Lake county, Utah, in 1895.

[All Schools, Directories & Church Histories in the Card Catalog](#)

Ancestry.com: Utah, U.S., Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Records, 1847-1868

# Santa Fe Trail

- First blazed in 1821 by William Becknell to open trade with Mexico. Franklin, MO to Santa Fe, NM.



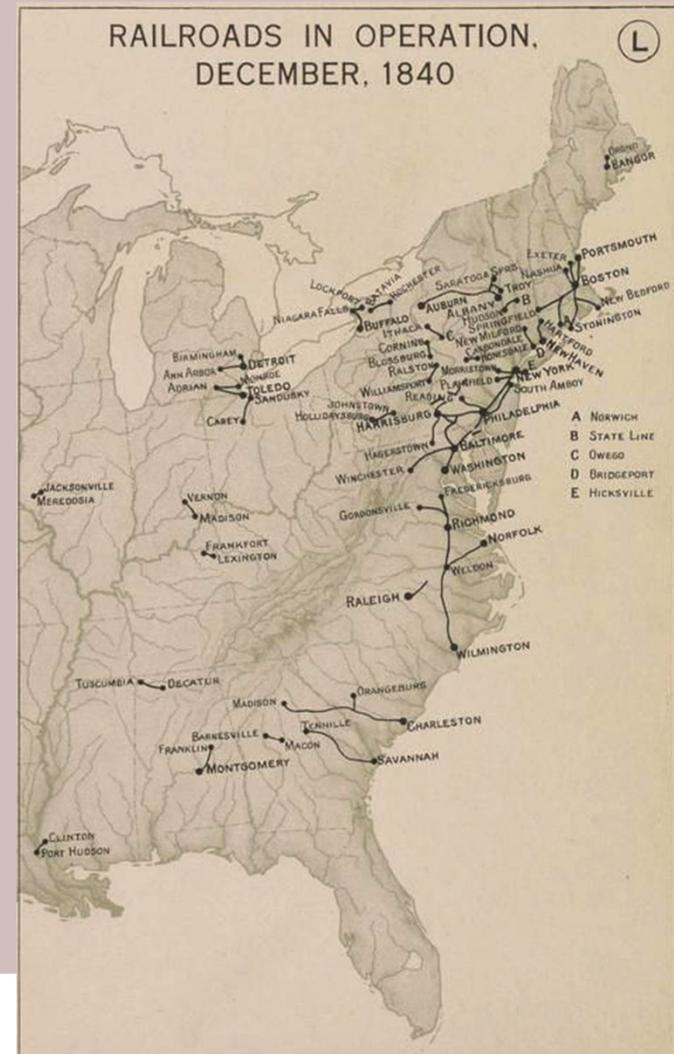
# California Trail

- Route laid out in 1844 but took off during the Gold Rush
- Many alternative routes developed



# Railroad Development

- Railroad development allowed another way to cross (or partly cross) the country
- First railroad: Baltimore & Ohio, 1830
- Early challenges: disconnected routes, varying track gauges



# Transcontinental Railroad

- Discussions began in 1830. Focused on route railroad would take
- Pony Express (1860-1861) proved the central route could operate even in winter
- Congress chartered Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroad Companies in May 1862
- Central Pacific began construction at Sacramento (1863) and Union Pacific began at Omaha, Nebraska/Council Bluffs, Iowa (1865)

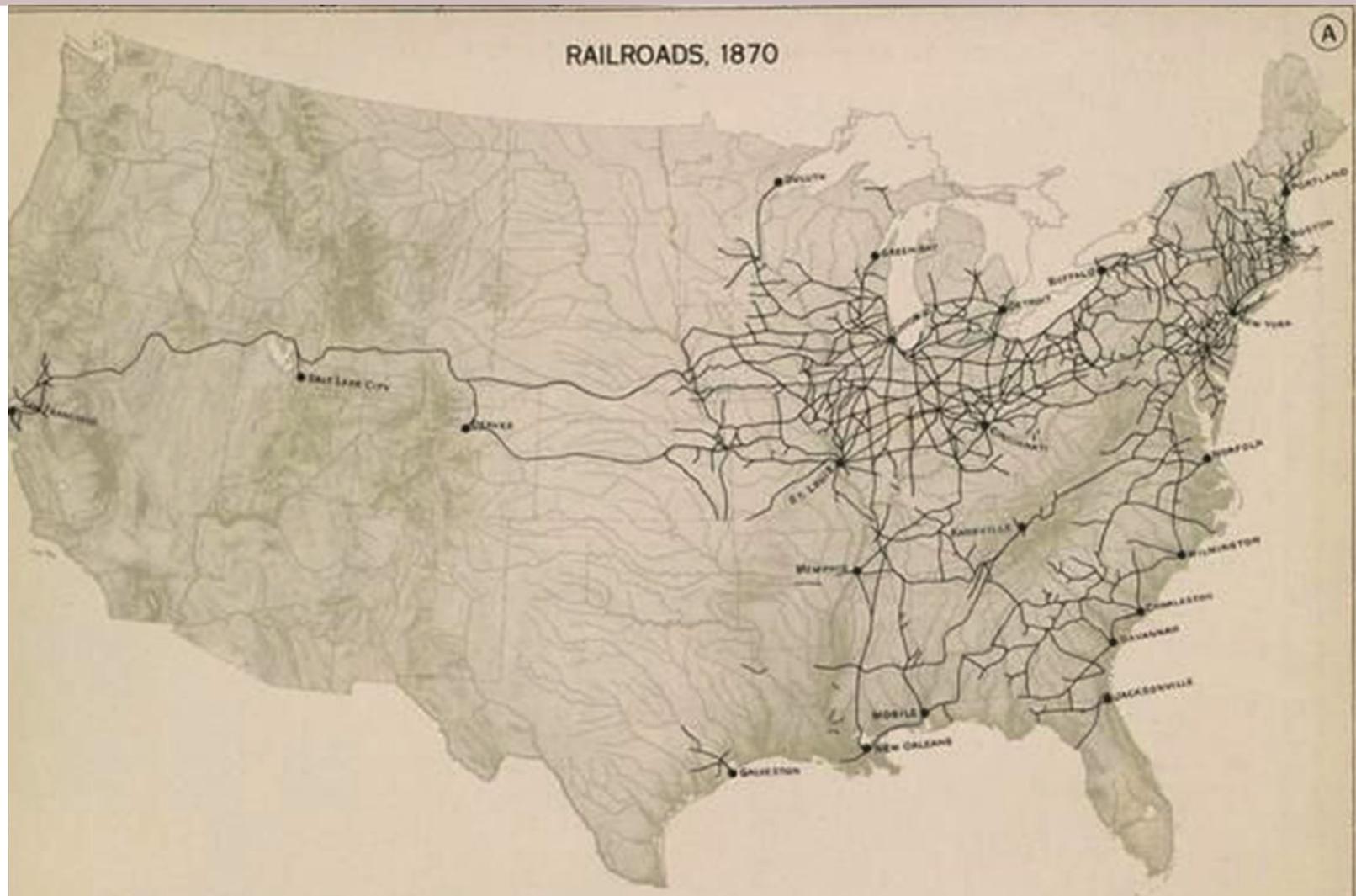
# Transcontinental Railroad



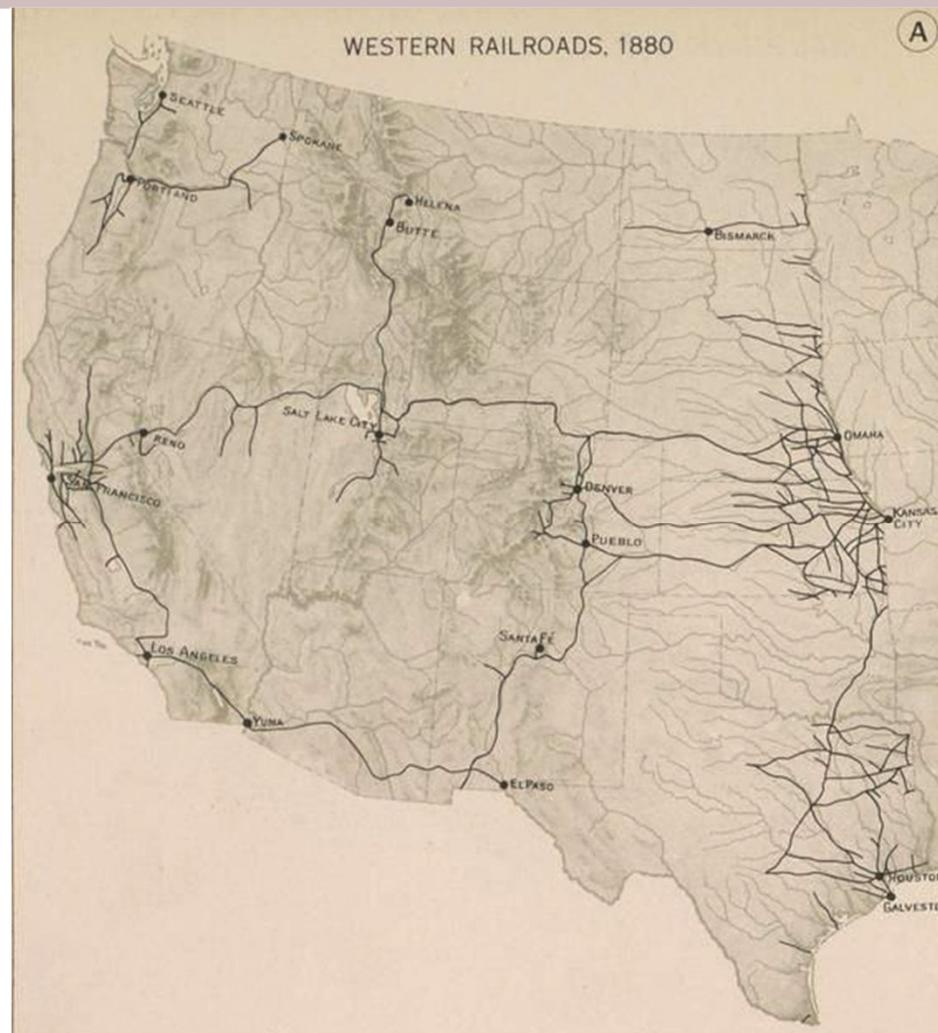
# Golden Spike, 1869



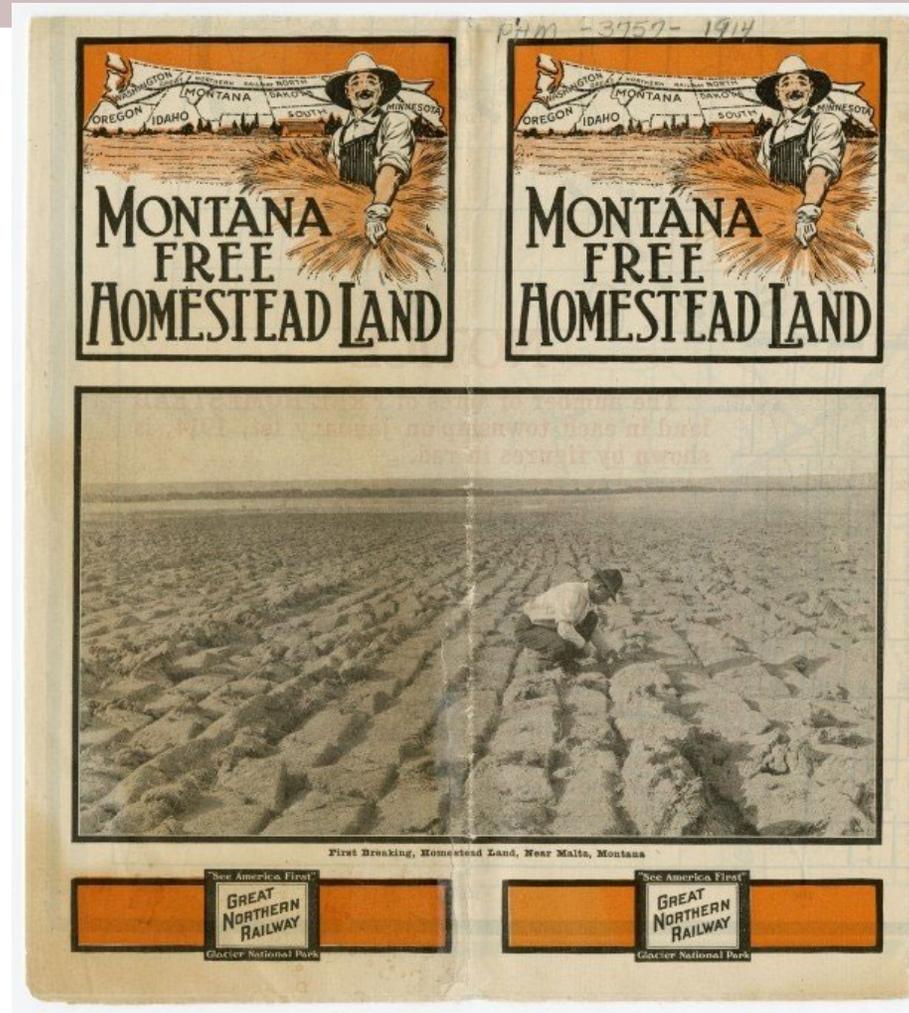
# Railroads, 1870



# Western Railroads, 1880



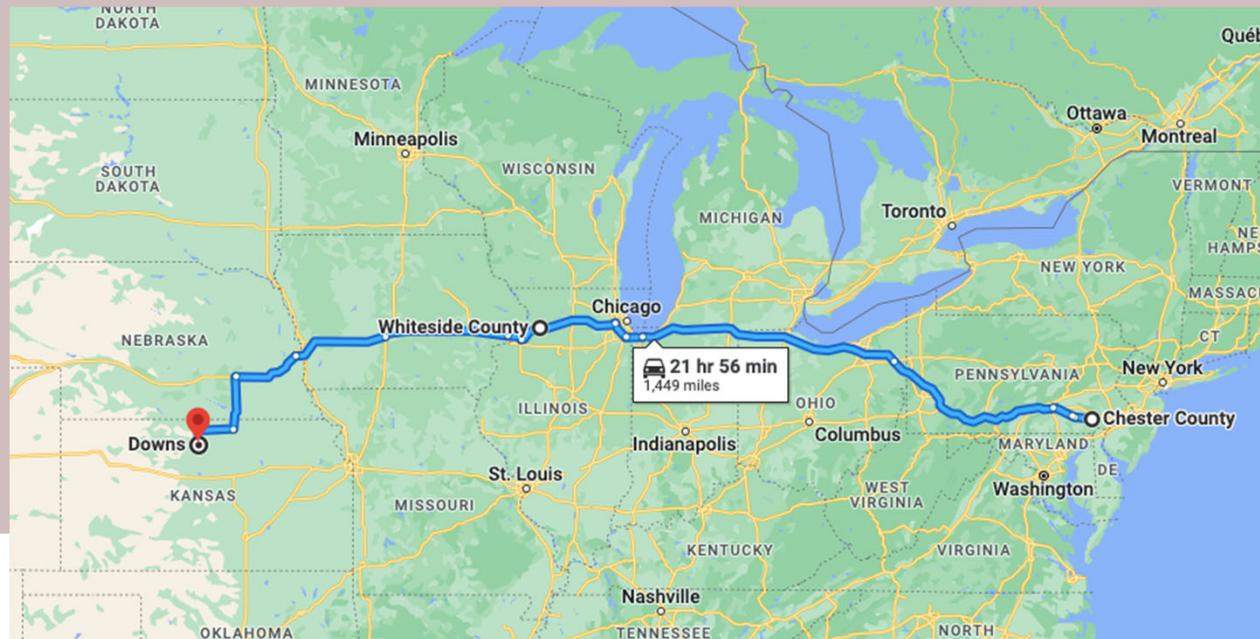
# Pamphlet, 1914



<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-homestead-acts/sources/123>

# Migration Patterns

- Often, but not always, families traveled due West, along the same latitude
- Migration could happen in phases across generations



# Migration Summary

- Identify the push/pull factors for your ancestors
  - Was there an opportunity?
  - How easy was it to get there?
- Colonial era migration constrained by geography and Native Tribes
- Post-Revolutionary War migration fueled by bounty land and speculative land companies
- 1840 onwards – settlers increasingly crossed the high plains and the Rockies to reach the coast

# QUESTIONS?

**Hire Research Services**

*research@nehgs.org*

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*AmericanAncestors.org/chat*

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# Tracing Ancestors on the Move in America 2022

**Thank you for registering for the online course, *Tracing Ancestors on the Move in America*!**

Our ancestors moved near and far seeking economic opportunities, religious freedoms, and closeness to family. These mobile ancestors, however, are notoriously difficult to research. We might have an ancestor in our sights and then—poof!—they're gone; or we may have an ancestor for whom we have no idea of where they came from. This four-session online seminar will give you the context and motivations behind migrations across America from the 17th to 20th centuries, offer strategies for discovering ancestral origins and future movements, discuss go-to records, and provide tools to help track your family on the move.

*This course includes four 90-minute classes; exclusive access to handouts and recordings of each presentation; and in-depth q&a sessions with the instructors. These recordings and all course materials will be available for the foreseeable future.*

## JOIN THE LIVE SESSIONS

Click here to join the live broadcasts: <https://zoom.us/j/96814789718>

*If you are unable to attend the live session, you will be able to watch the recordings on this course page.*

[AmericanAncestors.org/tracing-ancestors-move-america-2022](https://AmericanAncestors.org/tracing-ancestors-move-america-2022)



# THANK YOU!

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