

Westward Migration, 1783-1900

Melanie McComb
Genealogist

August 2023

THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER



American Ancestors®
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Overview

- Push/Pull Migration Factors
- Federal Policies and Other Stimulants
- Advances in Transportation

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

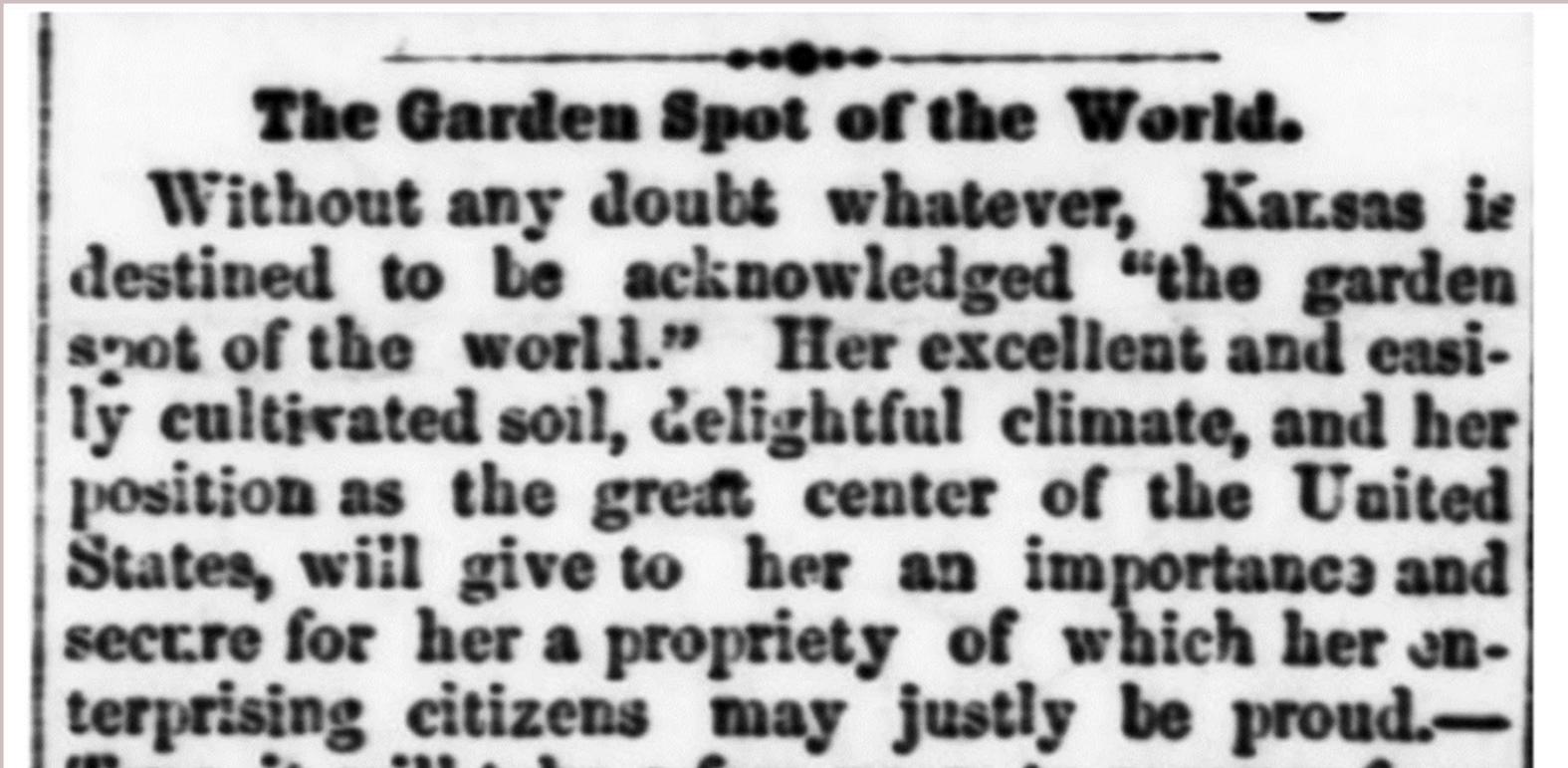
- Land
- Opportunity
- Ease of getting there
- Gold or natural resources
- Employment
- Newspaper accounts
- Family



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

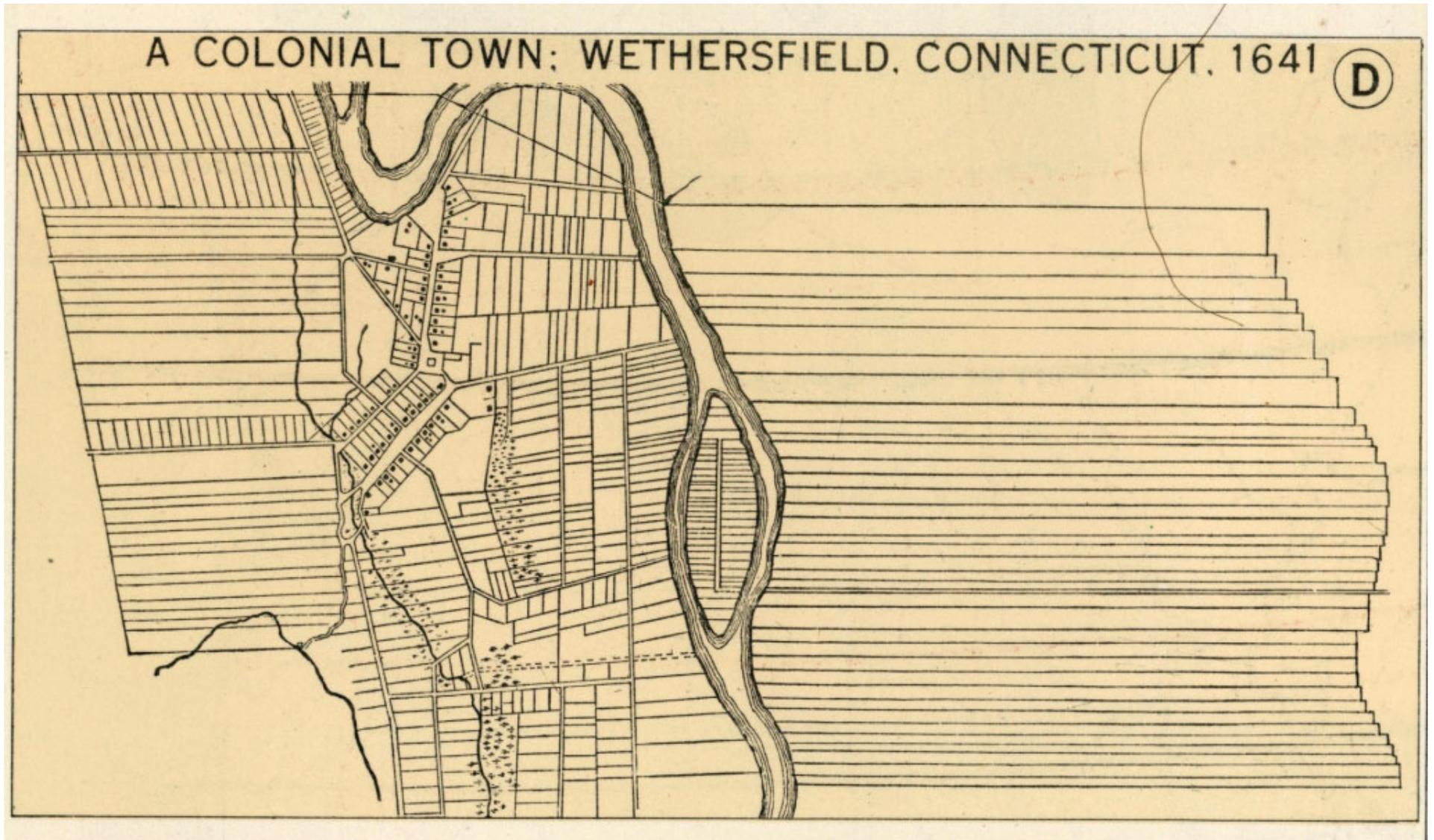
Migration Challenges

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



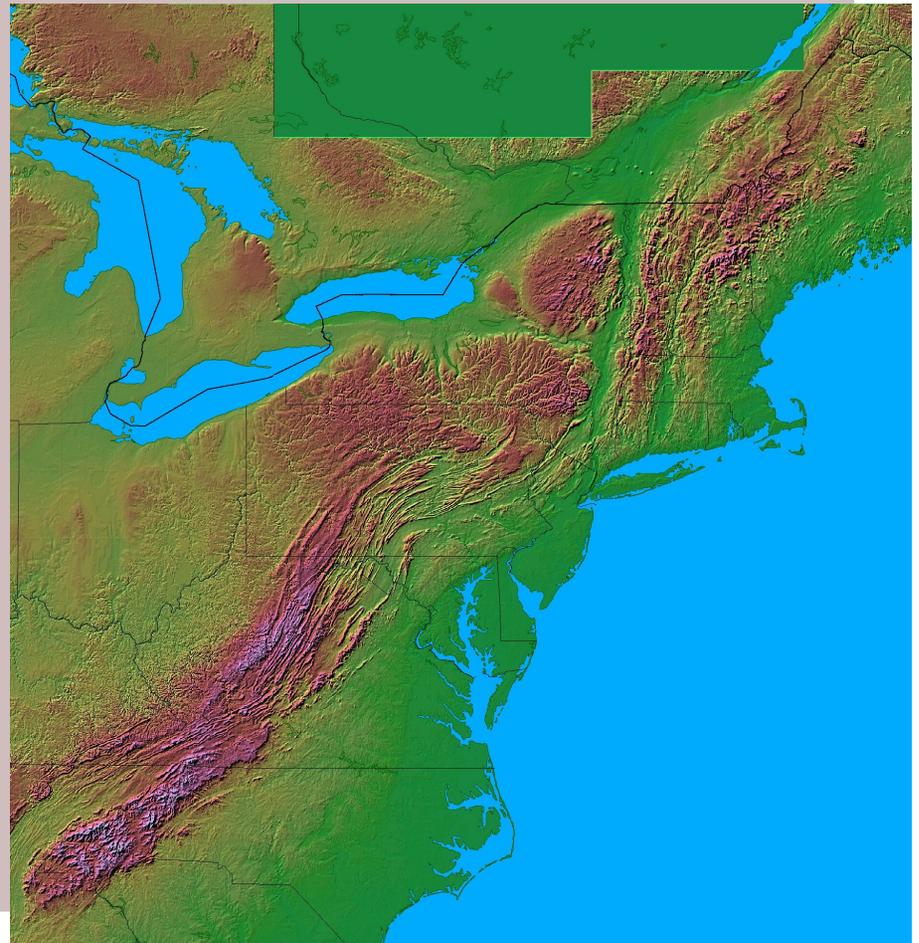




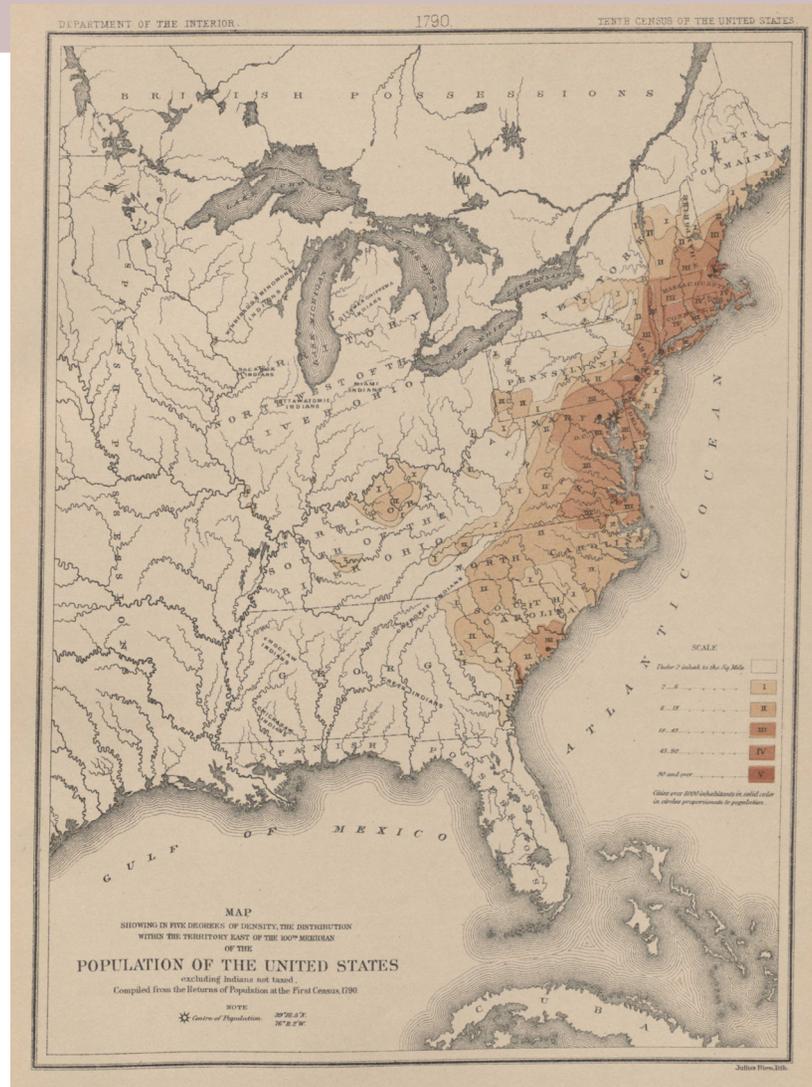


Crossing the Mountains

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



Population Distribution, 1790

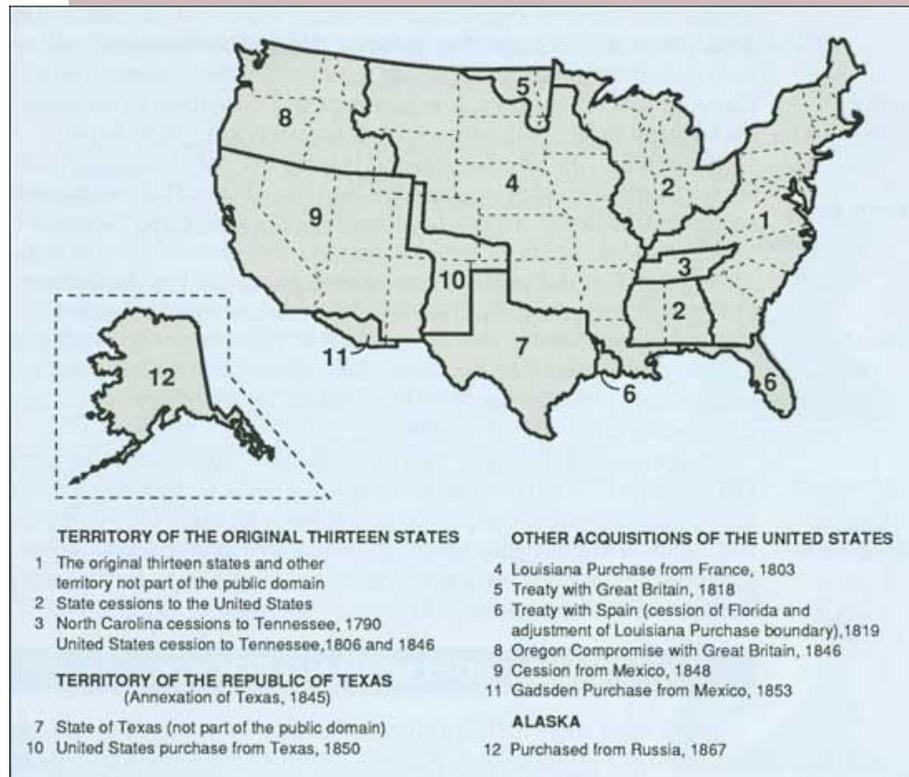


Population Distribution, 1790



Opening the West

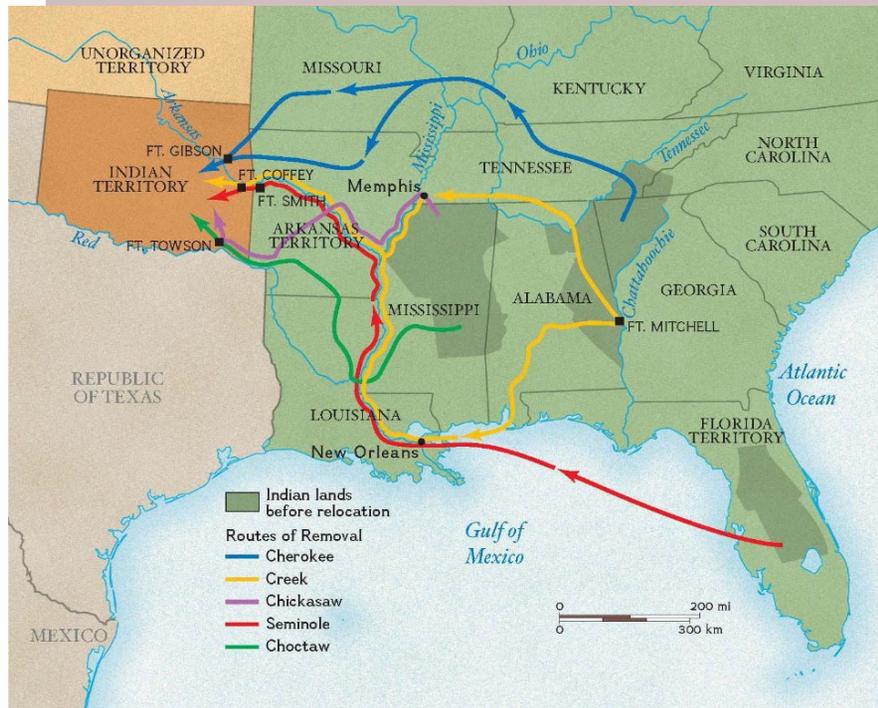
Public Land/Public Domain



- 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

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

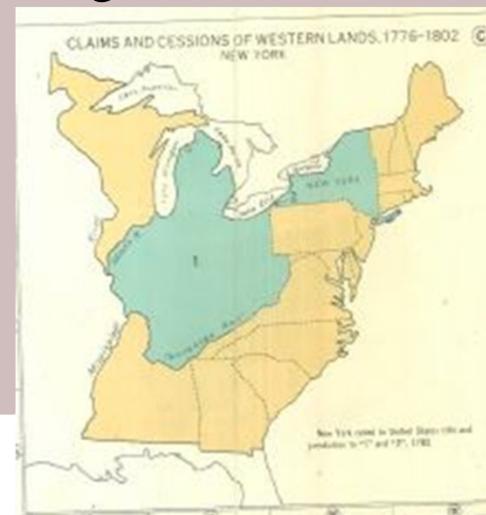
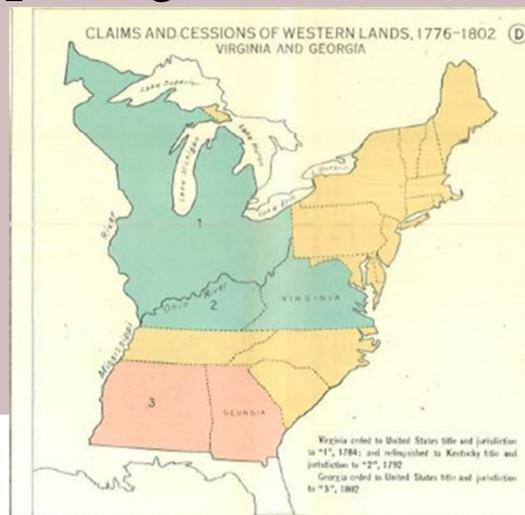
Land: An Incentive

- 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

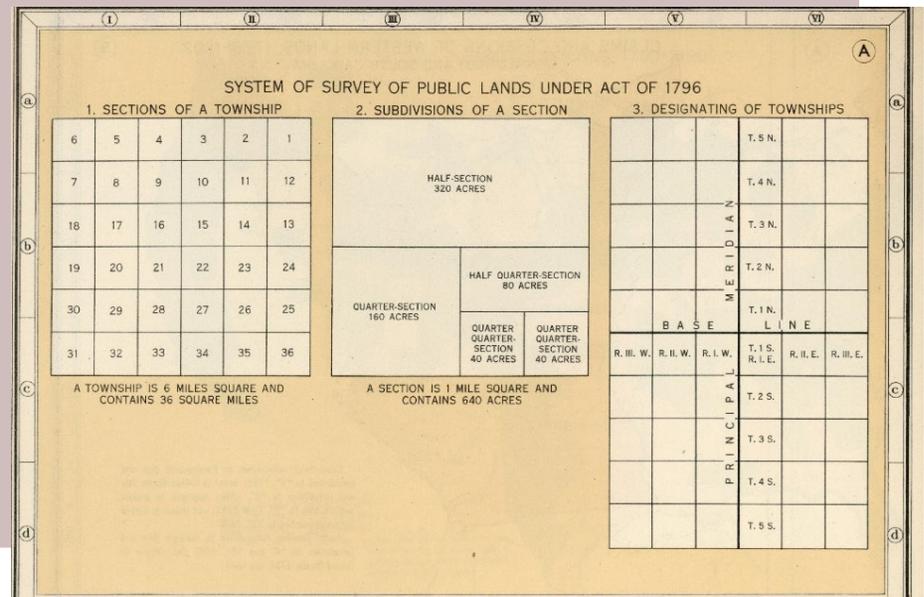
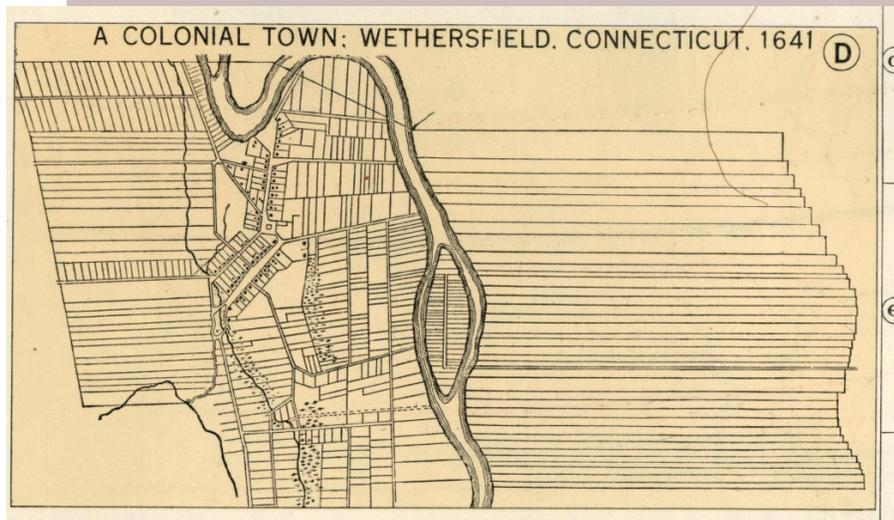


Land Survey Systems

Colonial

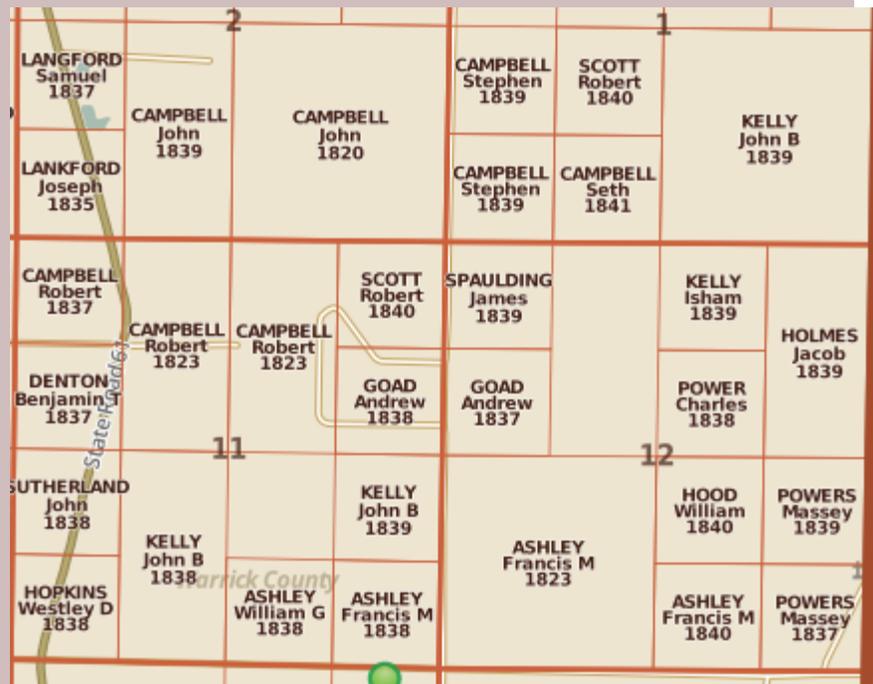
Post-1796:

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

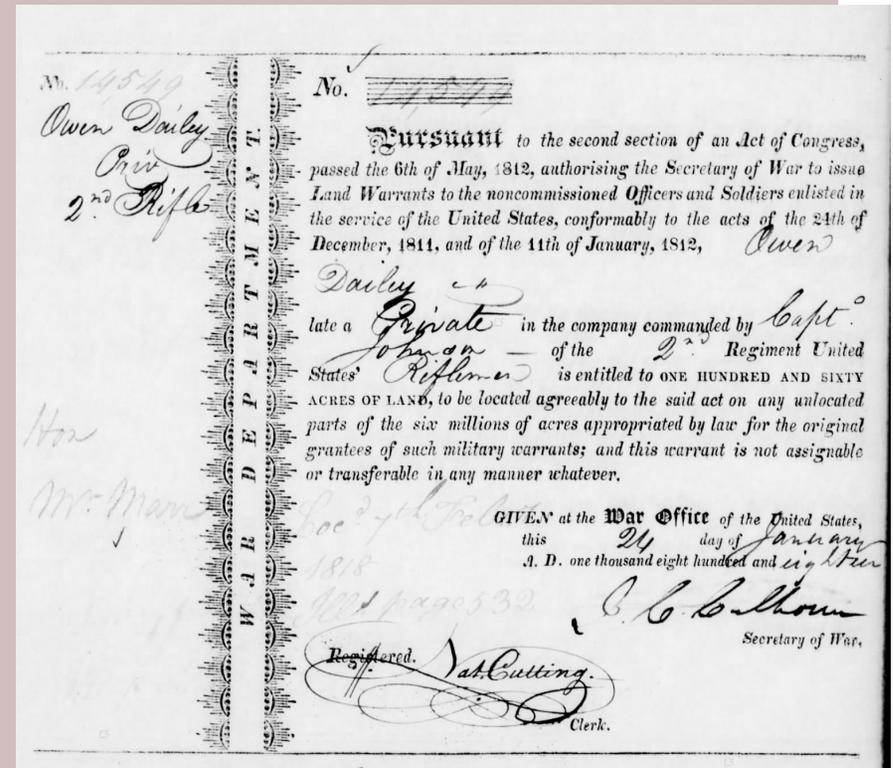
See Clifford Neal Smith, *Federal Land Series*, Chicago: American Library Association, 1973

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.

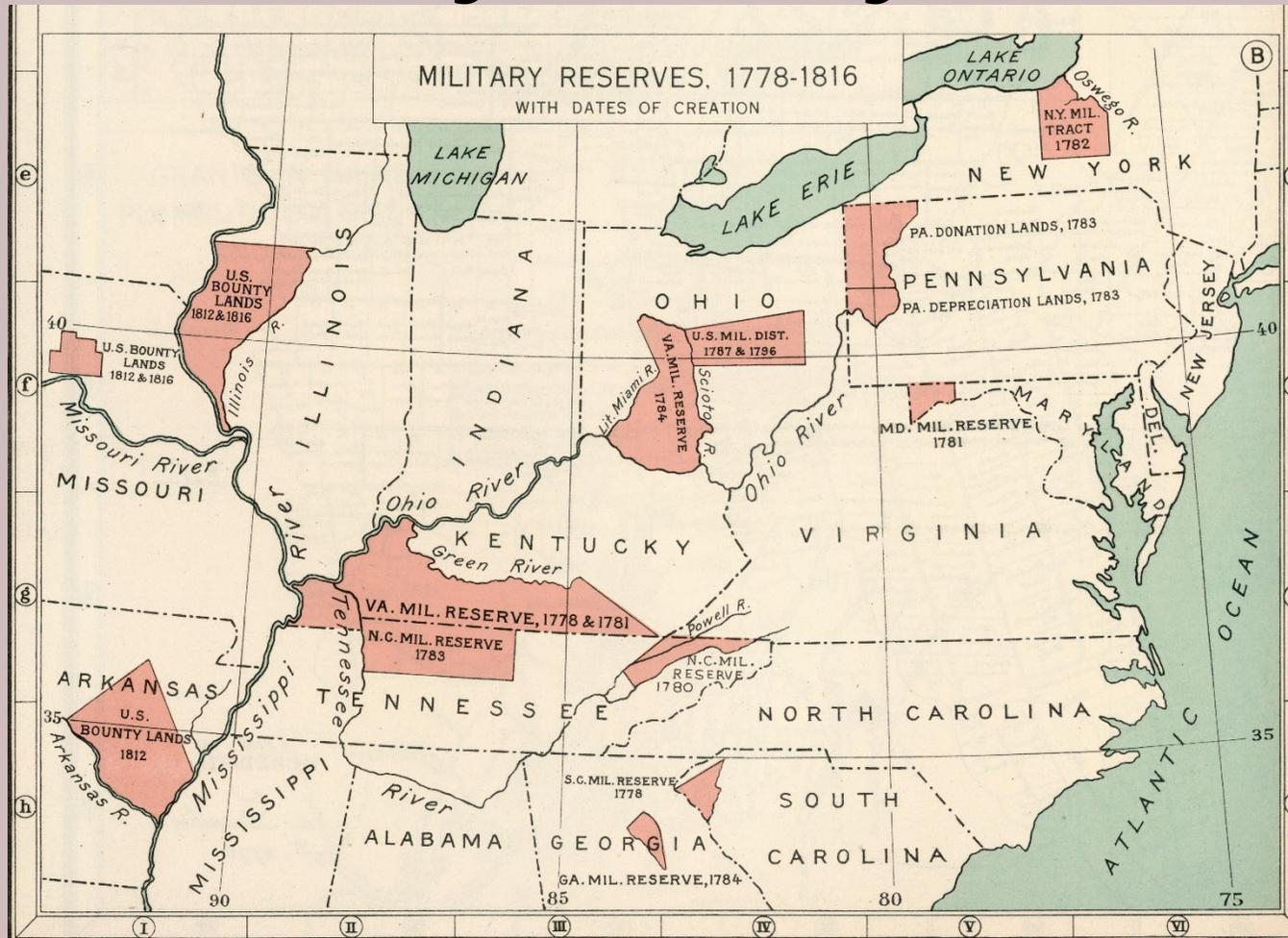
Paperwork to Claim Land

- 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



Provided in association with National Archives and Records Administration

Browse this collection

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

War

Choose... ▾

Record Set

▾

Warrant Range

Source Information

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

More help

[How to search Ancestry](#)

[Finding records](#)

[Search tips](#)

[Refining your search to improve](#)

Ancestry.com

Growth of Land Speculation

Speculative Land Companies

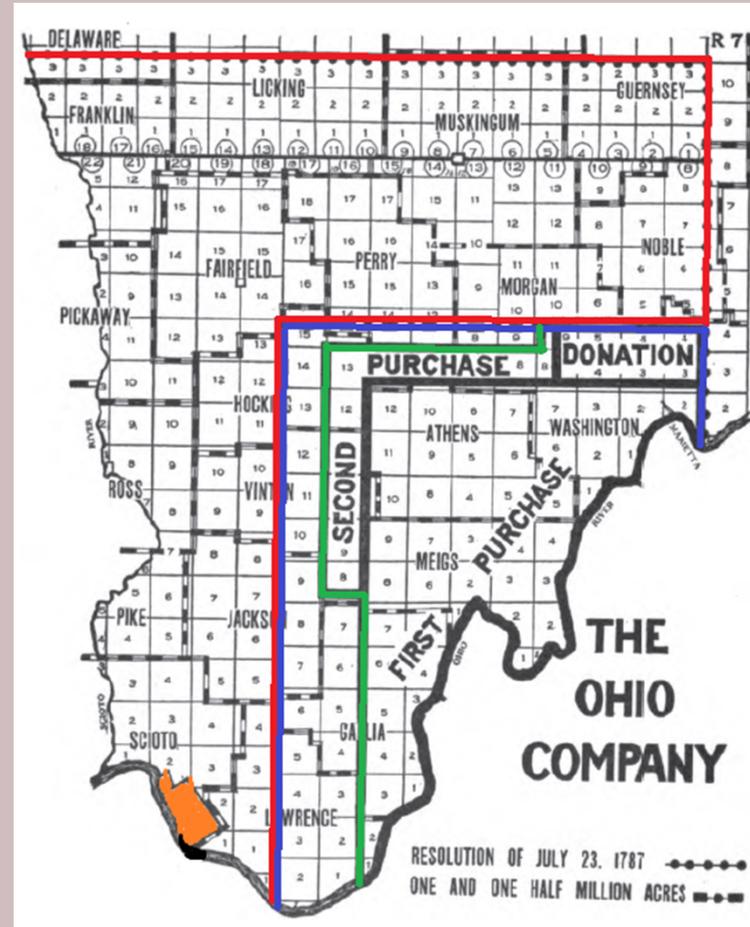
- Sale of public lands
 - Starting in the late 1700s
 - Earliest tracts were sold for pennies per acre to land companies, but generated necessary revenue for the U.S. government
- Series of land laws allowed for sale of territorial land for a minimum of \$2/acre
- Land companies
 - Purchased large tracts 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)

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

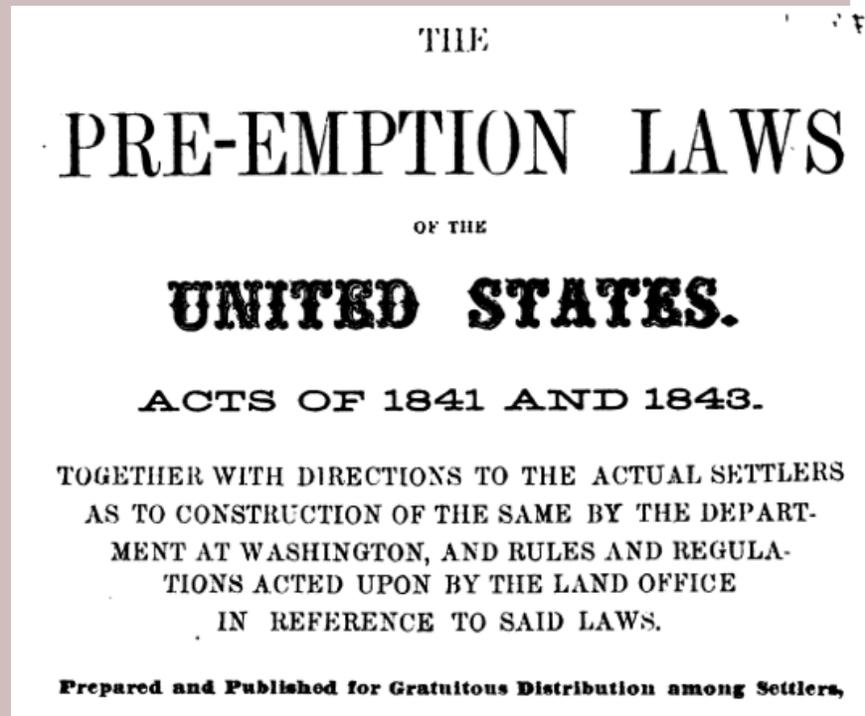
Federal Incentives

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

[Home](#)
[Search Documents](#)
[Reference Center](#)
[Support](#)
[Pathfinder](#)
Shopping Cart

▶ Search Documents

Search Documents By Type
Search Documents By Location
Search Documents By Identifier

Patents ▶

[Surveys](#)

[LSR](#)

[CDI](#)

[Tract Books](#)

[Clear Form](#)

Location

State: ▼

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:

Search Patents

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

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.
- For more tips and help, check out our [Patent Search Overview](#).

https://glorerecords.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



Provided in association with National Archives and Records Administration

Browse this collection

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

State

Iowa

Land Office

Des Moines

Final Certificate Year

1873

Township and Range

- [067 North, 015 West](#)
- [067 North, 025 West](#)
- [067 North, 028 West](#)
- [067 North, 030 West](#)
- [067 North, 033 West](#)
- [067 North, 034 West](#)
- [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

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

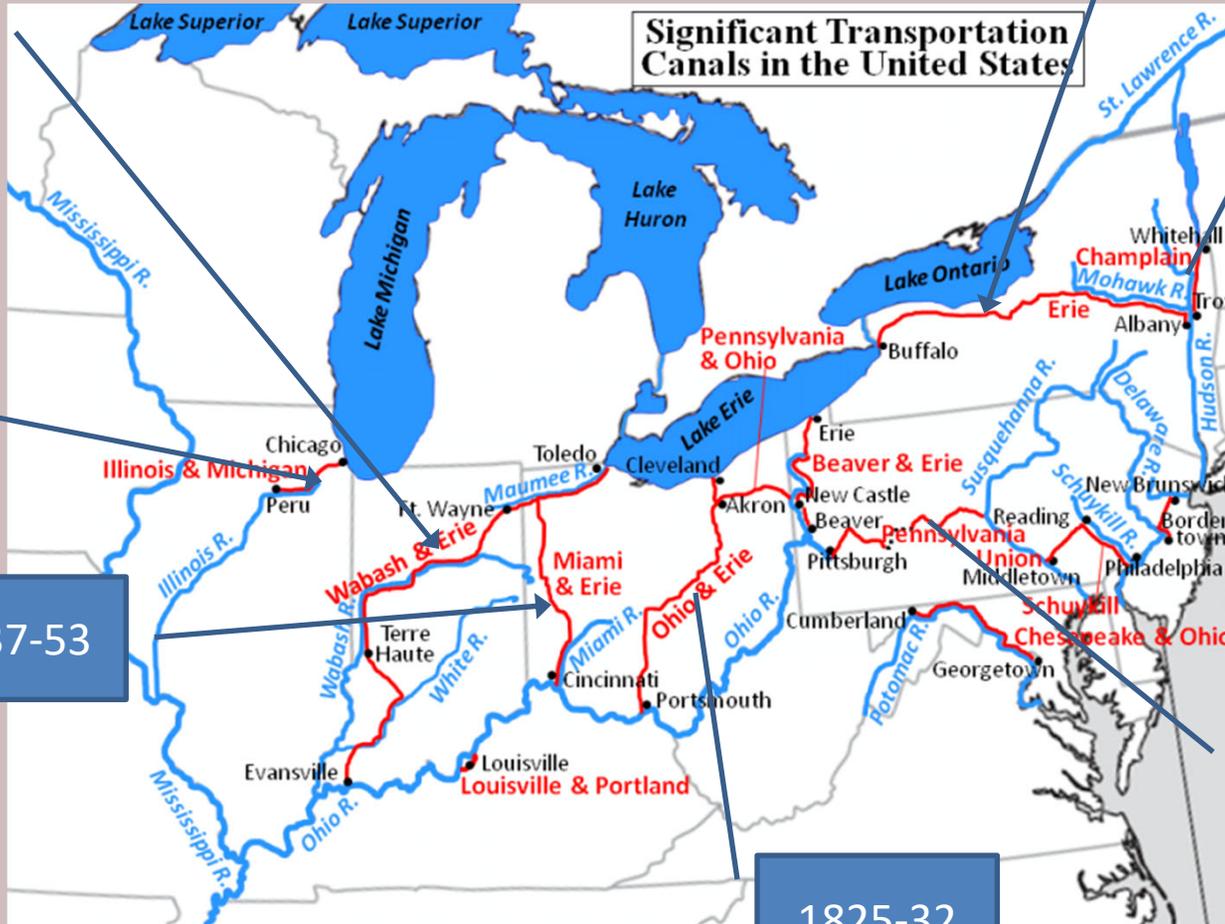
1818-23

1836-48

1837-53

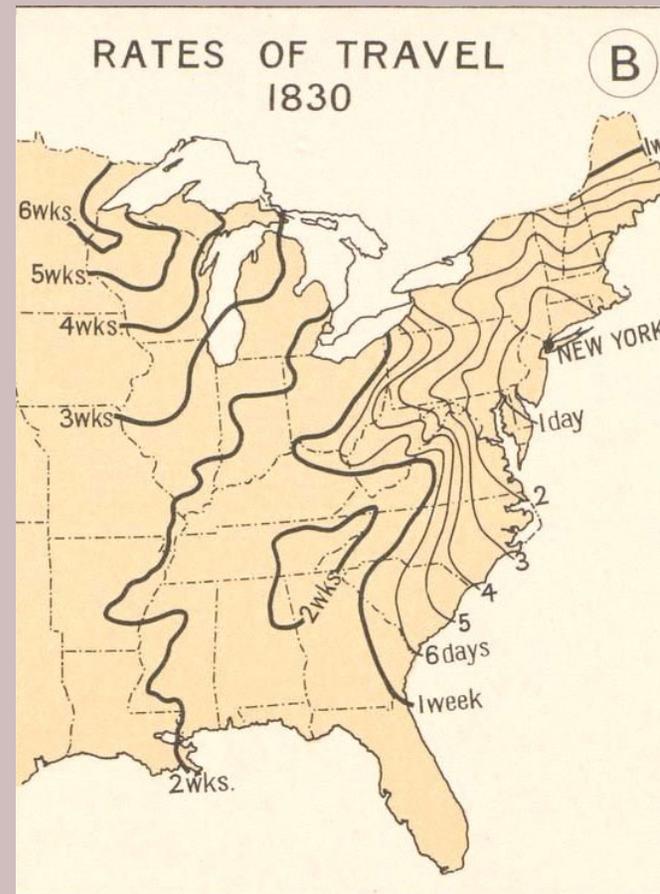
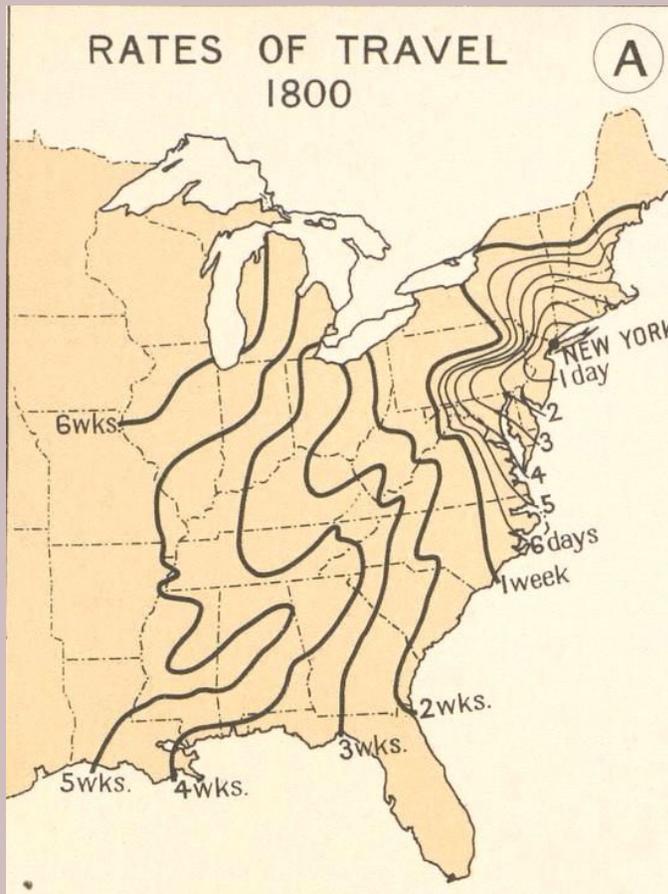
1828-50

1825-32



FamilySearch.org

Post-Revolutionary War Rates of Travel



Overland Travel

“Prairie Schooner”



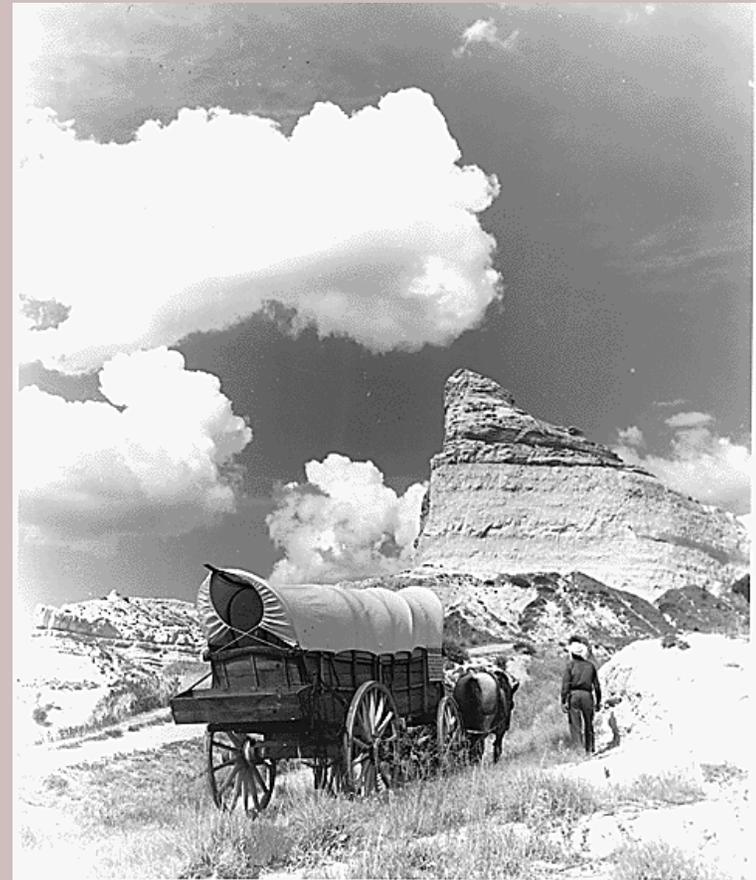
Edward Roper, A Prairie Schooner on the Cariboo Road or in the vicinity of Rogers Pass, Selkirk Mountains, c. 1887

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



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.

HOW TO USE THIS COLLECTION

First Names	Last Names
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Place	Year
<input type="text" value="City, County, State, Province, or Country"/>	<input type="text" value="Birth or Death Year"/>
<input type="button" value="SEARCH"/>	MORE OPTIONS



Cite This Collection

"Mormon Migration Database, 1840-1932." Database. *FamilySearch*. <http://FamilySearch.org> : 18 July 2022. Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

[COPY CITATION](#)

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.



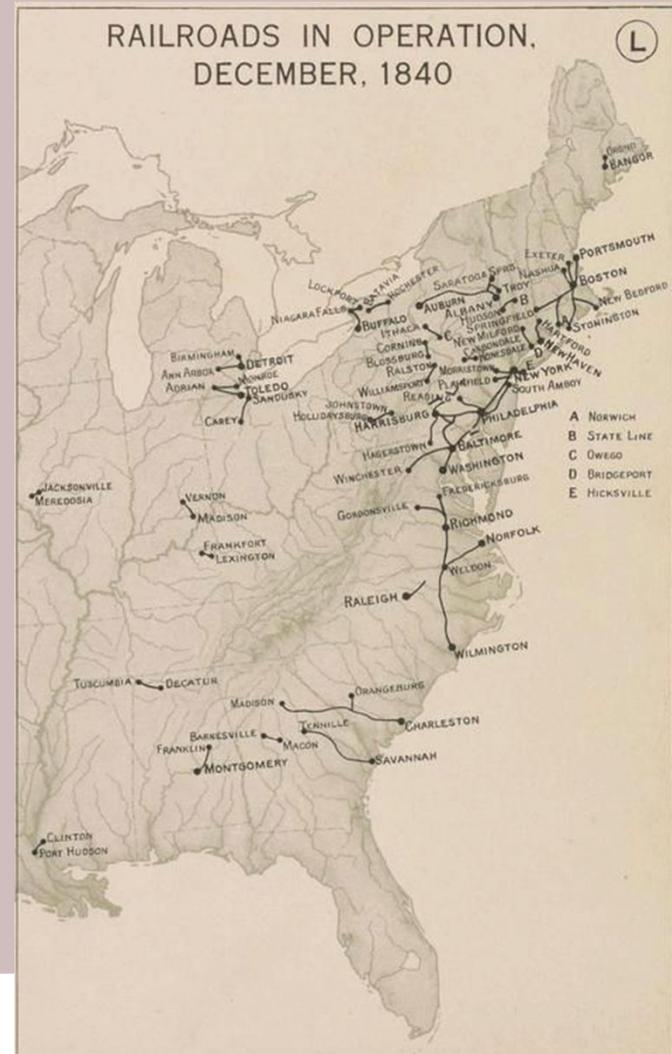
California Trail

- 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)

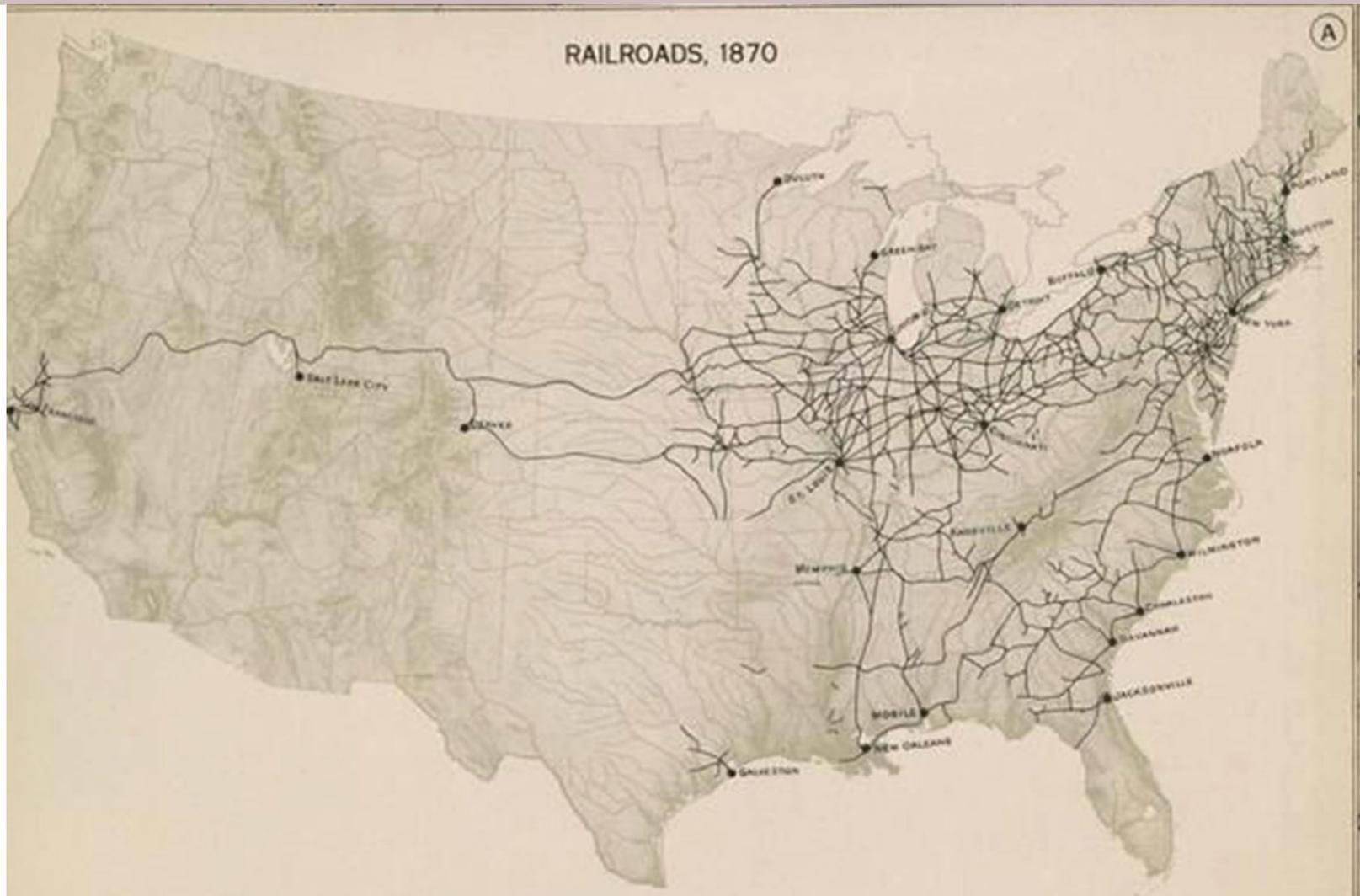
Transcontinental Railroad



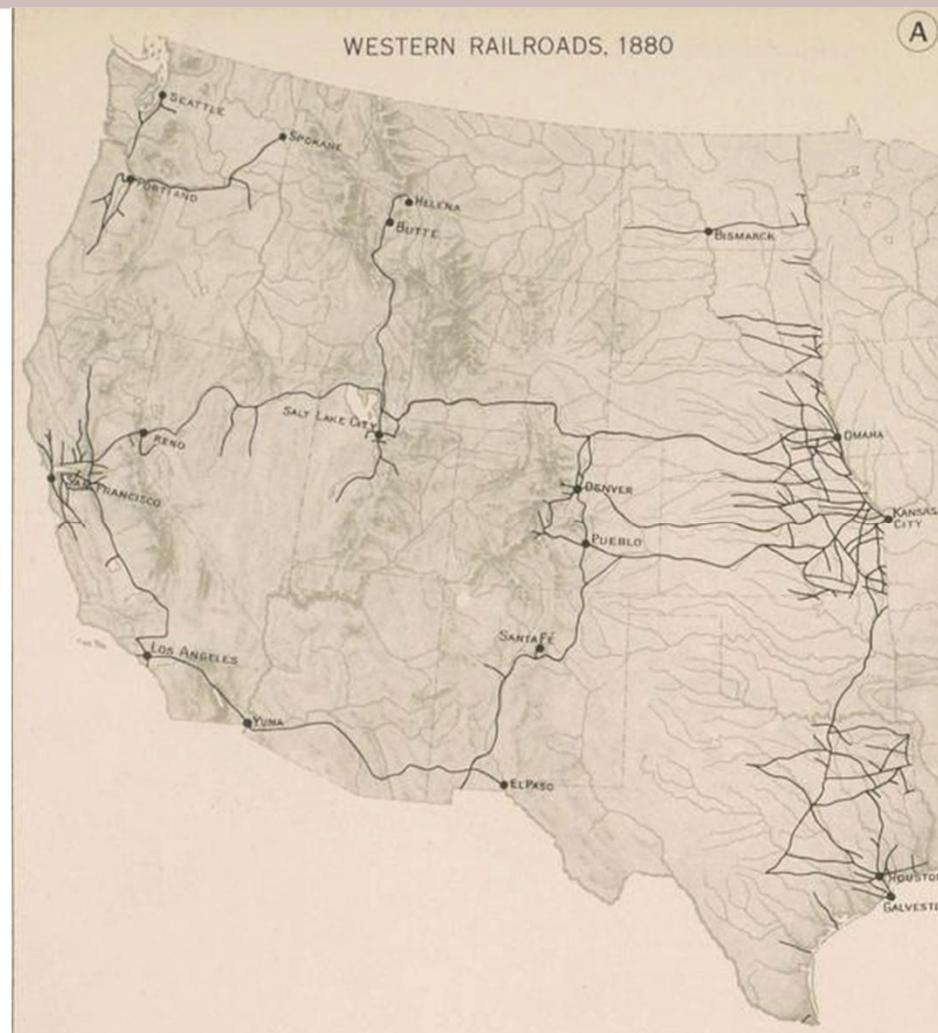
Golden Spike, 1869



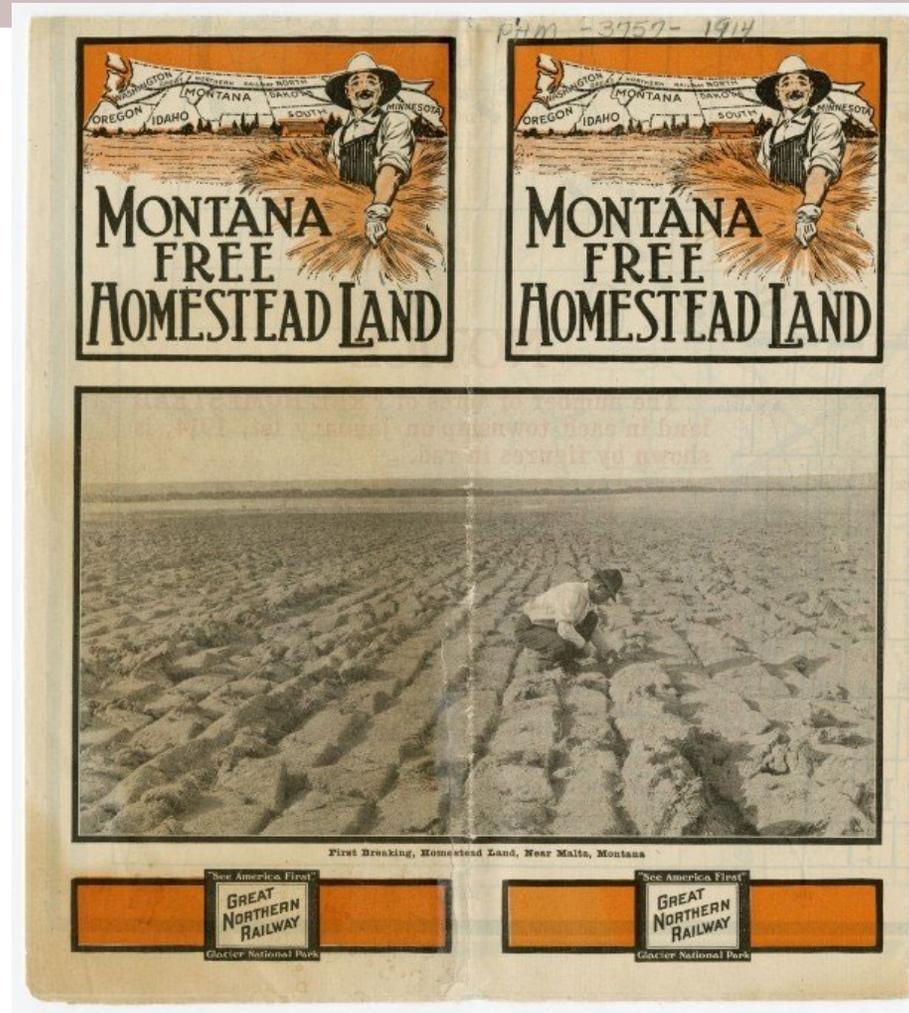
Railroads, 1870



Western Railroads, 1880



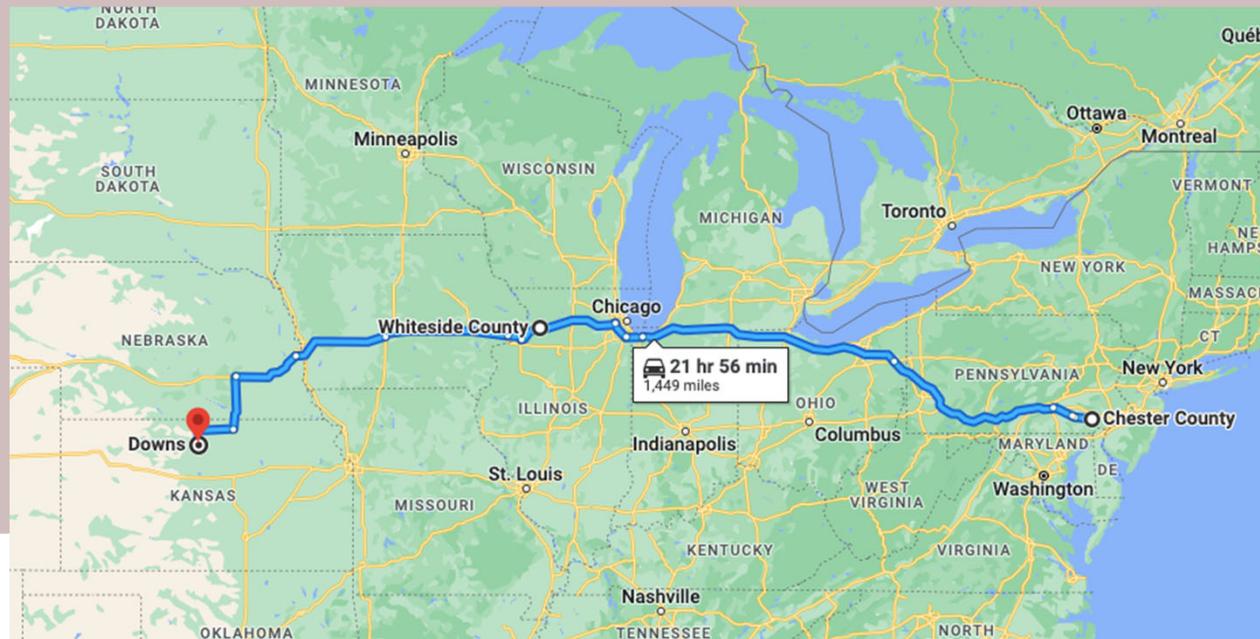
Pamphlet, 1914



<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

Chat with a Genealogist

AmericanAncestors.org/chat



THANK YOU!

AmericanAncestors.org



NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC
GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

AmericanAncestors.org

Copyright © 2023