

An aerial photograph of a farm with a winding road. The fields are a mix of green and brown, indicating different crops or stages of growth. The road is a light color, curving through the landscape.

Farming the Plains

Chapter 2 Section 2

USH Honors

Learning Objectives & Essential Question

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to explain the rapid settlement of the Great Plains due to homesteading.
- Students will be able to describe how early settlers survived on the plains and transformed them into profitable farm land.

Essential Question

- How did westward migration after the Civil War affect the United States?

Short Response:

- *Describe how farming transformed the West.*
- *Cite specific examples/evidence to support your answer.*

Points Earned:	Explanation:
4	Students can identify at least 4 major ways that farming transformed the West.
3	Students can identify at least 3 major ways that farming transformed the West.
2	Students can identify at least 2 major ways that farming transformed the West.
1	Students can identify at least 1 way that farming transformed the West.
0	Students cannot identify the major ways in which farming transformed the West.



Beginnings of American Settlement

- Why are the Great Plains important?
 - This is a region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains that is open land.



What does this regions look like today?

- **Did the population grow during the Civil War?**

- YES! There was steady growth during the Civil War
- The most growth occurred AFTER the Civil War
- Settlers faced MANY challenges:
 - Weather (blizzards, droughts, tornados, etc...)
 - Native Americans
 - Prairie fires
 - Swarms of invasive bugs



“Nobody can describe a blizzard. There is one kind in which the snow sticks all over everything, and another that is colder, in which the snow drives with terrible force, the sun shining above it. This is the Dakota boomer’s exhilarating weather!”

~from *The Checked Years: A Bonanza Farm Diary, 1884-1888*

Life on the Plains

- **What grows in the Great Plains?**
 - Trees grow naturally near rivers and streams
 - Dry grassland
- **What would people use for housing without timber?**
 - SOD! Chunks of earth cut (even with the roots) and stacked together
- **How would they get water?**
 - DIG! Plains' farmers would dig wells (sometimes 100' deep) and use a hand pump to get the water to the surface.
- **What encouraged growth? Railroads!**
 - Companies sold land along the rail lines to prospective settlers.
 - Advertisements were sent globally to encourage immigration to the American West.



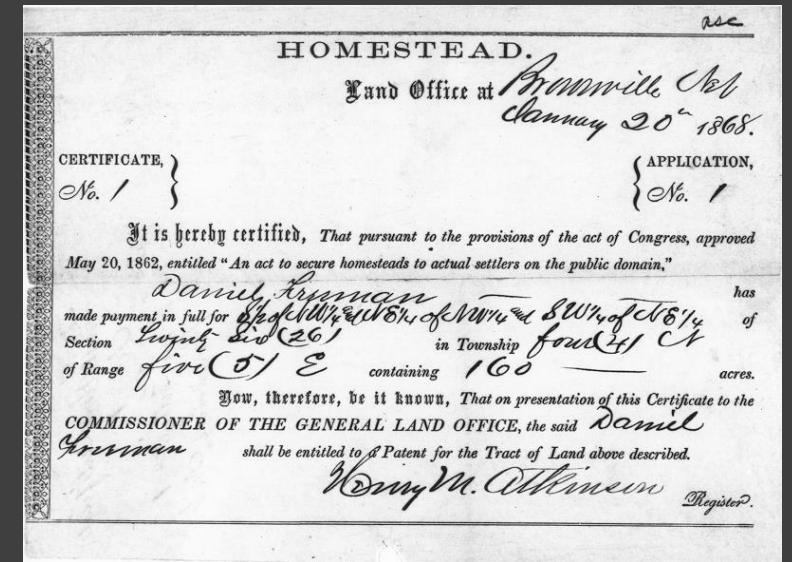
**Sod House,
late 1880s**



**Hand Pump,
1942**

Government Support for Settlement

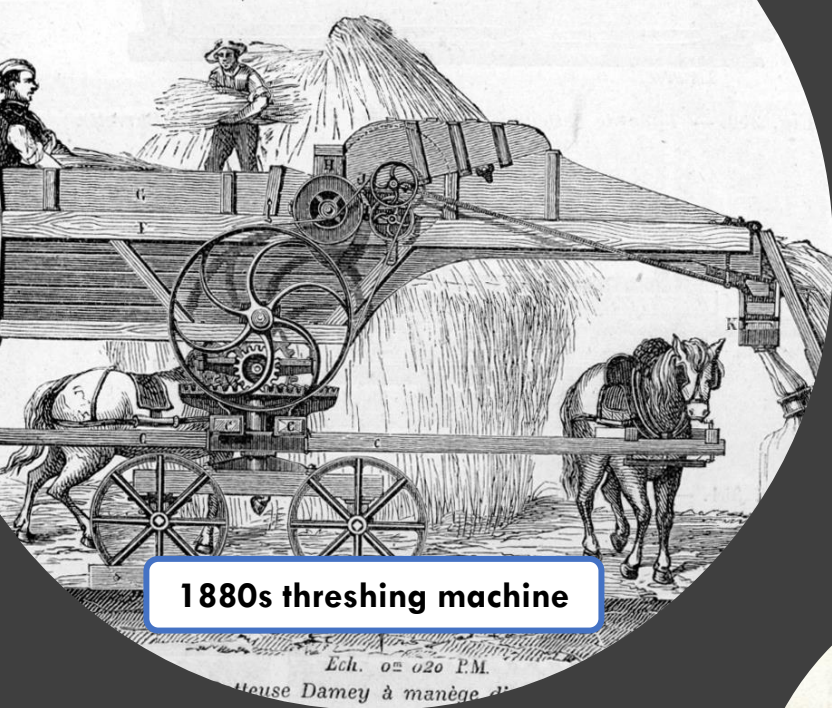
- **How did the government encourage Western settlement?**
 - 1862: Homestead Act offered 160 acres free to any head of household willing to farm the land for 5 years.
 - Applicants would pay a small registration fee.
 - Individuals filed for a homestead: a tract of public land for settlement
- **How did this act impact settlement?**
 - This act provided legal settlement on the frontier
 - Between 1862 and 1900, almost 600,000 families settled in the Great Plains
 - Railroads further encouraged settlement by moving needed supplies to the region (timber and food)



Sound Smart: The Homestead Act (1862)



Technology & the Wheat Belt



1880s threshing machine



1880s steel plow



1940s seed drill

- **How did farming the Plains present problems?**
 - Because of the harsh, dry climate & densely packed soil, farming was hard.
 - New farming methods were needed
- **What methods of farming were used?**
 - **Dry Farming:** planting seeds deep in the ground where there was enough moisture.
 - Steel plows, threshing machines, seed drills and reapers were used.
- **How did this type of farming change the environment?**
 - Sodbusters: those participating in dry farming.
 - The clearing and use would increase the chances of soil blowing away in the dry seasons.
 - Drought, wind erosion, and loosened soil would impact a farmer's ability to keep the homestead.
 - Wealthy farmers could afford mechanical machines for farming.
 - **Bonanza Farms:** a large, highly profitable wheat farm.

Farmers Fall on Hard Times

- **Were there ways that the farmers were supported?**

YES!

- Mass markets for farm machines developed with migration to the plains.
- Morrill Act (1862): assisted with financing agricultural colleges.
- Hatch Act (1887): created agricultural experimental stations.

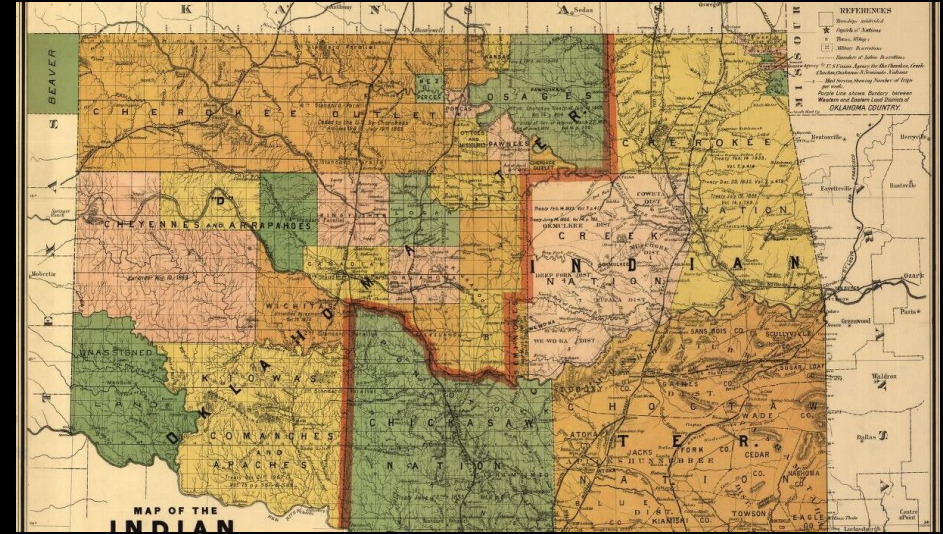
- **How did farmers see an increase in debt?**

- Farmers often only grew ONE crop – WHEAT!
- One bad growing season (drought, storms) could destroy the crop and cause bankruptcy.
- Investors bought large tracts of land (bonanza farms) – creating a sort of monopoly.
- Between 1885 and 1890, droughts bankrupted single-crop operations.
- Rising costs of shipping increased the farm debt.



Closing the Frontier

- **What happened on April 22, 1889?** Oklahoma Land Rush
- **How does this impact the Great Plains?**
 - This was one of the LAST large territories opened in this region.
 - Thousands of people raced across the territory to “claim” lands.
 - Frederick Jackson Turner: the frontier created a “safety valve of social discontent”
 - Americans could make a fresh start in the West.
- **Closing the westward movement was assisted by Congress...**
 - Oklahoma marked a change in the frontier – “closing the frontier”
 - Nathaniel P. Langford asked Congress to protect lands from settlement.
 - 1872: Yellowstone National Park was created to protect the wilderness.



Short Response:

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