

Chapter 5 – Section 1

Moving West



American Progress, 1872 by John Gast

Why go West?

- Hoped for a new start in life
- A chance to own a farm and be own boss (out of factories)



Who owned the land?

- The *Union Pacific* and *Central Pacific* RR companies (received 10 sq. miles from the Federal govt. for every mile of track laid)



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Homestead Act



- Gave 160 acres of land to anyone who met 5 conditions:
- 1. At least 21 or head of family
- 2. American citizen or immigrant who filed for citizenship
- 3. \$10 registration fee
- 4. Had to build a house and live on it at least 6 mo.'s/yr.
- 5. Had to actively farm land for 5 consecutive years before claiming ownership

Problems for Homesteaders

- Couldn't meet all the requirements
- Total cost to make a homestead liveable could easily reach \$1,000
- City settlers had no farming experience
- Fraud – portable homes (too many claims to check out)



Why so many gave up before their 5 years were over

- Prairie sod hard to plow
- Water was scarce
- Climate was blistering heat (in summer) and bitter cold (in winter)



Water

- Difficult to collect water if land claim wasn't near a water source
- Used buckets for rain



Prairie Fever

- Disease from drinking contaminated water

(safer water underground, but too difficult and dangerous to dig a well w/out machinery that wasn't available until late 1800's)



Months away

- Men often spent months away from the homestead after the plowing and planting was done.
- Had to earn cash for survival.



Relied on each other

- Settlers cooperated building houses/barns, husking corn, and sewing quilts.



Women on the prairie

- Made clothes, soap, candles, and preserved foods



Exodusters

- Group of African Americans from the South escaping (Exodus) violence after Civil War.
- (Most settlers were white, but 50,000 were black.)



3 Difficulties

- Difficult to earn enough to support a homestead
- Not used to growing corn and wheat on plains (Cotton)
- Faced racial hatred (Though it was better than the South)



Difficult for Women

- Women spent long periods of solitude on the prairie
- Responsible for maintaining the homestead by themselves



Squatters

- People who moved onto land that doesn't belong to them (like some homeless people today)



Western Women

- Were the first to campaign for the right to vote.
(1890 Wyoming is first state to let women vote)



Homework

- Write a 1 page diary entry describing life on the prairie. Use *at least 5 facts* from the section notes and underline and/or number them.