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WORLD OF WONDER

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THE WILD WEST

The Old West of the 19th century has captured the imaginations of many people. It was a time of great conflict as more and more settlers moved onto lands that had been occupied by Native American tribes for thousands of years. The determination and courage of the people who lived at this time have become the stuff of legend.

Westward bound

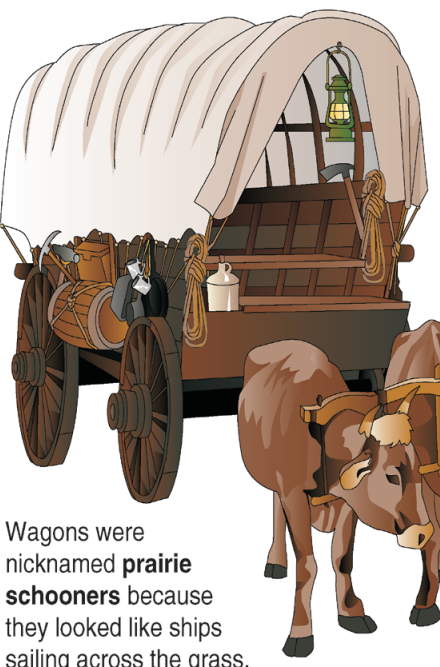
In 1804, **Captains Meriwether Lewis** and **William Clark** led a successful expedition west to the Pacific Ocean. It was not long before other explorers and traders followed, establishing trails and routes that would be used by future settlers. Pioneers began to push westward from the Mississippi River. Some moved farther west than the United States legal boundaries, into Texas, California and Oregon Country. By the mid-1800s, the United States had grown to encompass much of this land.

The Oregon Trail

The famous Oregon Trail was a series of trails used by the first European explorers and traders. The longest overland trail in North America, it became the main route for settlers heading to Oregon in 1843. It took about six months to travel its 2,000 miles.

Wagon trains

The first pioneers traveled in large groups, or caravans. These wagon trains were made up of wagons pulled by oxen. Wagons were not that large, and cargo space was limited; few wagons could carry more than 2,000 pounds. Crossing rivers could be trouble. If the river was shallow and slow-moving, it was **forded** (waded across). For deep water, they built a barge or raft called a **scow** and floated across. If the water was fast-moving, the travelers had to scout for a safer place to cross.



Wagons were nicknamed **prairie schooners** because they looked like ships sailing across the grass.

Cheap land

In 1862, the U.S. government passed the **Homestead Act**, which encouraged farmers to move to the Great Plains. For a small fee, each family was given 160 acres. This land that was purchased so cheaply had been taken from the Native Americans who had lived there for thousands of years.

Greedy for gold

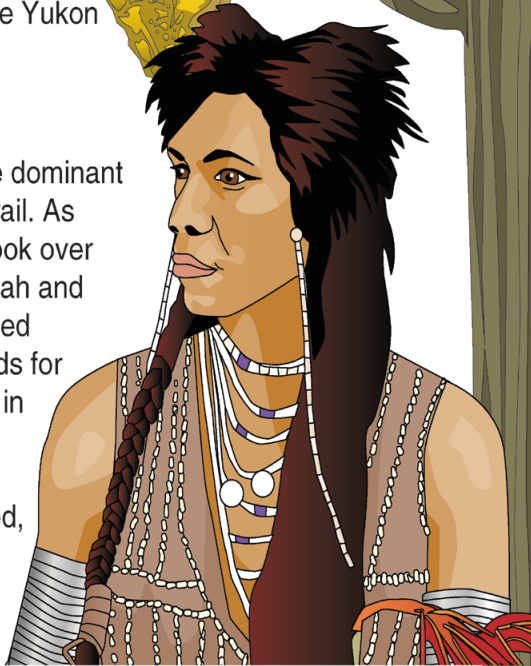
The discovery of gold sparked a large and rapid movement of people into the Far West. The California gold rush of 1848 attracted thousands of eager **prospectors**. There was also a major gold rush in the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory in 1897.

The Shoshone

The **Shoshone** were the dominant tribe along the Oregon trail. As thousands of pioneers took over land and resources in Utah and Idaho, the Shoshone faced starvation, leading to raids for survival and culminating in the 1863 Bear River Massacre, where about 400 Shoshone were killed, including women and children.

The essentials

A settler usually had one or two small wagons, some oxen and a milk cow. They needed to bring all food, clothing and utensils. Early settlers could hunt antelope and bison, but game soon became scarce. Being crushed by wagon wheels, accidentally shot or trampled by stampeding livestock were the top three causes of death on the Oregon Trail. Contrary to popular belief, attacks by Native Americans did not happen often.



Shoshone warrior



Saguaro cactuses generally live for 150 to 200 years, often reaching heights 50 feet or taller.

The **bison**, also known as the **American buffalo**, was hunted almost to extinction in the 1800s.

Outlaws & bad guys

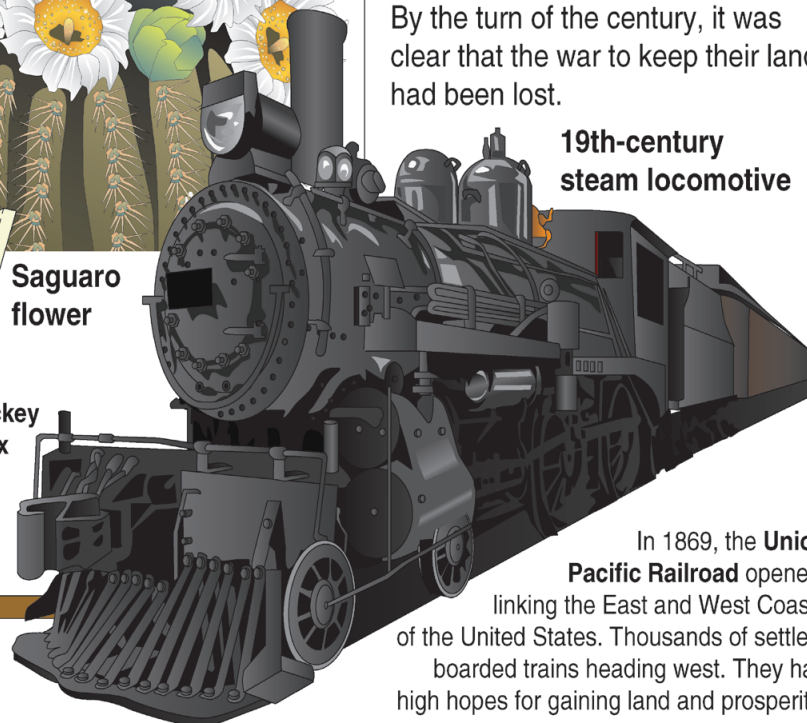
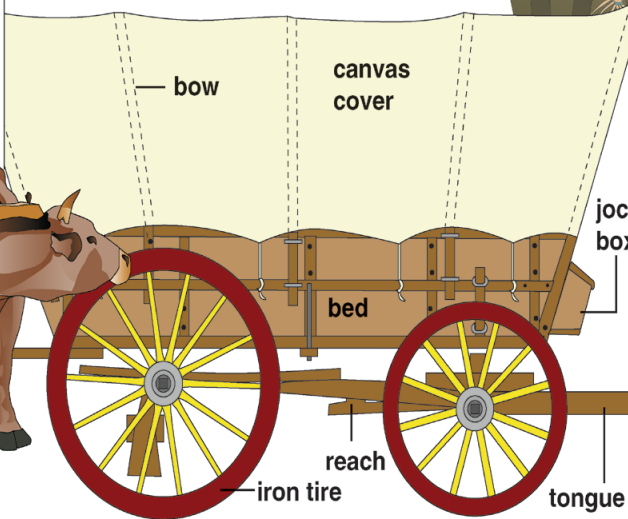
Many tales, both true and tall, were created on the American frontier. The land was expansive and difficult to police, giving rise to an abundance of outlaws, such as Billy the Kid, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Black Bart, the Dalton brothers, and the notorious Jesse James and his brother Frank James. Lawmen were few and far between, but some, like Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp, Pat Garrett, Wild Bill Hickok and Bill Tilghman, earned their places in history chasing the bad guys.

Indian wars

Westward expansion resulted in the deaths of thousands of Native Americans, some to diseases they had no resistance to, and others over land disputes. In 1830, the U.S. government passed the **Indian Removal Act**, which forced many Native Americans to leave their homelands and live on reservations. By 1861, the Native Americans were fighting an all-out war to keep their land and stave off starvation. By the turn of the century, it was clear that the war to keep their land had been lost.



Saguaro flower



19th-century steam locomotive

In 1869, the **Union Pacific Railroad** opened, linking the East and West Coasts of the United States. Thousands of settlers boarded trains heading west. They had high hopes for gaining land and prosperity.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://www.history.com>; <http://www.thewildwest.org>; <https://kidskonnnect.com>; www.american-historama.org

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