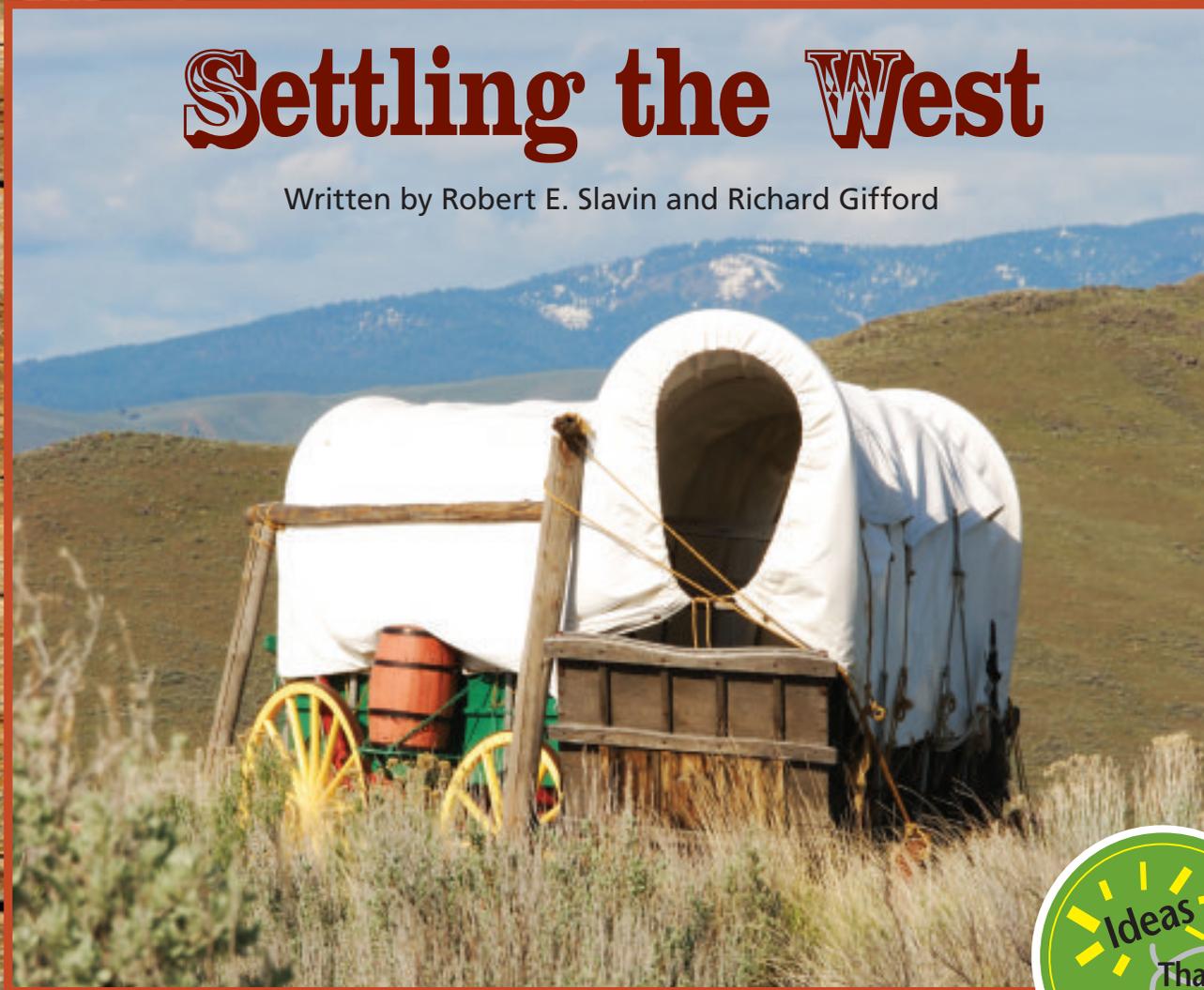


Settling the ^{WT} West

Written by Robert E. Slavin and Richard Gifford







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Why Understanding the Settlement of the West Matters

Hundreds of years ago, the ordinary people of Europe very rarely owned land. Kings, **nobles**, and other rich people owned the land. The **common** people farmed the land for the rich. This was

extremely hard work. The landowners got to keep most of the money that came from selling the crops. The common people stayed poor. It was a very unfair system.

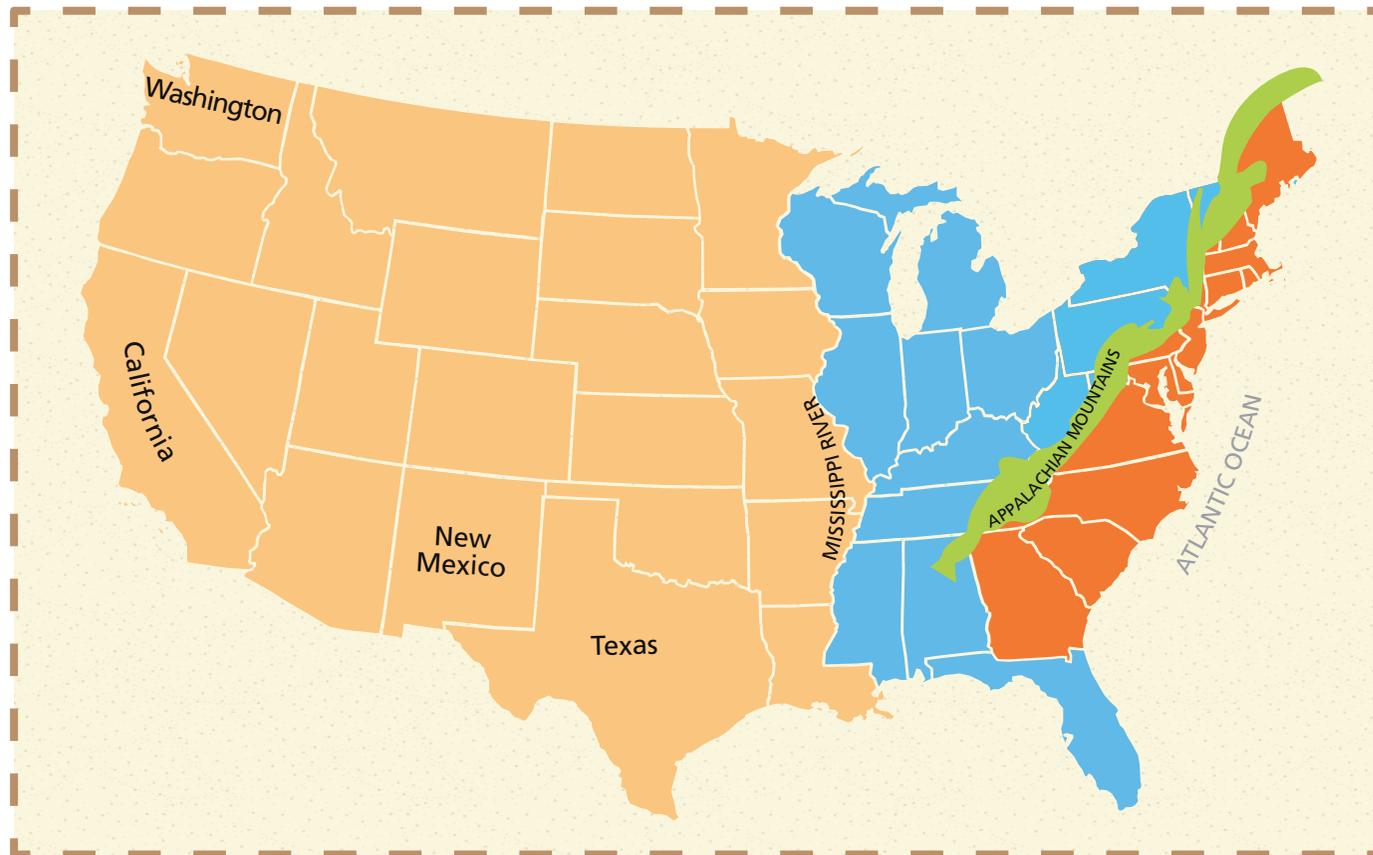


Then the **Europeans** discovered America. Kings and nobles hoped to find gold and silver in America. Ordinary people had different hopes. They hoped for land of their own. They wanted to farm this land and grow their own food. They wanted to keep the money that they earned. This was the shining promise of America. Millions of people came to America looking for this promise.



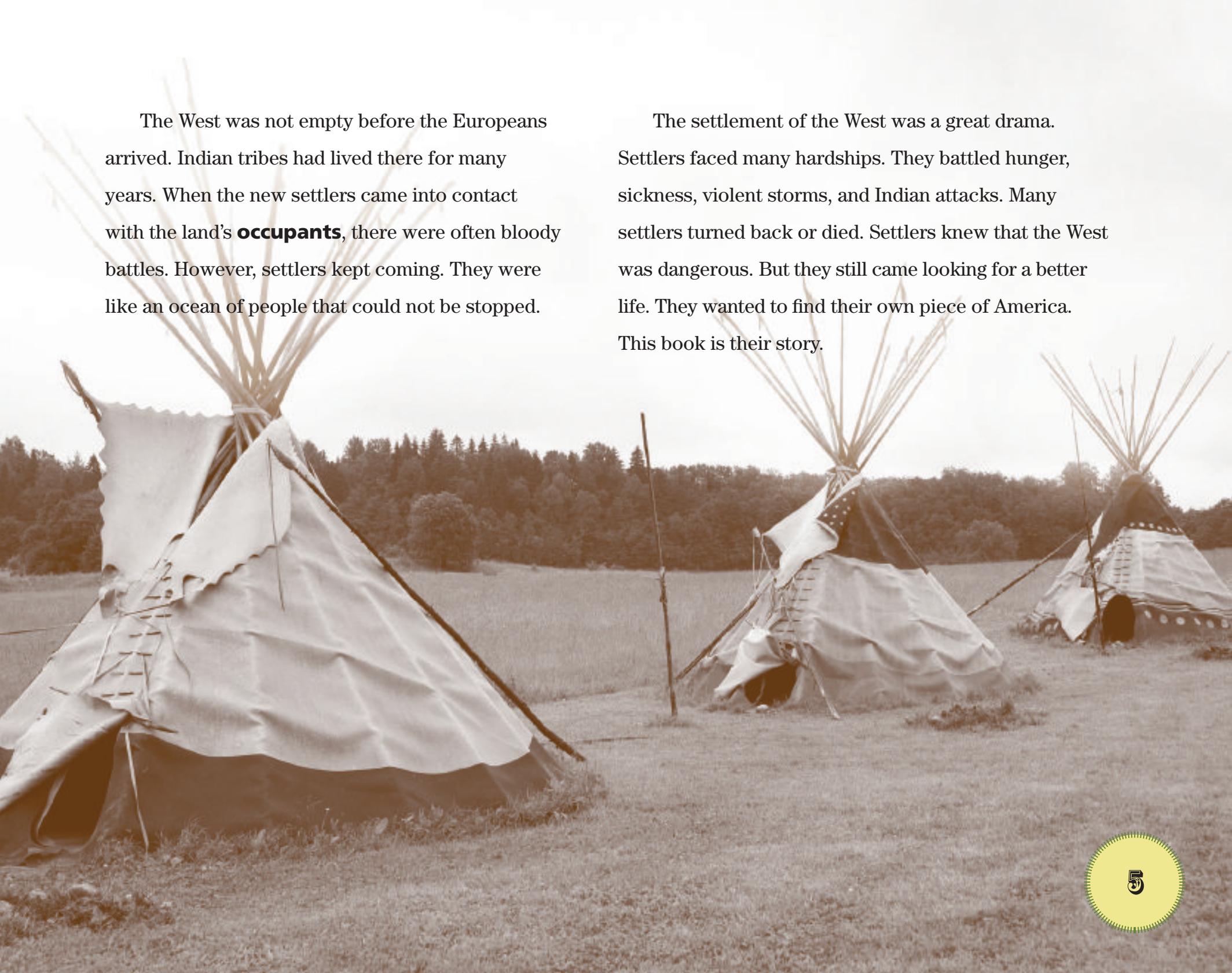
What is the West? The Europeans came to America by ship. They sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and landed on the east coast of America. The early settlers claimed the nearest land. When later settlers discovered that the land on the coast was already taken, they began looking for land to the west. At first, the West meant anything

west of the Atlantic **ports**. Later, it meant anything west of the Appalachian Mountains. Over time, the meaning of the West kept moving, well, westward. Finally, the West meant all land west of the Mississippi River. This area included land that is now part of Texas, New Mexico, California, and Washington.



The West was not empty before the Europeans arrived. Indian tribes had lived there for many years. When the new settlers came into contact with the land's **occupants**, there were often bloody battles. However, settlers kept coming. They were like an ocean of people that could not be stopped.

The settlement of the West was a great drama. Settlers faced many hardships. They battled hunger, sickness, violent storms, and Indian attacks. Many settlers turned back or died. Settlers knew that the West was dangerous. But they still came looking for a better life. They wanted to find their own piece of America. This book is their story.



Early Settlements

Different European countries claimed land in different areas of America. The Spanish claimed the area around Florida. The French claimed land in the area now known as Louisiana. England claimed all of the east coast north of Florida. European rulers used this land to start colonies and **settlements**.

The English colonies were the most successful. At first, they were set up like England. The king gave big pieces of land to his friends. For example, he gave his friend William Penn a lot of land. This land became the colony of Pennsylvania. The king gave James Oglethorpe all of Georgia. Then these people gave some of this land to their friends. People from England flocked to the colonies to start new lives. The English built settlements along the east coast. Some of these settlements later became major cities, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, and Savannah.



There was even more land farther west. Some farmers began buying land west of the Atlantic coast. Other settlers traveled westward, and when they found empty land, they started to farm it.

Sometimes the settlers bought land from the Indians. At other times, they fought with the Indians for the land. These settlers didn't think that they owed the Indians anything.



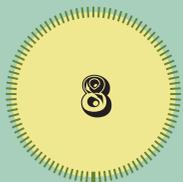
After the American Revolution

In 1776, the American colonies broke away from England. War with England followed. Some causes of this split, such as unfair taxes, are well known. For example, most Americans have heard of the Boston Tea Party, but fewer people know that western settlements were another cause of the war. The King of England would not let Americans own land west of the Appalachian Mountains.

He wanted to avoid fights with the Indian tribes that were already there. This made many colonists angry. They wanted to farm that land.

The Americans defeated the British in 1780. More settlers moved west. Many of them were soldiers who got land for fighting the British. This land was very good for farming. Americans were headed west.

British general Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in the American Revolution





The Boston Tea Party was a protest against taxation without representation.

American colonists boarded British ships. They dumped chests of tea into Boston Harbor. The colonists did not want to pay taxes on the tea since they could not elect representatives in the English government.



Louisiana Purchase

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson bought a huge amount of land from France. This new land roughly doubled the size of the United States.

Settlers could now keep going west. And keep going they did.



The Lewis and Clark Expedition

President Jefferson didn't know much about the land that he'd bought. Jefferson asked Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to carry out an **expedition** to explore the new land. They put together a team of thirty-three people. The team traveled more than 2,000 miles. They paddled up the Missouri River and crossed the Rocky Mountains. An Indian named Sacajawea helped the expedition. She spoke several Indian languages. She knew the ways of different Indian tribes. She helped Lewis and Clark get along with the Indian tribes in the new land. Along the way, they met more than seventy Indian tribes. Without Sacajawea, the expedition might have failed.



Lewis and Clark needed a lot of supplies. See below for a partial list.

Scientific Instruments:

hand compass

telescope

thermometers

Camp Supplies:

150 yards of cloth to be oiled and sewn into tents and sheets

30 steels for striking to make fire

hatchets

iron corn mill

mosquito curtains

10 1/2 pounds of fishing hooks and fishing lines

193 pounds of "portable soup" (a thick paste concocted by boiling down beef, eggs, and vegetables)

Presents for Indians:

12 dozen pocket mirrors

144 small scissors

10 pounds of sewing thread

130 rolls of tobacco

tomahawks that double as pipes

288 knives

Arms and Ammunition:

15 prototype Model 1803 muzzle-loading .54 caliber rifles
knives

176 pounds of gunpowder packed in 52 lead canisters

1 long-barreled rifle that fires its bullet with compressed air, rather than by flint, spark, and powder

Traveling Library:

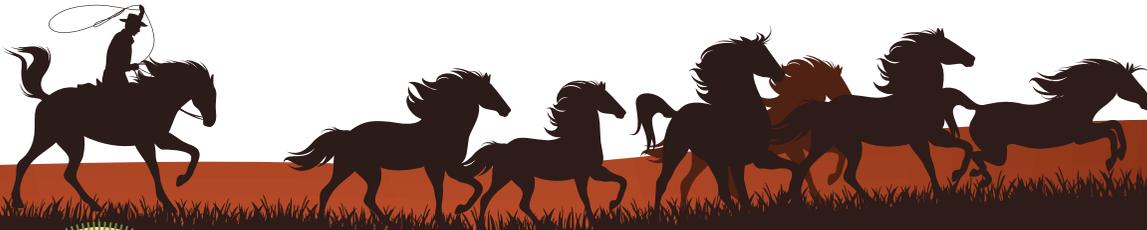
Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz's History of Louisiana

a four-volume dictionary

map of the Great Bend of the Missouri River

Texas

Before 1836, Texas was owned by Mexico, but not many Mexicans lived there. Mexicans in Texas were often attacked by Indians. To help cut down on the Indian raids, the Mexican government wanted more people to move to Texas. American settlers were also asked to move to Texas, and soon the American settlers outnumbered the Mexicans in Texas. The Mexican government became worried that they might lose control of their **territory**. In 1830, **immigration** to Mexico from the United States was outlawed. New tax laws were also passed. This upset the new settlers. In 1835, the Texas Revolution began. The American settlers won the war, and Texas became its own country. Ten years later, Texas joined the United States. After that, many more settlers came to Texas.



Fun Fact:

When Texas joined the United States, the deal included the right for Texas to be divided to create up to five separate states.

Remember the Alamo!

The Alamo was a small fort in Texas. In 1836, about 200 Texans were defending it. They were attacked by 1,500 Mexican soldiers. The men of the Alamo held out bravely for thirteen days. Finally, the Alamo fell. Every defender was killed. Several weeks later, Texan troops attacked the Mexican army. The troops cried out, "Remember the Alamo" as they charged. The Texans won the battle and with it their independence.



Oregon

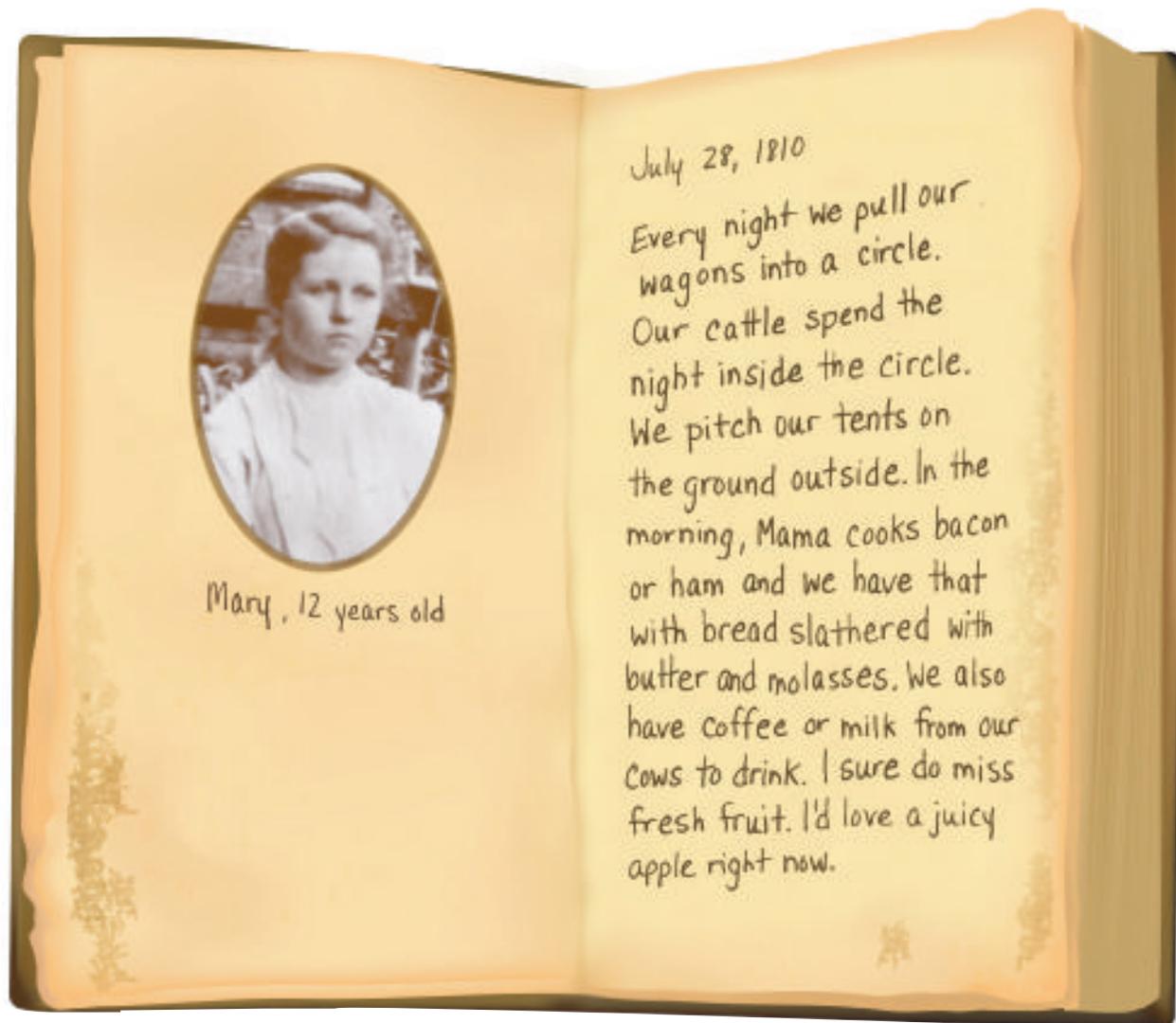
In the 1500s, Spanish explorers came to what is now Oregon. Much later, Lewis and Clark traveled through the **region**, and Americans began arriving to work as farmers and trappers. Trappers could make a lot of money. They caught animals, such as beavers and otters, and sold the furs. These furs were very valuable. More people moved to Oregon to trap animals and sell the furs. The land was also good for farming. The United States and England fought over the area. Finally the two countries made a deal. In the deal, the United States got to keep Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Thousands of settlers flooded into the region.

Oregon Trail: The Oregon Trail was a route that stretched from Missouri to Oregon. It was more than 2,000 miles long. Hundreds of thousands of settlers used the trail on their way west. Modern highways follow sections of the trail. These highways pass through towns that were first built to supply travelers on the trail.



Witness to History:

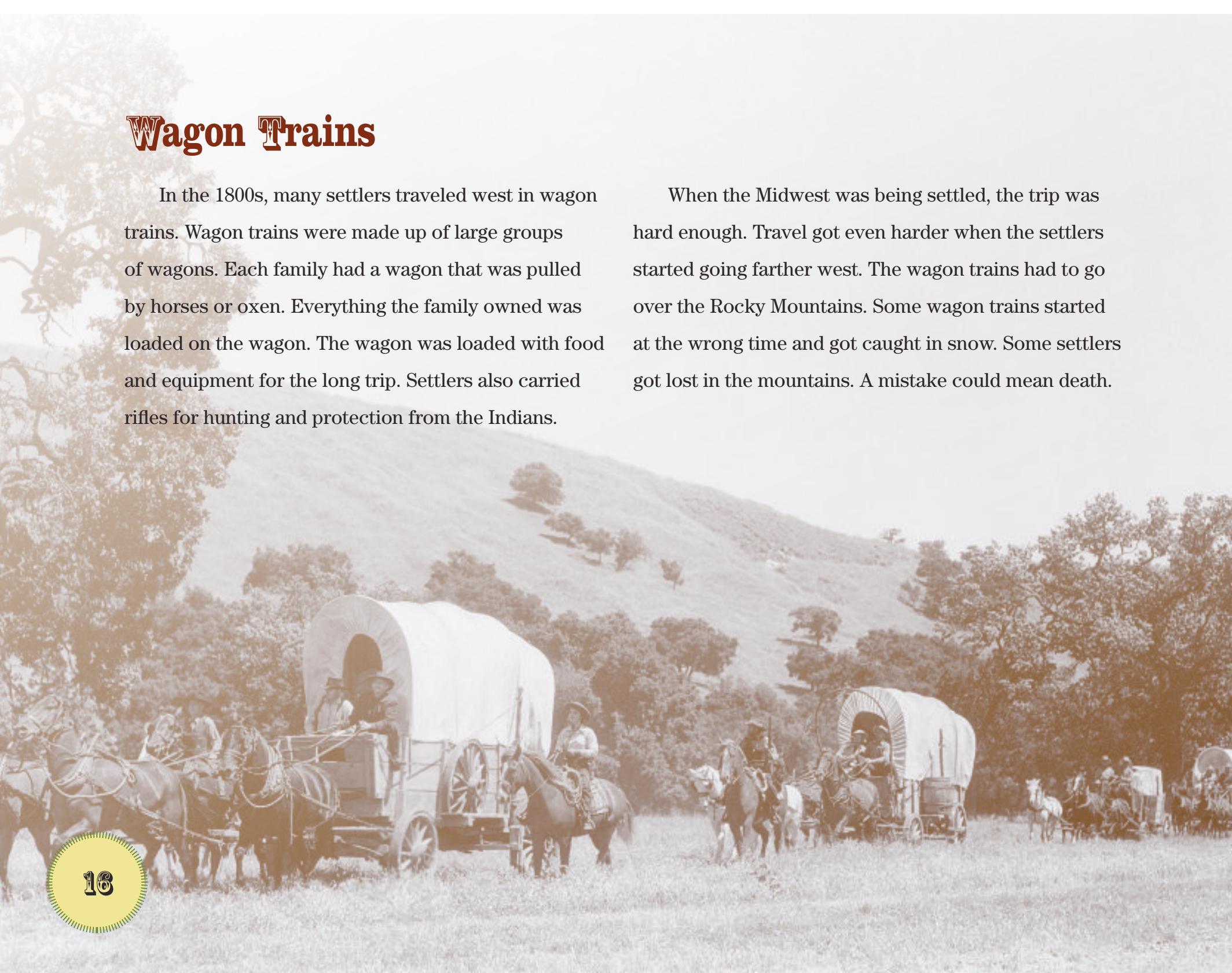
Thousands of children traveled on the Oregon Trail. Some of them kept diaries.



Wagon Trains

In the 1800s, many settlers traveled west in wagon trains. Wagon trains were made up of large groups of wagons. Each family had a wagon that was pulled by horses or oxen. Everything the family owned was loaded on the wagon. The wagon was loaded with food and equipment for the long trip. Settlers also carried rifles for hunting and protection from the Indians.

When the Midwest was being settled, the trip was hard enough. Travel got even harder when the settlers started going farther west. The wagon trains had to go over the Rocky Mountains. Some wagon trains started at the wrong time and got caught in snow. Some settlers got lost in the mountains. A mistake could mean death.



Settlers also faced an invisible threat. It was more dangerous than Indians and deadlier than blizzards. It was disease. This was the biggest killer of settlers traveling west. Many people caught **smallpox** and

typhoid fever, and other people developed **scurvy** due to a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. Trail conditions were harsh, and there was little medical care. These diseases often ended in death.



California and the West

Until 1848, Mexico owned large parts of the West. California and other western states belonged to Mexico, so when Texas joined the United States, trouble broke out. The United States and Mexico disagreed over their border. War started in 1846. Mexico lost within two years and California became part of the United States. That same year, gold was discovered in California. More than 300,000 people

flocked to the area. Most came by ship into San Francisco Bay. Some miners became rich, but most did not. Some people became rich by selling supplies to the miners. This included Levi Strauss. He made blue jeans out of sailcloth. Miners loved the tough jeans. Levi's jeans are still sold today. Other settlers came to start farms. California became the largest state in the far West.



Fun Fact:

People who came to California looking for gold were called forty-niners. This referenced 1849—the year that many of them traveled to California. This is why the professional football team of San Francisco is called the 49ers.

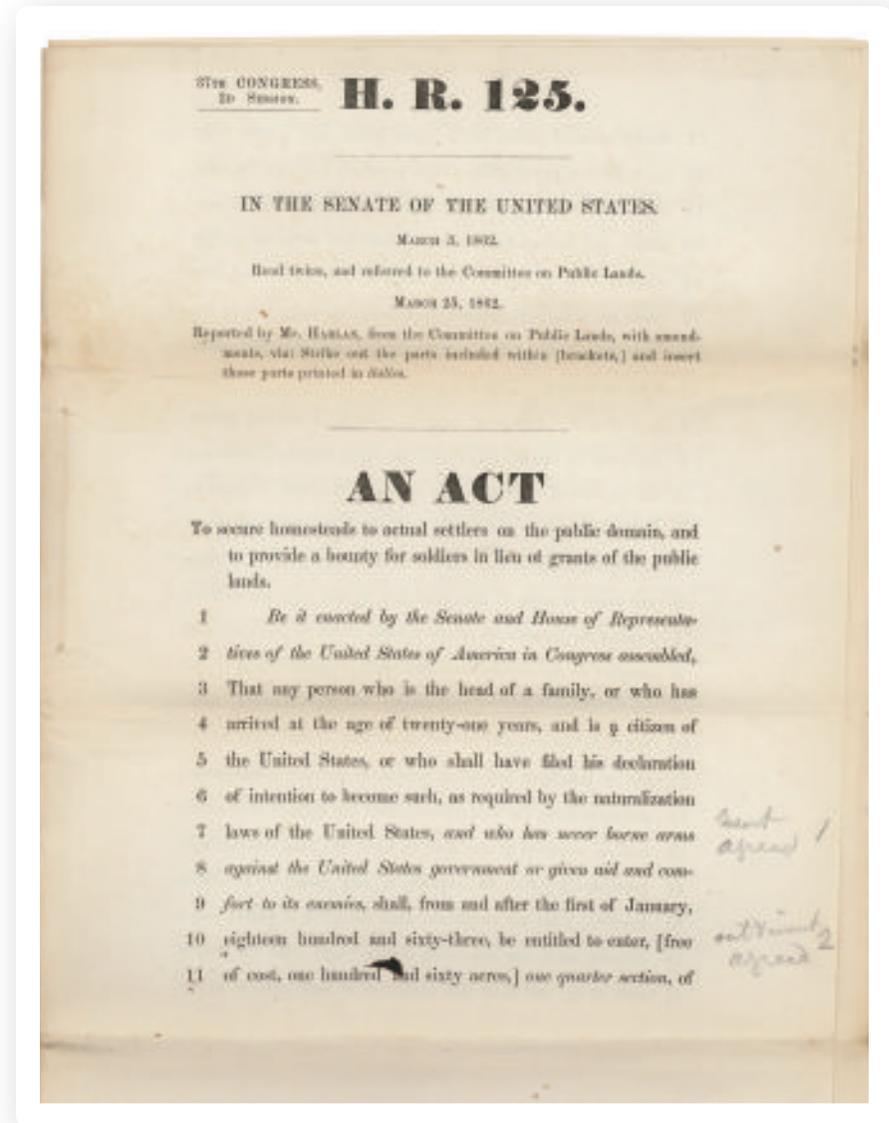


The Homestead Act

In 1862, Congress passed a law that gave away free land in the West. You could have the land if you could farm it. The land was cut up into homestead farms. Each farm was 160 acres. Farmers had five years to show that they could run a farm.

Free land! People from all over the world came to the American West. Many former slaves set up homesteads. Some even started their own towns.

The Homestead Act was very important. Thousands of settlers headed west to get free land. Towns sprang up almost overnight. Later, railroads were built to serve the new communities.



What Was Life Like for New Settlers?

Settlers starting farms in new parts of the West had very hard lives. Families had to plant a crop to feed them for the first year. There was no time to lose! In most of the Midwest, there was thick sod on top of the soil. Farmers had to remove the sod before they could plow. They often used the sod to make houses. In other places, farmers

made dugouts in the earth or log cabins. These were not comfortable, but there was no time for comfort. Crops had to be planted and harvested. **Livestock** had to be fed and cared for. Men, women, and children worked all the time. There was little time for fun, or even for school.



Sod: strip of earth with densely growing roots and grass

After several years, when the new farms started growing enough crops, people began to build better houses. They built schools, churches, and roads too.

If the townspeople were lucky, a railroad might be built through their town, making it easier for them to send their crops to market and get supplies.



What Happened to the Indians?

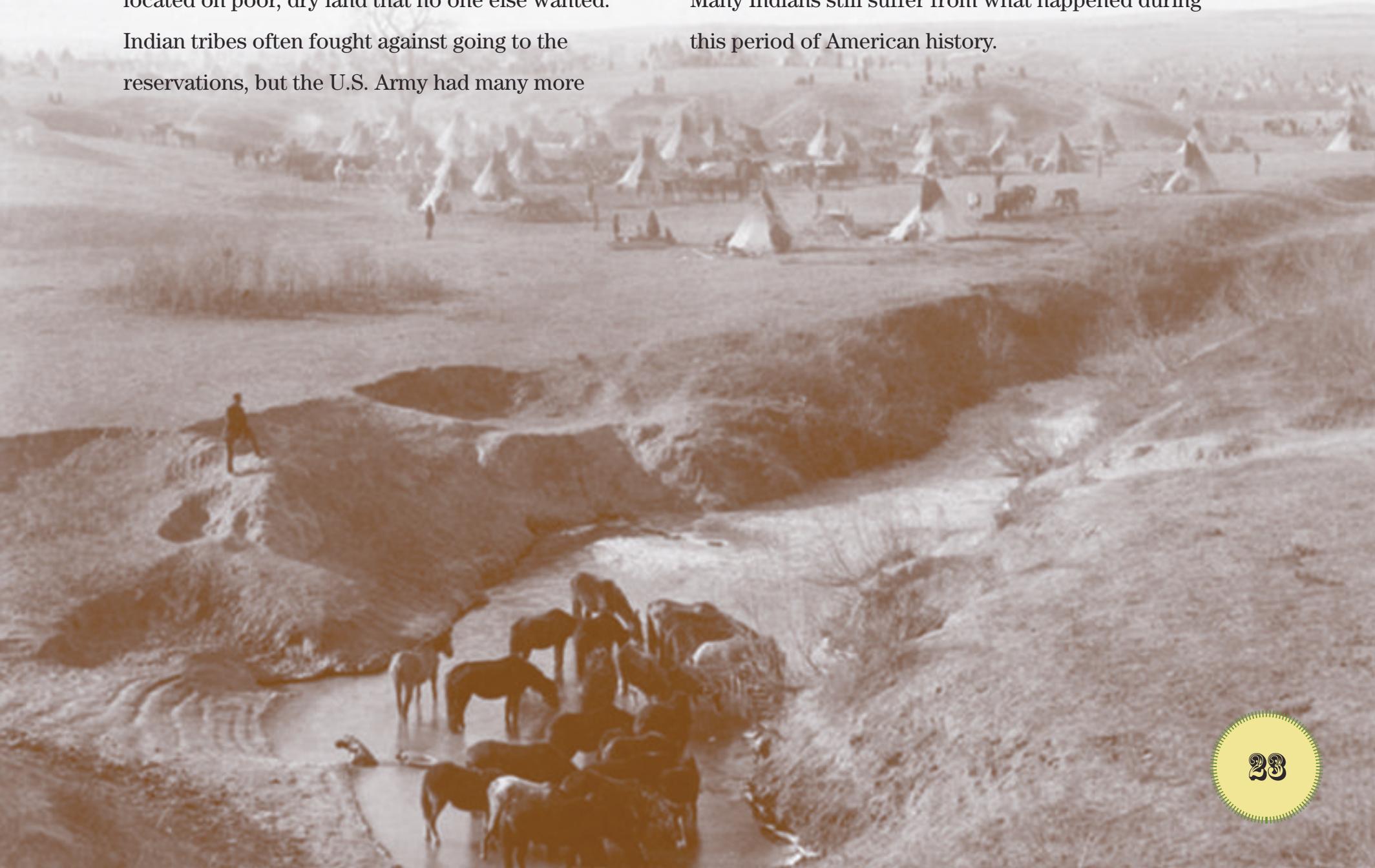
The settlement of the West pushed out the people who had called it home for centuries. All across the West, settlers started their new lives in areas where Indians already lived. Sometimes the Indians helped the new settlers and traded with them. Other times, they fought against them. Diseases brought by settlers wiped out **vast** numbers of Indians. Smallpox and measles killed thousands. The survivors were then pushed off their land.

Indians did win some victories. However, the settlers and the United States government always won in the end. One reason was because Indians lived in small, separate tribes. They did not join together to fight the settlers very often. Also, when Indians did kill settlers, the U.S. Army was sent to punish them.



Most Indian tribes were forced to live on **reservations**. These reservations were usually located on poor, dry land that no one else wanted. Indian tribes often fought against going to the reservations, but the U.S. Army had many more

soldiers. The settlement of the West was a great tragedy for the Indians. Their way of life was never the same. Many Indians still suffer from what happened during this period of American history.





Trail of Tears: In 1836, the United States Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. Indians from the Cherokee and other tribes were forced to leave their homelands in the southeastern states. They had to move to reservations farther west. U.S. soldiers rounded up Indian families. They were held in stockades and then forced to begin the journey out of their homes. Many of the Indians had to travel during brutal winter weather. Thousands died from disease, exposure, and starvation.



I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into the stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred forty-five wagons and started toward the west...

Witness to History: Excerpt from a letter by John Burnett, a soldier in the U.S. Army who took part in moving the Cherokee.

Different Perspectives: The settlement of the American West provided new homes for millions of American and European immigrants. However, the native peoples were forced off their land. Look below to see different views on settling the West.

A person in favor of westward expansion



America should own the whole continent.
The West is full of good farmland and timber.
Everybody should be able to use these. There are few Indians, and most of them don't even farm.
We can treat them fairly but still make far better use of western lands. We can make good lives for all the people of our nation.

A person against westward expansion



Settling the West is a great mistake and a great sin. The West belongs to the Indians who lived there first. Sending whites into Indian territory means constant war and killings on both sides.
We have enough land in the eastern states. Let's develop what we have and live in peace with our Indian neighbors.



An Indian leader

The land we live on has always belonged to our tribe. It is holy to us. We will never give it up. Why is it right for the white man to come with his guns and swords to take our land? If the white man stays on his land and leaves us alone, we will be friends. We will trade with him. But if the white man comes to take our land, we will fight him, and everything will be destroyed.



A white farmer

I do not want to fight with the Indians. I just want to be left alone to grow my crops and make a good life for my family. The Indians hardly use the land, mostly for hunting. I should be able to farm it to feed my family.

The West Today



In the past, all the land in America beyond the Mississippi River was called the West. Settlers did not know how much distance was between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean. Now we know that the West is much larger than people once thought. In fact, twenty-two of our largest states fit in that land. When people realized just how big the West was, they began calling the area around the Mississippi River the Middle West. Today we know that region as the Midwest.

There are towns and cities across the Midwest and the West, but there is also a lot of unsettled land. Many of nature's most amazing creations, such as the Grand Canyon in Arizona and Mount St. Helens in Washington, are west of the Mississippi. Some of man's greatest creations, such as Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, are there too. There is much to do and see in our western states, and the land will continue to change as more people move west.



Glossary

common:	Without special privilege	2
Europeans:	People from the countries of Europe	3
expedition:	A trip made for a particular purpose	10
immigration:	The act of moving to a new country or territory	12
livestock:	Animals raised for food and other uses	20
nobles:	People belonging to a high political class	2
occupants:	People who live in a certain place	5
ports:	Areas where ships dock	4
region:	An area of land	14
reservations:	Lands that Indians in the United States were forced to live on	23
scurvy:	A disease caused by not eating fresh fruits and vegetables	17
settlements:	Small communities where people live	6
smallpox:	A disease that causes small bumps all over a person's body	17
territory:	A large area of land	12
vast:	Very large	22

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