

— CHANGES IN THE PLAINS



Ranching the Plains

- Challenges and Developments: Ranching on the Great Plains faced significant challenges due to the scarcity of water and the unsuitability of Eastern cattle breeds for the tough prairie environment. However, the emergence of the Texas longhorn, a breed adapted to the harsh conditions, revolutionized the cattle industry on the Plains. This breed was descended from Spanish cattle and had developed characteristics that allowed it to thrive in the harsh climate and feed on the tough prairie grasses.
- Impact of the Civil War and Railroads: The Civil War and the subsequent increase in beef demand for feeding soldiers led to a surge in cattle prices, making the long-distance transportation of cattle for sale profitable. The expansion of railroads across the Great Plains provided the means to transport cattle to eastern markets efficiently. This combination of factors transformed ranching into a lucrative business on the Plains, with ranchers organizing large-scale cattle drives to railroad hubs.



Farming Becomes Big Business

- **Railroad Influence:** The construction of railroads played a crucial role in the development of farming on the Great Plains. Railroads provided access to previously inaccessible lands and facilitated the transportation of agricultural products to markets in the East. Railroad companies offered land at low prices along their routes and provided credit to settlers, encouraging migration to the Plains.
- **Homestead Act and Settlement:** The Homestead Act of 1862 further incentivized settlement on the Plains by offering individuals the opportunity to claim up to 160 acres of public land for a small registration fee. This legislation spurred a wave of migration to the region, as settlers sought opportunities for land ownership and farming. The availability of land, combined with favorable weather conditions and technological advancements, led to the establishment of thriving agricultural communities on the Plains.



Native Americans

- **Impact of Westward Expansion:** The settlement of the West had profound consequences for Native American communities on the Great Plains. As ranchers, miners, and farmers encroached upon their traditional lands, Native Americans were deprived of their hunting grounds and forced to relocate to reservations. Treaties guaranteeing certain lands were often broken by the government, leading to increased tensions and conflicts between settlers and Native Americans.
- **Resistance and Conflict:** Native Americans resisted the encroachment of settlers and the government through various means, including attacks on wagon trains, stagecoaches, and ranches. Some Native American leaders, such as Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph, led efforts to resist relocation to reservations. However, these efforts were met with military force, leading to violent conflicts such as the Battle of Wounded Knee.
- **Assimilation Policies:** The government's assimilation policies, including the Dawes Act of 1887, aimed to transform Native American communities by allotting reservation land to individuals for farming and breaking up communal land ownership. However, these policies proved detrimental to Native American cultures and livelihoods, as many struggled to adapt to farming and faced poverty and displacement as a result. The assimilation policy ultimately failed to achieve its intended goals and further exacerbated the challenges faced by Native American communities on the Great Plains.



— THE END

