

Ch 13 Section 2 Settling on the Great Plains

Settlers Move Westward to Farm

Railroads Open the West

- 1850–1871, huge land grants to railroads for laying track in West
- 1860s, Central Pacific goes east, Union Pacific west, meet in Utah
- By 1880s, 5 transcontinental railroads completed
- Railroad was most responsible for bringing an end to the era of the wide-open western frontier
- Railroads sell land to farmers, attract many European immigrants

Government Support for Settlement

- 1862 **Homestead Act** offers 160 acres free to any head of household, most of it was taken by people seeking profits
 - 1862–1900, up to 600,000 families settle
 - The intent was to encourage white families to develop the West
- **Exodusters**—former slaves from the South who settled on the Great Plains, Southern African-American settlers in Kansas
- Railroad, state agents, speculators profit; 10% of land to families
- Government strengthens act, passes new legislation for settlers

The Closing of the Frontier

- 1872, Yellowstone National Park created to protect some wilderness
- 1890s, no frontier left; some regret loss of unique American feature

Settlers Meet the Challenges of the Plains

Dugouts and Soddies

- Few trees, so many settlers dig homes into sides of ravines or hills
- In plains, make **soddy** or sod home by stacking blocks of turf

Women's Work

- Homesteaders virtually alone, must be self-sufficient
- Women do men's work—plowing, harvesting, shearing sheep
- Do traditional work—carding wool, making soap, canning vegetables
- Work for communities—sponsor schools, churches

Technical Support for Farmers

- Mass market for farm machines develops with migration to plains

Agricultural Education

- **Morrill Act** of 1862, 1890 finances agricultural colleges
- 1887 Hatch Act creates agricultural experiment stations

Farmers in Debt

- Railroads, investors create **bonanza farms**— huge, single-crop spreads
- 1885–1890 droughts bankrupt single-crop operations
- Rising cost of shipping grain pushes farmers into debt