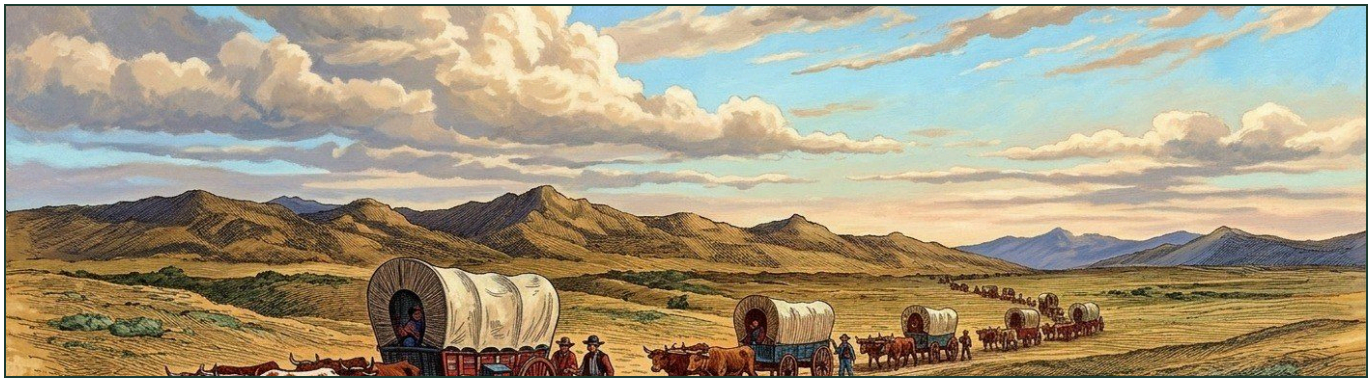


1803 – 1890

Westward Expansion Timeline

Westward expansion is the period when the United States grew across the continent, as settlers, trails, and railroads pushed toward the Pacific.

1803 Louisiana Purchase

The U.S. buys a vast area of land from France, doubling the size of the country.

> **Why it mattered:** *The huge land deal doubled the country and set the stage for the push westward.*

1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition

Lewis and Clark set out to explore and map the new western lands.

> **Why it mattered:** *Their maps and reports showed Americans what the western lands held and how to reach them.*

1825 Erie Canal Opens

A canal links the East Coast to the Great Lakes, speeding travel west.

> **Why it mattered:** *It made travel and trade toward the West faster and cheaper, speeding up settlement.*

1836 Texas Independence

Texas wins its independence from Mexico and later joins the United States.

> **Why it mattered:** *Texas broke from Mexico and later joined the U.S., expanding the country to the southwest.*

1843 — **The Oregon Trail**

Nearly 1,000 settlers set out from Independence, Missouri, in the first big wagon train to Oregon, the Great Migration.

> **Why it mattered:** *The wave of wagons proved whole families could make the long overland journey west.*

1848 — **Gold Discovered in California**

Gold is found at Sutter's Mill, drawing fortune-seekers west.

> **Why it mattered:** *The discovery set off a rush that brought people west by the hundreds of thousands.*

1849 — **California Gold Rush**

The "Forty-Niners" rush to California hoping to strike it rich.

> **Why it mattered:** *California grew so fast from the rush that it soon became a state.*

1862 — **Homestead Act**

The government offers settlers free western land if they farm it.

> **Why it mattered:** *Offering free land drew waves of farmers to settle the Great Plains.*

1869 — **Transcontinental Railroad**

The railroad is completed, connecting the country from coast to coast.

> **Why it mattered:** *The railroad linked East and West, turning the journey into days instead of months.*

1890 — **The Frontier Closes**

The Census reports that the western frontier line has essentially disappeared.

> **Why it mattered:** *It marked the end of the open frontier — the West had been settled from coast to coast.*