

MONTANA

HISTORY

Native nations, fur traders, miners, ranchers and farmers each helped build Montana.

The First Peoples

People have lived in Montana for more than 12,000 years. The Salish and Kootenai lived in the western mountain valleys. The Blackfeet, Crow, Assiniboine and other nations lived on the plains. After horses arrived in the 1700s, plains hunters rode after bison. Bison gave them meat, tools and hides for tipis. The nations traded and fought with each other.

Explorers and Fur Traders

In 1803, the United States bought most of Montana from France. Lewis and Clark crossed Montana in 1805 and 1806. Sacagawea, a Shoshone woman, traveled with them, and her people sold them horses. In 1806, Lewis's group fought a few Blackfeet men who tried to take their guns and horses. Two Blackfeet were killed. Fur traders came next and built trading posts. Fort Benton began as one in 1846. Later, steamboats carried goods up the Missouri River to its docks.

Gold, Cattle and Territory

Gold was found at Bannack in 1862. Bigger strikes followed at Virginia City in 1863 and Helena in 1864. Miners came by the thousands, and shopkeepers and farmers followed. Congress made Montana a **territory** in 1864. In 1866, Nelson Story drove a herd of Texas cattle to Montana. Ranches soon spread across the open grass. In **treaties**, the nations agreed to keep some lands and give up others.



The Little Bighorn

Settlers kept coming, and wars followed. In 1876, the Army tried to force the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne onto **reservations**. On June 25, George Custer's soldiers attacked their camp on the Little Bighorn River. The warriors killed Custer and more than 200 of his men. Crow scouts rode with the Army. Within five years, the Lakota and Cheyenne bands had surrendered.

The Nez Perce War

In 1877, the Army chased the Nez Perce across Montana. Soldiers attacked their camp at the Big Hole, and the Nez Perce drove them back. Chief Joseph surrendered that October near the Canadian border. The Nez Perce were sent south to Indian Territory. Montana has seven reservations today, and Native people live across the state.

Rails, Statehood and Homesteads

The Northern Pacific Railroad was finished across Montana in 1883. Trains carried out cattle and ore and brought in settlers. Montana became the 41st state on November 8, 1889. Helena became its capital. A 1909 law let a settler claim a 320-acre **homestead** on the dry plains. Thousands of families came and plowed the grass for wheat. Dry years began in 1917, and many left. In 1916, Jeannette Rankin of Montana became the first woman elected to Congress. In the 1930s, about 10,000 workers built Fort Peck Dam on the Missouri River.

MONTANA THROUGH TIME

1805	1846	1862	1864	1876	1883	1889	1916	1940
Lewis and Clark cross Montana	Fort Benton begins	Gold is found at Bannack	Montana Territory is created	Battle of the Little Bighorn	Railroad crosses Montana	Montana becomes the 41st state	Rankin is elected to Congress	Fort Peck Dam is finished

PEOPLE TO KNOW

Sacagawea	Shoshone. Traveled with Lewis and Clark.
Plenty Coups	Crow chief. His home is a state park.
Charles M. Russell	Cowboy artist of Great Falls.
Jeannette Rankin	First woman elected to Congress.
Gary Cooper	Movie star born in Helena.

WORDS TO KNOW

territory	land run by the United States that is not yet a state
treaty	a written agreement between nations
reservation	land set aside for a Native nation
homestead	land a settler could own by farming it