

NEBRASKA

HISTORY

Native nations, wagon trains, homesteaders and railroad builders each helped make Nebraska.

The First Peoples

People have lived in Nebraska for more than 10,000 years. The Pawnee built round earth lodges along the Platte and Loup rivers. They grew corn and hunted bison. The Omaha, Ponca and Otoe lived near the Missouri River in much the same way. Farther west, the Lakota and Cheyenne followed the bison herds.

Explorers and Traders

The United States bought the land from France in 1803. In 1804, Lewis and Clark came up the Missouri River and met Otoe and Missouri leaders north of where Omaha is now. Fur traders followed. They built a trading post at Bellevue, the oldest town in Nebraska.

The Road West

From the 1840s to the 1860s, hundreds of thousands of people crossed Nebraska in wagons. They followed the flat Platte valley toward Oregon, California and Utah. The army built Fort Kearny in 1848 to guard the trail. In 1854, Congress made Nebraska a **territory**. That same year the Omaha and the Otoe signed **treaties**. They sold most of their land to the United States and kept reservations. A few settlers held enslaved people until the territory banned slavery in 1861.

Wars on the Plains

The Lakota and Cheyenne fought to keep their hunting lands. In 1855, an army under General William

Harney attacked a Lakota village at Blue Water Creek and won. In August 1864, Cheyenne and Lakota warriors attacked wagon trains and ranches along the Platte and Little Blue rivers and killed dozens of settlers. Pawnee men served as army scouts and guarded railroad crews. By the late 1870s the army had won, and the Lakota lived on reservations in Dakota Territory. The Pawnee moved to a reservation in what is now Oklahoma. The Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux and Winnebago tribes have their governments in Nebraska today.

Homesteads and Rails

The **Homestead** Act of 1862 offered 160 acres to a settler who lived on the land and farmed it for five years. Daniel Freeman filed one of the first claims, near Beatrice. The prairie had few trees, so families cut blocks of **sod** and stacked them into houses. The Union Pacific Railroad started west from Omaha in 1865. Nebraska became the 37th state on March 1, 1867, and Lincoln became the capital.



Building Nebraska

Farmers plowed the prairie, and ranchers filled the Sandhills with cattle. Omaha grew into one of the country's biggest meatpacking cities. Grasshoppers in the 1870s and drought in the 1930s ruined many farms. Nebraskans answered with dams, wells and sprinklers that bring water to dry fields.

NEBRASKA THROUGH TIME



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Standing Bear	Ponca chief who won in court
Susan La Flesche Picotte	Omaha doctor in Walthill
Buffalo Bill Cody	Wild West showman, North Platte
Willa Cather	Writer who grew up in Red Cloud
Father Edward Flanagan	Started Boys Town in 1917

WORDS TO KNOW

territory	U.S. land that is not yet a state
treaty	a written agreement between nations
homestead	a farm earned by living on it
sod	soil held together by grass roots