

In 1840, the vast expanse of land beyond the Mississippi River was wide open and sparsely populated. For the next 60 years, settlers and adventurers by the thousands moved west across the prairies to the farmlands of Oregon, the ranchlands of the Southwest and the northern plains, and the gold fields of California. Others made the journey by ship around South America or came across the Pacific Ocean.

These newcomers were not the heroes of popular myth, most of them. They were ordinary people — farmers looking for land to till, women leaving homes they loved to follow their husbands, emigrants from Europe and Asia in search of a new life. Many of them saw the West as a huge, uninhabited space, waiting to be claimed.

But the West was far from empty. Indian tribes had made this land their home for centuries, and they wanted it to stay as it had always been — unconfined and unspoiled. The struggle that ensued was not the great adventure portrayed in western myth. For most of the settlers, life was harsh and demanding. For the Indians, the way of life they cherished was gone by the end of the century.

Here, in the words of a few who were there, is a glimpse of those times and the people who lived then.

Trail map from *Horn's Overland Guide*, 1852.
Approaching Chimney Rock by William Henry
Jackson, 1931. Detail from "A Blackfoot
Travois" by Edward S. Curtis.

PHOTO CREDITS: Library of Congress; National Park Service; *The North American Indian*, volume 18, plate 637, by Edward S. Curtis.

Moving West

All who ventured westward were stunned by what they saw.

“The vast prairie itself soon opened before us in all its grandeur and beauty. . . . The view of the illimitable succession of green undulations and flowery slopes . . . stretching away and away, until they fade from the sight in the dim distance, creates a wild and scarcely controllable ecstasy of admiration.”

Journal of Edwin Bryant, 1846

Most Americans believed that it was God's will that they settle all the territory between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

“Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.”

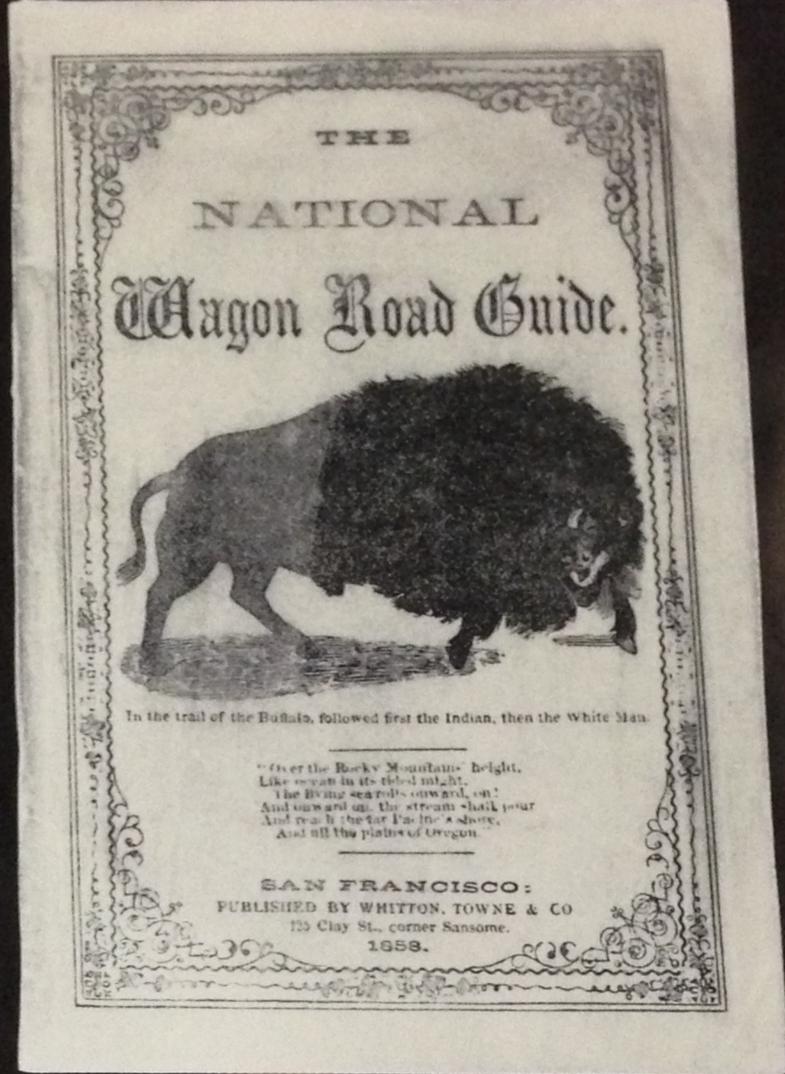
John Louis O'Sullivan

New York Morning News, December 27, 1845

Emigration continued at a steadily increasing pace through the 1840s and '50s. Then, after 1862 — when the Homestead Act offered 160 acres (65 hectares) to any citizen over 21 who would live on the land and cultivate it — the stream became a flood.

**“Come along, come along —
Don’t be alarmed,
Uncle Sam is rich enough
To give us all a farm.”**

Popular song of the 1860s



By 1870, a quarter of a million pioneers had crossed the prairies and mountains. Many of the records of what it was like to make this journey — letters, diaries, and journals — were written by women. The picture they give is far different from that of the history books.

“To add to the horrors of the surroundings one man was bitten on the ankle by a venemous snake. Although every available remedy was tried upon the wound, his limb had to be amputated with the aid of a common handsaw. Fortunately, for him, he had a good, brave wife along who helped and cheered him into health and usefulness.”

Catherine Haun

“A Woman’s Trip Across the Plains, 1849”

1 Settlers on the trail west. **2** *The Emigrant Ship* by James Glen Wilson, ca. 1850. **3** Passengers transfer from train to stagecoach in the Sierra Nevada Mountains before completion of the transcontinental railroad. **4** Emigrant women boil their wash. **5** A rest stop on the journey through Navaho Country. **6** *The National Wagon Road Guide*, one of many emigrant guidebooks from the mid-1800s.

PHOTO CREDITS: **1** National Archives; **2** Ulster Museum, Belfast; **3** USIA Photo Library; **4** Courtesy of Fred Hulstrand Collection, North Dakota State University, Fargo; **5** Courtesy Museum of New Mexico, Ben Wittick photo; **6** Denver Public Library, Western History Department.

Settling In

Once the wagons had arrived at their destinations, the men and women went to work clearing the land and building homes.

“Dear Mother:

. . . I have saw a pretty tuff time a part of the time since I have been out here, but I started out to get a home and I was determined to win or die in the attempt. I worked to hard in the fore part of the season, I would get up early and get my breakfast and get out to work. Scarcely ever set down only while I was eating from the time I got up until I went to bed at nine and ten o'clock. . . . I broke out about 30 acres last spring besides putting in my crop and tending it. . . . Have got a good crop of corn. . . .”

Letter from Ed Donnell

Basora, Nebraska, October 8, 1885

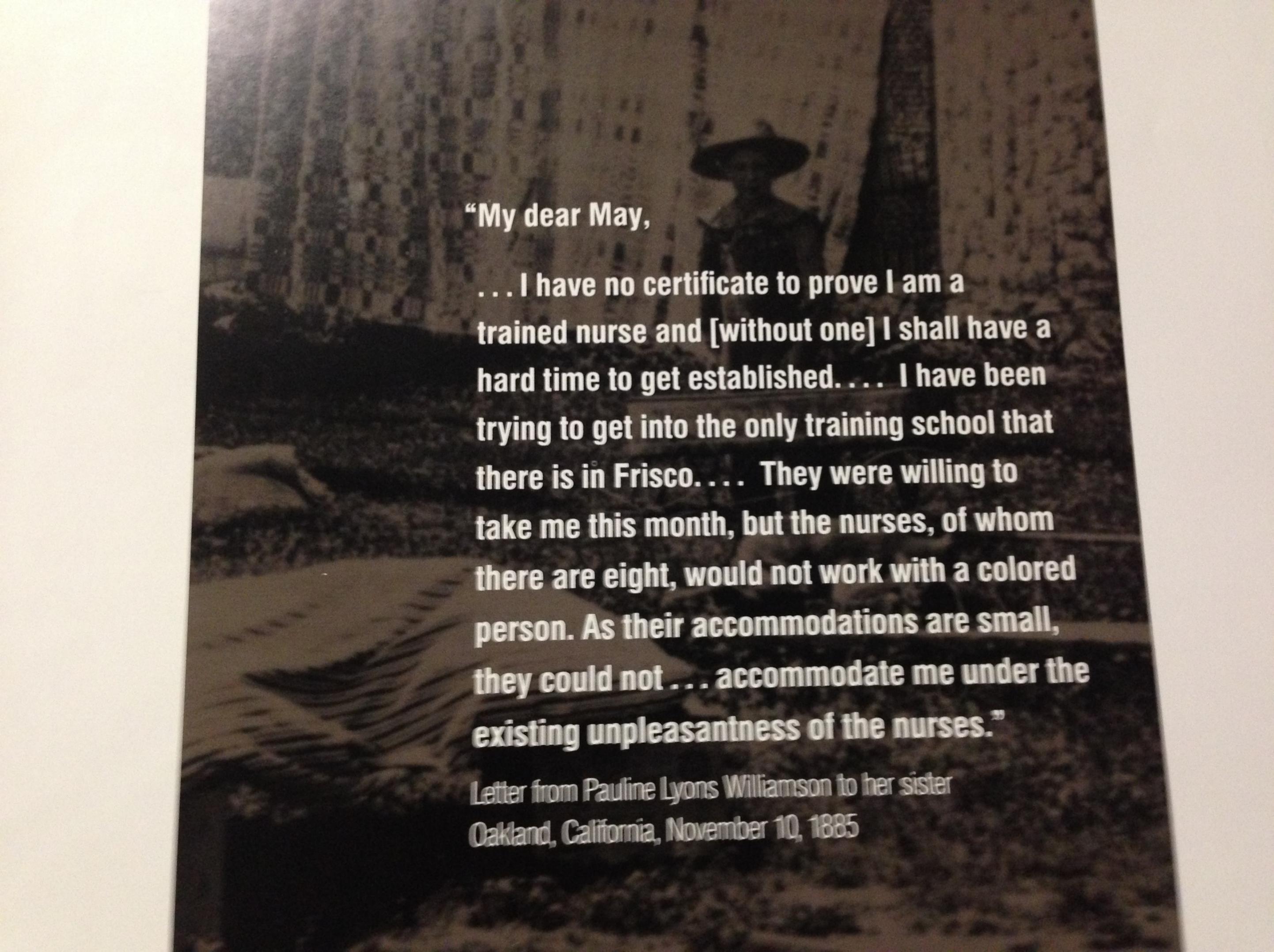
Despite the hardships, many of
the settlers were content.

“Dear Brother & Sister:

**. . . I did not like [it here] very well but after we had taken our
claim and became settled once more I began to like [it] much
better and the longer I live here the better I like [it]. . . . I think
with good health and good economy we shall get along very
well. I cannot say that I wish to go back to the states to live at
present if ever.”**

Letter from Mary M. Colby
Lebanon, Oregon Territory, 1849

Some, particularly those of other races who went to cities and towns, found that the prejudices they had hoped to leave behind had followed them West.



“My dear May,

... I have no certificate to prove I am a trained nurse and [without one] I shall have a hard time to get established. . . . I have been trying to get into the only training school that there is in Frisco. . . . They were willing to take me this month, but the nurses, of whom there are eight, would not work with a colored person. As their accommodations are small, they could not . . . accommodate me under the existing unpleasantness of the nurses.”

*Letter from Pauline Lyons Williamson to her sister
Oakland, California, November 10, 1885*

1 Portrait of an Oregon settler in the late 1800s. **2** "Plowing on the Prairies Beyond the Mississippi" from *Harper's Weekly*, May 9, 1868. **3** Oklahoma family beside their dugout. **4** The Shores, an ex-slave family, in front of their Nebraska "soddy" in 1887. **5** A thorough housecleaning on a farm near present-day Seattle, Washington.

PHOTO CREDITS: **1** University of Oregon Library; **2 & 3** Library of Congress; **4** Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society; **5** Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries.

Gold!

“I am credibly informed that a quantity of gold, worth in value \$30, was picked up lately in the bed of a stream of the Sacramento.”

Letter from San Francisco published in the *New York Herald*, August 19, 1848

A few months later, the eastern states were buzzing with the news.

“The California gold mania is again in the ascendant, and bids fair to depopulate this side of the continent altogether. The accounts of the immense riches to be acquired in the new El Dorado, instead of abating, are every day arriving in a more authentic shape, till even the most incredulous are compelled to believe.”

New York Herald, December 3, 1848

The rush was on. Thousands were sure they would be rich overnight — or at least find enough gold to pay off their debts. But few succeeded.

1 Prospectors panning for gold. **2** Daguerreotype of gold miners in California around 1850. **3** *Mountain Jack and a Wandering Miner* by E. Hall Martin, 1850. **4** Large companies mechanized many mining operations by the mid-1850s. **5** Miners work by candlelight in Idaho Springs, Colorado. **6** Many would-be miners traveled to California by ship in the late 1840s.

PHOTO CREDITS: **1** Library of Congress; **2** The Bancroft Library; **3** The Oakland Museum; **4** & **5** Library of Congress; **6** Courtesy Chicago Historical Society.



Persons who wish to secure a passage to California will do well to call on the subscriber, who has opened an office for the express accommodation of persons wishing to embark for the

GOLD REGIONS.

He is employed by several Companies for the conveyance of those wishing to secure passage to California, the rates of the first class being well regulated and comfortable, and commensurate with the expense of the passage.

Persons from the Country desiring information in regard to securing a passage can call on the subscriber by mail, or

CLARKE'S
GENERAL AGENT'S OFFICE,

St. AND NEWARK.

Ad for American Merchant Marine.

All documents related to the most advantageous terms and conditions.

Register Book Room, No. 100 Nassau Street, New York.

“Mining is the hardest work imaginable and an occupation which very much endangers the health. A weakly man might about as well go to digging his grave as to dig for gold. The greater portion of those who expected to make a fortune in a day have given it over and that part of them who have the means have already taken passage for the states. Dissatisfaction is almost universal. . . .”

Letter from William R. Rockwell to his father
Weaver Creek, California, September 15, 1850

ek, California, September 15, 1850

Soon gold and then silver were discovered in other parts of the West — Colorado, Nevada, the Dakotas — but the story there was the same. When the precious metals gave out, even the mining towns were abandoned.

“Nevada is one of the very youngest and wildest of the States, nevertheless it is already strewn with ruins that seem as gray and silent and timeworn as if the civilization to which they belonged had perished centuries ago. . . . Wander where you may throughout the length and breadth of this mountain-barred wilderness, you everywhere come upon these dead mining towns. . . , the very names of many of them . . . now known only through tradition — tradition ten years old.”

Naturalist John Muir

San Francisco Evening Bulletin, January 15, 1879

Cattlemen

In the late 1860s, after the Civil War had ended, cowboys began driving herds of cattle up from Texas to the railheads in the central plains. At the same time, on the northern plains, a separate range cattle industry was starting up, based on free use of government land for grazing. Moving these cattle from grazing lands to market was hard, tedious work.

"[May] 6th Started once More on My journey left Cow
House River & got to Leon crossed & camped in prairie
5 miles north of River dark & Gloomey night hard
rain Stampeded & lost 200 head of cattle (Milts Herd)

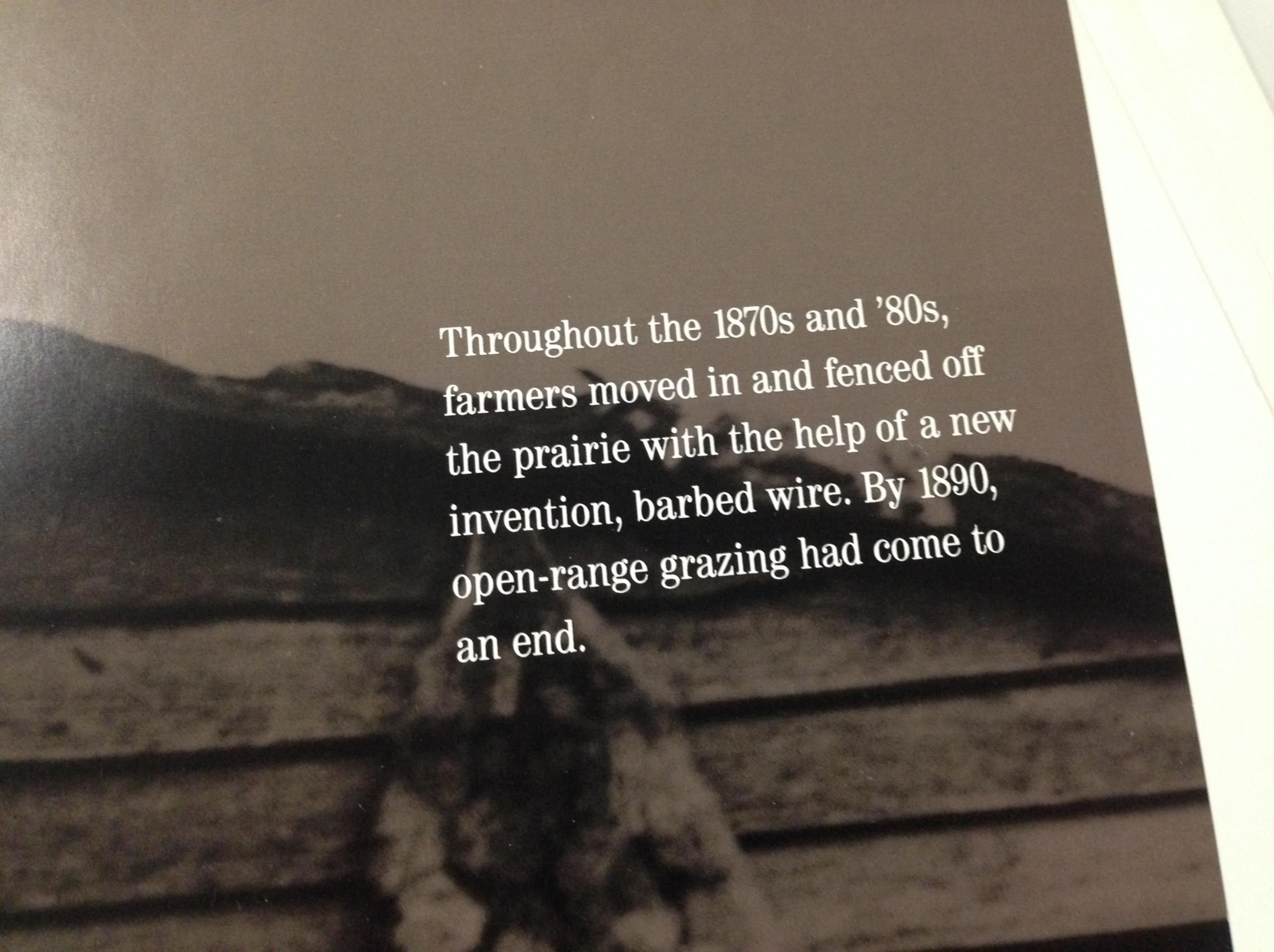
7th Hunt cattle is the order of the day — found most of our
Cattle & drove 12 miles & camped on a large creek in
Bosque Co

8th All 3 heards are up & ready to travel off together for the
first time travelled 6 miles rain pouring down in torrents &
here we are on the banks of a creek with 10 or 12 ft water
& raising crossed at 4 Oclock & crossed into the Bosque
Bottom found it 20 ft deep Ran my Horse into a ditch & got
my Knee badly sprained — 15 Miles"

Diary of George C. Duffield,
"Driving Cattle from Texas to Iowa, 1866"

1 Cowboys with their herd. **2** Western saddle.
3 *The Fall of the Cowboy* by Frederic Remington,
1895. **4** A cowboy gets a haircut at a line camp
in Texas. **5** Cowboy camp in Texas in 1887.

PHOTO CREDITS: **1** Library of Congress; **2** Colorado Historical Society; **3** Amon Carter Museum, Fort
Worth, Texas; **4** Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; **5** Library of Congress.

A black and white photograph of a prairie landscape. In the foreground, a wooden fence runs across the frame. The middle ground shows a flat, open prairie field. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Throughout the 1870s and '80s, farmers moved in and fenced off the prairie with the help of a new invention, barbed wire. By 1890, open-range grazing had come to an end.

“In those days [1874] there was no fencing along the trails to the North, and we had lots of range to graze on. Now there is so much land taken up and fenced in that . . . we have hard lines to find enough range to feed on. These fellows from Ohio, Indiana, and other northern and western states — the ‘bone and sinew of the country,’ as politicians call them — have made farms, enclosed pastures, and fenced in water holes until you can’t rest; and I say, D — n such bone and sinew! They are the ruin of the country, and have everlastingly, eternally, now and forever, destroyed the best grazing-land in the world.”

Prose and Poetry of the Live Stock Industry of the United States

National Live Stock Historical Association

Maas subot

The people who lived in the West before the settlers came had sophisticated cultures and religions and knew – much better than those who came after them – how to live in harmony with nature.

“I have never forgotten my wild, free childhood when I lived in a tepee and heard the calling of the coyotes under the stars . . . when the night winds, the sun, and everything else in our primitive world reflected the wisdom and benevolence of the Great Spirit. . . . I remember playing with the other children on the banks of a clean river, and I shall never forget when my grandfather taught me how to make a bow and arrow from hard wood and flint, and a fishhook from the rib of a field mouse.”

Chief Red Fox of the Sioux (born 1870)

When white people first arrived, the Indians greeted them as friends.

“I was a very small child when the first white people came into our country. . . . When the news was brought to my grandfather, he asked what they looked like? When told that they had hair on their faces and were white, he jumped up and clasped his hands together, and cried aloud:

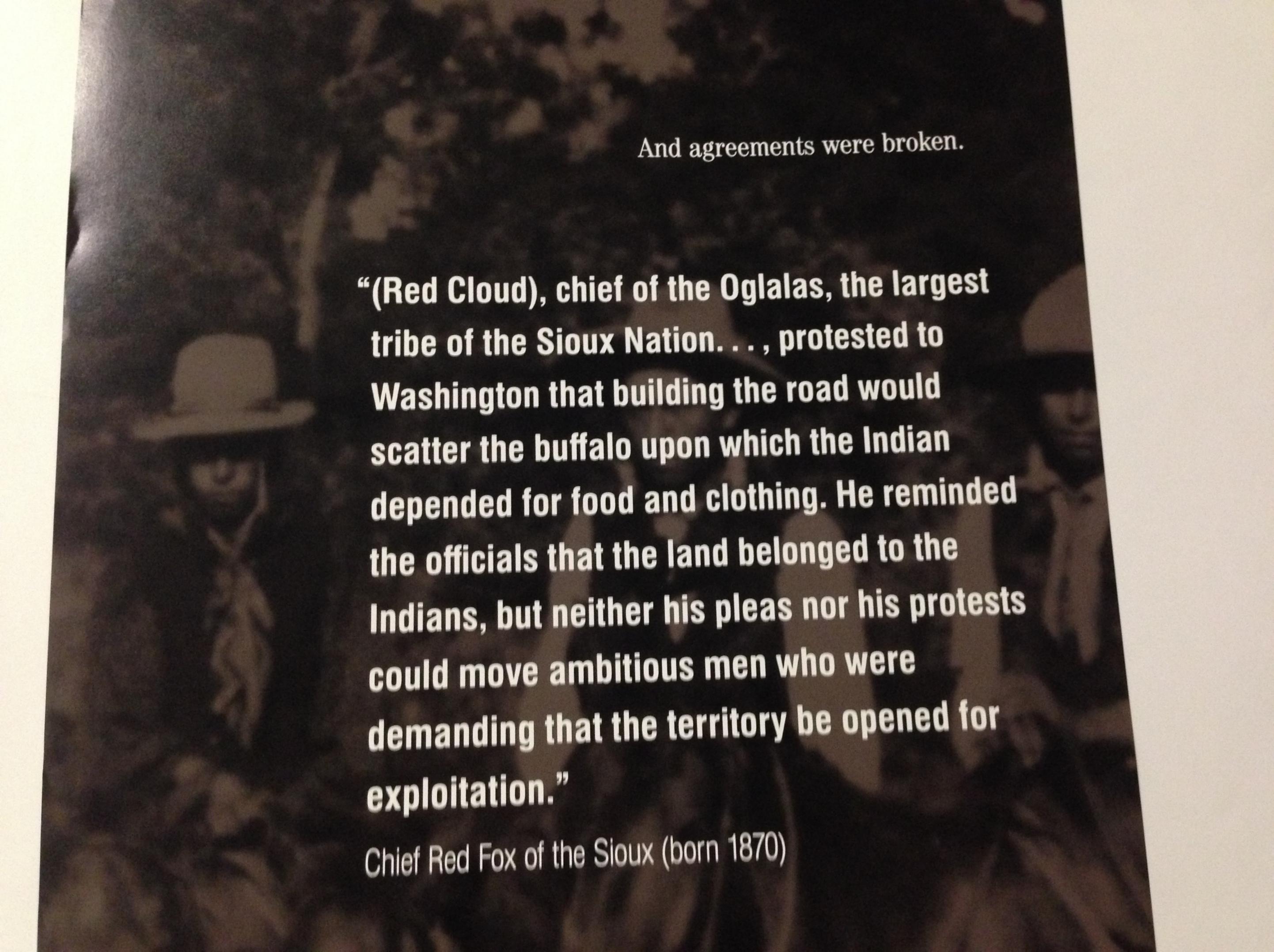
‘My white brothers — my long-looked-for white brothers have come at last. . . !’”

Sarah Winnemucca of the Paiute (born 1844?)

The Indians quickly learned that the newcomers wanted their land. Agreements were made to protect their property.

“No white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the territory, or without the consent of the Indians to pass through the same.”

Treaty of 1868



And agreements were broken.

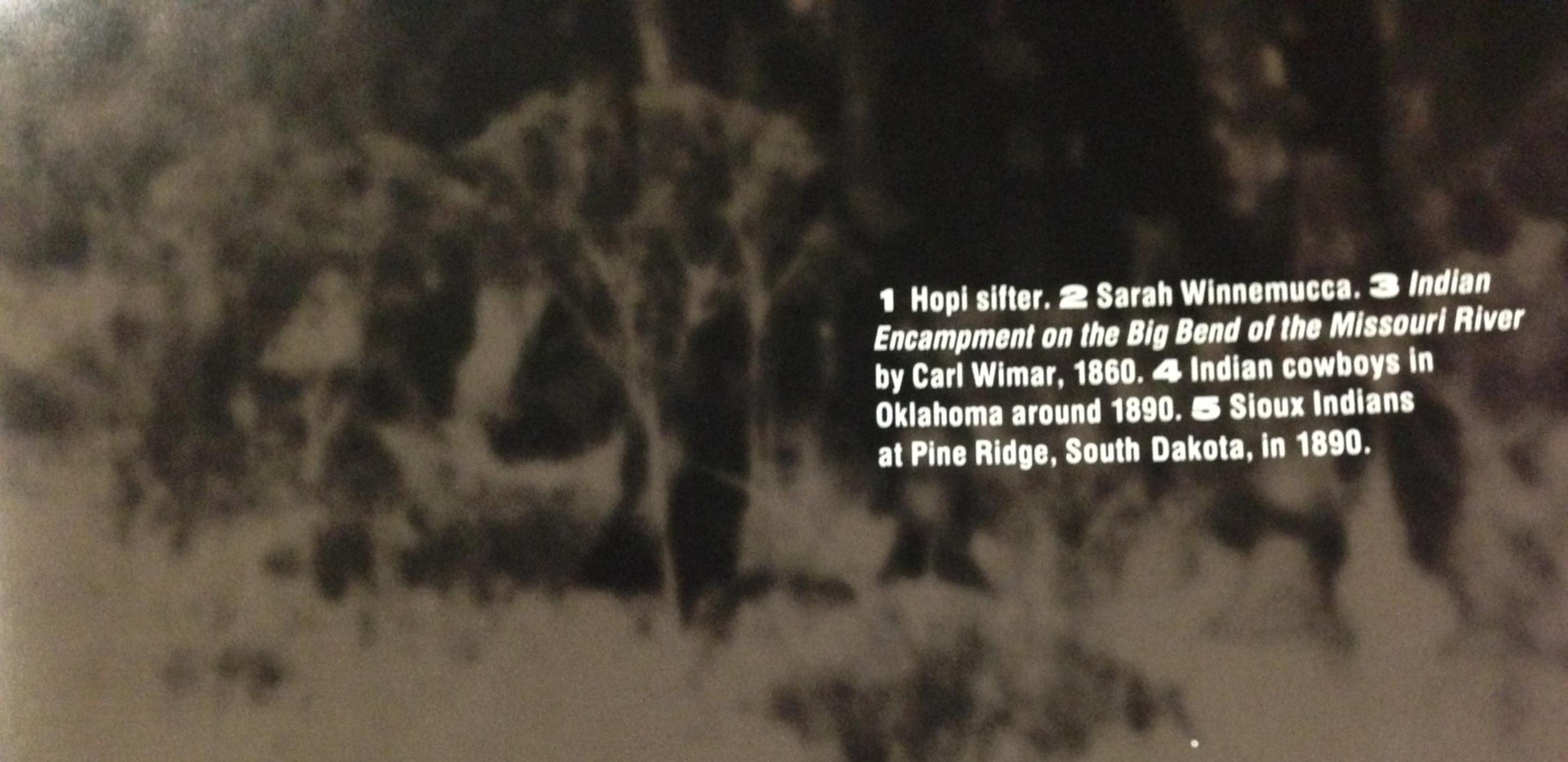
“(Red Cloud), chief of the Oglalas, the largest tribe of the Sioux Nation. . . , protested to Washington that building the road would scatter the buffalo upon which the Indian depended for food and clothing. He reminded the officials that the land belonged to the Indians, but neither his pleas nor his protests could move ambitious men who were demanding that the territory be opened for exploitation.”

Chief Red Fox of the Sioux (born 1870)

For as long as they could, the Indians resisted the idea of living in the confinement of a reservation. But in the end, the tribes were defeated.

“They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they never kept but one; they promised to take our land, and they took it.”

Red Cloud of the Oglala Sioux (born 1822)



1 Hopi sifter. **2** Sarah Winnemucca. **3** *Indian Encampment on the Big Bend of the Missouri River* by Carl Wimar, 1860. **4** Indian cowboys in Oklahoma around 1890. **5** Sioux Indians at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in 1890.

PHOTO CREDITS: **1** Photo by Barry Fitzgerald; **2** Nevada Historical Society; **3** Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma; **4** Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; **5** Library of Congress.

WEST

By the turn of the century, the West had been tamed, and the frontier was gone forever. The buffalo herds had vanished, the cattle drives had ended, the gold had been mined, and the endless expanses of grassland had been cut up into small farms. The Indians — those that were left — were living on reservations.

This was progress, of course, and civilization. But there were many, newcomers and Indians alike, who mourned the loss of what had been.



**“But, brothers, we are falling,
Our race is almost run;
The days of elk and buffalo
And beaver traps are gone.**

...

**The fighting days are over;
The Indian yell resounds
No more along the border;
Peace sends far sweeter sounds.**

**But we found great joy, old comrades,
To hear, and make it die;
We won bright homes for gentle ones,
And now, our West, good-bye.”**

“The Old Scout’s Lament”

EXPAND THE MARKET AND INCREASE PRODUCTION.

Vol. IX. NEW YORK, MARCH, 1882. No. 4.

AMERICAN BARB FENCE WIRE.
PATENTED OR GALVANIZED.



En el de los 4 últimos años
se han vendido en los Estados Unidos
más de 100,000,000 pies de alambre
de hierro galvanizado. Este alambre
es el más fuerte y duradero que
se haya inventado. Se resiste a
la oxidación y a la acción de
los animales. Es el único alambre
que se puede usar en los terrenos
de los Estados Unidos.

La 5ª vez que se ha
publicado en estos Estados Unidos
el nombre de este alambre
es el más fuerte y duradero que
se haya inventado. Se resiste a
la oxidación y a la acción de
los animales. Es el único alambre
que se puede usar en los terrenos
de los Estados Unidos.

**CALVANIZED QU'APRÈS
LA FABRICATION.**

et qui empêche complètement
l'oxydation de la surface.

Patented in America and
England, and is the only
aluminum wire that has
been patented in both
countries.

SELLERS SEND FOR PRICES LIST AND SAMPLES.

American Fencing Co.,
Office: 234 West 29th Street, New York.

WORKS: (Nos. 222, 227, 232, 238, 247, 250) West 28th St.

5

1 In the late 1800s, towns like Lower Creede, Colorado, began to dot the landscape. **2 & 3** Ephraim Swain Finch built a log house in Nebraska in the 1880s. Twenty years later, his family lived in a house of seasoned lumber with scroll-saw decorations. **4** Wright's Buffalo Hide Yard in Dodge City, Kansas, in 1874. **5** Barbed wire helped fence in the Plains and tame the West.

PHOTO CREDITS: 1 Courtesy Colorado Historical Society; **2 & 3** Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society; **4** National Archives; **5** Library of Congress.