Timeline of Westward Expansion and Settlement. Source: PBS, "The West"

1830 Congress passes a Pre-emption Act which grants settlers the right to purchase at $1.25 per acre 160 acres of public land which they have cultivated for at least 12 months, thereby offering "squatters" some protection against speculators who purchase lands they have already improved.

1830 The Indian Removal Act, passed with strong support from President Andrew Jackson, authorizes the federal government to negotiate treaties with eastern tribes exchanging their lands for land in the West. All costs of migration and financial aid to assist resettlement are provided by the government. Jackson forces through a treaty for removal of the Choctaw from Mississippi within the year.

1830 Alarmed at the growing number of Americans in Tejas, Mexico imposes sharp limits on further immigration.

1831 The Nez Percé send a delegation to St. Louis requesting white teachers for their people, sparking a missionary movement to the Northwest.

1831 In *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia*, a dispute over Georgia's attempt to extend its jurisdiction over Cherokee territory, Chief Justice John Marshall denies Indians the right to court protection because they are not subject to the laws of the Constitution. He describes Indian tribes as "domestic dependent nations," saying that each is "a distinct political entity...capable of managing its own affairs."

1832 In *Worcester v. State of Georgia*, the Supreme Court rules that the federal government, not the states, has jurisdiction over Indian territories. Chief Justice John Marshall writes that Indian tribes must be treated "as nations" by the national government and that state laws "can have no force" on their territories. President Andrew Jackson, when asked to comply, says, "The Chief Justice has made his ruling; now let him enforce it."

1834 William Sublette and Robert Campbell establish Fort Laramie on the North Platte River in Wyoming, the first permanent trading post in the region and soon to be an important stopping point for pioneers traveling the Oregon Trail.

1835 The Florida Seminoles reject forced removal to the West and begin a seven-year war of resistance under Chief Osceola. In that same year, the Cherokee finally sign a treaty of removal, giving up their lands in Georgia for territory in present-day Oklahoma.

1835-1836 Texas War for Independence. For the next ten years, Mexican troops and Texans continue to war against one another in a series of intermittent clashes along the border. In 1836 Sam Houston is elected the first President of the Republic of Texas and Texans vote to seek annexation by the United States.

1836 Responding to the 1831 Nez Perce request for teachers, the Whitman party -- Dr. Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, accompanied by Narcissa's former suitor, Rev. H. H. Spalding, and his wife, Eliza -- travel what will soon be known as the Oregon Trail to arrive at the junction of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, where they establish a mission to bring Christianity to the Indians of the northwest. Narcissa and Eliza are the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains, and their group is perhaps the first party of settlers to travel overland to the West.

1837 Congress refuses to annex Texas, bowing to abolitionist opponents who call it a "slavocracy." But President Andrew Jackson recognizes the Republic of Texas on his last day in office.

1838 General Winfield Scott oversees the forced removal of the Cherokee from Georgia to the Indian Territory of the West along the "Trail of Tears."

1840 The last rendezvous on the Green River marks the end of the mountain trapping era, as fashion changes in Europe and steady declines in the beaver population make the fur trade barely profitable.

1841 John Bidwell organizes the Western Emigration Society and leads the first wagon train of pioneers across the Rockies, a party of 69 adults and children who divide into two groups after crossing South Pass. One group heads north into Oregon, while the other, led by Bidwell, continues west to California, suffering desperate hardship and near starvation before arriving in Sacramento.

1842 Lieutenant John C. Fremont of the Army Topographical Corps leads a scientific expedition into the Rocky Mountains, guided by the mountain man Kit Carson. Crossing into the mountains at South Pass, Fremont explores the Wind River Mountain region, pausing to plant a specially prepared flag on a high peak which he names for himself. On his return, Fremont's account of the expedition and expert maps are ordered published by Congress. It becomes a best-seller.

1842 Francisco Lopez discovers gold dust in the roots of an onion he dug up for lunch, touching off a local gold rush to San Feliciano Canyon near Los Angeles, but news of the discovery is largely ignored elsewhere.

1843 a party of 1000 pioneers heads west from Independence to fertile lands of the Willamette Valley, establishing the Oregon Trail and the migration to Oregon becomes an annual event, with thousands more making the trek every year.

1844 James K. Polk is elected President with the slogan "54-40 or Fight" -- a promise to set the disputed northern border of the Oregon Territory at 54 degrees, 40 minutes by diplomacy or war, and an implicit promise to expand American territories in every direction. John L. Sullivan, editor of the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, criticizes American temerity toward Mexico and argues that it is "our Manifest Destiny...to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." Texas enters the Union at year's end.

1846 Mexican-American War between the Nueces River, which Mexico regards as the Texas border, and the Rio Grande, which is the border Texans claim. Fighting ensues in Texas and California. Over the next two years, more than 13,000 Americans die in the Mexican War, which prepares a generation of military leaders for the Civil War.

1846 Britain and the United States reach a compromise in the Pacific Northwest, setting the Oregon Territory's northern border at the 49th parallel.

1846 Driven from Nauvoo by violent mobs, the Mormons head west under the leadership of Brigham Young, travelling in highly organized companies of 50 and 100. They establish Winter Quarters near present-day Omaha, Nebraska, but despite their preparations, suffer near starvation and a cholera epidemic that claims 600 lives.

1846 The Donner Party, trapped by heavy snows when it attempts to follow the "Hastings Cutoff" through the Sierra Nevada Mountains into California, is driven to cannibalism as it attempts to survive the winter.

1847 Brigham Young leads an advance party along the Mormon Trail into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, where they arrive on July 23 to begin creating a secure refuge for their church. Before the day is over, these first settlers begin digging irrigation ditches and planting crops. And even before the thousands following behind them arrive, Brigham Young begins laying out the streets of Salt Lake City. In that same year, Cayuse warriors massacre Dr. Marcus Whitman, his wife, Narcissa, and twelve others at Waiilatpu, their mission on the Columbia River in reprisal for deaths caused by a measles epidemic among their tribe.

1848 On January 24, James Marshall, a veteran of the Bear Flag Revolt, discovers gold on the American River at Coloma while building a lumber mill. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ends the Mexican War, giving the United States Texas, California, New Mexico and other territories in the southwest.

1849 Forty-niners heading for California's gold fields expand the network of trails across the continent, as wagon trains stretch across the plains and struggle through the mountains as far as the eye can see. Forty-niners also come west by ship, sailing around Cape Horn or crossing by canoe and donkey train through the jungles of Panama.

1849 Forty-niners pioneer the boomtown life that will follow miners throughout the West, a life of desperately hard work hardened by gambling, drinking, violence and vigilante justice. "Pretty Juanita," convicted of murder after stabbing a man who had tried to rape her, becomes the first person hanged in the California mining camps. By year's end, more than 80,000 fortune-seekers have made their way to California from every corner of the world, nearly tripling the territory's population.

1850 California enters the Union. California's Indians find themselves deprived of their traditional food sources and forced by hunger to raid the mining towns and other white settlements. Miners retaliate by hunting Indians down and brutally abusing them. The California legislature responds to the situation with an Indenture Act which establishes a form of legal slavery for the native peoples of the state by allowing whites to declare them vagrant and auction off their services for up to four months. The law also permits whites to indenture Indian children, with the permission of a parent or friend, and leads to widespread kidnapping of Indian children, who are then sold as "apprentices."

1850 California legislature enacts a Foreign Miners' Tax which requires all miners who are not native or naturalized citizens of the United States to obtain a license at the staggering cost of $20 per month.

1850 Levi Strauss begins manufacturing heavyweight trousers for gold miners, made of the twilled cotton cloth known as "genes" in France. Strauss had intended to make tents, but finding no market, made a fortune in pants instead.

1851 Northern tribes sign Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. United States pledges that each tribe will retain possession of its assigned lands forever, that they will be protected by U.S. troops from white intruders and that they will each receive $50,000 in supplies and provisions annually for the next fifty years. Both sides agree to settle any future disputes, whether between tribes or between Indians and whites, through restitution.Unfortunately, the chiefs who sign the Fort Laramie Treaty do not have the authority over their tribes that the United States negotiators assume, and the negotiators themselves cannot deliver the protections and fair treatment they promise.

1851 John L. Soule, in an editorial in the Terre Haute Express, advises: "Go West, young man, go West." But New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley gets credit for the line.

1852 By year's end, more than 20,000 Chinese immigrants have come to America, all but 17 arriving at San Francisco to join in the search for gold.

1853 Kong Chow Temple is established in San Francisco, the first Buddhist temple in the United States.

1853 California begins confining its remaining Indian population on harsh military reservations, but the combination of legal enslavement and near genocide has already made California the site of the worst slaughter of Native Americans in United States history. As many as 150,000 Indians lived in the state before 1849; by 1870, fewer than 30,000 will remain.

1854 The Republican Party, born out of opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, declares its opposition to slavery and privilege, and its support for new railroads, free homesteads and the opening of Western lands by free labor.

1857 Responding to complaints by federal officials in Utah and national outrage over the Mormon practice of plural marriage, President James Buchanan sends U. S. troops to impose federal law in Utah. To the Mormons, this appears the onset of another persecution, which Brigham Young is determined to resist. Rather than engage in battle, however, he attacks the federal troops' supply lines, burning Fort Bridger, destroying supply trains and setting fire to the plains to deprive the advancing army of forage for its horses. At the same time, he readies a plan to evacuate and destroy Salt Lake City, should the federal troops get through. In this atmosphere, a wagon train of non-Mormon settlers moving through southern Utah on their way to California falls victim to Mormon fears, being massacred at Mountain Meadows.

1859 Gold is discovered in Boulder Canyon, Colorado, sparking the Pikes Peak gold rush which brings an estimated 100,000 fortune-hunters to the Rockies under the banner "Pikes Peak or Bust." Oregon enters the union as a free state.

1859 Silver is discovered at the Comstock Lode in Nevada, turning nearby Virginia City into a boom town. During this decade, a tidal wave of 2.5 million immigrants enter the United States, including 66,000 Chinese.

1860 The Pony Express completes its inaugural delivery, bringing mail over the 1,966 miles from St. Louis to Sacramento in 11 days. Organized by William H. Russell and Alexander Majors, the service depends on a string of 119 stations, about 12 miles apart, where the young riders -- "skinny, expert . . . willing to risk death daily" -- exchange horses to keep advancing at top speed.

1860 Lincoln is elected President, pledging to pass homestead legislation and to oppose the spread of slavery. His victory provokes South Carolina to secede.

1861 Kansas enters the Union as a free state. 1861 Colorado and Nevada Territories are organized as Congress begins to consolidate federal control over the West, establishing strong local governments loyal to the Union across the region. Texas joins the Confederacy, California joins the Union.

1861 Crews working to complete a coast-to-coast telegraph line meet at Fort Bridger in Utah Territory. The first transcontinental telegram, transmitted from Sacramento to Washington, carries a message from the state's Chief Justice to President Lincoln. Completion of a transcontinental telegraph line signals the end for the Pony Express.

1862 Congress passes the Pacific Railroad Act, which authorizes the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Companies to build a transcontinental rail line along the 42nd parallel and provides public lands and subsidies for every mile of track laid. Idaho Territory organized. Congress passes the Homestead Act, which allows citizens to settle on up to 160 acres of surveyed but unclaimed public land and receive title to it after making improvements and residing there for five years.

1865 The Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, brings an end to the Civil War.The Union Pacific Railroad begins moving westward, laying track at an average rate of one mile per day. In California, Chinese laborers join the Central Pacific work gangs, providing the strength, organization and persistence needed to break through the mountains.

1866 General Philip H. Sheridan takes command of U.S. forces in the West, proposing to bring peace to the plains by exterminating the herds of buffalo that support the Indians' way of life: "Kill the buffalo and you kill the Indians," he says.

1867 Nebraska enters the Union. The United States purchases Alaska from Russia. The first cattle drive from Texas up the Chisholm Trail arrives at the railyards of Abilene, Kansas.

1867 Medicine Lodge Treaty, intended to remove southern Plains Indians from the path of white settlement. The treaty marks the end of the era in which federal policymakers saw the Plains as "one big reservation" to be divided up among various tribes. Instead, the treaty establishes reservations for each tribe in the western part of present-day Oklahoma and requires them to give up their traditional lands elsewhere.

1869 A Golden Spike completes the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah.

1869 Wyoming becomes the first place in the United States where women have the right to vote.

1870 Buffalo hunters begin moving onto the plains, brought there by the expanding railroads and the growing market for hides and meat back east. In little more than a decade, they reduce the once numberless herd to an endangered species. Railroad companies begin massive advertising campaigns to attract settlers to their land grants in the West, sending agents to rural areas in the eastern states and throughout Europe to distribute handbills, posters and pamphlets that tout the rich soil and favorable climate of the region. But the higher costs of railroad land compared to public lands, and the fact that railroads pay no taxes on their lands, soon stirs charges of extortion, leading to state laws controlling railroad rates and land sale practices by the decade's end.

1870 With Brigham Young's support, the Utah territorial legislature grants women the right to vote, providing the Mormons with an added margin of political power.

1871 Congress approves the Indian Appropriations Act, which ends the practice of treating Indian tribes as sovereign nations by directing that all Indians be treated as individuals and legally designated "wards" of the federal government. The act is justified as a way to avoid further misunderstandings in treaty negotiations, where whites have too often wrongly assumed that a tribal chief is also that tribe's chief of state. In effect, however, the act is another step toward dismantling the tribal structure of Native American life.

1872 The Yellowstone Act sets aside more than 2 million acres in northwest Wyoming as a public "pleasuring-ground" for the "preservation... of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities or wonders... and their retention in their natural condition." It marks the first time any national government has set aside public lands to preserve their natural beauties.

1874 Mennonite immigrants from Russia arrive in Kansas with drought-resistant "Turkey Red" wheat, which will help turn the one-time "Great American Desert" into the nation's breadbasket.

1874 Joseph Glidden receives a patent for barbed wire, an inexpensive, durable and effective fencing material which, with the destruction of the buffalo, will open the plains to more efficient agriculture and ranching. George Armstrong Custer announces the discovery of gold in the Black Hills of Dakota, setting off a stampede of fortune-hunters into this most sacred part of Lakota territory.

1875 Deadwood, soon to be one of the wildest towns in the West, springs into existence when Black Hills miners find gold on Deadwood Creek. Within a year, the legendary gunfighter "Wild Bill" Hickock will be murdered here while holding aces and eights -- the dead man's hand -- in a game of poker.

1876 Colorado enters the Union.

1877 Congress votes to repeal the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty and take back the Black Hills, along with 40 million more acres of Lakota land. With the threat of Indian attack removed, mining camps and boom towns -- French Creek, Whitewood Gulch, Black Tail Gulch -- crowd the Black Hills.

1877 Congress passes the Desert Land Act, which permits settlers to purchase up to 640 acres of public land at 25¢ per acre in areas where the arid climate requires large-scale farming, provided they irrigate the land.

1878 With racial discrimination on the rise in the post-Reconstruction South, an estimated 40,000 African Americans begin to migrate from the former slave states into Kansas. Many of these so-called Exodusters answer the call of Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, a land speculator with a vision of establishing independent black communities across the state.

1879 To complete its consolidation of federally-funded scientific exploration in the West, Congress creates the United States Bureau of Ethnology to coordinate study of the region's native peoples and complete a record of their cultures before they vanish under the pressure of expanding white settlement.

1881 Late summer brings the last big cattle drive to Dodge City. With livestock plentiful on the plains, the long trek up the Western Trail is no longer profitable, and most states now prohibit driving out-of-state cattle across their borders. The increasing use of barbed wire to enclose farms and grazing land has ended the era of the open range. In the fifteen years since Texas cowboys first hit the trail, as many as two million longhorns have been driven to market in Dodge.

1882 Intensifying its anti-Chinese policies, Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act, which completely prohibits both immigration from China and the naturalization of Chinese immigrants already in the United States for a period of ten years. The bill comes amid increasing outbreaks of anti-Chinese violence, stirred up by the belief that low-paid Chinese workers are taking jobs away from Americans. Within the year, immigration from China drops from 40,000 in 1881 to just 23. Also, Congress passes the Edmunds Law, making polygamy a federal crime punishable by up to five years in prison and denying convicted polygamists the right to vote, to hold office and to serve on juries. The law increases federal pressure on Mormons to renounce their practice of plural marriage and sends many Mormon leaders into hiding.

1883 Buffalo hunters gather on the northern Plains for the last large buffalo kill, among them a Harvard-educated New York assemblyman named Theodore Roosevelt, who hopes to bag a trophy before the species disappears. Hunters have already destroyed the southern herd.

1885 Federal troops are called in to restore order in Rock Springs, Wyoming, after British and Swedish miners go on a rampage against the Chinese, killing 28 and driving hundreds more out of town. This "Rock Springs Massacre" follows a similar race riot in Tacoma, Washington.

1887 Increasing pressure on the Mormons, Congress passes the Edmunds-Tucker Act, which disincorporates the Mormon church, confiscates its real estate and other properties, and abolishes women's suffrage in Utah. The law effectively destroys the political, economic and social system by which the leaders of the Mormon church have guided and governed their society, imposing federal authority in its place.

1887 A fare war between competing rail lines and the inducements of eager land speculators bring newcomers to Los Angeles by the trainload; 120,000 arrive in 1887, drawn by the promise of pure air, warm sunshine and prosperity. Within a few years, the city is transformed and the Californios who have lived there for more than a century are suddenly regarded as strangers in their own land.

1889 President Benjamin Harrison authorizes opening unoccupied lands in the Indian Territory to white settlement, an order put into effect on April 22 at noon, when a gunshot gives settlers the signal to cross the border and stake their claims. Within nine hours, the Oklahoma Land Rush transforms almost two million acres of tribal land into thousands of individual land claims. Many of the most desirable plots are taken by "Sooners," so called because they crossed into the territory sooner than was permitted.

1889 At the urging of the National Farmers' Alliance, Kansas adopts first-of-its-kind legislation regulating trusts, providing an early portent of the agrarian-based progressive movement preparing to sweep through the West. Farm and labor representatives meet with prohibitionists in Salem, Oregon, to form a progressive Union Party. Washington, Montana and the Dakotas join the Union.

1890 Congress establishes the Oklahoma Territory on unoccupied lands in the Indian Territory, breaking a 60-year-old pledge to preserve this area exclusively for Native Americans forced from their lands in the east. Wyoming enters the Union.

1890 The U. S. Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of the 1887 Edmunds-Tucker Act, denying that its assault on Mormon institutions constitutes a violation of Mormon religious freedom. At the same time, Congress debates the even more punitive Cullom-Strubble Bill, designed to deny all Mormons the right to vote. In response, Wilford Woodruff, leader of the Mormon Church, issues the "Manifesto," a revelation urging all members of the church to comply with the laws of the land regarding marriage.

1891 Congress passes the Forest Reserve Act, which authorizes setting aside public forests in any state or territory to preserve a timber supply for the future. The law marks the first step in a process that will steadily place more and more Western land in the hands of the federal government while leaving less and less available for private purchase and use. As a result, federal priorities in the West gradually shift from selling public land to managing public resources.

1892 A strike by silver miners in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, erupts in violence, as miners are killed and a security guard barracks blown up. State and federal troops intervene to restore order by locking miners into an outdoor bullpen. The miners' defeat leads to the formation of the Western Federation of Miners in Butte, Montana, the next year, an organization representing mine workers across the West.

1893 Frederick Jackson Turner declares the closing of the Western frontier in his seminal lecture, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*.

1894 The Carey Act grants one million acres of public land to arid states and territories on the condition they "reclaim" the land by irrigation and sell it to settlers. This attempt to promote irrigation of arid Western lands proves unsuccessful when states find they cannot raise the funds to mount large-scale irrigation projects. Effective land reclamation in the West will require a massive federal investment.

1896 Utah enters the Union. William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech against the restrictive gold standard makes him the Presidential candidate of the Democratic and Populist parties, but his appeal to rural voters in the West and South does not carry him to the White House.

1896 The discovery of gold at Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River near Dawson City, Alaska, sparks the last great Western rush for riches.

1898 The United States annexes Hawaii.

1901 The Spindletop oil gusher in Beaumont, Texas, opens a century when "black gold" will play a vital role in the economy of the West, as Americans exchange the horse for the horsepower of the automobile.

1902 Newlands Reclamation Act, an unprecedented law authorizing federal construction of dams and reservoirs in the West funded by public land sales. The act is designed to promote settlement (rather than industry) by limiting tracts within the water project areas to 160 acres, in accordance with the 1862 Homestead Act. One effect of the Newlands Act is to institute a massive federally-funded public works program, leading ultimately to the colossal projects of the Depression years: Hoover Dam, the Grand Coulee Dam, Shasta Dam and the Glen Canyon Dam.

1906 A devastating earthquake virtually destroys San Francisco, setting off fires that burn out eight square miles in the city, leaving 250,000 homeless.

1907 Oklahoma enters the union.

1911 The Nestor Company opens the first film studio in the Hollywood area of Los Angeles, taking over a tavern closed by temperance activists. Within the decade, "Hollywood" will become the nickname for an entertainment industry destined to make the West the source of American popular culture and home of America's most incandescent cultural stars.

1912 Arizona and New Mexico enter the Union. Arizona, Kansas and Oregon give women the right to vote.

1913 William Mulholland completes construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, an engineering marvel that stretches more than 200 miles through mountains and over desert to bring his city the water it needs to grow. Tapping the Owens River in the Sierra Nevada, the aqueduct transforms the once fertile Owens Valley into a watershed for what will one day be the most populous city in the nation, providing a forecast of issues that will arise repeatedly as water resources are redistributed across the West.

1913 The U.S. Mint issues the "Buffalo" or "Indian Head" nickel, with an Indian's head shown in profile on the side inscribed "Liberty" and a buffalo on the side bearing the motto "E pluribus unum," or "From many, one." The unconscious irony of the design makes the coin almost an emblem of the nation's complex relationship to its Western heritage.

1913 California adopts the Alien Land Law, which targets Japanese in the state by making it illegal for aliens ineligible for citizenship to own farmland or lease it for more than three years.

1914 National Guardsmen and security agents attack striking mine workers at Ludlow, Colorado, setting fire to their tent city and shooting them down as they flee. Three men, two women and 13 children are killed in the "Ludlow Massacre," which company and National Guard officials defend as necessary to prevent anarchy. Also, the Panama Canal is completed, opening a new economic era in the West as Pacific seaports suddenly find themselves positioned on the world's busiest sea lanes.

1915 The first tourist automobiles enter Yellowstone Park.

1916 William E. Boeing, a Seattle timber baron, establishes the Boeing Airplane Company with a contract to build 50 biplanes for the Navy. His factory is the harbinger of an aerospace industry that will flourish in the West, drawing billions in government funds to the region.

1917 The United States declares war on Germany, entering World War I.