When people think of settlers moving west, they mostly imagine families crossing the plains (flat land) in covered wagons. Most Montanans, though, came to the state in the twentieth century. They came by train, car, or even airplane.
Homesteading

No single movement affected Montana history more than homesteading. Between 1909 and 1917, thousands of people from all over the world rushed to Montana to fulfill the dream of owning their own farm.

In 1862, the government wanted to fill the United States up with farmers, so it passed a law that gave people 160 acres of land if they would live on their farms and grow crops. At first, homesteaders (people who received land from the U.S. government in exchange for farming that land) went to the rich farmlands of the Midwest, where there was enough rain and good soil. When that land was all taken, they started looking farther west. Most homesteaders came to Montana after 1909 when the Homestead Act was changed to allow settlers to claim (take for their own) more land (320 acres, or the size of 242 football fields).

Some homesteaders found out about opportunities (chances for something better) in Montana from friends and
family members who were already here. Most learned about opportunities from advertisements. Railroad companies published \textit{(printed)} many of these ads. They wanted farmers to move to Montana so the railroads could have more customers. To get people to come to Montana, they published advertisements in many different languages. They also hired speakers to travel across Europe to encourage people to \textbf{immigrate} \textit{(move from one country to another)}.

\textbf{Push factors} \textit{(things that make people want to leave their homes)} played a role, too. War, \textbf{poverty} \textit{(being poor)}, and \textbf{discrimination} \textit{(treating a group of people unfairly)} led many

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{homesteaders.png}
\caption{Many homesteaders lived in small "homestead shacks" until they had the time and money to build something bigger.}
\end{figure}
Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans to leave their homes and take out homesteads in Montana. By the end of the homestead boom (time of great prosperity or rapid growth), newcomers had claimed almost twenty-five million acres of land in Montana under the Homestead Act.

**HARD TIMES**

Farmers need rain to grow crops. When homesteaders first started coming to Montana, the weather was unusually wet. Drought (lack of rain) hit Montana in 1917, and the next few years were even worse. Prairie (grassland) fires burned houses, barns, and fields. Insects ate everything green in sight. Topsoil blew off the fields, creating giant dust storms. By 1925, many of the **immigrants** (people who move to a new country) who had come to Montana to homestead had left the state.

*Hordes of crickets invaded eastern Montana between 1936 and 1941. Farmers defended their crops by building “cricket traps” like this one.*
The drought taught farmers and ranchers that they needed much more than 320 acres to make a living. Farmers and ranchers who stayed bought the land abandoned (left) by their neighbors.

By 1950, the average Montana farm was 1,689 acres. In 2019, the average size of a Montana farm or ranch was 2,156 acres. How much bigger is that than a 320-acre homestead?

**EVEN HARDER TIMES FOR MONTANA INDIANS**

The immigrants who came to Montana were looking for better lives for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, their arrival made life worse for the people who were already here.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were horrible times for Montana Indians. The federal government pushed tribes to give up most of their land. Buffalo had been hunted almost to extinction (death of a species). To survive, Indian people began to farm and raise cattle. The land on many reservations (lands tribes reserved—kept—for their own use) was not very good for farming. Many people went hungry.

The federal government wanted Indians to give up their own cultures (languages, customs, and ideas) and adopt European ways. This is called assimilation. Even though the Indian agents (non-Indians the government put in charge of reservations)
made it hard, Indians worked to keep their cultures alive. They continued to speak their own languages and practice many of their traditional (old) ways. They also continued to educate their children. Before Europeans came, Indian children did not go to school. Instead, their families taught them about the natural world (science) as well as about their history and how they should behave (social studies). They learned to make art. They also learned how to hunt, gather food and medicine, and make tools. They learned other skills they needed to help themselves and their families once they grew up, too.

To force Indians to assimilate (become absorbed into the majority culture), the government funded boarding schools. At these schools, children as young as six lived apart from their families. The government wanted to separate the children from their families so they could control everything they learned and
destroy the connections children had to their own cultures. Parents were punished if they refused to send their children to boarding schools. At boarding schools, children were punished if they spoke their native languages or tried to practice any of their traditional ways.

Life at many of the boarding schools was very hard. Students studied for half the day and worked the other half. Students did the school’s laundry. They worked in the school’s dairies or fields to produce their own food. They worked in the school kitchen, and they sewed most of their own clothing.

Look at the faces of the boys in this 1910 picture from the St. Labre boarding school on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. How do you think they felt about their short haircuts, scratchy wool suits, and giant bow ties?
There was not enough money for good food, and children lived in very crowded dormitories. Many students got sick at boarding school and some died. Sometimes, when children returned to their reservations after attending school, they discovered that they had forgotten their native languages and only knew how to speak English. Sometimes that meant they could no longer talk with their parents or grandparents.

Montana Indian parents and tribal leaders knew that their children needed to learn new skills. They did not like the boarding schools, but they did like some of the things (like math, reading, and writing) that students learned there. They fought for the right to send their children to day schools, so they could learn while living with their own families. Tribal leaders knew that education was important. They believed that, at day schools, young people could learn the things they needed to be successful in the changing world while keeping their connections to their own cultures.

**Immigration After 1920**

Large-scale immigration to Montana ended with the end of the homestead boom, but the state has continued to attract some new immigrants. The Mexican Revolution was a push factor that sent many people from Mexico north looking for work. Farmers needed people to work in the sugar beet fields in eastern
Montana, and many Mexicans found jobs there.

German-speaking Hutterites came from Europe seeking religious freedom. Hutterites live on large farms called colonies. The first colony in Montana was established in 1911, but most Hutterites came to Montana after World War II (1939–1945).

Mining and logging attracted many immigrants during the nineteenth century because they were a big part of Montana’s economy (businesses and jobs). However, after the 1920s, these industries (types of businesses) no longer drew many newcomers. Big machines did much of the work originally done by people. People still worked as miners and loggers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, but the industries did not need as many workers as they did before World War II.

In the late 1970s, many Hmong settled in Montana, particularly in the Missoula area. The Hmong, or “hill people” of Southeast Asia, fought on the same side as U.S. troops during the Vietnam War. After the war, they were chased from their homes in Laos and Vietnam. Now many make Montana their home.

Nou Yang, a Hmong refugee who moved to Missoula in 1985, made this embroidered “story cloth.” It shows scenes from village life in her native country of Laos.
GLOSSARY

Abandon  leave
Adapted  changed to fit new conditions
Allies  friends
Allotment  portion
Allotment policy  dividing Indian reservations into separate farms for each family
Amber  yellow
Ancestors  family members who lived long ago
Ancient  very old
Archaeologists  scientists who study the past by analyzing objects people have left behind
Artifacts  objects created by people
Assimilate/assimilation  to be absorbed into the majority culture, in this case, the white American culture
Atlatl  a spear thrower
Bacteriology  the study of bacteria
Badlands  an area created by erosion of rocks and hills with little vegetation
Band  group
Bison  buffalo
Boom  time of great prosperity or rapid growth
Capotes  coats made from thick wool blankets
Chinook  a warm wind that blows down the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains
Claim  take for their own
Climate  typical weather condition
Communal  group
Constitution  document that sets the rules for government
**Continent** one of the main areas of land on earth

**Continental Divide** a mountain ridge that separates North America and determines whether water flows east to the Atlantic Ocean or west to the Pacific Ocean

**Culture** a shared system of behavior, attitudes, and understandings; language, customs, and ideas

**Descendants** a person's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.

**Discrimination** treating a group of people unfairly

**Disease** sickness

**Distinct** separate

**Diversity** variety

**Drought** lack of rain

**Economy** businesses and jobs

**Environment** land, water, climate

**Epidemic** rapid spread of disease

**Erosion** the process by which rock or soil is gradually taken away by wind, rain, or water

**Essential** most important

**Extinct** gone

**Extinction** death of a species

**Fell** cut down trees

**Fertile** good for growing things

**Foothills** hills at the edge of a mountain range

**Geography** where things are, the study of particular places

**Geologists** scientists who study the earth

**Geology** minerals, rocks, and soil and the study of these things

**Great Plains** the flat land region west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains

**Homesteader** someone who received land from the U.S. government in exchange for farming that land
**Immigrant** someone who moves to a new country to live

**Immigrate** move from one country to another

**Indian agent** a person (usually non-Indian) who the government put in charge of a reservation

**Industries** types of businesses

**Leased** rented

**Lumber** wood for building

**Mechanization** using machines to do the work that people once did

**Natural resources** things found in nature and used by people

**Negotiate** discuss to come to an agreement

**Northern Divide** landform that separates water that flows north from water that flows south

**Opportunities** chances for something better

**Oral histories** important stories people pass down

**Pacifist** someone who believes that problems cannot be solved by fighting

**Pelts** skins

**Plains** flat land

**Poultry** birds raised on farms, like chickens and turkeys

**Poverty** being poor

**Prairies** flat grasslands

**Precipitation** rain and snow

**Predate** come before

**Prospectors** people looking for gold or other precious metals

**Published** printed

**Pull factors** things that make people want to move to a new place

**Push factors** things that make people want to leave their homes
Push-pull factors things that influence immigration (that push you out of your home country and pull you to another place)

Reservation an area of land that a tribe or tribes reserved (kept) for their own use

Reserved kept

Residents people who live in a place

Resilience strength

Resourceful good at figuring things out

Resources useful things

Sovereign self-governing

Sovereignty self-rule

Spacious large

Specific exact

Strike gold discovery

Suffrage vote

Suffrage activist someone working to win women the right to vote

Surplus extra

Taxes money people pay the government so the government can provide services

Timber wood for building

Time immemorial as long as anyone can remember

Toxic poisonous

Traditional old

Transcontinental all the way across the continent

Transport move

Treasurer the person who keeps track of an organization's money

Treaty agreement between nations

Union an organization that stands up for workers' rights and fights for better pay

Unique not the same as any other
IMAGE CREDITS

CHAPTER 4 - MONTANA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Montana Historical Society is abbreviated as MHS.

p. 35, Threshing rig of Martin Hanson, Vananda, no date, MHS PAc 80-95.2, colorized by Geoff Wyatt

p. 36, Treasure State, 1915, MHS PAM 359

p. 37, Grace Fitzpatrick West standing on a horse-drawn wagon near her home in Outlook, ca. 1910, MHS Pac 76-02.25
p. 5, White Bears and White Cliffs by Robert F. Morgan, oil on canvas, 1988, MHS 1988.103.01
p. 38, Cleaning a cricket trap, Big Horn County, June 1939 by Arthur Rothstein, Library of Congress FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-027411-D

p. 38, Cleaning a cricket trap, Big Horn County, June 1939 by Arthur Rothstein, Library of Congress FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-027411-D

p. 40, Bird Rattler’s Chapter Canning Club, Mr. and Mrs. Bird Rattler with long hair, 1923, MHS PAC 2012-19.24

p. 41, St. Labre Indian School boys, Northern Cheyenne, Ashland by L. A. Huffman, ca. 1910, MHS 981-055

p. 43, Embroidered Story Cloth by Nou Yang, 1999, MHS 2011.89.01