

Lecture 10.2

Homesteaders & Sodbusters

- In 1863, Congress passed the **Homestead Act**, which gave people 160 acres of western land if they agreed to farm it for at least five years.
- 500,000 people took advantage of the offer and streamed west. They were called “Homesteaders” and “Sodbusters.”
- In 1879, thousands of newly freed blacks followed suit, and headed west. They were called “**Exodusters**”.
- Many of Colorado’s eastern plains towns (Burlington, Limon, Greeley, etc.) started out as homesteader “colonies.” Most Colorado farmsteads grew apples, peaches, sugar beets, potatoes, alfalfa, and melons.
- Homesteading and sodbusting was full of hardship:
 1. The work was hard, and the plains were isolated and lonely.
 2. Wood was scarce, so homes were built out of sod.
 3. Grasshopper swarms could destroy whole crops in just a few minutes.
 4. Water was even more scarce than wood, so many began using windmills to bring water up from underground, and complex laws were written to guarantee people their water rights.
- Homesteading life was particularly rough for women. They had to make their own clothing, prepare all their own food, educate the children, tend the sick, and see to all the housekeeping.



What is “sod”?

Personal Reflection:

Exoduster:
portmanteau of “Exodus” and “sodbuster”

Lecture 10.3

A Changing Colorado

In the last quarter of the 1800s, new interests and industries appeared in Colorado.

Transportation

- Like on the plains, railroads were important to the growth of mountain communities, but in the mountains, it was “**narrow gauge**” (3 ft.) railroads that led the way, not the standard (4.5 ft.) railroads.

Health Resorts

- From all across the country, people sick with illnesses like tuberculosis and asthma came to the Colorado Springs area to try and recuperate.
- The mild and dry climate, and the mineral hot springs of the state attracted more people to Colorado than all the gold and silver mining booms combined!

Industry

- The area around Pueblo developed as the state’s main industrial center.
- It was called the “*Pittsburgh of the West*” & “*Steel City*” (because of all the iron and steel it produced), and “*Bullion City of the World*” (because of the smelters that produced **bullion**).

Coal

- The new industries were fueled by coal, which was first found in Colorado in 1859 near Trinidad and Walsenburg.
- As opposed to gold and silver mining, coal mining ... (a) didn’t occur in a “rush”, (b) was controlled by big companies, and (c) was very dangerous.



What’s this?

Personal Reflection:

bullion:
bars, ingots, or plates of precious metal