

TIMELINE: THE OLD WEST

Howdy, pardner. Hop into Uncle John's patented Wayback Machine, and we'll embark on a chronological journey through that not-so-long-ago time period called the Old West.

BACKGROUND

The loosely defined time period alternately referred to as the American West, the Old West, and the Wild West ranges from the early 1800s to the 1890s. But the story started long before that. The first humans to inhabit western North America came down the coast via a land bridge between Asia and North America (now known as the Bering Strait) around 20,000 years ago, or maybe more. And there's archaeological evidence of advanced civilizations, complete with big cities and well-established trade routes, going as far back as 11,000 years ago.

The first Europeans to arrive were the Spanish Conquistadors in the early 16th century, who made it as far north as Kansas. (In doing so, they introduced the horse to North America.) A few decades later, in 1579, British explorer Francis Drake sailed to what is now San Francisco. In the 1670s, the French colonized the Americas from New Orleans all the way north to Canada, calling their colony Louisiana (after the French king Louis XIV). As more Eurasians claimed various regions as their own, skirmishes between them and with the Indians escalated into all-out wars.

In 1776, when the United States declared its independence from England, the western boundary of the new nation was located only a few hundred miles inland at the Appalachian Mountains. Americans didn't know much about what was on the other side of the mountains, and few dared to venture to those wild and lawless lands. But that would soon change.

- 1803** President Thomas Jefferson makes the Louisiana Purchase (Napoleon needed the money to fight his wars in Europe), more than doubling the size of the new nation. The purchase proves worthwhile due to a population explosion: there were approximately five million Americans in 1800; by 1850 there were 23 million.
- 1804** Jefferson sends Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on an expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Over the next two and a half years, Lewis and Clark travel more than 7,000 miles, make contact with 70 Indian tribes, and catalog 200 plant and animal species. Most important, the explorers mark out the beginning and end portions of the Oregon Trail.
- 1810** New York business magnate John Jacob Astor founds the Pacific Fur Company, opening up trade with the Indians of the Pacific Northwest. The British, French,

Spanish, and Russians will lay claim to this region, but Astor's company gives the Americans the foothold they'll need to keep it. Meanwhile, to the south, Mexico declares its independence from Spain.

- 1811** The steamboat *New Orleans* begins carrying passengers up and down the Mississippi River. A few years later, steamboats will also take to the Missouri River. This opens up travel and trade to even more people, and helps turn New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, and Minneapolis into big cities.
- 1823** Most Americans are still wary of moving west due to a lack of law enforcement. This starts to change with the formation of the Texas Rangers. In addition to protecting homesteaders and aiding the U.S. military in battles, the Rangers (who are still active today) will foil an assassination attempt on President William Howard Taft in 1909, and gun down notorious fugitives Bonnie and Clyde in 1934.
- 1827** The city of Independence, Missouri, is established, marking the beginning of the Oregon Trail. The Concord Stagecoach also debuts this year. Over the next three decades, these horse-drawn covered wagons will transport approximately 400,000 people out west via the Oregon Trail to become farmers, ranchers, miners, and business owners. Though arduous and uncomfortable, these "wagon trains" prove to be much safer than traveling alone. Other trails will soon be established in California and the Southwest. Today's Interstate Highway System follows many of these wagon routes.
- 1829** A Mexican caravan traveling west along the Spanish Trail trade route from Colorado rests in a desert oasis before making the final leg over the mountains to Los Angeles. The travelers name the area Las Vegas ("The Meadows").
- 1830** In order to remove several Native American tribes from territory in the southeast, President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, which allows the U.S. government to forcibly move Indians to reservations. This escalates the ongoing Indian Wars and begins the Trail of Tears, the collective name for numerous forced Indian relocations from their fertile lands in the South to the harsher environments west of the Mississippi.
- 1836** The Battle of the Alamo takes place. This former Franciscan mission in San Antonio is occupied by about 200 Texans (including Davy Crockett) who are fighting for independence from Mexico. The small militia holds off thousands of troops for 13 days before Mexico takes back the mission. "Remember the Alamo!" becomes a rallying cry for Texans. A few weeks later, they win the Battle of San Jacinto (near the Gulf Coast), and Texas declares itself a republic.
- 1842** American explorer John C. Frémont earns his nickname as "the Pathfinder"



The inventor of the lollipop, Connecticut confectioner George Smith, named it after Lolly Pop, a racehorse.

when Congress sends him to retrace the footsteps of previous explorers. Frémont's maps of California and, later, the Oregon Territory further open the West to expansion...but not for everyone.

- 1844** Oregon City becomes the first incorporated city in the West, but the provisional government passes the "Lash Law," making it illegal for any black people to settle in the Oregon Territory (offenders will be whipped). The reason: fear that freed slaves could incite Indian uprisings. This and similar laws that follow won't be fully repealed until 1926.
- 1845** The phrase "Manifest Destiny" is coined (by whom exactly is disputed). This philosophy says that Americans are destined by God to control the lands all the way to the Pacific Ocean. A popular newspaper column commands, "Go West, young man," and hundreds of thousands of young men do just that.
- 1845** Texas ceases to be a republic and joins the United States. Mexico's leaders refuse to acknowledge this, sparking the Mexican-American War. President James Polk dispatches troops to drive the Mexicans back. The war ends in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which gives California and New Mexico to the United States.
- 1846** The United States obtains the Oregon Territory (which includes what will later be called Washington) from England via a treaty, completing the border between the United States and southern Canada.
- 1847** The Mormons settle Salt Lake City in the Utah Territory.
- 1848** Gold is discovered at Sutter's Mill, near Coloma, California, beginning the California gold rush. In the months that follow, hundreds of thousands of "Forty-niners" will head west to strike it rich. The population of San Francisco grows from about 1,000 to more than 25,000 within a few years.
- 1850** California becomes a state. Back east in Chicago, Allan Pinkerton establishes the first national detective agency. Pinkerton's detectives thwart several train robberies and bring many of these robbers to justice, making the West even safer.
- 1856** John "Grizzly" Adams opens the first zoo in the West in San Francisco.
- 1859** Oregon becomes a state. (Washington, to the north, won't win statehood until 1889.)
- 1860** The Pony Express drastically speeds up mail service between the coasts (but it will only last 18 months before going out of business due to high operating costs).
- 1861** While the Civil War rages back East, the first transcontinental telegraph is completed, bringing the country even closer together.

Highest paid actor for a debut leading role: Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson,
\$5.5 million for *The Scorpion King*.

- 1862** The first of several “Homestead Acts” passed by Congress allows any American man (including freed slaves) who has never taken up arms against the government to claim up to 160 acres of cheap land on the frontier. Over the next few decades, more than 1.6 million claims will be approved, establishing the Plains as a major hub of agriculture. (The Homestead Act lasted until 1988; the final approved claim was for 80 acres in Alaska.)
- 1864** Nevada becomes a state.
- 1865** The first true cowboy hat, known as the “Boss of the Plains,” debuts. Designed by John B. Stetson, this flat-brimmed, sun-blocking waterproof hat also works as a bucket and a stash for the wearer’s valuables.
- 1866** The “Long Drive” begins, in which Texas cowboys drive tens of thousands of head of cattle from the Plains to the railroad in Missouri. Along the way, the riders lose a lot of their animals to cattle rustlers. This becomes a major problem throughout the West, which leads to cries for more law enforcement. Over the next four decades, more than 27 million cattle will be driven from states in the West to train stations to be transported to the East.
- 1869** The ceremonial “Golden Spike” is nailed into the train tracks at Promontory Point in the Utah Territory, completing the Transcontinental Railroad. Built mostly by migrant Chinese workers, rail replaces the stagecoach and steamboat as the main means of cross-country travel, and will remain so until well into the 20th century.
- 1872** A large swath of land called Yellowstone, which straddles the Montana and Wyoming Territories, is found to contain the most geysers on earth. President Ulysses S. Grant signs the bill that establishes it as the country’s first national park.
- 1874** An improved version of barbed wire (invented a few years earlier) is patented by Joseph F. Glidden in Illinois. Wooden fences are expensive, and simple wire fences fail to keep cattle enclosed, but barbed wire is inexpensive and provides ranchers with a much more effective way to cordon off their land, drastically altering the “open range” feel of the Wild West, and leading to more disputes with the Indians.
- 1876** General William Custer makes his last stand in a battle against the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Nations along the Little Bighorn River in the Montana Territory, where gold had recently been discovered in the Black Hills. The Indians win the battle, but lose the Plains Indians War. The survivors are moved to reservations.

- 1881 and 1882** Some of the most enduring tales of the Old West come about in these two years. At the Maxwell Ranch in New Mexico, outlaw Billy the Kid (Henry McCarty, aka William H. Bonney) fails to reach middle age after he's shot dead by Sheriff Pat Garrett. In Tombstone, Arizona, the gunfight at the O.K. Corral lasts all of 30 seconds when the Earp brothers, with the help of temporary deputy Doc Holliday, defeat outlaws Billy Clairborne and the Clanton and McLaurry brothers. And in 1882 in St. Joseph, Missouri, (the outlaw) Jesse James is assassinated by (the coward) Robert Ford.
- 1883** Buffalo Bill Cody's "Wild West" show opens in North Platte, Nebraska. The traveling show becomes one of America's most popular forms of entertainment (pre-vaudeville), lasting until 1913. Featuring reenactments of famous battles, sharpshooting demonstrations, and a chance to meet celebrities like Wild Bill Hickok and Sitting Bull, Cody's shows help solidify the mythos of the Old West, which will continue in movies with stars like Tom Mix, John Wayne, and Clint Eastwood, and on TV with shows like *Wagon Train*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *Lonesome Dove*, and *Deadwood*.
- 1886** The surrender of Geronimo puts an end to major conflicts in the Apache Wars, which saw the Indians fighting for their lands in the Southwest. Geronimo goes on to become a celebrity, but he's never allowed to return to his birthplace.
- 1889** North and South Dakota become states. A year later, Wyoming and Idaho win statehood, followed in 1896 by Utah.
- 1890** After several clashes with American soldiers, the Plains Indians' efforts to protect their homeland ends at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. Between 250 and 300 Indians are killed in the massacre. The major newspapers report the military's version of events—that the soldiers had put down a Sioux insurrection—further vilifying the Indian in American culture.

THE "NEW" WEST

When did the Old West come to an official end? Some sources say as early as the 1890s, when the mass migration out west had slowed to a trickle, while others put it at 1912, when the additions of Arizona and New Mexico completed the contiguous United States as we know it today. But even as recently as a century ago, much of the western United States still had that wild frontier feeling. The last stagecoach robbery occurred in Jarbidge, Nevada, in 1916, and the last train robbery occurred in Oregon in 1923. But it was in 1924, after several Apache were arrested for stealing some horses in Arizona, that the Indian Wars were declared over. With that, the West was won.

...bitter taste receptors are dulled on food hotter than 95 degrees.