

Go West, the Events and Impact of the American Frontier

Since the first settlers landed in America, and each succeeding group pushed farther west, American colonists motivated by the need for land to farm, the wealth of the fur trade and curiosity, migrated into the interior of America. Several events would push the drive for land. The Head Right system provided land for immigrants who paid their own way to America. The French-Indian War also provided a stimulus to spread farther west. As the colonist moved west, and discovered the abundance of natural resources, a feeling of divine and manifested ownership developed. Often the Natives American defended their lands against the encroachment of the settlers. Attempts by the British to curtail this migration were met with varying forms of resistance and defiance.

Antagonism by both the British and Indians drove the settlers to resort to mutual assistance of each other, in order to survive and maintain their land.

It was beyond many men's imagination the bounty of resources that were available; it was the need for fertile farmland and the very idea that the land was there for the taking. Since the early settlers had claimed the lands in the east, the new arrivals had to go further west for suitable land to farm. Often immigrant were spurred on by the headright system, in which each person who paid his/her own way was granted fifty acres of land.

As the settlers spread out, socio-economic distinctions became apparent. Further out in the frontier were often the fur traders, who blazed the trails and set up trading posts. These would eventually lead to more people coming to a particular area for the purpose of gaining money and goods. Followed behind them were the pioneer farmers who were transforming the fields into tobacco fields. East of the pioneer farmers lay the aristocrats who tried to emulate the British high society. As England sent over its surplus population, people drove further into the west in search of land and wealth that was denied to them in the East. It was inevitable that this push west would come into conflict with Native tribes as well as the French. The English maintained tenuous and ever increasing hostilities with the leading to conflict and fighting in the French and Indian War. As the settlers pushed west they found new sources of wealth in the fur trade, however their encroachment into tribal lines caused resentment resulting in bloodshed.

England was not the only country setting up colonies in North America. Trading in fur was extremely lucrative for both the Dutch and the French. Each side attempted to protect its interest, trade routes, by building forts. New England colonies not wishing to miss out on the trade sent explorers out to set up trading posts. July 3, 1775 Colonel George Washington, after having set out to warn the French that they were on Virginia territory, dug in what they called Fort Necessity. The English were surrounded and forced to surrender and thus began the Seven Years War. A full declaration of war was made in 1756; the early part of the year went poorly for the British. England sent over Redcoats, British soldiers, to fight the campaign as well as relying on local colonists to fight the French. In 1759, forces led by General Wolfe assaulted the French fortress at Quebec. He captured the city; the French capitulated in 1760. France gave England all of Canada and

its dependencies. Spain gave up Florida in exchange for Cuba in the international conflict over in Europe.

The new lands opened up after the war created problems as to who would control that land and how it would be governed. The traders were highly influential that the west should remain unsettled and open to fur trade. Two rival groups emerged, the land speculators and the fur traders. Each group had its own agenda. The speculators were more interested in making wealth off of others and the fur traders were interested in maintaining the status quo, knowing that the Indians would trade with them and they could cheat them unmercifully at their discretion with little retribution. The land speculators would disguise themselves as hunters to evade Bouquet's proclamation (there be no westward expansion past the Appalachian Mountains) so as not to create conflict with the Indians.

Lord Jeffrey Amherst, commander of the military establishment, despised the Indians and wished to exterminate the dissatisfied tribes. He wrote to Henry Bouquet, commander of Fort Pitt, that he would like to send the Small Pox among germ- laden blankets to the Indians in hopes of exterminating them. Bouquet responded positively pointing out that he would like to use the Spanish method of utilizing English dogs to hunt and remove the Indians. These attitudes obviously could not diminish the Indians fears. There was no inclination of any type of conciliatory action toward the Indians at this time. It was decreed during the winter of 1762-63 that no gifts were to be exchanged with the Indians. The Indians were accustomed to these regular gifts and this was an indication of the fate that awaited them in the coming years at the hands of the British.

Only two months after winning the Seven Years War the English lost all the territory it had gained to the Indians. The Indians organized by Pontiac over took strategic forts such as Mackinac, and by July 1763 only Ft. Pitt and Ft. Niagara held out against the Indian attacks. The Proclamation of 1763 attempted to curtail the settlement west of the Appalachians was met with bitter resentment of the colonists. The colonists felt that the act represented a terrible threat to their liberties. The Proclamation was also designed to prevent conflict with the Indians who signed the Treaty of Easton in 1758, which set aside large tracts of land for the Indians. Though the threat of death to violators deterred some, most settlers simply moved in and staked their land. Needless to say many settlers lost their lives when local Indians became agitated.

As America emerged from the Seven Years war, an increasing wariness toward the British and attempts to control settlements sparked much protest. Yet over in London land speculators continued to pressure ministers and government leaders for support. With peace came the renewed interest in the western land. Westward expansion was a driving force of the lives of American colonists. New land shaped the American idea that there is something for everyone. The abundance of the west seemed to prove that idea.

Bibliography

Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1995.

Billington, Ray Allen & Ridge, Martin. *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier 5th Edition*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1982.

Miller, John C. *The FIRST FRONTIER: Life in Colonial America*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1966.

Paxson, Frederic L. *History of the American Frontier 1763-1893*. Georgia: Cherokee Publishing Co. 1990.

Savage, Henry Jr. *Discovering America 1700-1875*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1979.

Shenkman, Richard. *I Love Paul Revere, Whether He Rode or Not*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1991.