

An illustration of a man and a woman in 19th-century attire. The man on the left wears a black top hat, a blue jacket with a red bow tie, and striped trousers. The woman on the right wears a yellow dress with a blue and white patterned skirt and a grey skirt. Both are holding a bouquet of orange and yellow flowers. They are flanking a large, light-colored oval containing the text "Immigrants to America's Great Plains".

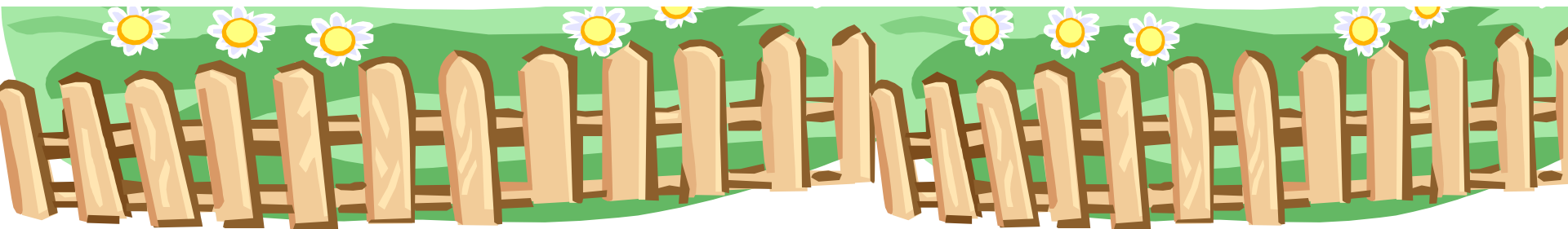
Immigrants to America's Great Plains

An illustration featuring a man and a woman in 18th-century clothing. The man on the left wears a black top hat, a red bow tie, a blue waistcoat, and a yellow and blue striped skirt. The woman on the right has blonde hair, wears a yellow dress with a blue and white patterned apron, and a grey skirt. Both are holding a green stem with a single orange flower. They are positioned on either side of a large, light-orange oval with a red border. The oval contains the text 'In the 1800s, a surge of immigrants land on America's shores.' in red. The entire scene is decorated with green leaves and small red flowers.

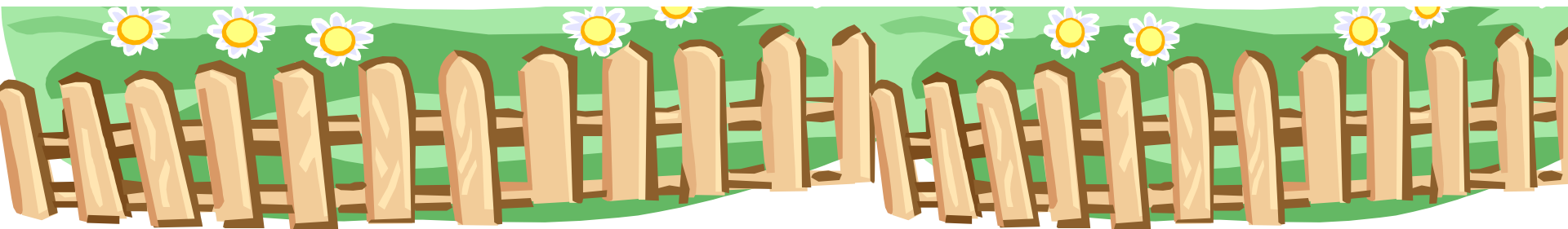
In the 1800s,
a surge of
immigrants
land on
America's
shores.

Many of them were in search of
free land offered through the
Homestead Act.

No single law by Congress had a
greater impact on the grasslands
of the Great Plains than the
Homestead Act of 1862.



The Homestead Act enabled U.S. citizens of at least 21 years old to claim 160 acres of land. Settlers had to pay a small fee, make improvements to the land and build a home. Settlers then had to live on the land for five years.



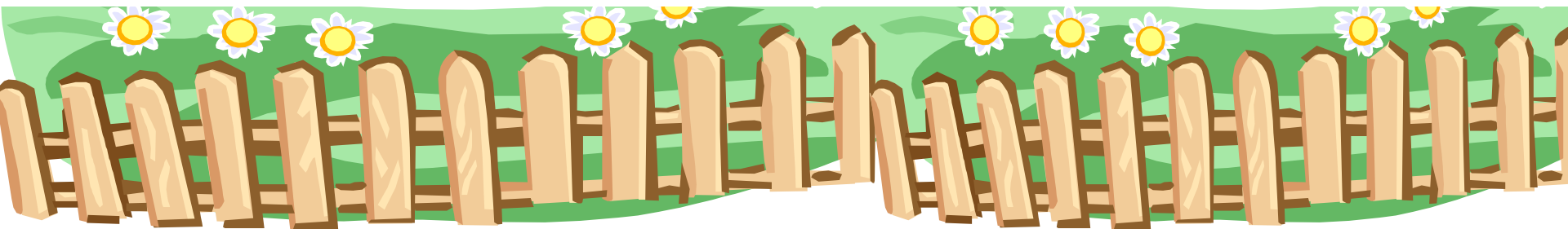
In all, 1.5 million homesteaders
acquired over 200 million acres of land
under this act.


The rich, black soils of the tallgrass
prairies were quickly converted to
farms shortly after immigrants arrived.



This explosion of people, farming, and building transformed the flat, rich land of the Great Plains.

The landscape became dotted with small farms. Trees had been planted to shelter homes from the strong winds that blow across the plains.

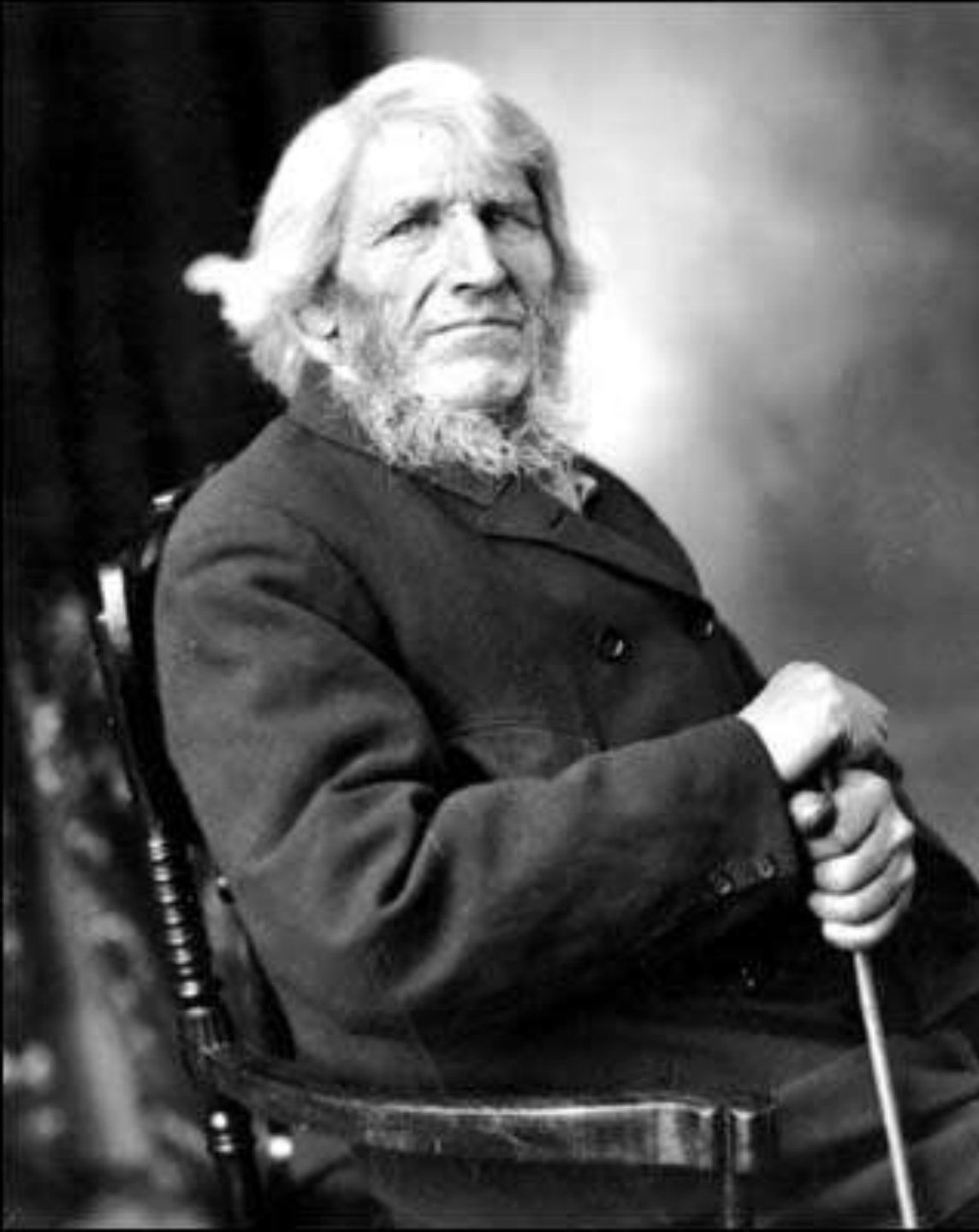


An illustration featuring a man and a woman in historical clothing. The man on the left wears a black top hat, a red bow tie, a blue vest, and a yellow and blue striped skirt. The woman on the right has blonde hair and wears a yellow long-sleeved top, a blue and white patterned apron, and a grey skirt with a white lace hem. Both are holding a large orange and yellow flower. They are positioned on either side of a large, light beige oval with a red border. The oval contains red text. The entire scene is decorated with green leaves and small red flowers.

People who
settled on
the Great
Plains came
from many
different
nations and
cultures.

During the late 19th century, one in every 6 Scandinavians left their homes for America.





*Such as
Ole Thronsedt,
a native of
Norway and
settler in
Milton,
North Dakota.*

*This is the homestead site of Ole I. Gjevre,
Dakota Territory.*



(Another Swedish homestead...)



Other European groups coming in large masses included the Irish and Germans.



John D. Soper family, German immigrants.

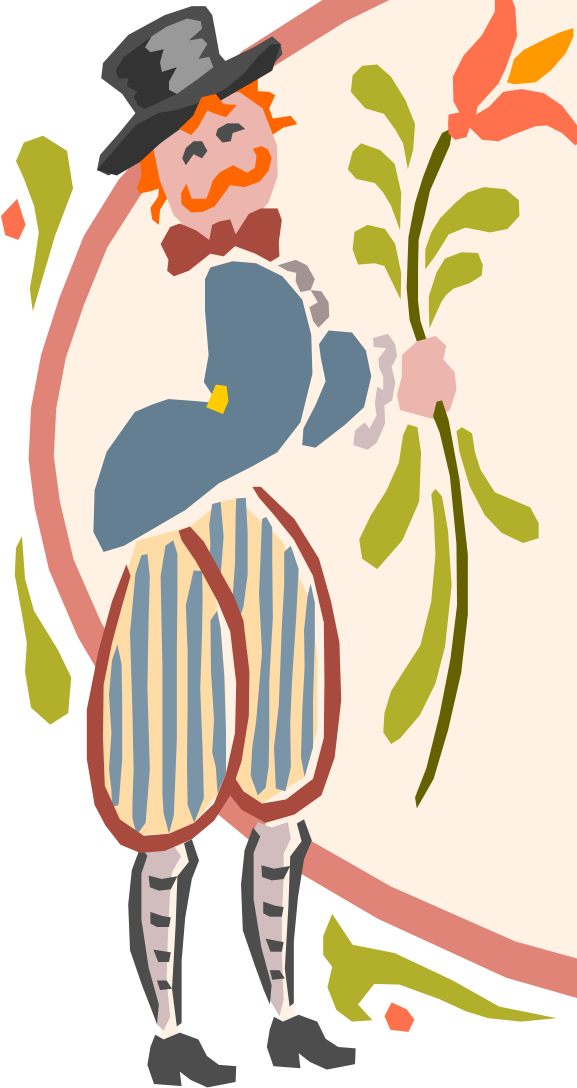


**(Meet the O'Laughons and McCormicks
from Ireland and Scotland.)**





These people
left their old
lives behind but
they brought
their heritage
with them—
arts,
handcrafts,
music,
storytelling, and
food traditions.





*What
brought
immigrants
to America
in the
19th
century?*

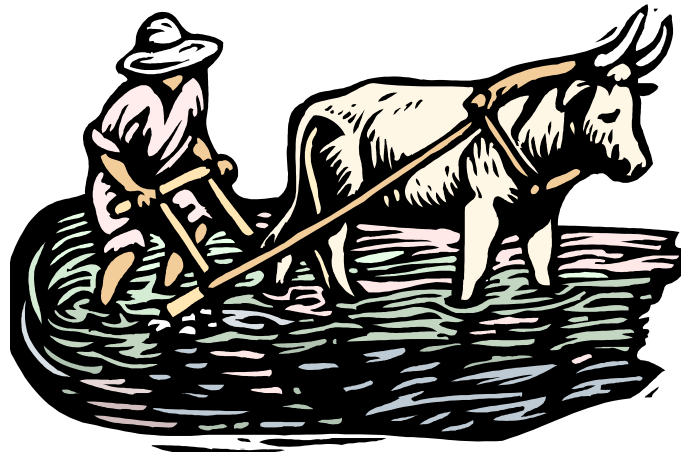


In the middle of the nineteenth century, Europe was a land of poverty. In the last half of the 1800s, many regions in Europe were struck by a series of famines.



The soil under the plow was becoming worn out and laborers saw no future for their hard work.

Agriculture, which was still not modernized, resulted in a series of crop failures caused by both drought and too much rain.



So many
people left
their belongs,
their
families,
and friends
for a new
start in
America.



They sailed spent months on the ocean until they finally landed in port cities, such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.





To accept the growing number of immigrants, Ellis Island, in New York Bay, opened as an immigration center.

It served as a point of entry for 16 million immigrants until the 1920s.

**Although it was only open a few decades,
40 percent of all Americans have at least
one ancestor who came through Ellis Island !**





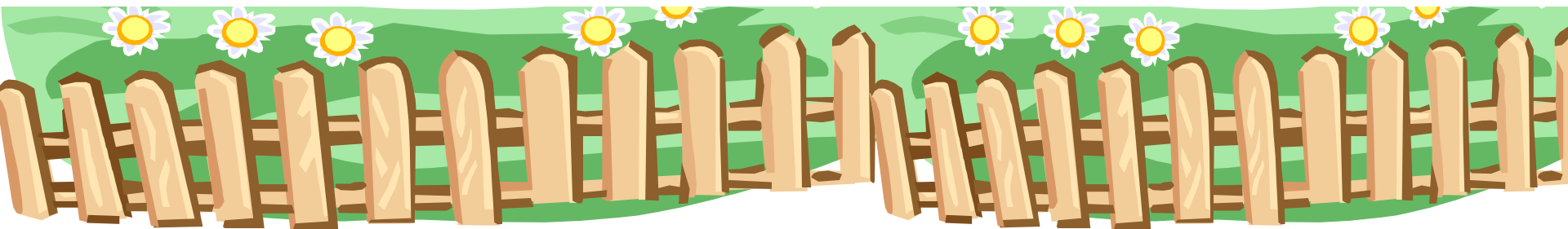
For most immigrants New York was just the half-way point. In the early days the journey continued by paddleboat on America's rivers.

Before the railroads were built the Erie Canal, served as the link between the Hudson River and the Great Lakes. By the 1850s, the railroads brought the emigrants farther inland to Chicago.

**(Norwegian immigrants and their sod home,
Dakota Territory)**



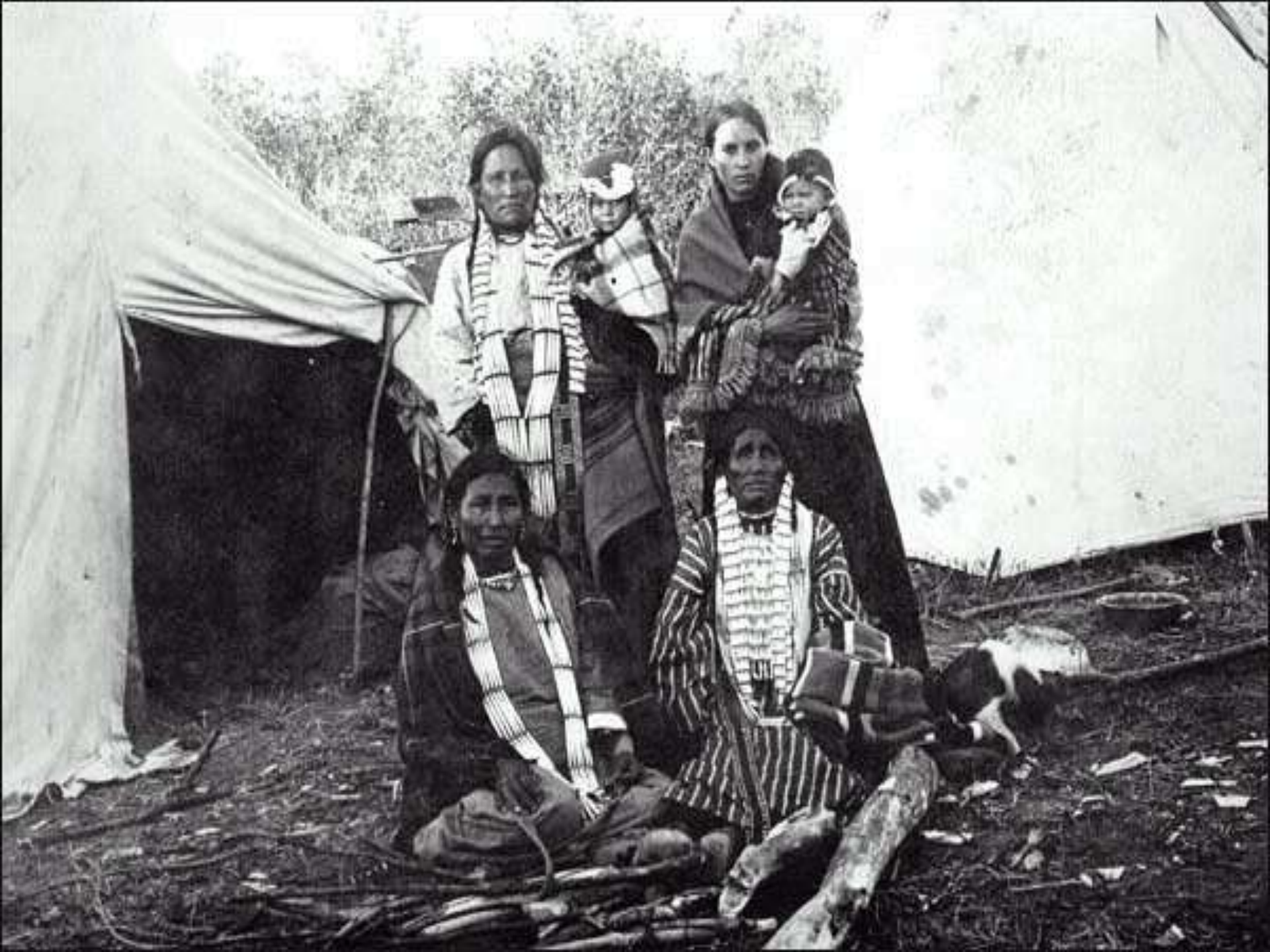
But for every positive aspect of European settlement, there were also challenges. Native Americans respected the open land, but the Europeans saw the land valuable for raising crops and built fences for their herds of livestock.



Prior to arrival by the new settlers,
tribes like the Arikara, Hidatsa,
and Mandan spoke different
languages, observed different
customs, and lived in permanent
settlements along the
Missouri River on the Great Plains.



- 1 Sarcee
- 2 Plains Cree
- 3 Blackfoot
- 4 Assiniboine
- 5 Gros Ventre
- 6 Hidatsa
- 7 Crow
- 8 Mandan
- 9 Yanktonai Sioux
- 10 Arikara
- 11 Shoshone
- 12 Cheyenne
- 13 Teton Sioux
- 14 Ponca
- 15 Yankton Sioux
- 16 Santee Sioux
- 17 Omaha
- 18 Pawnee
- 19 Oto
- 20 Arapaho
- 21 Kansa
- 22 Missouri
- 23 Kiowa
- 24 Osage
- 25 Quapaw
- 26 Comanche
- 27 Wichita
- 28 Kickapoo
- 29 Tawakoni
- 30 Tonkawa
- 31 Lipan Apache



**As the Europeans pressed westward,
Native American tribes were pushed away.
These migrations caused conflict between
tribes and the new immigrants.**



The U.S. Army built forts to keep the peace between the Native Americans, while protecting the settlers and railroad construction workers.



Soon after the first settlers
had arrived on the northern
prairies and had built their homes,
their efforts turned toward
other very important institutions...

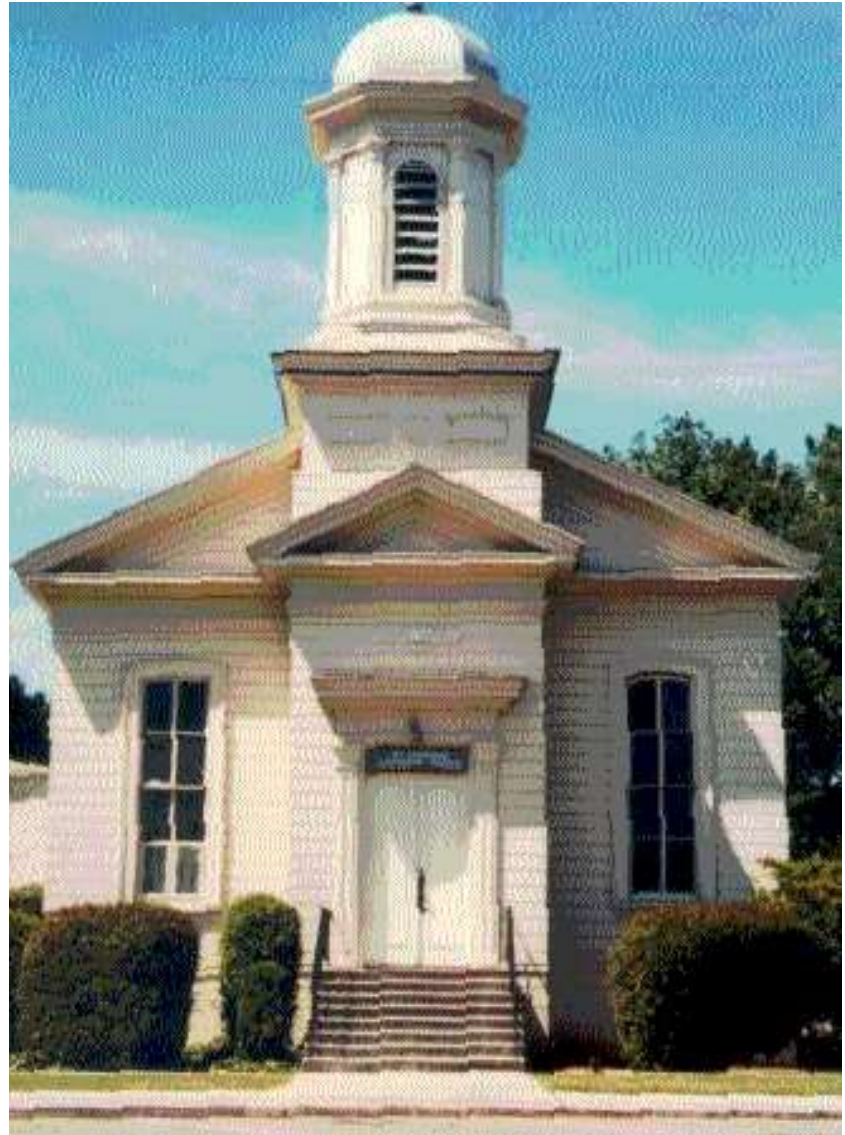


Many immigrants were members of the Lutheran and Catholic Church.

On the prairies they constructed their new church buildings in every township.



Church
buildings
were also
used for
schoolhouses
in many
communities.



Immigrants wanted their children to have a better education than they received, so many communities sought traveling schoolteachers who would teach children in the adopted language of English.



Eventually, territorial legislatures passed public school laws which established free school systems in the territories.



Children rarely attended school past the 4th or 5th grades and attendance competed with the needs of the farm.



Teachers, mostly teenage girls, were hired for school terms of various lengths.



Teachers often boarded with one family during the school session.



Not only did they teach all grades and all ages...



...they lit the fire in the morning before anyone arrived and swept out the room.



The women pioneers of the Great Plains served as the foundation of rural farm families.

They took care of family and home, plowed the land, raised poultry, milked cows, and sold garden produce to add to limited farm income.



Women, according to the Homestead Act, could also claim and cultivated their own land. Others established and ran successful businesses in the towns.



The primary reason immigrants came to the Great Plains was to farm its vast grasslands.

This flat, treeless, semi-arid region has impacted immigrant families for over a century.



The prairie was so different from the
landscapes of Europe.
Europeans used wood as the main material
for tools, furniture, buildings and fuel.
The great, treeless plains required a new
way of living.





Modern farming and ranching methods had to be developed in order for the homesteads to be profitable.

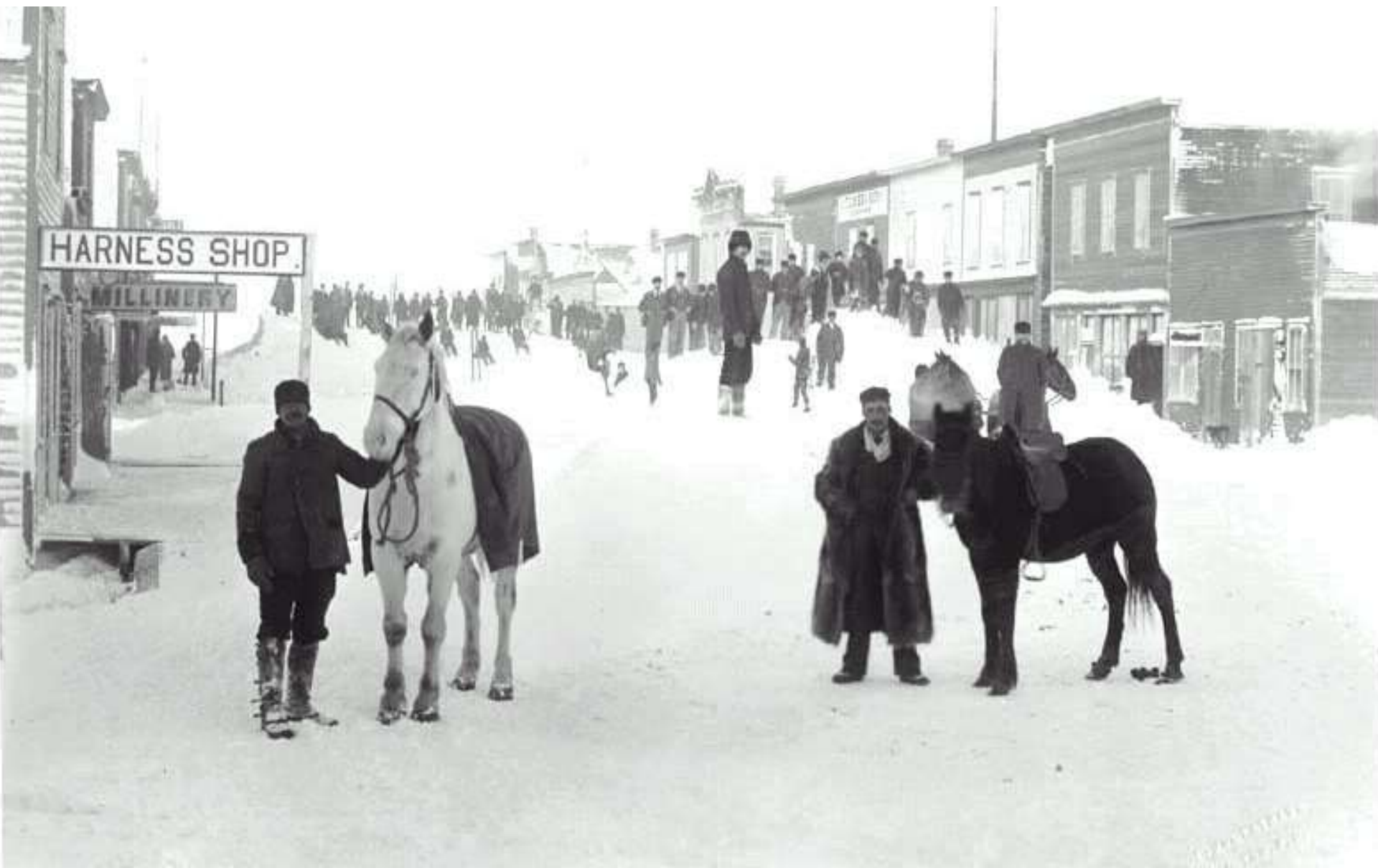
Great Plains farmers began planting two crops per year and developed new strains of wheat, corn and barley to withstand the climate of the plains.





The Great
Plains are
also subject
to tornadoes,
heavy
hailstorms,
droughts,
blizzards,
dust storms...

...ice storms and bitter cold.



But despite the harsh weather, the soil of the Plains is extremely fertile due to glacial deposits left during the last Ice Age.

The rich soils encouraged many early Americans westward into the harsh weather conditions.

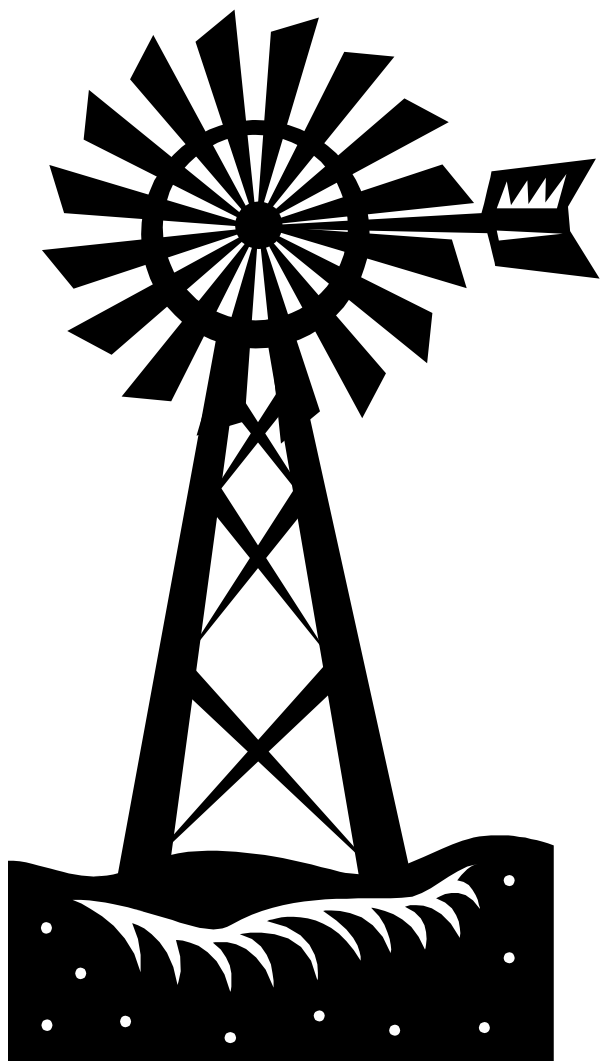


The region also was subject to massive attacks by insects, such as grasshoppers and locusts.





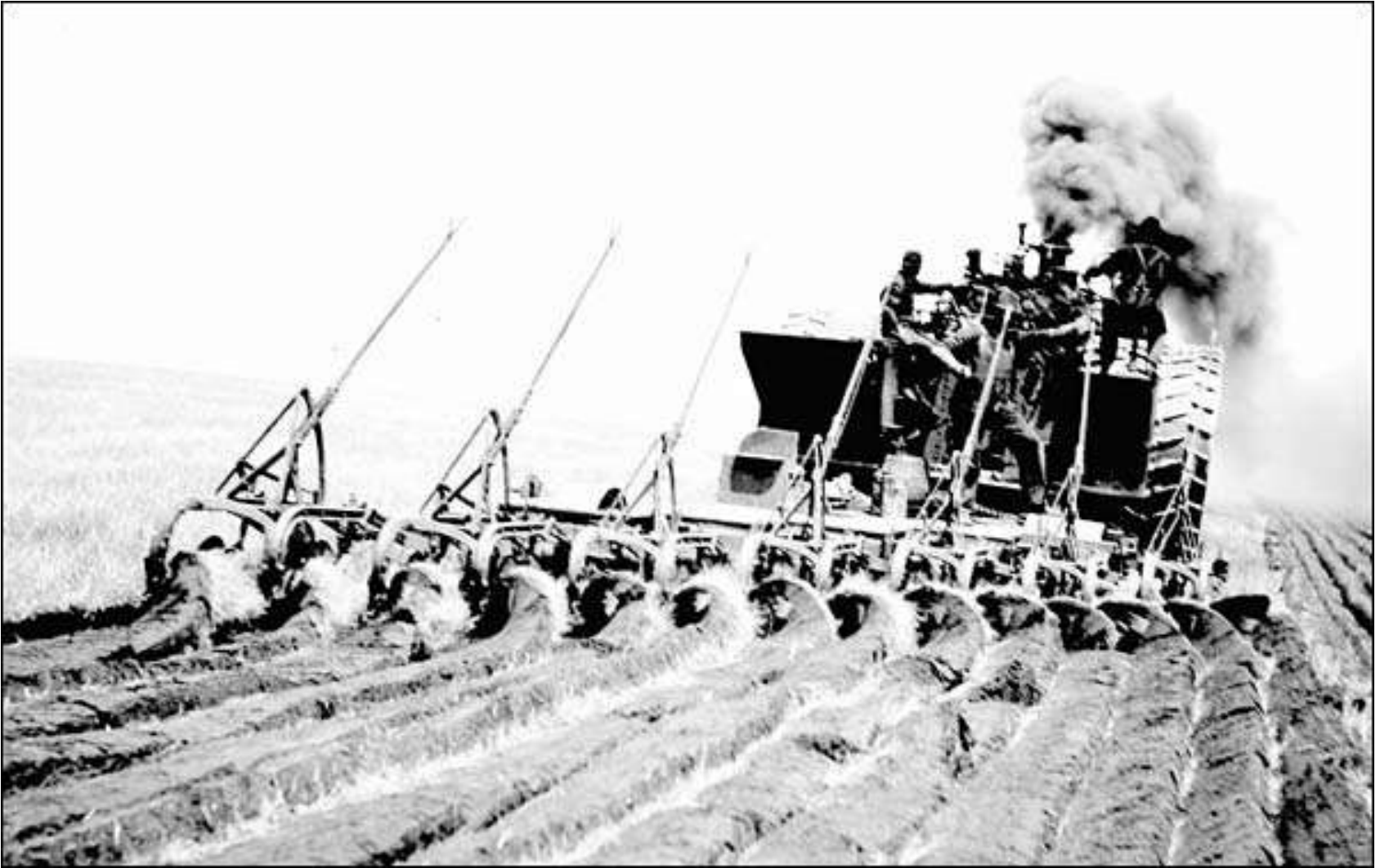
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The availability of an adequate water supply was a problem for settlers on the Great Plains.

Immigrant farmers often had to dig deep to reach underground water, pumping up the water with windmills.

For a farmer to be able to plant different crops on his land, it was necessary to clear the natural vegetation- the prairie grass.



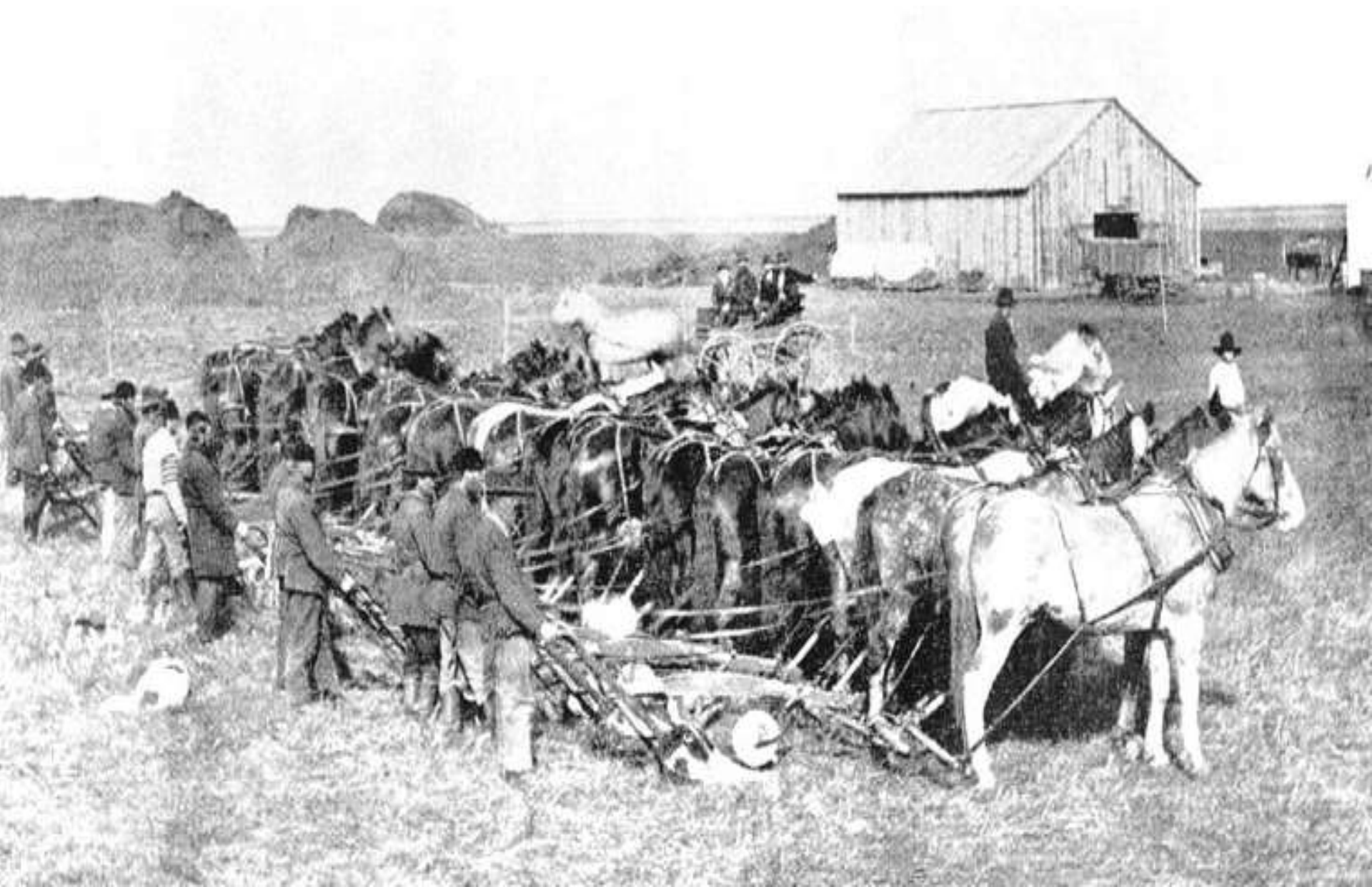
Millions of acres of prairie grass,
growing wild on the Great Plains,
was dug up and replaced with cropland.
It is estimated that less than 10% of
the Great Plains still has original
prairie grasses growing on its soil.



(John Talcott and his brother Ernest breaking sod on their homestead)



("Sodbusting" crew, South Dalota, 1890)



*(The Hofstader brothers, busting the sod,
North Dakota, 1885)*



Spring plowing was done to break up the soil for spring planting.



*(Wife and children bringing lunch
to husband seeding his crop)*





(Geiser steam-powered plow, Minnesota)



After the grain had ripened, it was ready to be threshed so that the farmer could sell it.

In the threshing process, grain is removed from the stalks by the use of a threshing machine.



The threshing machine was started, men standing on top of the wagon pitched down the grain bundles into the threshing machine's feeder where the grain was separated from the stalks.







(Immigrant Anders Hultstrand's threshing rig and crew, 1902)







(Men unloading sacks of wheat)



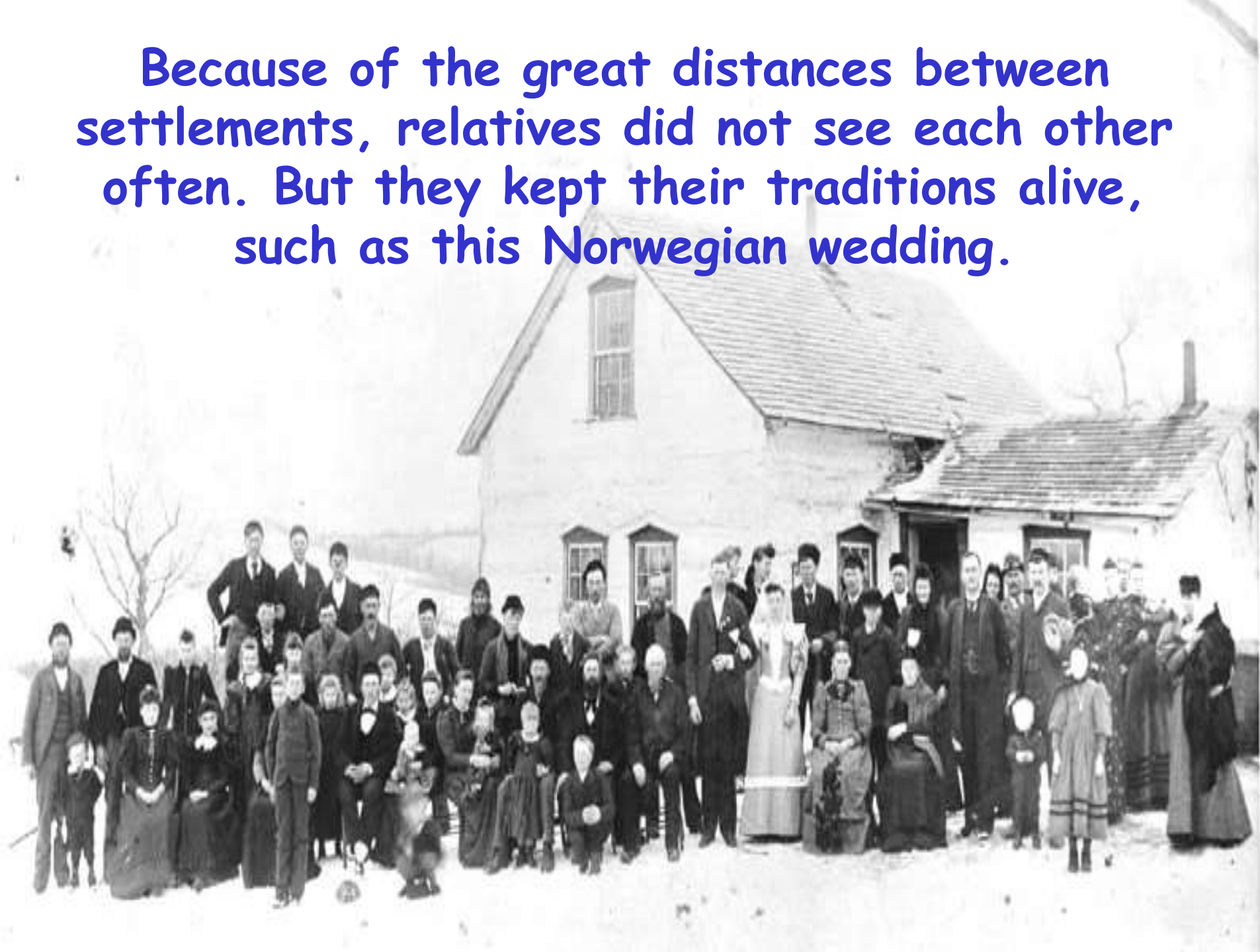
The loneliness
of the Great
Plains was a
contrast to
the close
community of
villages in
Europe.



(Women gather to share spinning tasks)



Because of the great distances between settlements, relatives did not see each other often. But they kept their traditions alive, such as this Norwegian wedding.



(Finnish wedding in a prairie church)

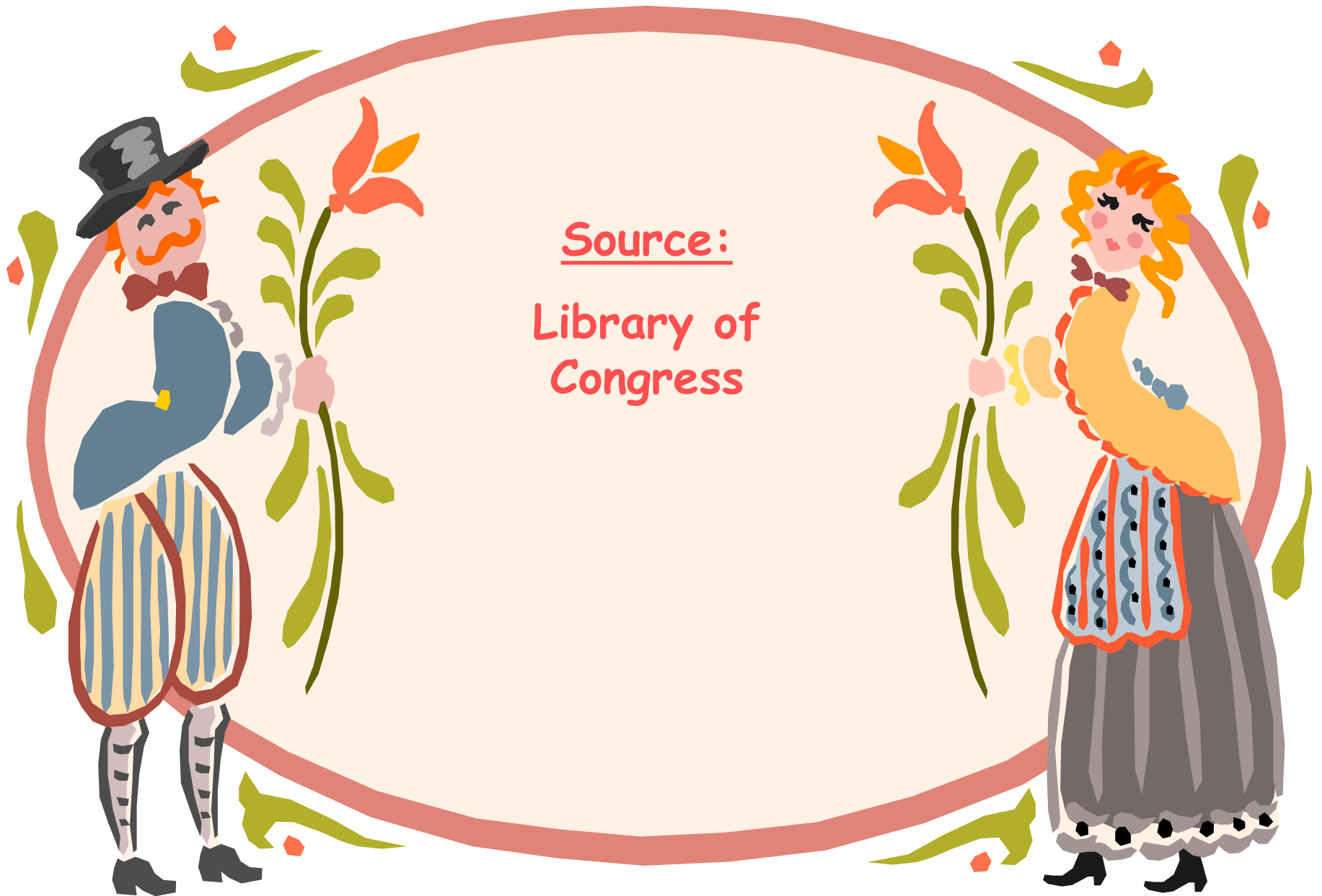


(Sunday gathering at the Olsen's farm)



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Immigrants
to
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Great
Plains



Source:

Library of
Congress