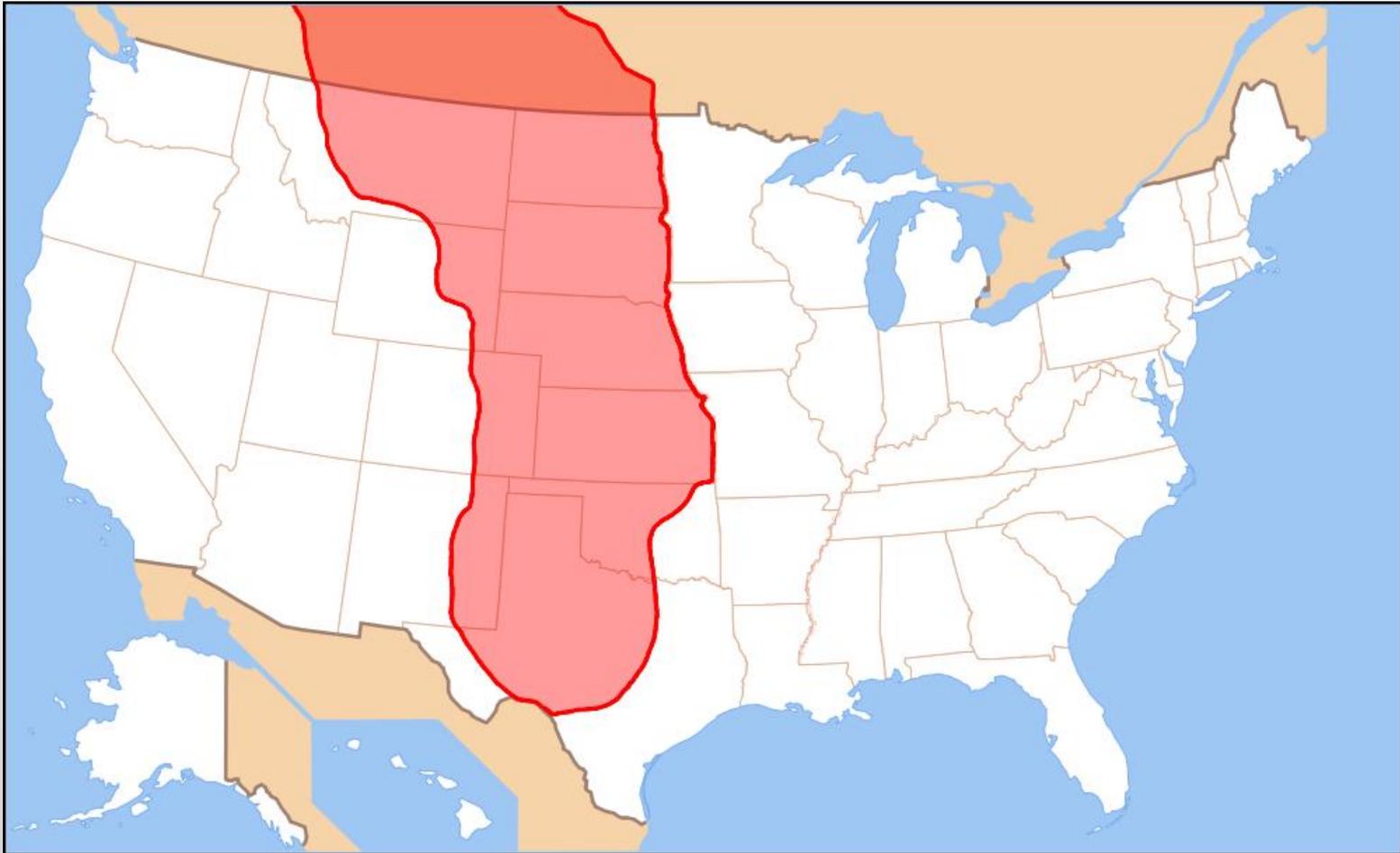


# **Great Plains Homesteaders**

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# Great Plains

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*AKA "Great American Desert"*

# The Great Plains

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- Until after the Civil War, the Great Plains were mostly inhabited by indigenous nations.
- Sioux, Cheyenne, Pawnee, Arapaho, Osage and Wichita.
- These peoples had little contact with White Americans in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# The Landscape of the Reigon

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- Mostly flat, vast expanses of short grass that thrived in the semi-arid climate.
- Americans referred to the plains as the Great American Desert.
- Thought the are was unsuitable for agriculture

# Homestead Act (1862)

**Uncle Sam Will  
Give You a Home**



ON THE JOCKO RIVER NEAR FLATHEAD AGENCY ABOVE ARLES

IN THE  
**FLATHEAD INDIAN  
RESERVATION**  
WESTERN MONTANA



Directly on the Line of the  
Northern Pacific Railway

1909 ad for land under the  
Homestead Act

**FREE HOMES IN MINNESOTA.**

BUREAU OF STATISTICS, }  
St. Paul, May, 1862. }

EDITOR DEMOCRAT:—Under the Homestead Law recently passed by Congress, Minnesota offers to free settlement a much larger area of public lands, and better adapted to successful agriculture in soil, climate and situation relatively to the great avenues of inland commerce, than any other Western State.

Minnesota contains 43,760,000 acres of land. Of this the whole area appropriated by settlement or purchase is about 6,500,000 acres, and there are 3,360,000 acres of School Lands, leaving 43,900,000 acres still open to free settlement under the operation of the Homestead Law

Three quarters of this surface consists of rolling prairie, interspersed with frequent groves, oak openings and belts of hard wood timber, watered by numberless lakes and streams, and covered with a warm, dark soil of great fertility. The rest, embracing the el-

1862 article in the St. Cloud  
Democrat

# The Homestead Act of 1862

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- To encourage settlement the federal government passed the Homestead Act.
- It granted 160 acres to anyone 21 years old and the “head of a family.”

# To maintain ownership

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- Had to live there, build a home and farm the land continuously for five years.
- Providing small-scale farmers with land had long been popular with Northern Republicans.

- 
- Southern Democrats opposed the law because they believed it threatened the westward expansion of the plantation model which depended upon slavery.
  - Worried the law would undermine slavery itself

- 
- The Homestead Act was one of the most impactful acts ever signed.
  - About 10% of the area of the entire U.S. was claimed by individuals under the act.

# Pacific Railway Act (1862)

PRODUCTS WILL PAY FOR LAND AND IMPROVEMENTS!

## MILLIONS OF ACRES

View on the Big Blue, between Camden and Crete, representing Valley and Rolling Prairie Land in Nebraska.



## IOWA AND NEBRASKA LANDS

FOR SALE ON **10 YEARS CREDIT**  
BY THE  
**Burlington & Missouri River R.R. Co.**

**AT 6 PER CT. INTEREST AND LOW PRICES.**  
Only One-Seventh of Principal Due Annually, beginning Four Years after purchase.  
20 PER CENT. DEDUCTED FROM 10 YEARS PRICE, FOR CASH.

**LAND EXPLORING TICKETS SOLD**  
and Cost allowed in First Interest paid, on Land bought in 30 days from date of ticket.  
*Thousands of Land Buyers GET A FREE PASS in the State where the Land bought is located.*  
*These TERMS are BETTER at \$5. than to pre-empt Land at \$2.50 per Acre.*  
EXTRAORDINARY INDUCEMENTS on FREIGHT and PASSAGE are AFFORDED TO PURCHASERS and THEIR FAMILIES.

Address **GEO. S. HARRIS, LAND COMMISSIONER,**  
or **T. H. LEAVITT, Ass't Land Comm'r,** Burlington, Iowa.

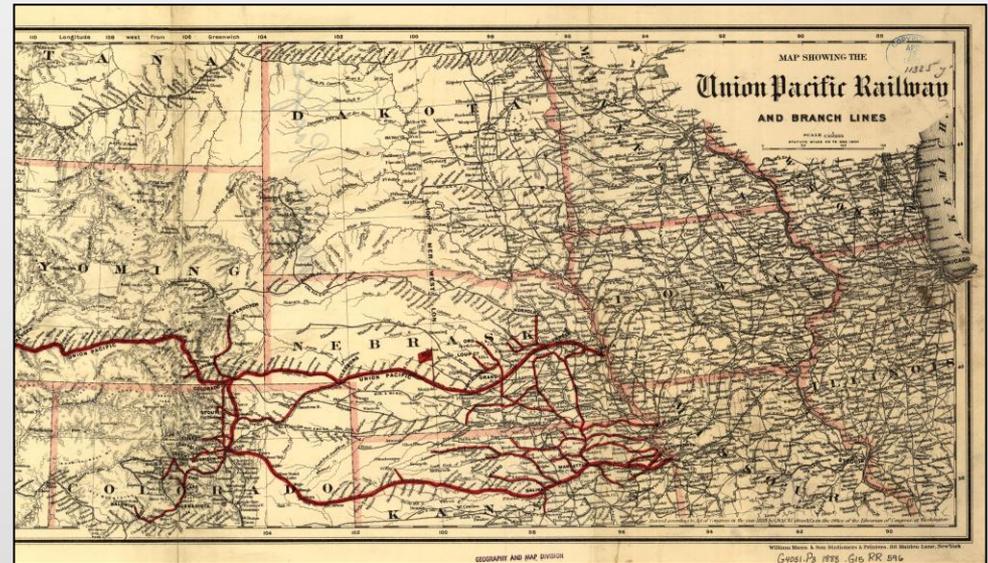
Or apply to

FREE ROOMS for buyers to board themselves are provided at Burlington and Lincoln.

CIRCULARS are supplied GRATIS for distribution in ORGANIZING COLONIES and to induce individuals to emigrate WEST.

A SECTIONAL MAP, showing exact location of our IOWA LANDS is sold for 30 Cents, and of NEBRASKA LANDS for 30 Cents.

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER, PRINTING HOUSE, BUFFALO, N. Y.



Map of Union Pacific rails in the Great Plains in 1888.

An 1872 advertisement from a railroad for inexpensive land for sale in Iowa and Nebraska in

# Pacific Railway Act (1862)

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- Supported the building of a transcontinental railroad.
- Encouraged westward settlement.
- To fund the construction of the railroad the federal government granted railroads large tracts of land.
- Which they sold to the public.

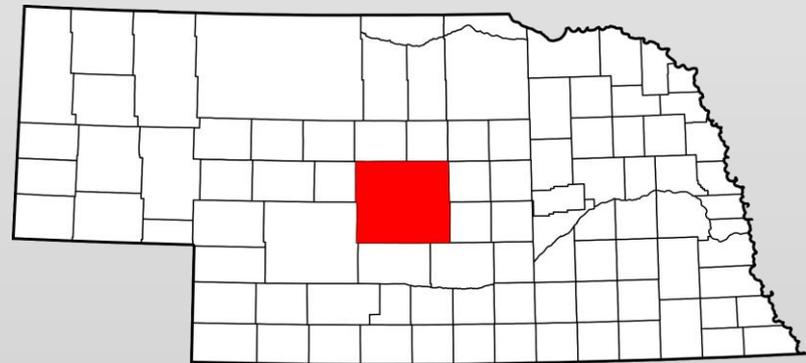
- 
- Once completed the railroad provided transportation for settlers moving west.
  - Also provided a way for western farmers to ship their goods to markets in the East.
  - Making farming the Great Plains more profitable.

# Solomon D. Butcher

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*Butcher in 1886*



*Custer County, Nebraska*

# Solomon Butcher

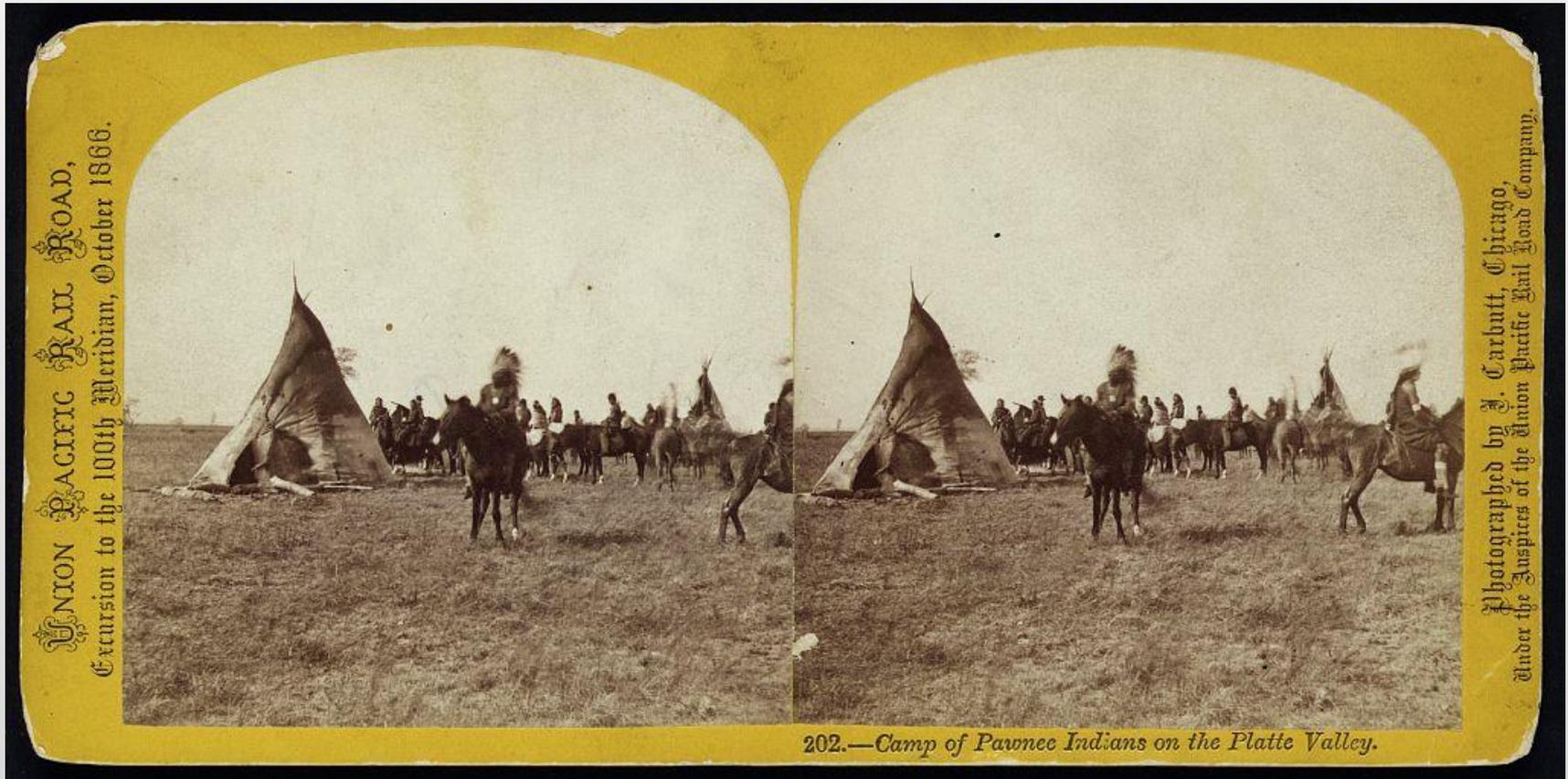
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- Was a photographer from Custer County, Nebraska.
- Butcher homesteaded land in Custer County in 1880 having moved from Ohio.
- His homestead failed.

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- Started to write an illustrated history of Custer County.
  - Began traveling the county in a wagon taking photographs of settlers and their property in 1886.
  - Over 3,000 of his photographs survive today.
  - A rare glimpse into life on the Great Plains.

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- Photographs were expensive to take, so Butcher often only took one from each site.

# Displacement of the Pawnee



*A Pawnee encampment in 1866*

# Displacement of the Pawnee

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- Custer County had once been Pawnee territory.
- The Pawnee relied heavily on the buffalo, travelling hundreds of miles twice a year to hunt.
- These hunt would last from June to August and then November through March.

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- Exposure to white settlers was disastrous to the Plains Indians, the Pawnee among them.
  - Smallpox in 1830 and cholera in 1849.
  - By 1850 their population had fallen by 75%

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- The Pawnee had long been under pressure from the Sioux long time enemies of the Pawnee
  - The Pawnee supplied the U.S. Government scouts in its wars against the Sioux, Kiowa and Cheyenne in 1860s and 1870s.

- 
- Under pressure from white homesteaders, the Pawnee agreed to cede their Nebraska lands in 1874.
  - They were removed by the U.S. Government to a reservation in Oklahoma.

# Central Historical Question

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- *What can Solomon Butcher's photographs tell us about life for homesteaders on the Great Plains in the 1880s?*