

1.5 MEXICAN WARS 1846-1848

France's position was not to compete in the New World with Spain after the French Civil War in 1785, so Napoleon Bonaparte offered to sell the Louisiana Purchase (the south central part of North America) to release France from sending nonexistent soldiers to defend up-to-then unproductive territory—and to gain some badly needed cash—in 1803. The sale included some of what became the Wisconsin Territory (including Minnesota), and was negotiated by Thomas Jefferson. <http://history.state.gov/departments/history/people>

The Mexican Constitution of 1824 officially established The United Mexican States, or the First Mexican Empire. It was the largest extension of Mexico as an independent country. The 24 Intendencias of the Empire in 1821 included what is now California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, parts of Colorado and Texas.

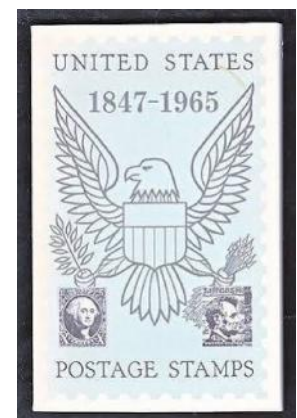
Border disputes included whether people from the United States could move through Mexican Sonoran land to reach California. The Gold Rush of 1848 would soon test the decision. By 1849 Mexico had dwindled to its current size. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_intervention

Q: How should adding historical perspective inform attitudes concerning Mexican migrant workers and public immigration policy?

Gaining Ground

In 1846 we entered the Mexican Wars.
In 1848 Wisconsin became a state.
My 2-greats grandfather
Received a Wisconsin Land Grant
For serving in that war.

—Gary W.



The U.S. Postal Service began in 1847. The Franklin (stamp with the smudge on his nose = hand cancellation) was produced by a private security printing company. The other Franklin and Washington are from the first stamp set produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in 1894. Stamp sizes were standardized, and workmanship became more difficult to forge. —Mystic Stamp Company “Secrets Behind 19th Century Stamps”, circa 1962. In 2005 postage stamp production was again given to private printing firms. —<http://www.moneyfactory.gov/researchstamps.html>

La famille du Robideau had already been pushed from Iroquois Territory in northern New York to Black Hawk Territory in Michigan. As a result of the Black Hawk War they were nudged further west. After the Mexican War, the following generation married into the Chippewa tribe of Wisconsin Territory, then they moved into Dakotah Territory in what would become Minnesota, intermarrying Ojibwa.

Le Famille du Robideau III

Progeny moving 3 lifetimes away (1840)
To a place that would be named Princeton (territorial MN),
A *Gulag* on the savannah,
Testament to the self-discipline of soul and body.

Le tôme du vie telling *le temperature*
By how high the frost creeps inside a tarpaper shack,
By chipping ice out of the washbowl before dawn chores;
Of huddling masses—around a single pot of boiled *vegetables*,
Of sharing one candle, *lucère*,¹
One language: *vîva la lang, Française!*
One collective memory, *l'illuminae grande êt brillante*.
Knowing *la consçience* could never again allow
Le solidarite with a soft life of ease.

We are not at all like them.

Quelle chânge!

Family, people celebrating births,
Commemorations d'anniversaires,
Burying, *il sont môrte*, their dead,
In front of God, *Ton Père. Má Dîos, ouî, á je suis*,
Mourning and celebrating and living out
What is and was and is to come:
We are just like them.

Community people
Raising barns
Sharing butter and milk and eggs
Mending fences
Finding *le commonality*
Putting in hours— *beaucoup des heures!*—
For the common good;



Steel and leather cornhusker,
1840-1860, from family archives.

Along with self-improvement of *situation*,
Requirement beaucoup des jours,
Just like us.

Sharing a rich, old language
Knowing roots are solid, good, sure,
Able to move forward
Because of what was laid down before
Je suis et nous somme:
Just like them.

Survivors
Thrivers
Despite *le politic*
La situation
La location
Les ambiances
Les choses très difficile
Will we be like them?

¹*Lucére*: verb; “to shine”.

Chippewa horsehair and wool blanket from family archives. Handmade blankets are given by Native Americans to seal a bargain, marriage, or friendship, signalling a covering, a protection: “I’ll watch your back.” Received by Great-Grandfather Harry from a good friend, “Indian Joe”.

By contrast, during the 1600s, a few European entrepreneurs had brought blankets infected with smallpox to present to tribes that were in the way of progress.

—From Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World by Jack Weatherford.



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The first rail system in America was built on the East Coast in 1826. Railroad construction was quite primitive at first, but had progressed from wood wheels on wood rails to iron wheels on iron-surfaced wood rails with stone ties. In 1862 President Lincoln chartered the first continental rail system, but the Civil War prevented action.

Congress gave land grants for the project after the war. The Central Pacific Railway building east in 1865 from Sacramento recruited only Chinese workers.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all communicated with a single language and worked well together. Gold had been discovered in the new state of California in 1848 and by 1849 it attracted prospectors worldwide. Some Chinese were already prospecting and others were courted from abroad for the rail project.

The Union Pacific Rail Company attracted [or purchased and brought] Irish (see p. 36) and hired other immigrants to Council Bluffs, Nebraska, to build west. Their polyglot crew had difficulty understanding each other. The companies were paid by laid track: \$20,000 per mile on the prairie, \$40,000 a mile in the foothills, and \$60,000 each mile in the mountains. There was no incentive to make it straight. At Ogden, Utah, they missed meeting each other and kept building for the trackage dollars. It was quickly determined they needed to meet in Promontory, Utah, to prevent more cost overruns. The rail line followed the same tried-and-true route the 49'ers used, which was the route of the Mormons, the telegraph right-of-way, and the Pony Express before them. It eventually was called the Lincoln Highway, which is I-80 today.

Ten years after the first rail line, the Northern Pacific received a land grant from Congress (1880), and by 1890 the Southern Pacific also made good on its land grant. In return for the investment, the government received free transportation for troops and supplies to 1900. Starting in 1901 the government could still move military passengers and freight for 50% of the regular fee. There was a federal tax on all other tickets and freight. Even with subsidies, all 3 government-contract lines failed. The only still-existing rail lines [were and] are all privately owned enterprises.

Since a big chunk of Mexico made our Southwest states, The Mexican Wars had to decide who could expand and use the resources that became accessible with rail traffic. Spain poked at wanting the advantageous situation in 1847 and again in 1898.

—Gary W., Railroad Historian

<sup>1</sup>Until the Last Spike: The Journal of Sean Sullivan, Transcontinental Railroad Worker, Nebraska & Points West, 1867 by William Durban, 2013.

Collectible stamped brass transportation buttons and charms were popular marketing gimmicks in 1849. The center button is a Doodlebug rail engine charm. From family archives.



## Room to Breathe

“Over time free Negroes trained as cavalry soldiers and were sent to a rugged frontier no one was keen on taming, to manage ‘the Indian problem’. ‘Buffalo Soldiers’, they were called. But I’ll have to say, they were more like respectful peacekeepers; at the very least fair fighters; they understood oppression. Too well.

I went to pastor a Methodist Church in the Mexican Mountains. Yes, The Union won, took possession of the area in 1848 as The Territory of New Mexico, then *bought* it in the Gadsden Purchase, transferring title from the Mexican State of Sonora, to become the State of Arizona February 14, 1912.

The cavalry helped clear the land for railroads and settlement. That meant they rounded up Native Americans for reservation life. Imagine the emotional and moral dilemma for Negro soldiers. Arizona had sparse population, cattle, cotton, citrus and copper. The “Great Migration of 1945” hadn’t been thought of yet.<sup>1</sup>

When I, a Minnesota kid fresh from seminary, began to visit the people on Arizona reservations in 1944, I had no clue. But they educated me if I listened closely enough. They had been on the land there since 900 A.D. That is forever, in a very real sense. In Minnesota we swell our chests if our family farms are 100 years old. When I had first contact with my congregation, they had already been there 1040 years. Think of it.

Due to my military father, my own history is full of relocations. But I could relate: the years I spent in one spot from 4th grade through high school is the longest time I’ve been in any one place. I was gone from Minnesota for 60 years, but when I’d go back to that neighborhood to visit, there was the rushing in of ‘home’ for me. I’ve been to every class reunion. The few roots I have are in that soil.

My relatives came in 1620 to America and met the East Coast Penobscot Indians, who archaeologists now say had been there since 700 A.D. They were rooted to the place we call Martha’s Vineyard, to a place we named Boston. Plymouth Plantation is their back yard. The Penobscot tended and appreciated that land 920 full years before the Pilgrims landed.

So I bonded with my Arizona congregation on that fact: they had something so deep and enduring, something I needed, too. I began to understand, just a little, what it must have meant to feel like bull-dozed trees pushed off their own property, away from the graves of their grandfathers, and in a way, their eternal way of life. I can understand, too, that those of Sonoran/Mexican heritage would feel an equal kinship to the place and feel it is their own regardless of some political borders. They are imprinted with the landscape and the fierce



independence it requires to survive in the unforgiving climate.

I also took comfort from from a Methodist Pastor from Echo, Dakota, in the 1870s. Things were pretty touchy there for a long while during the 1865 Dakotah War, the terrible massacres on both sides of the conflict. He gave this counsel to his wife and children: ‘When I’m gone on the circuit to the meetings (church services across the region), pray for me. If anyone comes near, go into the soddy, close the door, forget about trying to collect the animals. I’m not sure what the Cavalry would want with us or why they should ever need civilian provision, but the Indians are just hungry. If they need an animal, let them have it. They won’t take more than they need.’ He continued, ‘In the winter an Indigenous man would come. He would take one animal, and leave. I’m glad we had enough to share. They never harmed my family or me. By the grace of God, I hope I have never harmed one of their people.’”

—Harold Biederman, Pastor, retired back to Minnesota.

<sup>1</sup>Retirees coming from the north for favorable climate and inexpensive living once air-conditioning was perfected after World War II.

**Q:** “Is it surprising that there are border disputes, frustration and confusion about why the land in the Southwestern states is not available to descendants of Sonoran people who originally had homes and history there?” —Mexican man, Chaska, MN

Meanwhile, Minnesota’s borders were established one by one. The French and Indian War decided the northern border (New France/Canada and the Northwest Territory/U.S.) The section west of the Mississippi River was part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Congress determined the St. Louis River would be Minnesota’s eastern border to give it access to Lake Superior. The southern border was set when Iowa was made a state in 1846. The western border of Minnesota went undetermined for 10 years due to government bureaucracy, but was surveyed for statehood in 1858.

—Based on How the States Got Their Shapes by Mark Stein, pp.145-152.



[www.50states.com/flag/mnflag.htm](http://www.50states.com/flag/mnflag.htm)

“My grandfather served in the Mexican-American War. My grandmother was very worried about him, but he came home. I’m sure many more of my family before him were involved in the wars of this nation.” —Ardis, age 93.

## **PRE-CIVIL WAR**

### The Arc of Drawing a Bead (Technology that would affect the Civil War)

Revolutionary War (1775) weapons were more deadly accurate  
Than those factory-manufactured after the Industrial Revolution:  
Weapons designed and made by craftsmen  
Had custom-fit mechanisms, tried sights, and  
Provided a more tightly fitted tolerance  
Than a close-march of privates.  
Militia guns were privately owned,  
Intimately understood and carefully attended.

Still, the factory-produced Springfield minné ball<sup>1</sup>  
Changed the tide of the Civil War  
For a time, creating an advantage for the Ceded States:  
A charge flared the hollow end of the ball  
To fill the chamber for greater velocity,  
Producing graver wounds.  
But by the end of the war  
The Union also had their own ship come in,<sup>2</sup>  
So the tide turned back.

Casualties mounted because many officers  
On both sides had attended West Point,<sup>3</sup>  
Studied the same textbook,  
Then added stronger weapons,  
So gentlemen’s rules of war  
Were too well understood,  
Then shot to hell.

—Jesse Hunt

<sup>1</sup>Claude-Etienne Minié’s conical iron plug has lead skirting, and 3 exterior grease-filled grooves.

<sup>2</sup>The Confederacy purchased superior weaponry from the French, thus their early upper hand in the coming conflict. Later, the Union confiscated a trainload of the shipped weaponry, noted better battle success, then followed suit, also ordering munitions from

the French. Because they badly needed money to keep their own ship of state afloat, the French supplied both sides of our civil conflict.

<sup>3</sup>“Both Generals Lee (Confederate) and Grant (Union) had fought together in the Mexican Wars and had learned war at West Point; but Grant was much younger and Lee didn’t recall him.” —Jac P.

## Irish Slaves

“Black slaves had it plenty rough. But in a way—though it hardly seems possible—Irish slaves might have had it even worse. Blacks were at least valued and cared about, if only because lots of money changed hands. King George of England, however, wishing to send a strong message to keep Ireland under his thumb, sent boatloads of his POWs to America, demanding they be deliberately sold to the North<sup>1</sup> at bargain basement prices (inferring they weren’t worth as much as blacks). This was done in order to demoralize the Irish left at home, and stigmatize any Irish who had escaped his grip by managing to make it to North America on their own. The king had PLENTY of prisoners; consequently they were treated as though they were an expendable commodity.”<sup>2</sup>

—Stephen Gaston, Irish immigrant to Minnesota, 2014.

<sup>1</sup>This policy to sell Irish people reduced the “advantage” of the South, glutted the labor market in the North, drove down industrial wages (causing anger against the Irish), fed the textile industry which caused higher demand for cotton. That prompted the North to seek the fiber from other sources like Egypt, which angered the South and became a cause for the Civil War.

<sup>2</sup>The author’s great-grandfather came from Ireland to Canada about 1848. The information above added an aspect that helped fill in the blanks why her MN father, of Irish extraction, never felt worth very much 3 generations later.



Valley Forge Bunting, Amazon.com

Lincoln’s election victory in 1860 precipitated the secession of the South. His Secretary of State Seward focused most of his efforts on preventing foreign recognition of the Confederacy as a new country. <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/>