

## 8/22: Irrational Landscape - The Great Plains and its towns

- What is environmental history?
- Idea of the “anthropocene”...
- *The Great Plains*
  - example of a human-imposed landscape
  - geologic history of North America and the region; extends from 100th meridian to front range of Rocky Mountains - west of meridian, less than 20 in. of rainfall annually (subhumid climate)
  - story of the Coronado expedition (1538-1539) → Popé’s Rebellion (1680) → Plains Indian cultures (developed through using horses, grasses)
  - “The Great American Desert”
  - Post-American Civil War (1861-1865): new technologies for farmers - making farms more commercial
- White settlement of The Great Plains (starting in mid-1800s)
  - Land sold by federal government (e.g. Homestead Act of 1862) and railroad companies (about \$2-5 per acre)
  - 160 acre plots,
- The Great Plains economy that gets built...
  - economy grows with the the development of transportation and infrastructure in the West
    - U.S. roads for carrying products, then county/state roads, too
  - geometric structures (e.g. square plots, irrigation circles)
  - intensive plowing for agriculture - it will have effects in the decades to come; need for energy and resources - now these are political questions
  - *every single major town in the Great Plains was built around a railroad hub*

## 8/24: Reading Wooster and Wayne County

- Impressions of Wooster - spatially, geographically, construction
- 19th century cities (North): wealth and status less defined - shown spatially in cities like Springfield, Illinois...
  - the model = small town surrounding by small, self-sufficient farmers
  - towns were able to survive and expand by becoming capitals, centers of universities, etc.
- City of Wooster (before “boosters” raised money to have Presbyterian Church locate an institution in the city in 1860s)
  - central business district, railroad built next to water source, town is actually not laid square to the north like most
  - neighborhoods vary based on land value, topography, etc.; post-1960 population explosion; conscious preservation recently
  - roads go out of town to nearby cities (based on Native American trails)
- Models of cities
  - 1.) Plains towns model (human-imposed, geometric)
  - 2.) Common city model (central business district with a main thoroughfare, located next to a body of water, then surrounded by residential space) → *model for almost every town in U.S.*
  - 3.) The “Wooster” model (not really using a grid; different because prone to flooding, with the water running downhill - recent building in the north)
    - another ex: Mexico City (massive city, built on marsh, high in mountains, use of bridges - a city built on human-created property)
- Some facts...
  - Prior to 1946 most Americans (non-farmers) did not have the opportunity to own a home - due to financing and building costs

- Wayne County is very wealthy - the source: agriculture
- Wooster's first suburb was The Forest University neighborhood (built in 1920s and used street-car system)
- Cars are a post-1910s phenomenon
  
- Thinking about landscapes
  - some historical lenses: how does money work at this place and at this time, where is the water, how much is the land value?...