BREAKING NEW GROUND:
ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF
HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT OF
AMERICA
NEBRASKA

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# Table of Contents

Document Approval ................................................................. ii
List of Figures ........................................................................ vi
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations ........................................ xi

**Introduction** ............................................................................. 1

**Chapter 1: Historical Background** ........................................... 10
  Prehistory and Early European Exploration ................................ 10
  American Expansion into the Plains: Federal Land Policy ............ 17
  The Freeman Homestead in Beatrice, Nebraska ......................... 24

**Chapter 2: Legislative History** .................................................. 29
  Local Origins: 1909-1933 .......................................................... 29
  Local and Federal Action, 1934-1938 ........................................ 33
  Freeman School .......................................................................... 42
  Boundary Expansion: Heritage Center ........................................ 44
  Name Change ............................................................................ 46

**Chapter 3: Initial Implementation** ............................................ 49
  Historic Sites in the National Park System ............................... 49
  Work Commences at Homestead National Monument ............... 51
    Initial Conservation Efforts .................................................... 52
    Initial Prairie Restoration ..................................................... 54
    Cub Creek Erosion Control ................................................... 58
  Initial Historical Research ...................................................... 60
  Buildings .................................................................................. 63

**Chapter 4: Early Conservation Efforts: 1946-1978**.................... 68
  Summary of Early Conservation Efforts ...................................... 69
  Initial Post-War Conservation ................................................ 69
  Gage County Soil Conservation District ................................... 71
  Cub Creek Erosion Control: 1951-1975 ..................................... 71
  Prairie Restoration: 1958-1978 ................................................ 74
  Prescribed Burns ...................................................................... 77

**Chapter 5: Early Research and Interpretation** ......................... 82
  Research: 1946-1970 ............................................................... 82
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archeological Survey</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Handbook</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative History</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation: Early Steps</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for Reconstruction</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer-Epard Cabin</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Trail</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visual Technology</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission 66: Visitor Center Exhibits</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Development</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening and Initial Reviews</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living History and Environmental Education</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Buildings, Infrastructure, and Land Protection</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Residences</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cub Creek Footbridge</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Center</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer-Epard Cabin</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance and Infrastructure</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Protection</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachments in the 1960s and 1970s</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic Easements and the Freeman School</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway 4 and the State Triangle</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Collections</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayerhoff-Dietz Collection</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections Management in Mission 66</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8: Natural Resources Since 1978</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Restoration</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening the Scope of Natural Resource Management</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Landscape Report</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osage Orange Hedgerow</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire and Fire Protection</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: Interpretation and Research, 1975-2015</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation and Living History</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

FIGURE 1: MAP OF THE UNITED STATES SHOWING THE STATES WHERE HOMESTEADERS ACQUIRED LAND THROUGH THE HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1862 ......................................................... 2

FIGURE 2: THE RESTORED PRAIRIE AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, LOOKING WEST. .... 3

FIGURE 3: 1946 MAP OF HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT SHOWING THE ORIGINAL BOUNDARY. ................................................................................................. 4

FIGURE 4: BOUNDARY MAP OF HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT ........................................ 5

FIGURE 5: JULIA BEATRICE KINNEY ............................................................................................. 25

FIGURE 6. HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT STAFF WITH THE 1857 FLAG. ..................... 26

FIGURE 7: DANIEL FREEMAN ...................................................................................................... 27

FIGURE 8: 1938 PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FREEMAN HEIRS CONVEYING TITLE TO THE FREEMAN HOMESTEAD TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ......................................................... 42

FIGURE 9: WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION WORKERS AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1939: ........................................................................................................ 53

FIGURE 10: TWO VIEWS OF HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1939 ............................... 54

FIGURE 11: A VIEW OF CUB CREEK ON HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1939 ............ 58

FIGURE 12: EROSION CONTROL PLAN FOR CUB CREEK, 1939 ............................................ 59

FIGURE 13. THE FORMER CCC CAMP LOCATION AT DEMPSTER PARK .......................................... 64

FIGURE 14: 1941 PHOTOGRAPH OF UTILITY BUILDING ............................................................ 65

FIGURE 15: 1940 DRAWINGS OF PROPOSED ENTRANCE SIGNS FOR HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT ........................................................................................................ 66

FIGURE 16: 1952 MAP SHOWING EROSION CONTROL LOCATIONS ........................................ 72

FIGURE 17: 1952 PHOTOGRAPH OF CUB CREEK SHOWING WILLOW PLANTINGS ...................... 73

FIGURE 18: 1970 MAP SHOWING NATIVE GRASS PLOTS ............................................................... 76

FIGURE 19: A 1950 PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PALMER-EPARD CABIN ........................................ 94
FIGURE 20: 1957 DESIGNS FOR TRAIL SIGNS AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT .......... 97

FIGURE 21: DAVID SHAVER, SON OF SUPERINTENDENT RALPH SHAVER, LOOKING AT THE ADMATIC SLIDE MACHINE. ................................................................. 98

FIGURE 22: HERBERT PALMER, LAST CHILD BORN IN THE PALMER-EPARD CABIN IN 1872, VIEWING THE ADMATIC SLIDE MACHINE IN 1958 ........................................... 98

FIGURE 23: 1967 MAP SHOWING PROPOSED HORSE TRAILS ................................... 112

FIGURE 24: SUPERINTENDENT’S RESIDENCE, 2018 ................................................... 116

FIGURE 25: EMPLOYEE RESIDENCE, 2018 ................................................................. 119

FIGURE 26: CUB CREEK FOOT BRIDGE, 2018 ................................................................. 121

FIGURE 27: A VIEW OF THE VISITOR CENTER SITE, INDICATED BY THE FLAGPOLE, IN 1958 LOOKING SOUTH, WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT’S HOUSE AND PALMER-EPARD CABIN ON THE RIGHT ........................................................................................................... 123

FIGURE 28: NEBRASKA GOVERNOR MORRISON WITH ASSISTANT REGIONAL DIRECTOR BAGGLEY AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESIDENT BOYD AT VISITOR CENTER GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY, 1961 ................................................................ 124

FIGURE 29: 1960 DRAWING OF PROPOSED VISITOR CENTER ..................................... 125

FIGURE 30: EDUCATION CENTER, 2018 ................................................................. 125

FIGURE 31: ANNOTATED VERSION OF 1954 PLAN SHOWING EXISTING BUILDINGS IN RELATION TO THE ORIGINAL ALIGNMENT OF HIGHWAY 4 (DOTTED LINE) AND NEW ALIGNMENT .... 127

FIGURE 32: 1962 PLAN SHOWING NEW LOCATION OF PALMER-EPARD CABIN ............. 129

FIGURE 33: PALMER-EPARD CABIN, 2018 ................................................................. 134

FIGURE 34: 1962 PHOTOGRAPH OF INSTALLATION OF WATER RESERVOIR BEHIND UTILITY BUILDING ......................................................................................... 135

FIGURE 35: 1973 NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR PIONEER ACRES SUBDIVISION ........ 139

FIGURE 36: 1968 PLAN SHOWING FREEMAN SCHOOL AND PROPOSED SCENIC EASEMENTS .... 141

FIGURE 37: 1964 MAP ANNOTATED TO SHOW THE STATE TRIANGLE AND HIGHWAY 4 .... 145

FIGURE 38: 1980 MAP SHOWING PRESCRIBED BURN UNITS .................................... 166
FIGURE 39: A PRESCRIBED BURN AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT ........................................ 168

FIGURE 40: A PORTION OF THE OSAGE ORANGE HEDGEROW WITH THE PALMER-EPARD CABIN AT THE LEFT, 2019.............................................................................................................. 177

FIGURE 41: USE OF DRONE FOR PRESCRIBED BURN IN 2016 ........................................................ 182

FIGURE 42: DON FERNEDING, 2019 ........................................................................................................ 192

FIGURE 43: EDUCATION SPECIALIST AMY GARRETT, 2006 ............................................................ 194

FIGURE 44: FREEMAN SCHOOL, 2018 .................................................................................................... 197

FIGURE 45: DIAGRAM SHOWING BRICK RESTORATION WORK AT FREEMAN SCHOOL, 1974 .... 203

FIGURE 46: 2003 PHOTOGRAPH OF FREEMAN SCHOOL FLOOR RESTORATION ........................... 204

FIGURE 47: HERITAGE CENTER INTERIOR SHOWING UPPER AND LOWER LEVELS, 2018 ........ 211

FIGURE 48: HERITAGE CENTER INTERIOR, EXHIBITS ON LOWER LEVEL, 2018........................ 211

FIGURE 49: WAYSIDE EXHIBIT ON PATH ALONG OSAGE ORANGE HEDGEROW, 2019 .......... 212

FIGURE 50: MEMBERS OF THE DAR AND BEatrice ELECTED OFFICIALS WITH NEW HIGHWAY SIGN IN DOWNTOWN BEatrice, 1955 ......................................................................................... 224

FIGURE 51: 1962 FOUR-CENT COMMEMORATIVE POSTAGE STAMP ............................................. 228

FIGURE 52: SCOTT HIGGINS, SON OF SUPERINTENDENT JOHN HIGGINS, AT THE CHRISTMAS TREE TRIMMING EVENT, 1969......................................................................................... 230

FIGURE 53: CHRIS SAYRE, FROM LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, PERFORMS AT THE 2010 HOMESTEAD DAYS EVENT .......................................................................................................................... 231

FIGURE 54: FORMER FRIENDS OF HOMESTEAD PRESIDENT LAUREEN RIEDSEL, 2019 ....... 233

FIGURE 55: STUDENTS TAKING PART IN NEBRASKA LITERACY FESTIVAL AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, 2014 .............................................................................................................. 234

FIGURE 56: 2015 HOMESTEAD QUARTER ................................................................................................. 236

FIGURE 57: SELFIE SPOT OVERLOOKING THE RESTORED PRAIRIE, 2019 ..................................... 236

FIGURE 58: FRIENDS OF HOMESTEAD MEMBER WILLIAM B. SCULLY, JR., 2019 .................... 237

FIGURE 59: VISITOR CENTER SHOWING HOMESTEAD LEGACY BANNERS, 2019 .................... 239
FIGURE 60: ORIGINAL HOMESTEAD ACT OF 1862 IN WOODEN CRATE BEING DELIVERED TO HERITAGE CENTER COLLECTIONS STORAGE WHILE AN ARMED PARK RANGER WATCHES OVER THE HISTORIC DOCUMENT, 2012 ................................................................. 241

FIGURE 61: 2017 SOLAR ECLIPSE EVENT ........................................................................ 242

FIGURE 62: REPRESENTATIVE DOUGLAS BEREUTER, 2019 ........................................... 245

FIGURE 63: 2006 PHOTO OF HERITAGE CENTER SITE PRIOR TO EXCAVATION ............... 254

FIGURE 64: HERITAGE CENTER FOUNDATION UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN JULY 2006 .......... 254

FIGURE 65: HERITAGE CENTER ROOF UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN JANUARY 2007 ............ 255

FIGURE 66: INTERIOR OF THE HERITAGE CENTER UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN FEBRUARY 2007 ................................................................. 255

FIGURE 67: COLLECTIONS STORAGE AREA IN HERITAGE CENTER UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN MAY 2007 ........................................................................ 256

FIGURE 68: HERITAGE CENTER LOOKING EAST FROM RESTORED PRAIRIE, 2019 ............ 257

FIGURE 69: MARVIN DIAMOND GIVING AMERICAN INDIAN BLESSING AT OPENING OF HERITAGE CENTER, 2007 ................................................................. 257

FIGURE 70: SUPERINTENDENT MARK ENGLER (L) AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR ERNIE QUINTANA AT HERITAGE CENTER OPENING, MAY 2007 ................................................................. 258

FIGURE 71: LAST HOMESTEADER KENNETH DEARDORFF AT HERITAGE CENTER OPENING, MAY 2007 ................................................................. 258

FIGURE 72: BOUNDARY EXPANSION FOR HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT AS PROPOSED BY NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION, 1988 ................................. 262

FIGURE 73: PHOTOGRAPH OF OPAL SHUM, UNDATED .................................................. 263

FIGURE 74: LAND PURCHASED BY FRIENDS OF HOMESTEAD WITH FUNDS FROM SHUM BEQUEST AND NEBRASKA ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST, LOOKING NORTH TOWARD HERITAGE CENTER, 2018 ................................................................. 264

FIGURE 75: PROPOSED BOUNDARY ADDITIONS ............................................................. 265

FIGURE 76: SUPERINTENDENT CLARENCE SCHULTZ IN 1954 AS HE PREPARED TO LEAVE HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT ................................................................. 268
FIGURE 77: SUPERINTENDENT GEORGE BLAKE (L) WITH REGIONAL HISTORIAN RAY MATTISON (R), 1954

FIGURE 78: SUPERINTENDENT RALPH SHAVER (CENTER) WITH SUPERINTENDENT GEORGE BLAKE (RIGHT) AND REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER NEAL CASTRO, 1956

FIGURE 79: HISTORIAN DONALD WARMAN, 1958

FIGURE 80: SUPERINTENDENT WARREN HOTCHKISS, 1959

FIGURE 81: HISTORIAN CECIL HALLIDAY, 1962

FIGURE 82: SUPERINTENDENT VERNON HENNESAY, 1965

FIGURE 83: SUPERINTENDENT JOHN ROHN, 1965

FIGURE 84: ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER EVELYN CARLSON AND SUPERINTENDENT JOHN HIGGINS, 1969

FIGURE 85: HISTORIAN FAHY WHITAKER, 1969

FIGURE 86: SUPERINTENDENT VINCENT HALVORSON, 1971

FIGURE 87: SUPERINTENDENT CONSTANTINE DILLON, 2019

FIGURE 88: SUPERINTENDENT MARK ENGLER, 2019

FIGURE 89: HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT ORGANIZATION CHART, 2009

FIGURE 90: HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, ORGANIZATION CHART, 2019

FIGURE 91: FORMER CHIEF OF INTERPRETATION AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SUSAN COOK, 2019

FIGURE 92: VOLUNTEER QUILTERS AT HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1971

FIGURE 93: VOLUNTEERS ASSISTING MUSEUM TECHNICIAN AMY NEUMANN (R) WITH DEMPSTER MILL ARCHIVAL COLLECTION, 2016
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANCS  Automated National Catalog System
BP    Before Present
BVHA  Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects
BRFD  Beatrice Rural Fire Department
c.    circa
CCC   Civilian Conservation Corps
CLI   Cultural Landscape Inventory
CLR   Cultural Landscape Report
CMP   Collections Management Plan
CRGIS Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems Center
CRPP  Cultural Resources Preservation Program
D     Democrat
DAB   Development Advisory Board
DAR   Daughters of the American Revolution
DBA   Doing Business As
DOI   Department of the Interior
DSC   Denver Service Center
EA    Environmental Assessment
EASI  Environmental Association for Senior Involvement
ENPMA Eastern National Park and Monument Association
EPPL  Environmental Planning and Programming Language
ESA   Environmental Study Area
ESU   Educational Service Unit
ESRI  Environmental Systems Research Institute
FEMA  Federal Emergency Management Administration
FOH   Friends of Homestead
FTE   Full-time Equivalent
FY    Fiscal Year
GMP   General Management Plan
GIS   Geographic Information System
GLO   Government Land Office
GPRA  Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
GWWO  Grieves, Worrall, Wright and O’Hatnick, Inc.
HFC   Harpers Ferry Center
HFP   Historic Furnishings Plan
HHA   Homestead Historical Association
HNPA  Homestead National Park Association
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HPTC</td>
<td>Historic Preservation Training Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSR</td>
<td>Historic Structure(s) Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVAC</td>
<td>Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>I&amp;RM</td>
<td>Interpretation and Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRS</td>
<td>Internal Revenue Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Land and Conservation Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDS</td>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints</td>
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<tr>
<td>LE</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>LPP</td>
<td>Land Protection Plan</td>
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<td>LRIP</td>
<td>Long-Range Interpretive Plan</td>
</tr>
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<td>LTEM</td>
<td>Long Term Environmental Monitoring</td>
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<td>MEP</td>
<td>Museum Exhibit Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>MPDO</td>
<td>Management Plan Development Outline</td>
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<td>MWRO</td>
<td>Midwest Regional Office</td>
</tr>
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<td>NARA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASA</td>
<td>National Aeronautic and Space Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>Nash Brookes Associates</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBS</td>
<td>National Biological Service</td>
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<td>National Catalog Steering Committee</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>NIMBUS</td>
<td>Nebraska Intelligent Mobile Unmanned Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPCA</td>
<td>National Parks and Conservation Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPPD</td>
<td>Nebraska Public Power District</td>
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<td>NPS</td>
<td>National Park Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRMP</td>
<td>Natural Resources Management Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIG</td>
<td>Office of Inspector General</td>
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<td>ONPS</td>
<td>Operation of the National Park System</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Parks as Classrooms</td>
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<td>PCP</td>
<td>Project Construction Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>P.L.</td>
<td>Public Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMAP</td>
<td>Prairie Management Action Plan</td>
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<td>PMIS</td>
<td>Project Management Information System</td>
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<td>PMP</td>
<td>Prairie Management Plan</td>
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<td>PWA</td>
<td>Public Works Administration</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>Republican</td>
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<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>S&amp;MC</td>
<td>Soil and Moisture Control</td>
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<td>S.</td>
<td>Senate</td>
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<td>SCA</td>
<td>Student Conservation Association</td>
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<td>SCD</td>
<td>Soil Conservation District</td>
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<td>Sen.</td>
<td>Senator</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFM</td>
<td>Statement for Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHPO</td>
<td>State Historic Preservation Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNL</td>
<td>University of Nebraska-Lincoln</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPS</td>
<td>United Parcel Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>USCIS</td>
<td>United States Citizenship and Immigration Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>USFWS</td>
<td>United States Fish and Wildlife Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIP</td>
<td>Volunteers-in-Parks</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASO</td>
<td>Washington, D.C. Office</td>
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<td>WODC</td>
<td>Western Office of Design and Construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPA</td>
<td>Works Progress Administration</td>
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<td>YWCA</td>
<td>Young Women’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Homesteading has a hold on the American imagination that few other movements in the nation’s history can match. Somewhere near the core of the American psyche is a combination of expansionism and independence, the inclination to strike out on one’s own, the desire to own and develop one’s own land, and the belief that such an endeavor is not only possible but a fundamental American right. The apparently limitless amount of land available on the American continent created a new reality for European and other settlers who arrived beginning in the mid-sixteenth century. By the nineteenth century, the land had shaped a mentality that recognized few limits to both individual and national growth and achievement. The westward migration of the nineteenth century and the suburbanization of the mid-twentieth century to the present have this much in common: the desire to stake out a plot of land, no matter how small, and make it one’s own. Other cultures and nations exhibit this tendency, but no others put it at the center of a national identity in the way that Americans have for centuries. When Congress passed the Homestead Act, which President Abraham Lincoln signed into law on May 20, 1862 (Public Law [P.L.] 37-64), these political leaders tapped into and made law the expansionist and independent spirit that has formed so much of the American identity from the beginning.

Under the Homestead Act, some 270,000,000 acres of public land were transferred into the hands of actual settlers. Public lands were available to homesteaders in thirty states, from Florida to Alaska, but most of these transfers took place within the Great Plains states, from the Dakotas south through Kansas and Oklahoma (Figure 1). The law provided that American citizens, or those who declared their intent to become citizens, who were at least twenty-one years of age and who had never taken up arms against the United States, were eligible to receive 160 acres of public land so long as they resided on the land for at least five years, constructed a house, and cultivated the land after paying a filing fee. The Homestead Act remained in place until 1976, when Congress repealed it with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The 1976 Act, however, allowed homesteading until 1986, while those completing their claims in 1986 were allowed to finish the process and prove their claims. Ken Deardorff, who made his claim in 1974 in Alaska, was the last to receive his patent under the Homestead Act in May 1988. Through this act, more than a million settlers took up formerly public lands and created farms and communities throughout the Great Plains, the mountain west, and the far west, as well as in the settled states of the Midwest. In the southeast, the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 applied to more than 40,000,000 acres of public domain lands in five southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi). This land had not been accessible in 1862 when the Homestead Act was passed, but the 1866 legislation opened the land to freed slaves and white citizens who could prove their loyalty during the Civil War. Before being repealed in 1876, the Southern Homestead Act resulted in more than 6,000 homestead claims, approximately 1,000 of which were proved.

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1 Subsequent amendments to the Homestead Act through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the Kinkaid Act and the Stock-Raising Homestead Act, increased the total amount of land to 640 acres in certain circumstances and allowed the acquisition of land that would be planted with trees without a residency requirement.
Homestead National Monument of America (Homestead National Monument; park), located near Beatrice, Nebraska, preserves and interprets one of the nation’s original homesteads, filed by Daniel Freeman on January 1, 1863, the first day the Homestead Act took effect. The park, created in 1936, allows visitors to understand the social, economic, and political impulses that drove homesteaders to seek out new lands, the conditions these homesteaders faced, and the original landscape of the Nebraska plains the early homesteaders knew. Homesteaders acquired land in all thirty states that had public domain lands, from Florida to Alaska, making it a truly national phenomena that has powerfully impacted the nation’s history (Figure 1). In addition to discussing the impact of the Homestead Act on Nebraska, Homestead National Monument, through its exhibits and interpretive programs, addresses the scope and legacy of homesteading throughout the nation from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, as well as the broader implications of homesteading.

Open land is a vital component of Homestead National Monument. By preserving a portion of the prairie that once covered the Great Plains and restoring a large area to the original native grasses, the park is able to afford visitors a sense of the landscape that the first homesteaders encountered (Figure 2). The novelist Willa Cather, whose family traveled to Nebraska in the 1880s to homestead, was eloquent in her descriptions of the prairie on the cusp of the large-scale agricultural development which began in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries. As she wrote in *My Antonia*, “There was nothing but land; not a country at all, but the material of which countries are made.” In this, she expressed the apparently limitless scope of the Great Plains and the sense of possibility and potential which that immense space represented. Native and foreign-born homesteaders, as Cather indicated, were conscious of shaping the vast new land which faced them into a country, a vital part of America. The expanse of prairie preserved at Homestead National Monument lets visitors gain a sense of the time and place encountered by the new homesteaders of the late nineteenth century.

Figure 2: The restored prairie at Homestead National Monument, looking west. Photo by the author.

Homestead National Monument of America was authorized by Congress in the winter of 1936 via P.L. 480, 74th Congress, which President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law on March 19, 1936. This was the culmination of nearly three decades of effort by local citizens in Beatrice, Nebraska, and by Nebraska’s Congressional delegation. Homestead National Monument was a result, in part, of the actions of the land’s original owner, Daniel Freeman, who had made a strong claim to being the nation’s first homesteader by filing his claim shortly after midnight on January 1, 1863. Freeman lived on his land until he died in late December 1908, and his family retained ownership of the property after his death. Freeman had been a prominent fixture in Beatrice. As the newspaper account of his death noted, Freeman lived on his homestead for forty-six years, “during which time he took an active interest and occupied a conspicuous position in the affairs and history of Gage county.”

Soon after his death, local leaders in Beatrice, with the support of Freeman’s widow and children, began to seek ways of commemorating the historical significance of Freeman’s homestead and began proposing either a

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national or a state park at the site. While both local and national political support waxed and waned from the 1910s into the 1930s, Daniel Freeman’s heirs remained on his land and eventually sold their property back to the federal government in 1938.³

![Figure 3: 1946 map of Homestead National Monument showing the original boundary. Source: files of Homestead National Monument.](image)

As a result of this purchase from the heirs of Daniel Freeman in 1938, Homestead National Monument preserves the original T-shaped claim that Freeman filed on January 1, 1863. Totaling 162.73 acres, the original park consisted of lands that bordered Cub Creek lying to the northwest of Beatrice (Figure 3). It is organized into four forty-acre squares, three along an east-west alignment and one extending to the north from the center southern square to form the T-shape; each of these forty-acre squares is known colloquially as a “forty,” thus, the park’s original boundary encompassed the south, center, east, and north forties. By 1938, the land had been substantially modified from its original appearance. It had been farmed extensively for two generations, and the original alignment of Nebraska State Highway 4 passed directly through the site. After the first Superintendent, Clarence H. Schultz, entered on duty in the fall of 1940, the National Park Service (NPS) initiated efforts to restore the prairie to its native grasses, and Highway 4 was realigned to bypass all but two small corners on the park’s northeast side in 1954.

The boundary of the park has been expanded twice since the original purchase of the Freeman property in 1938. On September 25, 1970, President Richard Nixon signed into law P.L. 91-411 which allowed NPS to acquire the nearby Freeman School property located at the northwest corner of SW 89th Road and Highway 4, approximately 0.3 miles west of the park’s Headquarters Office. Built in 1872, the Freeman School was the oldest continuously operating one-room schoolhouse in Nebraska at the time of its closure in 1967. It has a two-fold connection to Daniel Freeman: in addition to being the school closest to his homestead and farm, he fought for the concept of the separation of Church and State when he filed a successful lawsuit against the school district in 1902, forcing the school to cease using the Bible in classroom instruction. With the support of NPS Region Two (now the Midwest Regional Office [MWRO]), park staff began planning for the preservation and interpretation of the school in the early 1960s. The local school district announced plans in 1966 to close the school. In early 1967, NPS coordinated with the school district to transfer the school to NPS pending passage of legislation to allow expansion of the park boundary to include the school property.4

The park’s boundary was expanded again in 2002 when President George W. Bush signed P.L. 107-332. This law, initiated by Nebraska’s U.S. Representative Douglas Bereuter, allowed NPS to acquire several tracts of land bordering the park, most significantly a tract at the eastern edge of the original Homestead National Monument land. This, in turn, allowed the park to construct a new Heritage Center, which opened in 2007 on the 145th anniversary of the Homestead Act. Figure 4 shows the current boundaries of Homestead National Monument.

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4 “Preservation of old Freeman School as national monument seems assured,” Beatrice Daily Sun, February 8, 1967, page 1.
Homestead National Monument had no buildings within the boundary when it was created in 1936, though it included the remains of four earlier buildings: a squatter’s cabin, the Freeman Homestead Cabin, the Freeman Brick House, and the Agnes Suiter Freeman Cabin. Each of these buildings had either been demolished or had burned prior to the site’s acquisition by the federal government. In addition, the site contained the graves of Daniel and Agnes Freeman and a monument placed at the site by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in 1925 and dedicated in 1926. Both resources remain on the site and are incorporated into the park’s interpretive program.

When Superintendent Clarence H. Schultz entered on duty in 1940, his office was located in an existing Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) building in Dempster Park, located on the north side of what is now Highway 4 approximately three miles east of Homestead National Monument. The first building in the park was a utility building constructed in 1941; this also served as a temporary park headquarters and museum space. In 1950, NPS began construction of a one-story brick residence for the Superintendent, which was completed in early 1951. At the same time, the park identified and acquired an early local settler’s cabin. The cabin, originally located on a farm approximately fourteen miles northeast of Homestead National Monument, was constructed by homesteader George Washington Palmer in the late 1860s. J.B. Epard, who owned the cabin at the time, donated it to NPS in 1950. With the support of the local community and the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce, the park moved the cabin to the site. The Palmer-Epard Cabin has been located on several sites within the park property since 1950, most recently on the grounds of the Heritage Center.

In the mid-1950s, the park began planning for an extensive series of improvements as part of the service-wide Mission 66 program. This program was designed to provide a wide range of upgrades to NPS facilities throughout the nation in recognition of the 50th anniversary, in 1966, of the establishment of the National Park Service. At Homestead National Monument, Mission 66 funds were used to construct a new suspension footbridge over Cub Creek in 1961, a new visitor center in 1962, and a second employee residence, completed in 1966. The footbridge and visitor center were planned to be completed in time for the centenary anniversary of the Homestead Act in 1962. The visitor center allowed office and interpretive space to be relocated from the original 1941 utility building. The utility building was then remodeled in 1962 and returned to its original purpose as a maintenance shop facility. The park continued to operate with these buildings, which were grouped together in a campus on the park’s western edge.

First developed in the mid-1950s, self-guided trails in the section of restored prairie lying west of Cub Creek were expanded through the 1970s and 1980s, with new interpretive signs and brochures providing information about the site’s history and environment. In 1970, Congress approved the first expansion of the park’s boundary to allow the inclusion of the Freeman School approximately one-quarter mile west of the Visitor Center. The park completed extensive renovation work at the school in the early 1970s and incorporated it into the park’s interpretation in 1973. By the 1980s, park staff were paying increasing attention to the management of the park’s natural resources, particularly the section of restored prairie, including regularly scheduled prescribed burns to control invasive plant species.
The park then saw a renewed era of physical growth in the early 2000s. In December 1999, Midwest Regional Director William Schenk approved the new General Management Plan (GMP) for Homestead National Monument. Among the recommendations in the GMP was a new visitor education center to be located on land adjacent to but outside of the original park boundary. Superintendent Mark Engler, with the support of the Friends of Homestead, worked with Representative Douglas Bereuter (R-NE) to secure funding and to make an adjustment to the park’s original boundary in 2002 to allow for the purchase of a lot adjacent to the park’s eastern boundary. This lot then served as the site for the park’s new Heritage Center. The park’s current boundary thus includes the original 160-acre Freeman homestead and the two additional parcels added by legislation (see Figure 4). Completed in 2007 and located immediately east of the park’s original boundary, the Heritage Center contains a greatly enlarged exhibit, a Homestead research area, a climate-controlled and secure archival storage space, offices, and an educational bookstore.

The new Heritage Center allows Homestead National Monument to more completely fulfill its mission regarding the original homestead tract as stated in the original 1936 legislation:

to lay out said land in a suitable and enduring manner so that the same may be maintained as an appropriate monument to retain for posterity a proper memorial emblematical of the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed in the settlement, cultivation, and civilization of the great West.

The law also enjoins the Secretary of the Interior, through NPS,

to erect suitable buildings to be used as a museum in which shall be preserved literature applying to such settlement and agricultural implements used in bringing the western places to its present high state of civilization, and to use the said tract of land for such other objects and purposes as in his judgment may perpetuate the history of the country mainly developed by the homestead law.5

From its inception in the late 1930s, and particularly after the first NPS staff arrived in 1940, Homestead National Monument has used its natural and cultural resources to interpret the history of homesteading in America. Superintendent Schultz inaugurated this approach to balancing both aspects in 1940 and 1941. At the same time, he pursued the restoration of large portions of the park to its vegetational appearance at the time that Daniel Freeman began homesteading in the 1860s and also developed a research program into the history of the site and of homesteading in general. Although succeeding superintendents have adjusted the balance between these two resources to emphasize one or the other at different times throughout the life of the park, both have always been part of the park’s interpretation and education programs. Beginning in the late 1950s, the park has consistently had a historian on staff except for the period from 1976 to 1998. The role of the Historian over the years has included guiding the park’s interpretive program, conducting research and directing volunteers in studying various topics related to homesteading. In more recent years, the Historian has taken part in the development of a museum that includes a substantial modern archival collection. The results of this research material, dating back to early studies conducted by Superintendent Schultz and

5 Both of these quotations are from the park’s enabling legislation, Public Law No. 480, 74th Congress.
continuing to the present, have informed the development of self-guided and ranger-led tours through the prairie, exhibits, and interpretive signage. Several superintendents and natural resource managers have experimented with the introduction and protection of a variety of grass types and have developed systems of protecting the prairie from fire. Because an appropriate cultural landscape is vital to interpreting the site as the early homesteaders would have known it, park staff have been devoted to researching, developing and maintaining the park’s resources to provide that understanding to its visitors.

The purpose of this Administrative History of Homestead National Monument is to explore how the National Park Service has developed this park which interprets the experiences of the actual settlers who took advantage of the Homestead Act to create farms and communities throughout the nation. In pursuing the protection and cultivation of the native landscape and the interpretation of the homesteaders’ lives and experiences, park officials and staff since 1940 have worked to fulfill the requirement in the site’s enabling legislation to create “an appropriate monument to retain for posterity a proper memorial emblematical of the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed in the settlement, cultivation, and civilization of the great West.”

The park has been the subject of two previous administrative histories. In 1962, Regional Historian Ray H. Mattison completed the park’s first Administrative History, which was subsequently published as a long article in *Nebraska History*, the journal of the Nebraska State Historical Society.\(^6\) Mattison’s administrative history focused primarily on local and regional attempts to have a park created at the Freeman homestead as well as on the park’s legislative history together with a review and assessment of Daniel Freeman’s claim to be the nation’s first homesteader. He also provided a brief summary of the work of the park’s first Superintendent, Clarence Schultz, and the work of planning the park’s development under the Mission 66 program of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Seasonal Historian Robert Tecklenberg, employed in summer 1981 by the Cultural Resources Management division of the Midwest Regional Office, prepared an update to the 1962 Administrative History in 1981. Approved in early 1982, the study included a brief summary of the park’s early history and the planning for the Mission 66-era improvements. Tecklenberg provided information on the park’s interpretive program, collections management, acquisition and restoration of the Palmer-Epard Cabin and the Freeman School, restoration of the prairie, energy conservation efforts, and growth of staff.\(^7\)

The current document incorporates these earlier studies as it includes the entire sweep of the site’s history, reaching back to the roots of the story with the early use and settlement of the land through its present operation as the nation’s principal interpreter of homesteading in its broader context. The principal sources for this study are the archival collections maintained in the Heritage Center and the administrative files in the Education Center, both components of Homestead National Monument. An important component of the present study are oral history interviews with individuals who are knowledgeable about the park’s recent history and

\(^6\) Mattison, 1962.
operations, including previous and current park and regional office staff, volunteers, professionals who have collaborated with the park on various programs, and a former member of the House of Representatives. These oral history interviews, which were transcribed and provided to the park, convey not only information that may not be recorded in the park’s documents but also invaluable insights into the basis for many decisions and actions that affected the development of the park. In addition, the Federal Records Center in Lenexa, Kansas, a branch of the National Archives and Records Administration, contained a substantial collection of records pertaining the park. Finally, local and regional newspapers, particularly the Beatrice Daily Sun, proved extremely useful to help fill some gaps in the documentary record.

This study was produced under contract with the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. Regional Historian Ron Cockrell guided this project, as he has so many other administrative histories, with consummate skill, sharing specific knowledge and insights about the park and regional office history and his experience in the preparation of these types of documents. In addition, Homestead National Monument of America Superintendent Mark Engler enthusiastically supported the project, providing both an infectious enthusiasm for the park and for the history of homesteading and information and insights from his more than two decades at the park’s helm and experience from the time he was a seasonal employee, 1977-1982. He also made available staff time and support that made the research vastly more productive. This expansive project would not have been possible without them.
Chapter 1: Historical Background

Free Land! This was the rallying cry that drove more than four million people to claim land under the Homestead Act. To those eking out a meager living in the cities and small towns of the East, to recent immigrants seeking the promises of American life and prosperity, to freed southern African Americans seeking a chance to begin their new lives of freedom with the hope of their own property, and to others looking for new opportunities, free land for the taking from the federal government was a powerful allure.

But, of course, free land is never free. Like anything good in this life, there is a price to be paid. Of the millions of acres in the public domain that the federal government distributed to settlers through the Homestead Act, the price for much of it, particularly in Nebraska, had, in a sense, already been paid by the former occupants of the land. Various American Indian peoples had lived out their lives from time out of memory on the Great Plains. These groups had roamed the Plains for millennia, adjusting their ways of living to the changing climates and waves of new people arriving from throughout the continent. Their descendants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had accommodated the final wave of immigrants, from Spain, France, and Great Britain, adapting some of their technologies, incorporating their foreign goods and animals into the continent’s existing trade networks, fighting wars with them, and making peace and alliances with them. By the nineteenth century, the transitory European visitors had largely been replaced by Americans, who were there to stay and had expansion on their minds.

After taking occupation of their new land, the homesteaders themselves paid a price. With so many of the American Indians gone, the homesteaders in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s faced a land with vistas of open grassland, views unbroken by signs of human occupation. The day-to-day loneliness, backbreaking labor, and continual threat of loss and hunger that accompanied life as a pioneer homesteader on the Great Plains were extraordinary burdens that took a generation to overcome. Success as a homesteader, particularly in the early decades, exacted a high price indeed.

As the wave of westward migration gained strength through the early and mid-nineteenth century, the pressure on the remaining American Indians, whose numbers had been decimated over the past several generations by diseases, wars, and displacement, increased inexorably. Over the course of two generations, the claims of these native people to their traditional lands were extinguished. This process cleared the way for an unimpeded westward march of Euro-Americans from the east. Before exploring in greater detail the Homestead Act and the role of Homestead National Monument in interpreting its many impacts, it is important to provide a brief discussion of the peoples who had occupied the Great Plains and whose land had been cleared to allow the U.S. government to make “Free Land!” the clarion cry.

Prehistory and Early European Exploration

Archeological evidence reveals that humans have occupied the Great Plains for at least 18,000 years. What is now the vast open area of plains and grassland is framed by the rivers that
flow out of the Rocky Mountains toward the south and east, including the mighty Missouri River, the various Platte Rivers, and the Arkansas River, providing transportation networks and sources of water for man and beast. While the northern plains were subject to glaciation, the most recent ice sheets, which reached their furthest extent approximately 11,000 years ago, did not develop as far south as Nebraska. Archeological evidence at the Medicine Creek Reservoir in south-central Nebraska indicates indigenous people were hunting there approximately eighteen millennia before the present (BP). Other archeological sites from throughout Nebraska show a nearly continuous presence of native peoples beginning approximately 10,000 years BP, what archeologists identify as the Paleo-Indian period.

Most archeological evidence for these Paleo-Indian peoples has been found in the plains lying to the west of the Missouri River, with examples of stone tools revealing a reliance on mammoths, now-extinct forms of bison, and other large animals for sustenance. The archeological evidence suggests that these Paleo-Indian peoples were organized socially as small, mobile groups that came together occasionally for larger hunting expeditions and ranged widely across the Great Plains. The climate changed dramatically in the centuries following the retreat of the last glacier, some 11,000 years BP, with the plains becoming drier and subject to wider temperature swings, while the grasslands began to form. With these changes, what are known as the Holocene Altithermal, megafauna such as mammoth and mastodon lost their habitats and declined in numbers, leading the human occupants of the land to a broadening pattern of subsistence, including hunting and gathering a variety of birds, mammals, fish, and shellfish, together with wild plants.

This era, frequently referred to as the Archaic Period extending from approximately 9,000 years ago to approximately 1,500 years ago, was a period of wide swings in climate that affected the economy, agriculture, and social organization of those living in the Missouri River Valley and the surrounding plains. Throughout this era, bison were the key for food, social organization, and technology, providing the tools necessary to hunt and process the animals. Beginning approximately 5,000 years ago, temperatures began to moderate after the warm and dry conditions of the Holocene Altithermal, bringing increased rainfall and the extension of bison herds further into the Great Plains. Even for those groups that settled on the rich soils along the Missouri River in Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota during this time, large, seasonal, communal migrations to the Plains for bison hunts were an essential part of life. Many archeological sites from this period have been found along the rivers that drain into the Missouri River.¹

As traditionally defined by archeologists, the Late Archaic Period extended from approximately 2,500 years to approximately 1,500 years BP. Mark David Spence, in his extensive summary of American Indians in the Great Plains and the Black Hills, described the Late Archaic most elegantly and effectively “as an endpoint for the vast and undifferentiated

The expanse of time that Native peoples often refer to in a phrase like ‘since time out of memory’ or ‘time immemorial.’

The range of tools available to the people of the plains was increasing during this time, and the changing climate brought a wider range of game animals. Populations at this point were becoming less nomadic than in earlier centuries, and pottery first came into use.

Beginning nearly 2,000 years ago, what has been identified by archeologists as the Woodland Period, is, Spence notes, within the time of stories and traditions that have been passed down for generations and continue to inform American Indian culture today. This era is characterized by increasingly complex cultural and technological systems. A key technological innovation that helped to shape the era was development of the bow and arrow, which was in use by approximately the year 250. This technology seems to have arrived with the Avonlea groups, who migrated from the Northern Rockies toward the Great Plains at that time and spread among the many diverse groups and cultures already living in the region. The impact on the productivity of traditional communal bison hunts was profound.

Populations increased significantly in the Missouri River Valley and Great Plains, both from natural increase and from migrants from the south, what is now Texas and New Mexico, and from the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys in the east. Patterns of social organization became more complex, with more and larger sedentary villages, while coordinated group hunting parties used a range of tools, and the use of pottery, likewise, became even more widespread. As Spence notes, more moderate temperatures and increased rainfall in the centuries immediately before and after 1000 allowed for increased agriculture as “Horticultural groups with ancient connections to the Lower Missouri, Middle Mississippi and Lower Ohio moved up the Middle Missouri and its main western tributaries—including the Platte, Niobrara, White, and Cheyenne Rivers.” Likewise, Wishart explains that the rapid expansion of agriculture in the Missouri River Valley and the Great Plains, based on the development of larger and more complex villages, spurred increasing trade throughout the region:

Some of the crops these villagers grew became part of the extensive trade networks that linked the horticulturalists with Plains hunters and with peoples outside the Plains. The Caddo and Wichita trade networks included some of the Pueblos in present-day New Mexico, Cahokia, Hiwassee Island on the Tennessee River, Etowha [sic] near the Chattahoochee River, and the Platte River Pawnee communities. . . . Both material goods (agricultural products, dried meat, flint, and animal hides) and cultural products (songs and dances) traded hands.

Caddoan-speaking groups that originated in the southwest, including the Pawnees and Arikara, together with Siouan groups that arrived from the east, began to develop villages along the Middle Missouri, including the Mandan and the Hidatsa. These new villages, settled from approximately 850 to 1200, were based in agriculture but relied on seasonal nomadic forays to the Plains as hunters and gatherers. An additional important component of the migration to the

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2 Spence, 38.
3 Naugle et al., 10; Wishart, ed., 3.
4 Spence, 38.
5 Wishart, ed., 3; Naugle, 11.
6 Spence, 45.
7 Wishart, ed., 3.
Middle Missouri included former residents of the Cahokia urban complex that flourished along the Mississippi River prior to approximately 1300. Wishart states that this movement of peoples into and out of the plains was a vital survival technique: “It seems that Plains societies were both amalgamating and splitting apart, and that mobility constituted a common response to both social and environmental factors.” This period, the centuries just before and after 1000, was one of a great cultural flourishing for the peoples living on the Great Plains. According to Naugle et al., “As a result of relative peace, agricultural advances, new influences, and perhaps new people from the south, their arts were relatively more advanced than those of their predecessors; they produced high-grade pottery and a wide variety of stone, bone, horn, and shell tools and ornaments.”

The centuries between approximately 1000 and 1400, however, were ones of great change in the populations of the Great Plains. Naugle et al. suggest evidence for climatic change during this era, with recurring bouts of drought and dust storms, and state that “The archeological record is curiously void, suggesting that the central plains were unoccupied” for portions of the time before the arrival of Europeans. By approximately 1400, many communities hugged the Middle Missouri, where water and game could be found. These were small, clustered village sites, many of them fortified with palisades and ditches. Relations among the several tribes and cultures who lived in villages along and near the river were complicated and evolving as agricultural, hunting, and trading conditions changed. As Fenn has noted of the populations in the Missouri River Valley, “fortified villages became common in the era after 1300, their construction correlating with episodes of drought. . .by the time of European contact some centuries later, the Mandan and Arikara—respective descendants of the Siouan and Caddoan-speaking groups—had long had troubled relations.”

The rate of cultural exchange among several ethnic groups throughout the Missouri River Valley and Great Plains increased in the four centuries prior to arrival of the early European explorers. The arrival of different groups to the area led to “the rapid diffusion of a wide range of cultural characteristics between formerly discrete cultural traditions.” In other words, extensive trade networks began to develop among various ethnic groups throughout the Plains: “The individual links in this trade network regularly involved quite long distances, and a very wide range of goods were exchanged.” By approximately 1400, these vast trade networks centered in the Missouri River Valley in South Dakota and North Dakota. The residents of the several agricultural villages in this portion of the Missouri River Valley, using their agricultural produce, especially corn, as a vital trade commodity, served as brokers for an array of goods that were traded among many different peoples from near the Pacific Ocean, across the Rocky Mountains, to the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

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8 Ibid., 49; see also Elizabeth A. Fenn, Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People (NY: Hill and Wang, 2014), 8-11; Ludwickson et al., 114-146.
9 Wishart, ed., 3.
10 Naugle et al., 11.
11 Ibid., 12.
12 Ludwickson et al., 114-146.
13 Fenn, 13.
14 Both quotations from Ludwickson et al., 162.
15 Fenn, 34.
The Apaches, who had separated from the peoples in the northern plains, had migrated south through Nebraska and into the southern plains by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, before the arrival of European explorers. The arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was, thus, the continuation of a centuries-long pattern of cultural interaction for the tribes who lived along the Missouri River and in the Great Plains. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Spanish explorers had begun to make their way into the southwest from Mexico, but they rarely ventured into the Missouri River Valley. Their goods, however, entered into the existing trade networks that traversed it. These trade networks quickly became complex, as different groups of Plains peoples interacted in different ways with the Spanish, French, and, later, the English, some of them serving as middlemen to more distant peoples. As Naugle et al., have explained, however, the goals of the Spanish explorers were primarily gold and a passage to the western sea; finding neither, “both the Spanish and the French had little effect on the plains beyond naming the major waterways and tribal peoples.”

Two other European arrivals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had more profound impacts on American Indians living in the Great Plains: horses and diseases. The Spanish brought horses with them through Mexico and into what is now the American southwest in the early sixteenth century. Still, a limited number of American Indians in the southwest were using horses by the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1680, Pueblo Indians in New Mexico led a revolt against the Spanish. One result of this revolt was widespread release of horses from control of the Spanish, which then came to be used by the American Indians. The use of horses spread quickly among the peoples of the Great Plains. As Spence noted, horses made “seasonal and year-round nomadism more productive, both in terms of the number of places and resources that could be utilized by a highly mobile group as well as in the amount of trade products that could be carried to and from the Middle Missouri villages.” Only some of the groups living along the Missouri River adopted the widespread use of horses, including the Lakota Sioux, who took to horses in the late 1740s and were, therefore, able to become more aggressive in seeking new territories in the Great Plains and elsewhere.

Horses clearly increased the possibility for conflict between groups, and the new European guns made those conflicts more deadly, but new European diseases were far more devastating to the region’s American Indians. With no natural resistance to these diseases and with the constant movement and interaction of people and goods throughout the Great Plains and Missouri River Valley, the risk of infection was great among the native people. Frequent epidemics during the eighteenth century destroyed villages throughout the region, often changing the balance of power among the different groups. A 1781 smallpox epidemic, in particular, was devastating across the upper Plains, decimating the Mandan populations and forcing them to retreat to smaller villages in North Dakota.

By the early eighteenth century, what is now Nebraska was home to many American Indian groups, including the Poncas, Omahas, Oto-Missourias, and Ioways, related tribes who were part of the Siouan language family that originated east of the Allegheny Mountains and

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16 Naugle et al., 13.
17 Fenn, 132-134
18 Spence 57.
19 Fenn, 156-171.
moved to the Plains in the seventeenth century. Most of these groups were sedentary and agricultural and had settled along the Missouri River. At the same time, in the mid-seventeenth century, the Pawnee were the dominant force in central Nebraska. Likely the descendants of an earlier people identified as Upper Republicans, the Pawnee were closely related to the Arikaras to the north and the Wichitas to the south. They most likely had come to the region in the thirteenth century. A loose confederation of several bands throughout the Platte River valley, they engaged with French explorers and traders throughout the eighteenth century.

The Spanish had made an attempt to move from their base in the southwest into the Great Plains, but they were rebuffed by the Pawnees and Otoes in 1720, retreated, and consolidated their interests in the southwest and in Florida. Instead, the French and the British were the principal European presence in the region. The French had established a colonial foothold in Canada by the middle of the seventeenth century, and the English controlled the eastern seaboard. The prize for each of these European colonial powers was the great interior of the continent: the wealth of natural resources, but also the elusive water passage to the Pacific and the Orient. While the British were largely tied to the eastern coast with no readily accessible passage across the Appalachian chain, the French were able to bypass those mountains, exploring west and south from their colonies in Canada by way of the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. The French first encountered the Missouri River and the peoples that lived along it from the north.

British explorers also ventured into the Great Plains from the north, primarily in the wake of earlier French explorers and led by large British trading companies. These companies built trading posts throughout the prairie, interacting and trading with such groups as the Assiniboin, the Plains Cree, the Blackfoot, and the Gros Ventres. Although European conflicts slowed the growth of trade with American Indians of the Missouri River and the Great Plains around the turn of the eighteenth century, trade picked up in the 1740s and 1750s as more French traders ventured to the area and as more American Indians began to travel north to French and British trading posts. During the second half of the eighteenth century, however, French traders began retreating from the region, particularly after France ceded all claims west of the Mississippi River to Spain in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Following the American Revolution, the British, from their bases in Canada, began pushing further south into the Great Plains in the hopes of competing for the trade of the Pawnees, Omahas, and Ioways of the Missouri River Valley and what is now Nebraska. Clearly, however, these European explorers and traders operated on a limited scale, and with limited resources. As a recent historian of the American Indians on the Great Plains has explained, “Few in number and often nomadic themselves, the French posed no threat to Indian autonomy.” As for the British, they did not have a big enough presence “to dramatically alter the Native Cultures.”

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, President Thomas Jefferson recognized the need for the United States to have control of the Mississippi River, particularly

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20 Naugle et al., 20-21.
21 Wishart, ed., 5
22 Chappell provides a good summary of these early French expeditions of the seventeenth century, pp. 2-13.
23 Fenn 85-99; Naugle et al., 14-15
24 Wishart, ed., 5; see also Naugle et al., 22.
the port of New Orleans. After his diplomats in France secured a deal with French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803 to purchase the entire Louisiana Territory for the United States, Jefferson put into action a plan that he had already developed. In 1802, he asked his private secretary, U.S. Army Captain Meriwether Lewis, to command an expedition to explore the Missouri. Together, they agreed that Lewis’s former Army colleague, William Clark, who also had extensive experience in the West, would serve as his second-in-command. In commissioning the expedition, Jefferson’s interest was partly scientific inquiry into the geography and natural resources of the American West. The more important part, though, was to consolidate influence in that portion of the North American continent within the United States by extending U.S. commerce into it. This meant forging commercial relations with the many American Indian tribes in the Missouri River Valley, drawing as much as possible of the American Indian trade network toward the new United States of America. The leaders of the expedition, Lewis and Clark, were to engage the different groups they met along the river, enter into trade, and convince them of the desirability of engaging with the new United States.25

The 1804-1806 expedition used the Missouri River to gain access to the West in the hope that it would ultimately lead to the Pacific Ocean and to greater trade for the new nation. Although the expedition finally demonstrated that there was no direct water passage to the Pacific Ocean from the Mississippi, it proved successful nonetheless for the United States. The reports which Lewis and Clark prepared revealed the amazing richness of the American West in beaver and other furs, quickly reigniting the American fur trade. In addition, in geopolitical terms, the Lewis and Clark Expedition identified a land connection between the headwaters of the Missouri River and the Columbia River which then led to the Pacific Ocean. This gave the United States reason to claim the Oregon country as well, and, therefore, envision a country stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific.26

At the same time, the Lewis and Clark Expedition represented the first sustained contact between the government of the United States and the American Indian tribes in the Missouri River Valley and the Great Plains. With few exceptions, these contacts were peaceful. While the Osage, Omaha, Sioux, Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan, and others were new to Lewis and Clark, all these groups had already gained experience in welcoming and trading with Europeans over more than a hundred years. Lewis and Clark’s expedition, followed quickly by the establishment of private trading posts which the expedition inspired, opened the door for Euro-American settlers to make initial forays to establish farms, ranches, and settlements on American Indian lands. The contrast between the American experience of the early nineteenth century and the European experiences of the century before were clear:

When the British, French, and Spanish entered the Plains, they tended to seek peaceful relations with the Indian people. In truth, Europeans lacked the power to do otherwise. The same cannot be said, however, of the Americans. U.S. expansion into the Plains in the nineteenth century involved the purposeful or

26 Ibid., xl-xl, 1.
incidental destruction and control of those Plains resources upon which Native Americans depended.27

American Expansion into the Plains: Federal Land Policy

Land, and ownership of land, is fundamental to American society. At various times in the history of America, while it was a set of British colonies and in the years of the American Republic, owning land was tied to the right to vote, to hold office, to provide for a family, and to secure one’s future. Even in the present, when relatively few Americans rely on the land to provide directly for one’s family, the impulse remains strong as seen in the incentives and societal pressures for owning one’s home instead of renting. The ability to own one’s own piece of land and make it productive rather than work the land held by others was one of the allure of the North American colonies and, after the Revolutionary War, of the United States of America. Owning one’s land allowed independence from the subject of another’s will, with a sense of freedom born of having a place to call entirely one’s own and not being dependent on another. This quest for freedom and independence based on land ownership helped to fuel an outward push through the eighteenth century from the Atlantic seaboard toward the western lands, an impulse that created what has come to be known as the American Dream, a combination of independence and an increasing prosperity that derives from one’s hard work. This movement extended into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave legislative approval and structure to this engine of American growth and democracy, adding the sense that the American Dream was an achievable goal for all. Homestead National Monument commemorates both the Act and its impacts on the nation.

Prior to the American Revolution, the British government issued the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade English colonial settlement to the west of the Allegheny Mountains. Intended to limit the deployment of military forces in these far-flung areas and concentrate the troops in the more populated areas in the hopes of maintaining order, the Proclamation created even more disenchantment among the colonial leaders, who already had expansion on their minds. In the wake of the Revolution, the new United States of America came into possession of vast areas of land. With the formation of the national government, first under the Articles of Confederation and then under the present Constitution, the existing thirteen states all ceded to the federal government their claims to western land, which, in some cases, extended all the way to the Pacific Ocean. This cession by the states initially created the “public domain,” lands held by the federal government. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, followed by the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806, solidified the American claim to nearly the entire continent between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean as public domain. A recent study shows that the U.S. government acquired over 1.4 billion acres of land in the lower forty-eight states between 1781 and 1853.28 With this nearly unfathomable amount of land, the American desire for expansion was unleashed as untold opportunities beckoned people west. Given the uncertain legal status of the enormous territory from the Alleghenies west to the Pacific, though, combined with the

27 Wishart, ed., 5.
claims by American Indians to large portions of this area, the management of these lands, and how to measure and then dispose of them, was a pressing concern for the new government.

The politicians and statesmen who led the formation of the new nation were nearly unanimous in asserting the importance of private land ownership to the success of the new American experiment. Although there were adherents of manufacturing and trade as vital to the long-term success of the nation, the belief that the virtue on which a republican form of government depended was rooted primarily in yeoman farmers who owned their own land was a foundational principle. This type of small-holding engendered virtue, it was believed, while a dependence on others for property degraded an individual’s virtue and, thus, the capacity to truly take part in a representative form of government. Making the lands in the new public domain available to individuals was, therefore, a pressing matter for the new government in the attempt to provide for the success and longevity of the American nation.

Disposing of such a vast territory to individuals, however, was a fantastically complicated process when much of the land was yet unknown. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Europeans, now Americans, had been traveling throughout almost the entire mass of what is now the United States for centuries. With the exception of limited areas of settlement along the major bodies of water such as the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, however, those who traveled in the lands west of the Allegheny Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did so largely as nomads. These were explorers seeking either raw products, especially furs, trading alliances with various American Indian groups, solitude, or adventure. They were not there as settlers, and the information which they provided about the nature of the land was informal at best.

In 1785, the first American government under the Articles of Confederation sought to impose a degree of order for both land surveys and sales. The Land Ordinance of 1785 created a standardized approach to measurement and mapping, identified as the Public Land Survey System. The Public Land Survey System used baselines (running due east and west) and meridians (running due north and south) to establish a rectilinear grid on the land. Lands that extended east and west from a meridian were identified as ranges, while lands that ran north and south of baselines were identified as townships. A township and range was defined as six square miles, divided into thirty-six sections, each measuring one square mile or 640 acres. Originally based on a system that Thomas Jefferson proposed for mapping farm and ranch properties, it was codified in the Land Ordinance of 1785 and popularized with the Homestead Act of 1862, which identified a quarter-section (160 acres) as a standard farm size.

Under the Land Ordinance of 1785, each state was to appoint a surveyor. The state surveyors constituted a team working under the direction of the Geographer of the United States (which was changed to the Office of the Surveyor General in 1796). In reality, few states sent a surveyor. Field surveying work began in late September 1785, when surveying teams from several states met at what is now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on the north bank of the Ohio River where the initial north/south and east/west meridians and baselines were located. Although initial progress was slow—the surveyors completed only four miles to the west of the starting point in the first year—the completion of additional surveys in subsequent years allowed Congress to
begin auctioning public lands by the fall of 1787. In later years, sections were plotted onto maps before any surveyors ever set foot on the land in question, which hastened the availability of land for auction. The sale of the land thus defined was restricted to those who could purchase at least one full section, at a predetermined price per acre, and were sold at public auctions. Eager buyers, many of them wealthy speculators, bought many such sections at auction, intending to subdivide them and sell the parcels for a profit. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, again passed by the Confederation Congress before the creation of the present Constitution, codified this system of measurement and sales and further defined the means by which the new territories being surveyed could become states on an equal footing with the original thirteen states.

Although a great deal of land was transferred from the federal government to the various state governments when each state was ratified, much land remained in the public domain. The new nation experimented with several means to distribute these lands that were not immediately transferred to the states and that would allow individual owners, rather than land investors, to acquire public domain lands directly from the government. During the Revolutionary War, for example, the government promised bounty land to soldiers, first as a way to encourage volunteer enlistments and later as way to reward veterans of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War of the late 1840s, and battles with American Indians. Individual veterans and their heirs could secure their claim to bounty by completing an application at a county courthouse. The veteran then received either a warrant for land or a scrip that could later be exchanged for a warrant to land. This act of Congress allowed the transfer of public domain land throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Congress also made the bounty land warrants assignable, meaning that they could be sold or transferred, to family members and investors alike. Before long, a secondary market opened, in which speculators purchased these scrips from destitute veterans, often for pennies on the dollar, thus acquiring rights to vast amounts of public land.

Other policies helped to drive public lands into the hands of the wealthy. The minimum purchase requirement for land in the public domain under the Land Ordinance of 1785 remained at a full section, or 640 acres, until 1800, when it was cut to 320 acres. Even this was too much for many individuals, though, and land sales often went to people of means or companies who could afford to purchase large tracts. These purchasers then either had the means to move to the new territories or to hold the land long enough to allow the value to increase before subdividing and selling it for a healthy profit. The inability to purchase land in the public domain, however, failed to stop the flood of individuals who simply moved to an area and began living and farming there. These “squatters” were, according to Edwards et al., “pervasive, insistent, unstoppable, and enjoyed considerable public sympathy.” The federal government proved largely incapable of stopping the flood of squatters who sought land in the public domain to establish farms for themselves, and, beginning in the 1830s, Congress began passing a series of laws designed to formalize the existing reality of a squatter’s occupancy of the land and allow them to make their

30 See Everett Dick, The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1937), 19; as Dick described the secondary sale of military land warrants, “These bounty warrants were assignable and were often sold at a discount by the improvident soldiers who disposed of their land rights for a mess of pottage,”
claims legal. This process of legalizing a squatter’s claim was called “preemption,” and was driven largely by “the impossibility of stopping the flow of people onto the land.”

A combination of factors in the early and mid-nineteenth century drove more people in the eastern United States to seek new lands in the West. These factors included limited opportunities for growing populations in established communities, difficult working conditions in the nation’s new factories, an influx of European immigrants, new canals and roads that created easier methods of transportation for both people and goods, and rising prices for agricultural products that promised a greater return on farming. Powerful interests, in both the North and the South, sought to limit westward migration, but for vastly different reasons: the new northern industrialists hoped to maintain an inexpensive and pliable industrial work force, while southern political leaders were concerned that new western territories would come into the Union as free states, thus reducing their own political power. Both interests worked to block most Congressional attempts to make easier the process by which individual settlers could secure public lands.

One important piece of legislation that escaped this Congressional blockade was the Preemption Act of 1841 (27th Congress, Ch. 16; 5 Stat. 453). As mentioned earlier, this law recognized the fact that vast numbers of settlers had already begun moving onto public domain lands as squatters and had established home sites. Under the Preemption Act, certain individuals, including heads of households, widows, and single men at least twenty-one years of age, who had been living on or improving the land for at least fourteen months could claim the right to purchase up to a quarter-section (160 acres) of public domain land on which they had been squatting for $1.25 per acre. In effect, in the Preemption Act “Congress abandoned the idea that squatting was trespass and wrong and authorized (future) preemptions but attempted to restrict them to already surveyed lands.” In response to this act of Congress, more American settlers moved west, though it was still required that the settlers pay the federal government for the land.

This expansion of westward migration put additional pressure on Congress to “extinguish” American Indian claims to territories, particularly on the Great Plains, and thereby open them to settlement and eventual statehood. The onrush of American settlers into the Great Plains only increased the conflicts with American Indians, whose populations had been ravaged by diseases and loss of hunting grounds. As early as 1825, the U.S. Army took part in an official foray into the Missouri River Valley, accompanying a commercial expedition, with the intent of compelling the different groups to work out treaties that would result in peace. The U.S. officials who took part in the expedition claimed sovereignty over the area and imposed U.S. federal law to resolve all disputes. This 1825 expedition resulted in treaties with nations all along the Missouri, including the Ponca, Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan, Crow, Oto, Missouri, Pawnee, Omaha, Lakota, and Dakota. With the westward migration of the 1840s and 1850s, the traditional ways of life for American Indians on the Great Plains were no longer viable. As a recent study has described, by 1848 some 2,500 wagons, some carrying settlers into the West and some carrying goods to and from those settlers, traveled through Pawnee lands along the Platte River every

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31 Edwards et al., 8.
32 Ibid., 8 and 10.
33 Fenn, 284-286.
year, “scaring away the game, exhausting the pasturage, and creating endless conflicts with nearby Pawnee villages.” Of the forty-nine million acres of land in Nebraska, thirty million acres had been alienated from American Indians by 1860, before the Homestead Act was created.34

The formation of new western states was also hindered by the growing conflict over slavery. Many southern legislators were concerned that new states, populated by small freeholders, would come into the Union as free states and, thus, upset the balance of power in Congress between slave-holding states and free states. They worried that an imbalance thus created would result in passage by Congress of laws restricting or even eliminating slave-holding in any of the states. In 1820, Congress agreed to a compromise over the proposed admission of Missouri as a state. The “Missouri Compromise” defined the northern border of the new state, latitude line 36’30”, as the border between free and slave states in all lands gained through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. By the 1840s, however, the growing importance of railroads led many to envision a railroad line that would span the entire continent. This proposed transcontinental railroad would have to pass through areas in the Great Plains and the West that had not yet been organized into territories. Senator Stephen A. Douglas (D-IL) hoped to secure for Chicago status as the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railway line and, through the late 1840s, proposed several bills to organize several territories, particularly what is now Nebraska, so that the rail line could be built. His proposals were all rebuffed by powerful southern senators since Nebraska was north of the Missouri Compromise line. In response, in 1853, Douglas proposed to extend to the Nebraska territory, which included what is now both Nebraska and Kansas, the concept of popular sovereignty, which he had first developed in the “Compromise of 1850” by which New Mexico and Utah were admitted to the Union. This concept would allow eligible voters in the territories themselves to vote on whether to be a free or a slave state. Since Nebraska was north of the Missouri Compromise line, northern anti-slavery politicians were upset because this meant repeal of the Missouri Compromise line. With northern Whigs and some northern Democrats splitting off to join the new anti-slavery Republican Party, the bill passed Congress in 1854; President Franklin Pierce then signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law.

At this point, Nebraska was officially open for settlement. Many settlers, however, refused to wait for an official opening of the new lands to settlement. As Everett Dick observed in his social history of western settlement in the nineteenth century, using language typical of the early twentieth century,

Even before the Indian titles had been extinguished the greedy land-seekers had gathered along the eastern borders of Kansas and Nebraska and impatiently waited to cross into the land of promise. A few, more anxious than the rest, crossed the border and, at the sufferance of the red man made possible by the payment of a small sum, staked out claims in the choicest spots. This little stream of settlers increased day by day until during the later fifties it formed a surging flood of land-hungry home-seekers.35

34 Edwards et al., 100-101.
Southern political leaders had also opposed an expansion of the Preemption Act of 1841, fearing the impact of larger numbers of free states coming into the Union. The new Republican Party emerged in the 1850s, in part, on a free land platform, urging the rapid settlement of the trans-Mississippi West by individual farmers using grants of public domain lands to individual settlers. The proponents of the new party painted a strong contrast between the vicious effects of slavery in the southern states and the virtuous exercise of operating one’s own farm free from dependence on others. Previous efforts at transferring the public domain to individual settlers required that the settlers purchase the land; earlier in the nineteenth century, indeed, land sales constituted an important source of revenue for the federal government. The Republican Party, however, which was created in the 1850s, advocated for transferring lands in the public domain to settlers without a charge. Lacking sufficient political clout through the late 1850s, the Republicans were unable to secure passage of a bill that promoted free homesteading on public domain lands. Their closest attempt was in 1860, when Congress passed a homestead act that required a payment of twenty-five cents per acre; President James Buchanan, however, vetoed the bill. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1860 and the election of the Republican candidate for President, Abraham Lincoln, the party of free land gained the ascendancy. Southerners no longer had a presence in Congress, having formed the Confederate States of America, and Republicans successfully brought forward the Homestead Bill, which President Lincoln signed into law as the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862 (12 Stat. 392). The law would take effect on January 1, 1863.

The official title of the Homestead Act summarized its intent: “An Act to secure Homesteads to actual Settlers on the Public Domain.” The goal was to encourage individuals to settle on the land and improve it. The Homestead Act made available “unappropriated public lands,” those lands in the public domain that had not already been set aside for other purposes. Rather than conducting auctions of public lands or requiring settlers to purchase the land, the Homestead Act allowed individual settlers 160 acres simply by filing a claim with a small processing fee. In order to file a claim, the settler had to: be a citizen or intend to become one, never have taken up arms against the United States, and be the head of a household, a single person over the age of twenty-one, or a war veteran of any age. Each settler was then required to live on the property for five years (later reduced to three years). Once the local Land Office staff accepted testimony as to the veracity of the claimant, the homestead was “proved” and the Land Office compiled the land-entry case file and forwarded it to the General Land Office (GLO) headquarters in Washington, D.C. with a certification of eligibility. Once determined valid, the GLO sent a deed of title for the land back to the local Land Office for delivery to the homesteader, certifying that the homesteader held the land in fee. Subsequent amendments to the Homestead Act and related laws included a provision to acquire 320 acres, largely to allow settlement in marginal areas where a family could not subsist on 160 acres, and to secure land in the public domain for the purposes of planting trees rather than for actual settlement.

36 A brief description of the process, and a detailed explanation of how to use land-entry case files for research, can be found in Kenneth Hawkins, comp., Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49, Reference Information Paper 114 (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., , rev. 2009); available online: https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf. These land-entry case files have been the subject of an enormous collaborative research project spearheaded by Homestead National Monument as described in Chapter 9.
Two additional homesteading acts in the early twentieth century expanded homesteading even further. In a 1902 address to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt urged the Senators and Representatives to provide for the transfer of even more public domain land to private ownership. One problem cited by the Congressional task force that looked into the issue was settling on arid lands, where traditional farming was not possible. Driven, in part, by the needs of cattle ranchers, who needed larger tracts to allow for grazing, Representative Moses Kinkaid (R-NE) introduced legislation that allowed individuals to claim up to 1,280 acres, or two full sections, on non-irrigable land. The limit was pared back to 640 acres for the Kinkaid Act, which was passed in 1904 (33 Stat. 547). The Kinkaid Act, which applied specifically to thirty-seven counties in the Sandhills region of northwestern Nebraska, retained many of the provisions of the original Homestead Act regarding improvements and occupancy and was successful at encouraging individual owners to acquire land. The challenges of making a successful business on 640 acres of arid land, however, prompted many of these individual farmers and ranchers to sell their properties to larger landholders. In 1916, the Stock-Raising Homestead Act of 1916 (39 Stat. 862) also allowed homesteaders to claim up to 640 acres of non-irrigable land deemed to be of no value except for livestock grazing. This 1916 legislation had fewer requirements regarding improvements and occupancy, but it separated the property ownership: the federal government transferred to the claimants the surface rights to the land but reserved the land’s subsurface rights, often identified as mineral rights. The act transferred approximately seventy million acres to private ownership.

From its beginning in 1863 until the government formally rescinded the Homestead Act in 1976, and in Alaska until 1986, between 270 and 285 million acres of land in the public domain were transferred to individuals. Thirty states transferred land to individuals through the Homestead Act. In eleven of these states, at least twenty percent of the total land of that state was claimed by homesteaders under the Homestead Act. In Nebraska, forty-five percent of the land was claimed by homesteaders.37

These statistics, however, convey only a portion of the story of homesteading. Chronicles of the conditions facing the early homesteaders tell a more complete story. Entering the Great Plains to claim a homestead was not for the faint of heart. For those more accustomed to the confines of space in the northeast and South, where vegetation and buildings framed one’s view, the vast and apparently endless open grasslands of Nebraska, Kansas, and other Plains states was a revelation. Hugh Dodds, writing a history of Gage County, Nebraska, in the early twentieth century, described the sensation of openness and desolation facing the settler who crossed the Missouri River into Nebraska:

Of one thing the immigrant could feel assured—when he turned his back upon the Missouri river [sic] and faced the western horizon he was like an army cut off from its base of supplies and lines of communication. Before him lay the undulating almost treeless prairie, rolling away to the west, north, and south like the billows of the ocean, hundreds upon hundreds of miles. . . .As he advanced westward a little in the brilliant sunlit plain, the last trace of the presence of civilized man soon vanished. The dim wagon trail grew dimmer and more uncertain and finally disappeared. . . .A silence, a solitude that had brooded

37 Edwards et al., 7, 10.
together over these vast areas since the world began closed about him as his distance from the river settlements slowly increased. In these primeval solitudes he might remain for weeks, aye months, without seeing a single human face or hearing save his own, a single human voice.  

A celebrated chronicler of the homesteading experience was the novelist Willa Cather. Born in Virginia in 1873, her parents moved to Nebraska in 1882 to claim a homestead. Upon becoming a writer, she frequently turned her attention to her memories of living on the Great Plains amid the mix of nationalities. In one of her better-known passages from the novel *O Pioneers!*, she, too, described the sparseness of settlements during the early years of homesteading in Nebraska, settlements which almost seemed absorbed into the land:

The homesteads were few and far apart; here and there a windmill gaunt against the sky, a sod house crouching in a hollow. But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes.

### The Freeman Homestead in Beatrice, Nebraska

In both statistics and in the popular imagination, Nebraska is the epicenter of the homesteading movement. Fully forty-five percent of the total land mass of the Cornhusker State was transferred to settlers by way of homesteading, more than in any other state. Willa Cather’s two most famous novels, *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* were set in Nebraska, where images of small farmsteads composed of small sod or log houses and windmills dotting the vast open prairie are often associated with the state. As described earlier in this chapter, squatters began moving into the state even before the federal government officially opened it to settlement in 1854. Congress finally acquired title to the land in Nebraska by treaties with the Otoe and Missouri tribes in early 1854, leaving to the original inhabitants of the land only a reservation on the Big Blue River in southern Gage County. Surveys of public lands in the new territory began in the 1850s and continued through the 1860s and 1870s, with an early focus on the Platte River Valley in anticipation of a railroad being built there. In 1864, Congress approved the petition of Nebraska’s residents to form a state constitution and proceed toward statehood. The territorial legislature approved the constitution in June 1866, and Nebraska became a state on March 1, 1867.

One of the first steps of the new territorial administration in 1854 was to determine the names and locations of counties. In 1855, the territorial legislature identified nineteen counties, one of which was Gage County. Named in honor of Rev. William D. Gage, the Methodist pastor who was then serving as chaplain to the territorial legislature, the county had no known Euro-American settlers when it was created, but they began arriving in Gage County in 1857.

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38 Hugh J. Dobbs, *History of Gage County, Nebraska* (Lincoln, NE: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1918), 64.
40 Dobbs, 85-86.
42 Dobbs, 36.
Instead, settlers began arriving in the county in 1857. The City of Beatrice emerged at this time, when a group of passengers on board the Missouri River steamboat *Hannibal* formed an association that would establish a settlement in the new territory. Created in late April 1857, members of the new association gathered in Omaha in May of that year and appointed teams to travel the new territory to identify a location. One of these teams identified a location on the Big Blue River in Gage County, which the full association approved on May 21, 1857. The name of the new town was chosen to honor Julia Beatrice Kinney, the daughter of the first president of the association, John F. Kinney (Figure 5). The members of the association then assembled in what is now Beatrice in July 1857 and began the process of dividing the town into lots and commissioning a formal survey. Beatrice Public Library Director Laureen Riedesel recounted a story of the new community’s Independence Day celebration in 1857, when residents in Nebraska City, approximately seventy miles to the northeast near the Missouri River, decided to pay their new neighbors a visit: “this was an excursion. . . .And the wonderful surprise was, when they arrived, the ladies of Nebraska City had made a flag for Beatrice. And it was huge—a great big flag on the scale that you could put up on a flagpole for the whole community.” The flag was dedicated with a public ceremony, including the reading of a poem written by Julia Beatrice Kinney. The flag was located in the collections of Homestead National Monument in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The park has since made it possible for the flag to be returned to the Gage County Museum (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Julia Beatrice Kinney. Source: Dodds, History of Gage County, Nebraska (1918).

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43 Ibid., 117-20.
44 Following the 2001 attacks, Homestead National Monument personnel searched through their flag collection, identified this flag as unique, and took staff photos with it. After discussions with the Gage County Historical Society they determined that this was the flag gifted to the city of Beatrice. Since the flag predated the Homestead Act and did not fit the museum’s scope of collection, it was deaccessioned, and ownership was transferred to the Gage County Historical Society. See also Laurenn Riedesel, oral history interview, April 1 and May 15, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
Following the completion of the town’s formal survey, Beatrice was officially recognized as a township on August 13, 1859. The association purchased a steam sawmill in Omaha in May 1857 to allow the first settlers to build a single residence which housed several of the members through the winter of 1857-1858. By the summer of 1858, the mill was in commercial operation, providing lumber for new settlers who began to arrive in the area. In 1861, a member of the community constructed the first dam across the Big Blue River, which powered a grist mill. New residents continued to build residential and commercial buildings, as well as a school. The first bridge across the Big Blue River was completed in 1870, though it was destroyed in a freshet the next year. Beatrice quickly became a market town for the region, centered around the mills and stores in the town. The nearest federal land office was transferred from Brownville, Nebraska to Beatrice in 1868.45

The town of Beatrice was, therefore, already a small but vibrant community along the Big Blue River when the Homestead Act went into force at the beginning of 1863. Not yet the local land office, it was already proving itself as a regional market center that ultimately drew the land office there in 1868. Homesteading in Nebraska was slow to take off. Maps in the nineteenth century often referred to the Great Plains as the Great American Desert, a reputation that scared a number of early homesteaders away from the territory. Nebraska, however, and Beatrice in

45 Ibid., 181-86.
particular, has the distinction of hosting one of the nation’s first homesteaders to file a claim under the Homestead Act: Daniel Freeman (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**: Daniel Freeman. Source: Dodds, *History of Gage County, Nebraska* (1918).

Freeman was born in Ohio in 1826, the son of parents moving west from Vermont. In 1835 the family moved west again, to Illinois, where Daniel Freeman grew up. He began studying medicine in 1847. After graduating from the Electric Medical Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1849, he began practicing medicine in Ottawa, Illinois. While there, he also developed a successful business as a merchant and as a private lender. In 1861, following the outbreak of the Civil War, Freeman enlisted in the Union army, serving with the Sixteenth Illinois Volunteer Infantry, and spent much of his time in the west and southwest. He was detailed to eastern Nebraska in 1862, stationed at Brownville in late December. He was aware of the Homestead Act and had, moreover, traveled throughout the Nebraska Territory; he knew of Gage County and Beatrice and decided to stake his claim there. According to an early, undated article in the Beatrice *Daily and Weekly Express* cited by Hugh Dodds in his 1918 history of Gage County, Freeman had selected the property, a quarter-section along Cub Creek near Beatrice, in the summer of 1862 and purchased a squatter’s right to it. Attending a New Year’s Eve ball in Brownville, he met the clerk to the receiver in the Brownville Land Office. He told the young clerk that he needed to return to St. Louis first thing the next morning and urged the clerk to open the office at midnight so that he could file his claim for the land on which he had been squatting. The clerk obliged, and Freeman was officially entry No. 1 in the Brownville land office.

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46 Ibid., 115-16, 890
47 Cited by Dodds, 890.
There is no way to state definitively that Freeman was the very first homesteader to file a claim in the United States. Thirty of the land offices in the United States had an entry No. 1 on January 1, 1863, and there are several reports of others who filed their claims shortly after midnight.\textsuperscript{48} He may have been the first to complete the proving-up process to secure his claim, though, and certainly few promoted their claims throughout their lives as vigorously as Freeman did. Freeman also had substantial supporters for his claim, including Pennsylvania Representative Galusha Grow, who had spearheaded the Congressional movement toward passing the Homestead Act. In 1936, the federal government, in effect, gave its endorsement to Freeman’s claim by creating the Homestead National Monument at his homestead.

Freeman returned to his homestead in Beatrice in 1864 after his service in the Civil War ended, proved up his claim to secure title, and lived out his life there. His first wife, Elizabeth Wilbur, abandoned him in 1860. Five years later, he married Agnes Suiter, who had been engaged to marry Daniel’s younger brother, James, until he died in the Civil War. Daniel and Agnes began corresponding in July 1864; Daniel proposed marriage through the mail, and they were married on February 8, 1865. Together, he and Agnes developed their homestead near Beatrice, and there raised their eight children. During his absence from his homestead because of the war, a squatter had taken up residence there, building a small cabin. Upon his return, Freeman traded a yoke of oxen to the squatter for relinquishing his claim. Freeman and his family lived in the squatter’s cabin until 1867, when he built another one-room cabin for his family. The Freemans remained in this cabin until he built a larger, brick house in 1876. This house remained standing until it burned in 1916. Agnes Suiter Freeman, by then a widow, moved into a small frame cottage which she had built on the property. She lived there until her death in 1931.\textsuperscript{49}

Freeman farmed his land, raised horses on it, and planted an orchard while taking wood for fuel and building materials from the woodlands surrounding Cub Creek. He was also a prominent community leader in Beatrice, serving as sheriff, Justice of the Peace, and county coroner, in addition to managing his homestead.\textsuperscript{50} He was not shy of the public limelight and frequently and vigorously defended his claim to have filed the first homestead claim in the nation. The local Beatrice community supported Freeman’s claim. Freeman died on December 30, 1908, having lived on his homestead for forty-four years. Recognizing the importance of homesteading in Nebraska and throughout the nation, local voices began calling for ways to commemorate his role in the homesteading movement almost immediately. The long process of commemorating Freeman’s homestead as a national monument is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{48} See the useful summary of rival claimants for Homesteader No. 1 in Mattison, 2-7.
\textsuperscript{49} See summary of natural and cultural resources at Homestead NM, August 1975; typescript MS in Homestead NM Archives, Collection 100-V-A, Catalog No. 7590, Box 1, Folder 1.
\textsuperscript{50} Dodds, 116.
Chapter 2: Legislative History

The Homestead National Monument of America had a particularly long gestation period. Daniel Freeman, the homesteader on whose original tract the park is located, was not shy about proclaiming the national significance of his role as the filer of the first free homestead claim, which he began doing as early as the 1870s. The local Beatrice community, moreover, actively promoted what they claimed was the undisputed fact of Freeman’s preeminence in the history of homesteading. From late 1908, when Freeman died, until March 1936, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill creating Homestead NM, the possibility of a park at his farm near Beatrice made frequent appearances in local discussions. Interest in the possibility waxed and waned over the decades, though, and locals never seemed able to muster quite enough support for the project to spur the state’s Congressional delegation to sustained action. By the early 1930s, however, nearly a quarter of a century after Daniel Freeman’s death, civic leaders in Beatrice coalesced into a formidable organization, enthused by the thought of tourists flocking to the city during the depths of the Great Depression and by the lofty ideal that their generation and future generations would be inspired by the story of this example of Nebraska’s pioneering past.

Local Origins: 1909-1933

Daniel Freeman filed his claim for a free homestead on Cub Creek, west of Beatrice, shortly after midnight on January 1, 1863. As a result, his claim was listed as homestead No. 1 in the Brownville, Nebraska, Land Office register. As early as the 1870s, he used this status to claim that he secured the first free homestead in the nation under the Homestead Act of 1862. In his early administrative history of Homestead NM, NPS Region Two (now Midwest Region) Historian Ray H. Mattison observed that the local newspaper, the Beatrice Express, also promoted Freeman’s claim by 1876:

To the citizens of Gage County, also, belongs the honor of having secured the first homestead, entered under the U.S. Homestead Law. The claim belongs to Daniel Freeman, and is on Cub Creek four miles west of Beatrice. Some claim that Mr. Freeman must be mistaken about this matter, as there are ninety-four Land Districts in the United States, and hence it would be impossible for him to know anything about it, but the indicia on his patent establishes the fact beyond a doubt.¹

As suggested in this newspaper article, Freeman’s claim was already a point of debate by the mid-1870s, and he frequently defended it in various newspapers. Two rival claimants entered the fray in the newspapers, including William Young, of Palmyra, Nebraska, and Mahlon Gore who filed his claim in Vermilion, South Dakota. Both of these filed claim No. 1 in their respective land offices, and both claimed to have filed shortly after midnight on January 1, 1863.² While both of these had entirely valid claims, Freeman won in the court of public opinion. Freeman was more active in promoting his claim than the others. Of perhaps greater importance,

¹ Beatrice Express, July 20, 1876; quoted in Mattison, 2.
² Mattison, 2-3.
though, he was able to convince Galusha Grow of the validity of his claim. Grow was a member of Congress from Pennsylvania who switched from the Democratic to the new Republican party in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, was a steady promoter of the free homesteading idea, and is acknowledged as the father of the Homestead Act (although he did not introduce it in Congress). He supported Freeman in his quest for recognition as the first homesteader under the Homestead Act of 1862. In a speech that has been quoted numerous times, Grow pontificated that

There are two interesting incidents connected with the final passage of the original free homestead bill. First, it took effect on the day of Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation. Second, the first settler under the homestead bill, which provided free homes for free men, was named Freeman. Daniel Freeman, of Beatrice, Gage county [sic], Nebraska, was a Union soldier, home on a furlough which would expire on the 2d or 3d day of January, 1863. . . .His entry was number one, his proof of residence was number one, his patent was number one, recorded on page one of book one of the land office of the United States. The first settler under this law was a Freeman, and I trust that the last of its beneficiaries in the long coming years of the future will be a free man.3

Grow clearly displayed the ability to turn a phrase nicely, and it is a matter of conjecture whether the word play influenced his support for Freeman’s claim. The two men, however, developed a long-lasting relationship. In 1903, Freeman delivered a tree grown on his homestead to Grow to be re-planted at Grow’s Pennsylvania house, and Freeman traveled to Pennsylvania shortly before he died for a ceremony honoring Grow. In Grow’s will, moreover, he left to the Susquehanna Historical Society a cane which Freeman had given to him, cut from an ash stick from a tree that had grown upon Freeman’s homestead.4

The first suggestion of a monument at Freeman’s original homestead came from Freeman himself as early as 1884.5 While nothing came of that plan, there were occasional suggestions to memorialize Freeman’s role as the first homesteader while he was still alive. In 1907, for example, the Beatrice Daily Sun, in a list of miscellaneous commentary passed along this notice:

One of the pioneers of the county suggests that it would be a good idea to secure, if possible, the log cabin erected by Daniel Freeman upon the first homestead in the United States, and make it one feature of the Golden Anniversary celebration [presumably of the Homestead Act of 1862]. A great many people would come miles to see the house wherein dwelled the first homesteader, and as we have the first homesteader himself and his good wife, we might see them as they are, if not as they were when the homestead was taken.6

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3 Galusha Grow, undated speech, quoted in Dodds, 116.
4 Beatrice Daily Sun, April 18, 1907; April 21, 1903.
5 Mattison, 7. Freeman’s call for a monument to homesteading came at the same time as a similar movement in Mitchell, Dakota Territory (now South Dakota). According to a report in the Sioux City Daily Journal on October 15, 1885, the territorial government office in Bismarck (now North Dakota) issued a charter to a Mitchell organization dedicated to “erect a magnificent monument to the originators of the homestead laws.” It is possible that Freeman’s call for a monument at his homestead was prompted by this action in the Dakota Territory.
6 Beatrice Daily Sun, August 3, 1907.
The idea of Freeman filing the nation’s first claim under the Homestead Act was so well known in Beatrice that it became part of an advertisement at the time:

Gage county has the honor of having located within her borders the first homestead that was ever filed upon in the United States. Everyone knows this. This city and county have had considerable advertising from this fact. . . . Another interesting fact is that the last homestead is located in Beatrice. It is the Homestead cigar, and discriminating smokers say it is the real goods. Luster is added to the fame of Gage county.\(^7\)

By this time, Daniel Freeman was in poor health. Freeman died on December 30, 1908, aged 83, having owned his homestead for forty-six years. He left behind his wife, Agnes Suiter Freeman, and their nine children; six of the children lived in Beatrice, while others lived in Iowa and Kansas City, Missouri. Calls to memorialize Freeman’s property began almost immediately. On February 27, 1909, less than two months after Freeman’s death, Representative Edmund H. Hinshaw (R-NE) introduced a bill in Congress that would appropriate $25,000 to purchase the Freeman homestead so that it could be preserved as a public park. The bill languished, and Congress adjourned before considering it.\(^8\)

In November of that year, the Beatrice City Council urged Rep. Hinshaw to make another attempt. Hinshaw did so in early January 1911 and raised the appropriation to $50,000. The appropriation would allow the federal government to purchase the homestead, turn it into a public park, and be maintained by the government. This second bill received substantially more local support. Nebraska Lieutenant Governor Melville R. Hopewell appointed a three-person committee in late January 1911 to prepare a request that Congress purchase the Freeman homestead for use as a national park, while Nebraska State Senator Peter Jansen introduced a resolution supporting the federal purchase of the homestead; the State Senate endorsed the resolution. The next month, a citizens’ committee from Beatrice delivered the State Senate’s endorsement of the park idea to Congress, where they received very little encouragement. The House of Representatives referred the bill to the public lands committee where, again, it languished and was never considered or brought to a vote.\(^9\)

This was the last attempt to create a memorial at the Freeman homestead for more than a decade. During that time, the Freemans continued to live at the homestead, experiencing both setbacks and changes. Agnes Freeman built a small cabin on the property in which to live, while their son, George, and his family lived in the main house. In early June 1915, George remained in Beatrice late one night, unable to come home because of a storm and bad roads. Shortly after midnight, a lamp exploded in the house on the homestead. George’s wife managed to escape with their children, but the house was destroyed by fire.\(^10\) Seven years later, in the spring of 1922, Agnes conveyed the original homestead tract to their two daughters, giving them each eighty acres. The sons had previously been given eighty acres each from the Freeman’s other land holdings. Agnes retained 320 acres in Frontier County, Nebraska, eighty acres south of

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\(^7\) Ibid., October 4, 1907.  
\(^8\) Ibid., March 2, 1909.  
\(^9\) Ibid., November 24, 1909; January 5, 1911; January 26, 1911; January 28, 1911; February 5, 1911.  
\(^10\) Ibid., June 6, 1915.
Beatrice, and another forty acres near the original homestead.\textsuperscript{11} She remained living at the homestead through the mid-1920s, but, by the late 1920s, she lived in Beatrice with her son, Frank, and his family during the winters. Declining health soon led her to live full-time in town, particularly after she broke her hip, forcing a long recovery that was never fully completed.\textsuperscript{12} On April 7, 1931, Agnes Suiter Freeman died at eighty-seven years old.

After the initial attempt to secure a national park at the Freeman homestead between 1909 and 1911, the next flurry of activity took place in the late 1920s. In November 1925, the Elizabeth Montague Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), based in Beatrice, announced that they had secured a stone from the recently-demolished State Capitol in Lincoln. They intended to place the memorial at the Freeman homestead as a monument to Daniel Freeman and the first official homestead in the nation. Nebraska Secretary of Trade and Commerce Dwight S. Dalbey agreed to ship the stone to Beatrice, and the DAR planned to place a bronze tablet on it. The stone was installed in 1925, and the DAR held a dedication ceremony at the Congregational Church in Beatrice on May 10, 1926. Governor Adam McMullen, who later moved to Beatrice in 1929, following his term in office, spoke at the dedication ceremony. He commended the appropriateness of a commemoration of the Homestead Act by “an organization of patriotic women interested in preserving the country’s history and knowledge of historic places. . . . The Homestead Act was official recognition of the fact that the stability of the republic depends upon the home, for that law facilitated the acquiring of public lands by people who were to make their homes upon those lands.” Testimony to the power of this junction of homesteading and home, he concluded, was the fact that Freeman “continued to make his home upon the quarter section he had received until his death and it is still owned by his family.”\textsuperscript{13}

The next year saw yet another flurry of activity. In early September 1927, Bess Gearhart Morrison, a Nebraska native who went on to become “one of America’s most popular readers and platform entertainers,” and appeared at many “chautauquas” throughout the nation, spoke to the women of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Beatrice. The daughter of a homesteading Methodist minister, Morrison was aware of the history of the area and of the importance of homesteading to Nebraska. During the course of her talk about the state’s natural resources, scenic beauty, and achievements, Morrison encouraged the creation of a state park at the Freeman homestead. The \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun} said the homestead “should be converted into a park and thereby become a perpetual memorial to the homesteaders whose courage and industry founded our great commonwealth.”\textsuperscript{14}

With this celebrity endorsement, local civic leaders worked to rally support for a park at the Freeman homestead, either a state or a national park. The Beatrice Chamber of Commerce officially endorsed the idea less than a week after Morrison’s talk and reached out to political leaders for support. The discussion soon coalesced into a general opinion that remained a talking point for the next decade: other communities throughout the state had secured either state or national parks to which tourists flocked in large numbers, and it was high time that Beatrice got its own park at the Freeman homestead. When asked if he would support the creation of a state

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., May 16, 1922.
\textsuperscript{12} See notice of her 86\textsuperscript{th} birthday, in Ibid., November 22, 1929.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., November 13, 1925; May 9, 1926; May 11, 1926.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., September 3, 1927.
park in his adopted home town, former Governor McMullen assured that he would on the condition that the people of Beatrice got behind the effort. A park at the Freeman homestead, he claimed, “would of course be a national as well as a state Mecca for tourists and would be visited by thousands of them every year. Nearly 1,000 tourist cars from many states were counted in the Stolley state park at Grand Island on Sunday.” A week later, the same question was put to Rep. J.N. Norton, representing what was then the 4th District, which included Beatrice. As with McMullen, Norton offered his enthusiastic support for either a state or a national park, with the same caveat: Beatrice citizens would have to take the lead. After pointing out the possibilities of increased tourist traffic to Beatrice, Norton concluded “that if anything is to come of the suggestion it would only be proper that the initiative move should be made by the people of Beatrice, themselves.”

And there the movement remained, dormant, within Beatrice. By early 1928, according to the Beatrice Daily Sun, the project had stalled: “The question was discussed at meetings of Beatrice civic clubs and other organizations, but one obstacle and another was encountered when tentative plans for launching an organized movement were considered.” More than a year later, the Nebraska DAR leadership endorsed a proposal to make the Freeman homestead a national park, but still no action resulted. In June 1929, Rep. Charles H. Sloan introduced a bill in Congress that called for the federal government to appropriate $50,000 for the purchase of the Freeman homestead and turn it into a national park; later that year, he gave a radio address in which he asked the people of Nebraska to create the sentiment that would push the issue forward. Still, Beatrice remained quiet. In early 1930, the Beatrice Daily Sun reported on the creation of a national park at Scotts Bluff, and again asked the question:

What about our national park at the Freeman homestead? This question has been agitated at times, but little or nothing has been done. Congressman Charles Sloan stated last year that he had asked for an appropriation but it has never been learned here what became of his bill.

Noting that the homestead was in “a pleasant little valley” near Beatrice, the article continued the refrain: “the proposed park would bring thousands of visitors here annually. As many as 5,000 or 6,000 people from numerous states have visited Arbor Lodge, near Nebraska City, and Stolley park, near Grand Island on one summer Sunday.”

Local and Federal Action, 1934-1938

Finally, the wheels began to turn in late 1933, as the local Beatrice community began taking more active steps to secure public relief. While agriculture, the principal industry in Nebraska, had been struggling since the late 1920s with lower prices for farm produce and increasing rates of farm bankruptcy, the combined impacts of the Great Depression and severe weather pushed the state into a crisis by the early 1930s.

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15 Ibid., September 9, 1927
16 Ibid., September 18, 1927.
17 Ibid., January 27, 1928.
18 Ibid., January 28, 1930.
Naturally treeless, the Great Plains had few defenses against erosion when the native grasses were plowed, and a series of devastating heat waves and droughts combined with inappropriate farming practices to deplete the soils even further. The federal government under President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to alleviate the hardships of agricultural areas throughout the country through the Resettlement Administration. Created by Executive Order in May 1935, the Resettlement Administration initially sought to address short-term suffering by relocating farm families to planned communities and providing emergency loans and grants to farmers, and the underlying environmental causes of the agricultural decline. Programs under the Resettlement Administration provided funds for planting trees, improving streams, building firebreaks, and purchasing land that was unsuitable for agriculture. In The Plow That Broke the Plain, a 1936 documentary film about the environmental and humanitarian crisis on the Great Plains produced for the Resettlement Administration, the introduction describes the Plains as “A high, treeless continent, without rivers, without streams…A country of high winds, and sun…and of little rain…” As early as the 1870s, the importance of trees to the survival of agriculture on the Great Plains had become clear. In 1873, Congress passed the Timber Culture Act, (P.L. 42-277) as a supplement to the Homestead Act of 1862; this legislation allowed homesteaders to receive an additional quarter-section, 160 acres, if they planted trees on one-fourth of that land and maintained the trees for at least ten years. Even this encouragement, however, had little impact on the rapid plowing of the Plains for agricultural purposes. By the early 1930s, the impacts of the widespread replacement of grassland by crops were devastating to Nebraska and its neighboring states and required intervention by the federal government.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated in March 1933, with the nation in its fourth year of the Great Depression. He came into office on the promise of sweeping change, using the power of the federal government to provide both immediate relief as well as structural reforms. He had long had an interest in the conservation of natural resources, and his efforts to attack the devastation of American agriculture, particularly in the Great Plains, included both short-term relief and long-term reform. Among his first acts after becoming president, in the spring of 1933, was to create the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Under this program, which Roosevelt established under an Executive Order on April 5, 1933, unemployed young men were eligible to work on public projects related to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control, and similar work. The young men were organized into camps in areas throughout the nation where work would take place. The camps included basic housing and meals, and the enrollees also received clothing, medical care, and a monthly stipend.

Beatrice was in the midst of a region that was particularly hard hit by the combined economic and environmental devastation of the 1930s, with unemployment on the rise and families forced off their farms through foreclosure and the inability to secure a living. Community leaders could no longer afford to allow to founder potential projects that would support the community and garner potential public funds. In late 1933, local residents began discussions of how to secure a public works program in Beatrice and initially focused on the possibility of a park at the Freeman homestead as a way to attract either the Public Works Administration (PWA), one of the major components of President Roosevelt’s New Deal

program, or the CCC. Community leaders at a meeting in December 1933 sought to enlist the support of Senators George W. Norris (D-NE) and William H. Thompson (D-NE), Representative John Morehead (D-NE), and other members of the Congressional delegation to support the project. Unlike previous efforts to develop a park, however, the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce quickly organized widespread local support. In coordination with other community groups, the Chamber of Commerce formed a committee, headed by Chamber member and Superintendent of Schools Emil L. Novotny, to begin planning efforts. In March 1934, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee, headed by Novotny and consisting of Carl Wilke, C.L. Aller, and W.H. Davis, to begin developing a proposal and to hold public meetings.

By the spring of 1934, the committee announced that Rep. Morehead had introduced a bill in Congress calling for an appropriation of $40,000 to purchase the Freeman homestead for a park. In addition, the committee had the support of Judge J.A. Van Orsdel. Van Orsdel practiced law in Beatrice for three years in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt as Assistant Attorney General for the United States in 1906, he was then appointed an Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in 1907, where he remained into the 1930s. He and his wife, who served as the national registrar general for the DAR, maintained a summer home in Beatrice. From his position in Washington, DC, Van Orsdel was able to maintain contact with members of Congress on behalf of the Beatrice committee.

The pace of activity remained steady through the summer of 1934. In late August, the Homestead National Park Association (HNPA), which had been organized earlier in the year, was formally established. The organization had fourteen directors, consisting of men and women representing a variety of local and statewide organizations. The board of directors included Cora McMullen, wife of Adam McMullen, who was the child of homesteaders and had served as the Governor of Nebraska from 1924 to 1930 and was then the Postmaster in Beatrice. The group’s purpose was to secure the establishment of a national park at the Freeman homestead. The group got to work quickly and, in late August 1934, sent letters to members of Nebraska’s Congressional delegation outlining the arguments in favor of creating a park memorializing homesteading in America at the Freeman homestead. Referencing the announced creation of a CCC camp in Beatrice in September 1934, the HNPA argued that the Freeman homestead would make a good CCC project. More than simply drawing from the New Deal and federal relief programs, however, the HNPA made a broader argument to the Congressional delegation:

When the homestead act was passed, it was in a time when the issue of human welfare was paramount. The government answered that need by passing the homestead act for the welfare of humanity in the middle west. . . . Today the need of human welfare is again the cry. This time it is for richer living, authentic development, recreational appreciation. It seems fitting that as the government met the human need in 1862 by passing the homestead act that this same

20 *Beatrice Daily Sun*, December 15, 1933.
21 Ibid., January 10, 1934; March 24, 1934.
22 Biography of Van Orsdel in Ibid., August 19, 1930.
23 Ibid., August 22, 1934.
government should take homestead No. 1 and convert it into a national park to answer the need of better and more enjoyable living for the populace of the middle west. It would be a monument to the million homesteaders who played a big part in turning this wild, barren region into productive land; and into homes which are responsible for building sturdy citizenship. . . . The converting of homestead No. 1 into a national recreational center would exemplify the desire of the government to perpetuate the welfare philosophy, so as to meet the needs of a people of a new day.24

Nebraska’s Congressional delegation responded favorably to this argument from the Beatrice committee. Senator Norris was particularly interested. Norris had been active in seeking federal support and assistance to combat the effects of the Great Depression and the droughts in Nebraska and traveled to Beatrice in late October 1934 to meet with the local committee. While there, he announced his support for the proposed development of a national park at the Freeman homestead and urged the local committee to begin developing statewide and national support.25

Norris clearly sought to place the development of a park in Beatrice within the larger context of his attempts to provide relief to Nebraska’s farmers. As Richard Lowitt has explained, Norris was overwhelmed by the need that he saw in his travels throughout Nebraska during the early 1930s. Norris, he observed, “saw a crisis situation and hoped that broader federal assistance would be forthcoming as private or local efforts failed to cope.” Senator Norris was broad-minded in his legislative approach to improve the conditions of Nebraska’s farmers and supported such measures as tax relief, mortgage assistance, and changing the way that livestock products were marketed and sold to provide more benefits to the farmers themselves.26 Norris was also an early proponent of one of President Roosevelt’s earliest and most grandiose conservation plans: the Great Plains Shelterbelt. Under this plan, initially administered by the U.S. Forest Service, the federal government would create a windbreak of trees planted within a 100-mile-wide corridor extending 1300 miles from Texas to the Canadian border to reduce the soil erosion and dust storms caused by winds sweeping unimpeded across the Plains. While many farmers on the Great Plains were reluctant to give up farm land in order to plant trees, even with financial compensation for land and effort, Norris was a fervent supporter throughout the 1930s, and, in 1937, he helped insure the passage of the Norris-Doxey Cooperative Farm Forest Act which included elements of the Shelterbelt plan.27

In promoting the creation of a national park at the Freeman homestead, Norris initially sought to incorporate it within the Shelterbelt program. Beatrice, he suggested, was just west of the proposed corridor and would be an ideal spot to test possible tree species and cultivation methods for use on the Great Plains. Indeed, he speculated, the Freeman homestead could be the

24 Quoted in Ibid., August 28, 1934.
26 Lowitt, 398.
27 In 1939, Norris concluded a review of arguments for planting trees on the plains by suggesting that “A permanent Federal program of tree windbreak planting and other measures of sound land use will go far toward the stabilization of farming and home life in this vitally important agricultural region;” Norris quoted in Richard Lowitt, “Shelterbelt in Nebraska,” Nebraska History 57 (1976): 405-422. See also Joel Orth, “The Shelterbelt Project: Cooperative Conservation in 1930s America,” Agricultural History 81 (Summer 2007), 333-357.
headquarters for the entire Shelterbelt project. Norris continued to keep this potential connection to the Shelterbelt alive, but he also sought other strategies by which he could help to secure the necessary support for the Freeman homestead. These included a proposal to have the federal government establish “a museum. . .to house relics of pioneering days on the prairies.” In early 1935, Norris began soliciting support in Washington, DC, including contacting President Roosevelt and seeking to enlist the aid of Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace. Wallace highly approved of the possibility of a museum at the site; both he and Norris agreed that the old Freeman log cabin should be restored as far as possible and a modern structure erected to show the development of the prairie states, the buildings to house evidences of homesteading days and progress since then.

In addition to contacting Senator Norris, E.L. Novotny and the HNPA contacted representatives of the National Park Service. The Beatrice committees’ correspondence with NPS staff was referred to NPS Director Arno Cammerer, a Nebraska native, in October 1934, whom Norris had also contacted. Cammerer replied to Norris, revealing that NPS had been considering the Freeman homestead for a number of years but had not had sufficient funds to purchase it. Cammerer then suggested that the Freeman homestead could be considered for a national monument rather than a national park. With the opening of the next Congressional session in January 1935, though, Novotny and the HNPA worked tirelessly to promote the national park idea. They received statements of support from the Nebraska State Historical Society and the local chapter of the DAR and again contacted both President and Mrs. Roosevelt. Judge Van Orsdel continued to contact the state’s Congressional delegation in Washington, DC.

The work of the local committee paid off, and Representative Henry C. Luckey (D-NE) coordinated with Senator Norris to prepare companion bills for the House and Senate. Senator Norris introduced S. 1307 in the Senate on January 22, 1935. Norris’ bill provided for an appropriation of $24,000 to purchase the Freeman property and suggested that it be called the “Homestead National Park of America.” His bill was sent to the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys for review and discussion. Six days later, Representative Luckey, who had just been elected to Congress, introduced H.R. 4878 in the House of Representatives; it was identical to Norris’ Senate bill. Luckey provided further comments on the bill, describing the full scope of what he envisioned:

By creating a national park of homestead number one, restoring the Daniel Freeman log cabin and building a museum which, it is proposed, would include the implements, etc. contributing to the development of the west, a fitting tribute would be paid to the pioneers who made this possible.

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28 *Beatrice Daily Sun*, November 12, 1934.
29 Ibid., December 6, 1934.
31 Mattison, 14. Mattison provides no other information on this recommendation, or why it was made, aside from noting in a footnote that national monuments are typically smaller, and that “A National Park is usually a superlatively scenic or scientific area.”
32 Ibid., 16; *Beatrice Daily Sun* January 13, 1935; January 15, 1935; January 20, 1935
33 *Beatrice Daily Sun*, January 28, 1935; see also Mattison, 17.
Luckey’s bill was then referred to the House Committee on Public Lands. In transmitting the bill to the committee and asking for its support, Luckey detailed the widespread local and statewide support which the measure received, including endorsement from a variety of societies and organizations. He then explained the broader significance of the bill: “The homesteaders came from every State and locality in the Union, and by virtue of this fact the creation of such a park takes on great national interest as a means of forever perpetuating the achievements of those pioneer heroes and heroines.”

In addition to being sent to the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys, Norris’ bill was sent to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes and to the Director of the Bureau of the Budget. The Bureau of the Budget in early March informed Secretary Ickes that the bill as proposed would not be in accord with President Roosevelt’s budget goals and that the bill would not be supported as long as it contained the appropriation authorization. Secretary Ickes, though he may have approved of the site coming into federal control, conveyed this requirement to the Senate committee. Ickes, like NPS Director Cammerer the year before, had also recommended that the site be designated a national monument rather than a national park. No additional justification for Ickes decision has been identified.

The category of national monument was created in the American Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 USC 431-433). This act of Congress originally sought to extend the protection of the federal government primarily to sites of archeological significance in the southwestern United States. In addition, the act authorized the President “to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments.” In effect, as Hal Rothman has explained, the ability of the President to declare a national monument “created a mechanism through which federal officials, interested professionals, and other special-interest groups could achieve preservation goals without waiting on popular or congressional consensus.” The only formal difference between national parks and national monuments, Rothman concludes, is the mode of establishment, as there are no operational differences.

The role of national monuments, and their relationship to national parks, however, is far more complicated than that and varied widely from 1906 through the 1930s and 1940s. Because the Antiquities Act allows the President to bypass Congress in the designation of national monuments, their creation has intersected the political battleground in myriad ways. In some cases, the President was able to create a national monument to protect a site of prehistoric, historical, or natural significance while waiting for public sentiment, expressed through

Congress, to act. In such cases, NPS frequently discussed the “upgrading” of sites from monument to park status over the course of several years. In his study of the uses of the Antiquities Act of 1906 within NPS, Robert Righter rhetorically asks:

“What was the difference?” The question could be answered in a variety of ways—none satisfactory—but certainly national parks were well funded, and national monuments were not. This had nothing to do with congressional law, but rather with bureaucratic preference and public popularity. Under the leadership of Stephen Mather and Horace Albright the national parks were considered the “crown jewels” of the system, thus entitling them to generous appropriations. National monuments, on the other hand, were expected to survive with little, and often no, appropriation. Many were simply a convenient way to accomplish immediate conservation goals.37

By 1935, President Roosevelt was under political pressure to rein in the vast public expenditures of the New Deal, and managing budgets carefully had become a political priority. The Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys adopted Secretary Ickes’ recommendation regarding its status, clearly with the understanding that the President would not sign the bill as a national park due to budget concerns. The Committee issued a report to accompany S. 1307, released on March 23, 1935, and recommended passage of the bill subject to several amendments. The first was the result of Secretary Ickes’ suggestion, and changed the title to “A bill to establish the Homestead National Monument of America in Gage County, Nebraska.” The committee also changed the language that required the United States to purchase and designate the park, softening it to read “that when so acquired, the said area be designated the Homestead National Monument of America.” Finally, the committee made the appropriation a maximum, not-to-exceed amount rather than a fixed sum, and allowed the government to “acquire” the site rather than directing the government to purchase the site.38 The report then recommended passage of the bill as amended, and added its own justification to the language which Norris had originally included:

It is the object of this proposed legislation to establish a proper memorial which will be emblematical of the hardships and trials of pioneer life in the settlement of the great West. That part of the country which is now the bread basket of the Nation was, in the main, settled under the national homestead law. . . . This legislation seeks to preserve for posterity the historic emblems and relics of a period in our Nation’s history which is rapidly being forgotten. The committee believes it is eminently proper that the events of this period should be preserved and while the place of commemoration might be selected anywhere in the country settled under the Homestead Act, yet it is fitting that the place selected for its

38 Mattison notes that Ickes negotiated with the Bureau of the Budget to have them withdraw the objection.
preservation should be on the land which constitutes the first homestead entry made under the act.³⁹

After the Senate committee recommended passage of the bill as amended, the full Senate considered the bill and voted in favor on March 29, 1935. The Senate then referred the bill to the House of Representatives for consideration. At the recommendation of Secretary Ickes, agreed to by Representative Luckey and Senator Norris, the House considered the bill as amended by the Senate. The amended bill called for the creation of a national monument instead of a national park. Ickes also endorsed the bill as amended by the Senate and recommended that the House committee report favorably on it. On June 12, 1935, the House committee reported favorably on the Senate bill with no additional amendments or comments.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, progress on the bill then stalled in the House. Luckey worked with Congressional colleagues from Nebraska and from other states to build support for a full consideration of the bill by the House. Eastern Republicans, however, who were concerned about the budget implications of new national parks and monuments, were against it. In particular, Representative Robert Bacon (R-NY) objected to the bill at first, but later withdrew his objection, and Representative John Taber (R-NY) objected to the bill on a second attempt. The Nebraska Congressional representatives negotiated vigorously with both Bacon and Taber until both allowed the bill to be passed over during that session of Congress without prejudice, meaning that it could be brought forward again in the next session.⁴¹ Despite the setbacks, Luckey remained hopeful. In an article published in Nebraska History in 1935, he concluded that:

I believe that the objection of those who oppose the establishment of all additional monuments and parks can be overcome. The realization will come that we should perpetuate forever one of the greatest acts of a wise and provident government—an Act that brought about the winning of the West. This monument to those pioneer heroes, men and women, should be established to conserve for all time the history of one of the greatest peace-time struggles ever made.⁴²

The issue remained dormant through the rest of 1935. In early 1936, however, the local committee re-started its effort to build support for the bill. In early March 1936, the committee convened a state-wide meeting in Beatrice to plan a strategy to bolster support in the House of Representatives. As NPS historian Ray Mattison observed, “It was evident when the monument proposal again came before the House, on March 16, that the park committee and the Nebraska Congressional delegation had done their work well.” No members of the House objected when the bill was read. After the third reading, the bill was passed by the full House. It was then sent to President Roosevelt, who signed it into law on March 19, 1936.⁴³

⁴¹ Luckey, 1935 provides a succinct discussion of the process of negotiations, page 51.
⁴² Ibid., 51.
⁴³ Mattison, 21
Civic leaders in Beatrice were overjoyed by the passage of the act, and anticipated a rapid development of the site following its purchase from the Freeman heirs. Their hopes were dampened, however, when they realized that Congress had not yet appropriated the funds to execute the law. According to a summary of the process in the *Beatrice Daily Sun* in 1937, the bill did not make funds available, but it “did allow the Secretary of the Interior to buy the land with whatever excess funds there might be in the treasury, but apparently there was no excess, for the purchase was not made.” Undaunted, local leaders E.L. Novotny and Elmer Hevelone, both of whom had served on the local committee, went to work to urge Senator Norris to move the appropriation forward. The process, however, was a long one, with several starts and stops. In May 1936, Representative Luckey reported that the Senate had included the $24,000 appropriation in a deficiency bill, and then in a Senate relief bill; the homestead appropriation was dropped from both. In the summer of 1937, the House of Representatives passed an appropriations bill that included the Homestead NM appropriation; this failed to secure President Roosevelt’s signature. Finally, in the winter of 1938, Senator Norris included the $24,000 appropriation for the Freeman homestead as an amendment to the Interior Department Appropriation Act of 1938. A deficiency appropriations bill containing the Freeman homestead appropriation then passed through a Conference Committee, was approved by both houses of Congress, and was signed by President Roosevelt on March 5, 1938.46

Even before Congress appropriated the funds, representatives from NPS began negotiations with the Freeman heirs regarding the purchase of the property. It was a challenging process of negotiation, since the original tract had been divided into nine parcels held by seven Freeman heirs. Discussions apparently began in the summer of 1937, but, by September 1937, the two parties announced that they could not agree on a price. The Freeman heirs expected the full $24,000 appropriation, but NPS offered only $11,000 based on their valuation of the property. In October 1937, the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce formed a committee to conduct an independent assessment of the Freeman homestead property in the hopes of finding a compromise in the face of NPS threats to initiate condemnation proceedings. E.L. Hevelone, a prominent banker and businessman in Beatrice, chaired the committee. As late as March 1938, on the eve of the passage of the deficiency appropriation act, NPS announced its intent to go ahead with condemnation as the fastest way to complete the purchase and clear the title.

By late March 1938, however, NPS had agreed to make a compromise offer based on the valuation suggested by the Chamber of Commerce committee. This offer, for $18,000, was accepted by the Freeman heirs, the last of whom agreed to the sale in April 1938. The remaining $6,000 in the federal appropriation would go toward improvements at the site. The process of closing the sale took several months, but, on October 18, 1938, the sale of the Freeman homestead to the federal government closed. A meeting to close the deal and sign the final documents was held in the offices of the State Savings and Loan Association, where Hevelone

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44 E.L. Novotny, for example, anticipated that the federal government would restore the land to its condition before Euro-Americans arrived, develop a museum of agriculture, rebuild the original log cabin, and maintain extensive records; *Beatrice Daily Sun*, April 6, 1936.

45 *Beatrice Daily Sun*, August 22, 1937.

46 Mattison, 23.
served as Secretary-Treasurer, with NPS representatives bringing seven checks totaling $18,000 for delivery to the Freeman heirs (Figure 8).47

Figure 8: 1938 photograph of the Freeman heirs conveying title to the Freeman Homestead to the National Park Service. Source: *Beatrice Daily Sun*

**Freeman School**

When the federal government purchased the Freeman homestead for development as Homestead National Monument of America, the brick Freeman School, one-third mile west of what became the park’s headquarters office, remained an active school. The National Park Service recognized the historical association between the Freeman homestead and the school from early in the history of the park, and, as early as 1947, Superintendent Clarence Schultz requested a study of the school with the idea of incorporating it into the park’s interpretive program.48 The issue remained in the background because the school remained under the jurisdiction of the Tri-County School District. By 1960, however, officials from what was then NPS Region Two included the possibility of interpretation of the school in discussions of the park’s future management. As noted in a report from Regional Historian Merrill J. Mattes to Associate Regional Director George F. Bagley in 1964,

> its acquisition [by NPS] has much merit, in view of the fact that there is only one structure, associated with homesteading, at the Monument [the Palmer-Epard Cabin, moved to the site in 1950]. At the Freeman School, the story of the pioneer school of the 1870’s [sic] could well be told. Nowhere in the Service is there a

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47 The process of negotiations was documented in the *Beatrice Daily Sun*; see September 23, 1937; October 6, 1937; February 25, 1938; March 4, 1938; April 15, 1938; July 10, 1938; October 18, 1938.
48 Tecklenberg, 9.
one-room rural school, which was so prevalent in all parts of the United States, preserved.49

However, early discussions within the regional office, by then the Midwest Regional Office (MWRO), of purchasing the school generated no enthusiasm.

Through the summer of 1964, MWRO interpretive staff began more active discussions about a possible role for the Freeman School at Homestead NM. Initially, these discussions centered on the possibility of moving the school to the Homestead NM grounds.50 In 1965, Regional staff, in association with park Historian Thomas Walsh, began work on a study of the “desirability and feasibility” of acquiring the Freeman School for interpretive use. The topic gained new importance later that year when the Tri-County School District announced plans to close the school at the end of that current school year. At that point, the Homestead Historical Association (HHA), which operated as the park’s friends’ group, began discussions with the school board about donating the school to NPS. In early February 1967, the school board agreed to donate the building to the federal government.51 The Association continued to meet with the school board through the spring of 1967, however, resulting in a change of plans in which the school board donated the building to HHA on June 4, 1967, with the condition that it remain in its existing location.52 Because the building would remain on land not then owned by the federal government, the park’s boundaries needed to be changed. This required Congressional action.

With the park’s and the Region’s long interest in making the school part of the park’s interpretive program, NPS officials quickly alerted Nebraska’s Congressional delegation that it would support the addition of the school, with its 1.2-acre parcel, to the park’s boundary. Representative Robert Denney (R-NE) prepared a bill for the House of Representatives, while Senators Roman Hruska (R-NE) and Carl Curtis (R-NE) prepared a companion bill for the Senate. Both bills were introduced on January 14, 1969, as H.R. 3259 in the House of Representatives and S. 58 in the Senate.53 The bill included an appropriation of $50,000 for the school’s acquisition and renovation. The Senate bill was referred to Interior and Insular Affairs Committee (now the Energy and Natural Resources Committee). The Senate committee took testimony in the fall of 1969, and its report included a statement from the Acting Secretary of the Interior, dated November 26, 1969, in support of the bill: “We believe that the addition of the Freeman School to the monument would enhance the opportunity to portray and interpret early pioneer life in accordance with the provisions of the 1936 Act.”54 The Senate, however, did not vote on the bill before Congress adjourned in late 1969.

The House bill was also not acted upon in the 90th Congress. In December 1969, Representative Denney urged the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation to hold

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49 Memorandum, Regional Historian to Associate Regional Director, May 4, 1964; archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075 Box 1, File 7.
50 See the detailed proposal in Memorandum, Museums Coordinator to Regional Director, August 6, 1964; archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075 Box 1, File 7.
51 Beatrice Daily Sun, February 8, 1967. See also Annual Report for 1967; handwritten MS, archives of Homestead NM, Catalog No. 7584, Fox 1, File 17.
54 Quoted in Tecklenburg, 11.
hearings on the bill. Denney also cited a favorable report from the Department of the Interior, which opined that “the ‘one-room country school will soon be a thing of the past,’ and an example should be preserved especially in ‘an area dedicated to the pioneer family’s role in westward expansion.’” Finally, in late April 1970, the Senate passed the bill to add the Freeman School to Homestead NM, at which point it was sent to the House of Representatives. Senator Hruska expressed his pleasure at the Senate’s passage of the bill, observing that:

Nebraska is proud of the fact that homesteading started in our state. The Homestead monument enables us to give the public a dramatic picture of the historical period revolving around this process of homesteading. Now we have an opportunity to round out the picture further by adding this little school at the monument.

The House subcommittee report, which was not released until July 1970, also included a statement from the Department of the Interior. The Department’s statement observed that the HHA had held the 1.2-acre parcel since 1967 with the intent of donating it to NPS. In his comments to the subcommittee, Denney referenced this report to explain that the anticipated costs were low and that the Bureau of the Budget had approved the measure. Because the school is separated by one-third mile from the park headquarters office, NPS officials were concerned to maintain a sense of connection between the two. As Denney described, the legislation would entail nominal costs “in getting easements to protect the view of the school from the monument and for some reconstruction, parking space and other tourist facilities.” The subcommittee reported favorably on the bill in July 1970. The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs then approved the bill the next month. As passed, the bill called for the acquisition, by donation or purchase, of the Freeman School and its parcel. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to acquire the school “in order to protect the setting of the Freeman School, preserve an adequate visual relationship with the existing Homestead National Monument of America, and provide access to the school from the national monument.” It also included an appropriation of $50,000, of which $45,000 was to be used for rehabilitation and development of the school. The bill then went before the House of Representatives on September 14, 1970, where it passed unanimously. On September 25, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed the bill into law as P.L. 91-411.

Boundary Expansion: Heritage Center

Almost thirty years passed before Homestead National Monument again became the subject of Congressional action. In 1996, Congress directed NPS to develop a new General Management Plan for Homestead National Monument of America. The purpose of this directive was to replace an existing GMP completed in 1988. The earlier GMP was already out of date and

55 Quoted in Beatrice Daily Sun, December 21, 1969.
56 Hruska quoted in Beatrice Daily Sun, April 28, 1970.
57 Cited in Tecklenberg, 11-12.
58 Beatrice Daily Sun, April 28, 1970.
60 Ibid., August 6, 1970.
did not provide for full protection and development of the park.\textsuperscript{61} The new GMP, which was completed in late 1999, included recommendations to protect the existing resources at the park and to provide for new and more modern interpretive and educational facilities. The protection of existing resources focused primarily on expanding the boundary to form a buffer that would further protect the components of the original 160-acre Freeman homestead. In particular, the existing museum and headquarters building, completed in 1962, was located within the 100-year floodplain of Cub Creek, posing a substantial safety risk for the park’s collections. These two needs, to expand the boundary and to provide a new and more secure interpretive space, coalesced in the proposed acquisition of a 15.98-acre parcel, identified as the Graff property, located along the eastern border of the park. This parcel, the largest of four parcels bordering the park that were proposed for acquisition, was designated as the site for a new Heritage Center. This building, the funds for which were appropriated in FY 2001, was to be a state-of-the-art, 28,000 square foot facility to hold the park’s collections, a museum area, a theater, research facilities, and offices.

The new GMP also revealed that the Nebraska Department of Roads had informed NPS that the Department of Roads would need to redesign and improve State Highway 4 by 2001 in order to bring it into compliance with current highway safety and design standards. According to the GMP, this would pose a threat to the park by increasing the volume of traffic and intruding further into the park’s boundary. To forestall this, the GMP recommended that State Highway 4 be rerouted so that it no longer passed through the park boundary. Once the highway was rerouted, the GMP recommended, the abandoned section of road could serve as an access road for local residents and park staff. This abandoned section of road would then become “Homestead Heritage Parkway,” from the eastern edge of the park’s boundary to the Freeman School, one-third mile west of the park’s headquarters office. The GMP then suggested the possibility of a voluntary extension of this Homestead Heritage Parkway west beyond the park: Beatrice to Plymouth.

On July 27, 2000, Representative Douglas Bereuter (R-NE) introduced a bill in the House of Representatives that would expand Homestead NM’s boundaries as recommended in the GMP (H.R. 5013). In particular, this included the 15.98-acre Graff property located at the park’s eastern boundary; three acres lying adjacent to the Pioneer Acres subdivision on the north side of Highway 4 immediately north of the park’s boundary; and two parcels totaling 9.7 acres then owned by the State of Nebraska. The bill had a time limit, providing that the properties must be acquired from a willing seller within five years of the passage of the act. Bereuter’s bill also provided for an appropriation of $400,000 to acquire the four parcels and recommended that NPS enter into cooperative agreements with Gage County, local governmental units, and private groups and individuals in order to develop the proposed Homestead Heritage Parkway. The bill was referred to the House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands.

Bereuter’s original bill died in the committee, but he reintroduced the bill on January 3, 2001 (H.R. 38). The new bill was again referred to the House Committee on Resources, which then referred the bill to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands on February 15, 2001. The subcommittee held hearings on the bill on October 4, 2001. During the subcommittee’s deliberations, Representative George Radanovich (R-CA) offered an amendment

\textsuperscript{61} See Chapter 12 for a comprehensive discussion of the need for a new GMP and its provisions.
that increased the size of one of the State of Nebraska parcels from 1.4 acres to 5.6 acres. The committee report also explained that NPS had arranged with the Nebraska Department of Roads to relocate State Highway 4 and create the Homestead Heritage Parkway. On voice vote, the subcommittee approved the bill as amended by Representative Radanovich. On November 28, 2001, the Full Resources Committee considered the bill and reported it favorably to the House of Representatives with no further amendments. The House of Representatives then voted on the bill on December 11, 2001. On the floor of the House, Representative Bereuter was the bill’s principal champion, explaining that it was noncontroversial: the amount of land to be added to the boundary was relatively small, it would be acquired from willing sellers only, and the funds had been appropriated during the previous fiscal year. Representative Mark Udall (D-CO) also spoke in favor of the bill. The House then passed the bill and forwarded it to the Senate.

In the Senate, the bill was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and, from there, to the Subcommittee on National Parks. The subcommittee held hearings on June 12, 2002, voting to report the bill favorably and referring it back to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The Senate committee met on July 31, 2002, and likewise reported the bill favorably. In its report to the full Senate, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee included testimony from NPS Assistant Director Daniel Smith. Smith testified that NPS supported the bill and explained that the new parcels of land “will allow the opportunity for greater protection of the Monument’s primary cultural resource [the Palmer-Epard Cabin], will protect the Monument from encroaching development, and will provide the opportunity for improved visitor and interpretive services.” The acquisitions, moreover, were all from willing sellers: the private landowners had already agreed in principle to the sale, and the State of Nebraska had already agreed to donate its land. Smith referred particularly to the 15.98-acre Graff property, explaining that the Graff family, “which has been a strong supporter of the Monument,” requested the provision that the sale must be completed within five years in order to allow them to plan “and to minimize the impacts on their lives.” In addition, Smith noted, the plans for State Highway 4 had shifted; he stated that the Nebraska Department of Roads was then only “examining proposals to reroute State Highway 4.”

The Senate committee released its report on September 2, 2002, reporting the bill favorably to the full Senate. The bill was brought to the floor of the Senate on November 20, 2002, where it passed without amendment by unanimous consent. On December 16, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the bill into law as P.L. 107-332.

**Name Change**

The park’s official friends’ association, Friends of Homestead, has led the effort to have the name of the park changed from Homestead National Monument of America to Homestead National Historical Park. Members of the Friends of Homestead, together with other community leaders, have actively met with members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation to urge the change of name to better reflect the nature of the park and its resources and to reduce the confusion that a majority of the park’s first-time visitors experience when visiting. After hopes

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63 Senate Report 107-260, 107th Congress, 2nd Session.
that the bill would be introduced in 2008 and again in time for the NPS Centennial in 2016, Representative Adrian Smith (R-NE) introduced H.R. 1472 on February 28, 2019. It was referred immediately to the House Committee on Natural Resources, from which it was referred to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. The subcommittee held hearings on the bill on May 22, 2019, and the Committee on Natural Resources then reported the bill by unanimous consent without amendments. The Committee on Natural Resources released House Report No. 116-292 on November 15, 2019. According to the report, the park’s current name “does not fit the typical National Park Service nomenclature. By renaming the site as the Homestead National Historical Park, the bill makes the name one that is a standard National Park Service designation and appropriate for a large unit that has complex physical resources.” The proposed name change, moreover, would have only a negligible budgetary impact, with the cost for new signs and maps covered through appropriated funds. The bill was then brought to the floor of the House for debate on November 20, 2019. Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Tom McClintock (R-CA) spoke in favor of the bill before yielding to Rep. Smith and to Rep. Jeff Fortenberry. The House of Representatives then passed the bill by voice vote.

Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE) introduced S. 1910 in the Senate on June 19, 2019 but deferred action until the House acted on its version. After passage on the House floor, the bill was sent to the Senate, where it was referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The Subcommittee on National Parks of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, chaired by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), held hearings on the bill on March 4, 2020. In his statement to the subcommittee, Senator Sasse entered into the record the many letters of support for the name change from local individuals, groups, and elected officials, and asserted that the proposed legislation would change only the name, not how the park is managed. The hearing also included a statement from NPS Acting Deputy Director of Operations Shawn Benge, who told the subcommittee that NPS fully supports the change of name to Homestead National Historical Park. Benge explained in his testimony that:

Homestead National Monument of America, with the addition of ‘of America’ to the title ‘national monument’ has made it an anomaly. Redesignating the unit as a national historical park would give the park a name that is one of the National Park Service’s standard designations, and one that is appropriate for a unit that is large and has a complexity of physical resources.”

Senator Sasse commented on the hearing, noting that the bill moved forward as a result of it. It was “a big deal,” he observed,

because the Homestead National Monument, as we all know, is a key celebration of Nebraska’s history and of our civics and of our people. It’s the grit in Nebraska. It's homesteaders that came here over decades and built the most productive farm and ranch land on the entire face of the earth. It started with the homesteaders and we need our kids to know that grit, that resolve and that history, and this park deserves that kind of attention. Renaming this the Homestead

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National Historical Park, we've got to get this written into final law and signed by the President. It's a big marker for Nebraska because this is one of the most important places in the entire United States.\textsuperscript{66}

Chapter 3: Initial Implementation

When Congress voted to establish the Homestead National Monument of America in March 1936, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill as 49 Stat. 1184, the civic leaders in Beatrice who had worked so tirelessly thought that it meant the immediate culmination of years of talking and planning. The wheels of government moved more slowly than the city’s leaders realized, however, and even the eventual arrival of funds to purchase the property from the Freeman heirs, more than a year after the enabling legislation passed, did not mean the start of work. The sale of the 160-acre Freeman property finally closed in October 1938, more than two years after the enabling legislation passed, but still the winter of 1939 came and went with no action at the site. Finally, in late March 1939, word from Washington arrived that the Department of the Interior had allocated funds to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to begin development efforts at the new park.

The delay must have been frustrating for the citizens in Beatrice, who longed for the economic and cultural advantages which having a unit of the National Park System in their community portended. Given the changes taking place within NPS during the mid-1930s, though, the delay was understandable. The 1930s was an exciting decade for the National Park Service, with unprecedented growth in several directions. The new Homestead National Monument of America benefited from and was shaped by these changes. The new trends of the 1930s included the emergence of historic sites as legitimate components of the National Park System, the rapid expansion of NPS budgets, the availability of vast numbers of emergency relief workers under the New Deal, and the creation of four regional offices, many of them with a growing cadre of historians and landscape architects who could oversee the implementation of the new historic sites and monuments. The creation and initial implementation of Homestead National Monument of America shows the impress of each of these. Homestead was one of seventeen historical areas brought into the National Park System between 1933 and 1939, nearly all of which were National Monuments, a remarkable expansion of the system which broadened the scope of NPS into historic preservation and historical interpretation. This rapid expansion, however, also taxed NPS, and its new historic sites section worked mightily to keep pace.

Historic Sites in the National Park System

The idea of historical sites in the National Park System was a new one in the 1930s and required an adjustment in thinking and planning on the part of NPS officials. In the recollections of Edward A. Hummel, the initial Regional Historian in what would become the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, the historical parks in the National Park System in the 1930s “were definitely step-children as far as the Park Service was concerned.” Most sites of historical and

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1 NPS established the following offices in their host cities: Region I in Richmond, Virginia; Region II in Omaha, Nebraska; Region III in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and Region IV in San Francisco, California. The four new regional offices opened August 1, 1937, and directly supervised NPS field personnel and equipment, oversaw funding, approved designs, and supplied technical expertise to park units within their respective boundaries. The Omaha regional office is the only one of the original four that has continuously remained in the downtown district of its host city.

2 Edward A. Hummel, oral history interview, October 22, 1962; files of Harpers Ferry Center.
archeological interest in the 1910s and 1920s, unlike the national parks, were identified as national monuments, which were under the authority of the General Land Office from 1906 until 1916. After 1916, responsibility for national monuments was divided among the Interior, Agriculture, and War Departments. The first historical sites that were formally established as units of the National Park System continued this trend: George Washington Birthplace National Monument and Colonial National Monument, both in Virginia.

Horace Albright, who assisted the first NPS Director beginning in 1916 and was appointed the second NPS Director in 1929, strongly advocated the inclusion of historical sites in the system. He created the Division of History within the NPS Branch of Education and Interpretation in 1931 after acquiring George Washington Birthplace NM and Colonial NM, both in 1930. Albright appointed Verne Chatelain head of the Division in September 1931; Chatelain then worked assiduously to institutionalize an awareness of the importance of historic preservation within NPS in his role as Chief Historian. Chatelain was a native of Waco, Nebraska, and received his bachelor’s degree from Peru State College, Nebraska. He later received a Master’s degree in history from the University of Chicago, a law degree from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and his doctorate in the history of political science from the University of Minnesota. In the early 1930s, Chatelain created a program of research and planning that would provide formal evaluation of potential new sites and professional interpretation at the early historical sites. In early 1933, Chatelain prepared a report that recommended the site of the Continental Army’s winter encampment in Morristown, New Jersey as the nation’s first National Historical Park. With Albright’s support, Morristown National Historical Park was established by Congressional action on March 2, 1933.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration completed a sweeping reorganization of the executive branch. Among the changes were the consolidation of all historical and archeological resources under NPS, which was temporarily named the Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations; NPS regained its original name in March 1934. With this new responsibility for all national monuments and to further his interest in expanding the range of historical sites within the National Park System, NPS Director Albright created the Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings.

President Roosevelt and his Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, were strong advocates of the National Park Service, and made sure that it was well provided for in the expansion of federal efforts to combat the Depression. Among the tools that President Roosevelt and his administration implemented under the New Deal to stimulate the economy and put people back to work were emergency work relief programs. On March 31, 1933 Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act (Public Law No. 5, 73rd Congress). Less than a week later, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 6101 to implement the Act by creating the Emergency Conservation Work Program, which was known more popularly as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was a temporary program that had to be renewed, but in

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3 Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s (NPS publication, 1983), 16.
4 Ibid., 161-68.
5 Ibid. 59-62.
6 Ibid., 2-3.
1937, the name of the program was made a permanent part of the federal budget and its name was officially changed to the Civilian Conservation Corps. Four departments of the executive branch had authority over the New Deal program: Department of Labor to select the enrollees; Department of War to handle administrative concerns; and Departments of Agriculture and Interior to utilize the manpower. The greatest benefit of ECW/CCC came to two bureaus: Agriculture’s U.S. Forest Service and Interior’s National Park Service. With six-year development master plans already in place for the national parks, NPS was quick to adopt all New Deal emergency conservation and public works programs. As Unrau and Williss observed, “These plans were quickly refurbished in early 1933 because Albright and his associates in the Washington office had anticipated that the national parks might be used for economic ‘pump-priming’ public works projects.” By the end of the 1933 fiscal year, 175 summer CCC camps were in operation throughout the National Park System, state parks, and other related areas. These several relief agencies were then consolidated in 1937 under the Emergency Relief Act, which allowed for the acquisition and development of park areas and for white-collar projects including research, statistical work, and interpretation efforts.8

As new units were added to the National Park System throughout the mid- and late 1930s, NPS administrators found that administration from the Washington Office was becoming too cumbersome and provided too little oversight over the activities of individual parks. Early field offices established throughout the country helped to project a greater NPS presence in areas that were remote from Washington, but they had no formal role in management, and park superintendents had nearly complete authority over their respective parks with only minimal guidance from Washington. With the rapid increase of units throughout the country, NPS established a plan for regional offices in August 1937 that initially divided the country into four geographic regions. Omaha served as the headquarters location for what was then Region II.9 Regional NPS staff then had administrative and general oversight responsibility over the units within their region. These administrative responsibilities included evaluating potential new units for recommendation to Congress. For the historical sites which were being proposed and evaluated, Chief Historian Chatelain built a staff of historians in each region who could oversee the approval and development of new units.10

Work Commences at Homestead National Monument

Edward A. Hummel was a graduate student in the summer of 1935 when he was hired as an assistant historian under the Emergency Conservation Work Act of 1933. He was assigned to what was then the Omaha field office and remained in Omaha until April 1942, eventually being appointed Regional Historian. Among his responsibilities in his early years was to compile the preliminary investigations for a large backlog of potential national parks and national monuments:

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7 Ibid., 75.
8 Ibid., 101-103.
9 The fourteen states covered by Region II were: Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado.
10 Ibid., 3.
It seems that for years various Congressmen had introduced bills or made recommendations to have areas established as national monuments and some even as national parks. These had piled up and no reports had ever been made. ...I recall that I made the first comprehensive report for the Pipestone National Monument and for Homestead National Monument.\footnote{Edward A. Hummel, oral history interview, 1971 (files of Harpers Ferry Center).}

The federal government closed on the Freeman homestead in the fall of 1938, after handing checks to the several Freeman heirs in downtown Beatrice. The property when NPS took possession of it was largely given over to farmland, with the exception of approximately fifty acres of woodland mostly along the banks of Cub Creek. Few buildings remained on the property; some reports indicated only a chicken coop and a handful of small outbuildings, while another report indicated a small frame house which had been occupied by Clifford Quackenbush, one of Daniel Freeman’s sons-in-law, and which was moved shortly after NPS began work in March 1939.\footnote{Beatrice Daily Sun, March 21, 1939, page 5.} The Freemans had been farming the property for over two generations by the time NPS acquired the land and had removed most of the original native grasses and trees in the course of their farming operations. In the late winter of 1939, the Department of the Interior announced that it had appropriated $7,440 through the WPA to begin developing the site. This sum allowed $5,804 for labor, $468 for superintendence, and $868 for other items; none of these funds were to be taken from the original Congressional appropriation of $124,000. As Edward Hummel recalled in 1971, “we did our first development with WPA labor out of Beatrice, Nebraska. In fact, it was not difficult to get WPA labor because they were looking for good projects.”\footnote{Hummel oral history interview, 1971. Beatrice Daily Sun, March 29, 1939.}

Work at the former Freeman farm finally started in late March 1939, when surveyors began work at the site.\footnote{Beatrice Daily Sun, March 21, 1939, page 5.} A month later, in April 1939, eight men assigned to the WPA camp in Beatrice arrived at the park. Thomas Allen, the first Regional Director in Omaha, appointed Hummel as acting custodian for the new monument. Hummel began with a two-pronged approach, giving attention simultaneously to conservation efforts and to historical research. Hummel personally directed the historical research efforts, while H.D. Chilen, also on staff at the Region II Office, served as coordinator for the conservation efforts and coordinated the work of the WPA crews under Hummel’s overall direction. Hummel unified the management of the two aspects of the park, natural and historical, in announcing that his plan was “to make the homestead as nearly as possible as it was during the first years that Daniel Freeman farmed the place.”\footnote{Beatrice Daily Sun, April 23, 1939.}

**Initial Conservation Efforts**

The 1930s was a time of exciting growth in natural resources conservation. Agronomists and soil scientists from the late nineteenth century were aware of the potential for catastrophic problems caused by erosion and soil depletion, and agricultural practices in the Great Plains
came under particular scrutiny. In particular, scholarly work by Hugh R. Bennett and William R. Chapline in the late 1920s detailed the causes and potential results of inattention to protecting soils. In 1933, the Soil Erosion Service was created within the Department of the Interior under the direction of Bennett. As with the new historic sites within the National Park System, the emergency work relief programs provided extensive support for natural resource conservation projects because soil depletion was often connected with rural poverty. As one historian has noted, “The connection between poor, eroded land and poor people came into focus.”

The Dust Bowl, the series of massive dust storms driven by drought and high winds that devastated the Great Plains and sent storms of dust swirling past the east coast and out to the Atlantic Ocean in 1934 and 1935, further brought the issue to the nation’s attention. The fledgling Soil Erosion Service was then expanded and relocated to the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (P.L. 46-74), which changed the program’s name to the Soil Conservation Service.

The Soil Conservation Service provided direct support to farmers and land managers through the CCC and the WPA and conducted demonstration projects with local and regional experiment stations. These programs relied primarily on existing knowledge and technology but in a more coordinated way. These approaches included the use of terracing and contour farming, grade stabilization to minimize water run-off, pasture management to reintroduce grass coverage, and fencing to protect woodlands from grazing in order to protect the underlying grasses. Civilian Conservation Corps workers also collected seeds for the nursery production of seedlings that could be planted to help the land resist erosion. According to Helms, “collecting native grass seed for revegetating rangeland played a large part in demonstration projects in semi-arid areas.”

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17 Ibid., 7.
Many of these conservation efforts were employed at Homestead. After the WPA crews arrived in late April 1939, their first steps included clearing the land of stumps and other debris. The few remaining buildings from the Freeman occupation of the site had already been removed before the WPA crews began work. Once basic clearing was underway, Chilen directed the initial conservation efforts in two directions, both of which aligned with the contemporary federal soil conservation efforts: erosion control along Cub Creek and replanting the former prairie land with native grasses. By early May 1939, more than fifty WPA men were working at the site, and more arrived at the site throughout the summer (Figure 9).

Initial Prairie Restoration

Hummel was convinced of the need to restore native grasses at the park through sowing seed and planting sod. Photographs included with the initial Forest Protection Requirement Report in 1939 (discussed later in this section) show the clear need for immediate and remedial action on both fronts in order to restore the land to its appearance when Daniel Freeman arrived on his new homestead. The land had been used mostly for animal grazing during the several years prior to its acquisition by NPS, and the result was that the Monument grounds were covered primarily with low bushes and widely scattered small trees (Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Two views of Homestead National Monument, 1939. Source: Shevlin, Forest Protection Requirements Report, 1939](image)

At the time that Hummel was planning the prairie restoration work at Homestead National Monument in 1939, only one section of original prairie had ever been restored. The University of Wisconsin purchased the Curtis Prairie in 1934, which had been cultivated from the 1830s through the late 1910s before laying fallow and then being used as a horse pasture. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin proposed that a native prairie could be reestablished
on the land and began experimenting with methods to do this throughout the late 1930s. Hummel quickly consulted with leading experts in the field of conservation and prairie management. In particular, he drew the attention of Professor John E. Weaver of the University of Nebraska to the Monument. Weaver, a native of Iowa, was one of the nation’s leading figures in the study of prairie ecology. He had taught plant ecology at the University of Nebraska since 1917 and used that position to study prairie ecosystems throughout the Great Plains for more than a decade before the Dust Bowl disaster struck. According to a current land management scientist, Weaver’s “baseline studies gave him an invaluable opportunity to document the dramatic changes to the plant communities of those prairies during and after the droughts of the 1930s. What he recorded, along with his former student F.W. Albertson, was an incredible testimony to the dynamism and resilience of those prairies.”

Weaver’s interest in Homestead National Monument was piqued by NPS Wildlife Technician Adolph Murie, who later went on to become one of the nation’s pioneering scholars and researchers in wildlife biology. Murie consulted with Dr. Weaver before preparing a five-page brief regarding the restoration of native grassland at the Monument in either 1939 or 1940. Murie reported that Hummel intended to restore the conditions at the Monument when Freeman settled there and that he “wishes to restore the vegetation so far as it is possible.” Murie was quick to elucidate the potential research value of attempting to restore the native prairie “because of the large amount of grassland under agriculture which should never have been plowed, and which will eventually probably be restored to grass.” Murie recommended two approaches to restoring the prairie. The first and best approach was to transplant sod in its original condition from neighboring farms and graft it in specific areas within the park. On the assumption that NPS could not secure enough sod nearby, Murie recommended sowing grass seed as a second priority.

Dr. Weaver, according to Murie, “is the outstanding authority in this field. In our efforts to restore the prairie at Homestead his advice should be obtained whenever possible.” Weaver had suggested to Murie that seeding the property could be effective, particularly with making adjustments in the mix of specific grasses over the ensuing years based on field observations. The importance of the project was not lost on Weaver. As Murie reported, “Dr. Weaver felt that the project contained the possibilities of an excellent experiment and expressed an interest in being rather closely associated with the project.”

The early conservation work at Homestead clearly followed the advice from Dr. Weaver as outlined by Adolph Murie. As work was beginning in April 1939, the Region II Office contracted with Joseph Scheve, a farmer living near the park, to prepare 100 acres of the land for

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20 Adolph Murie, “Restoration of Native Grassland at Homestead National Monument,” typescript MS in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 16. The document is undated, but a handwritten note at the top reads “Rec (?) 11-23-40.”
planting seed, including disking, rolling, and harrowing.\textsuperscript{21} The Region II Office expedited the purchase of tools, gasoline, and oil in April and purchased large quantities of grass seed. The Monument’s 160-acre property consisted of four forty-acre units in the shape of an inverted T, identified as the north forty, west forty, south forty, and east forty. Scheves’ task was to prepare approximately 100 acres of the Monument in the north, south, and southeast forties, and then to seed those 100 acres. Using guidelines provided by the federal Soil Conservation Service for the uses of native grasses in the conservation of soil and moisture in the Great Plains, the Region II Office provided Scheve with a mix of native grass seed, all harvested locally in Gage County. The mix of species in the seed was carefully defined:

The mixture which will be used for this area will contain about 40\% Big Bluestem (\textit{Adropogon furcatus}), about 50\% little Bluestem (\textit{Andropogon scoparius}), about 1\% needle grass (\textit{Stipe spartea}), 1\% bluegrass (\textit{Poa pratensis}), 1\% prairie dropseed (\textit{Sperobalus heterolepis}), 1\% Indian Grass (\textit{Sorghastrum nutans}), and 1\% side oats grama (\textit{Bouteloua curtipendula}).\textsuperscript{22}

By mid-summer, the grasses had taken root, and the Region II Office contracted with another local farmer, Louis C. Weibe, to begin mowing the 100 acres that had been planted. Later in September, Hummel directed the Region II Office to contract for reseeding approximately twenty acres of the north forty with native grasses. At the same time, WPA crews planted more than 8,000 tree seedlings, primarily oak and hackberry, and crews in the late summer began harvesting oak acorns to plant in the fall. Hummel also directed Chilen to begin seeding hulled walnuts on the southwest forty.

The process of restoring the prairie with native grasses brought with it an increased risk of fire. During the summer of 1939, southeastern Nebraska was facing drought conditions, which heightened concerns about the spread of fire from natural occurrences and from neighboring farmers who were “burning-off” their fields. Assistant Regional Forester Charles E. Shevlin began his first association with Homestead in 1939 when he prepared a Forest Protection Requirements Report. In the report, which was approved and released in early 1940, Shevlin assessed the new park as having “low-medium” risk for fire. Fewer than forty acres of the 160-acre property was covered in forest growth, all hardwood, with almost no dead or downed material, thus limiting the potential for fire there. The remainder of the property had been cultivated until 1937 in wheat and corn, leaving little combustible grass. With the intended restoration of original prairie conditions, however, the risk of fire was growing every year. Because the park is close to Beatrice, accessible by Highway 4 which passed through the property, and with low visitation, the risk of fires was relatively low. Shevlin still recommended a number of preventive measures including securing a cache of fire-fighting tools for the park, installing a telephone line, and training any future staff at the park on what to do in case of fire.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Contract form between Thomas J. Allen, Jr., Regional Director and Joseph H. Scheve, April 21, 1939; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 13.

\textsuperscript{22} Justification statement, n.d. [1939], Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 13.

\textsuperscript{23} C.E. Shevlin, “Forest Protection Requirements Report for Homestead National Monument, December 1939,” typescript MS; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VI-C, Cat No 6965, Box 1 Folder 14.
In late September also, Hummel directed Chilen to secure informal bids from other local farmers to secure sod which could be cut and delivered by November 1939. He also communicated with William Clifford, a member of the Township Board, who had a sod breaker which the WPA crew could use. This sod was to be used in the north forty, with work to be completed in November 1939.24

There is no indication that the sodding work contemplated in late 1939 was completed. However, the idea was revisited in early 1942. In April, the Region II Office contracted with R.H. Buss, a Beatrice farmer, to cut and install five acres of sod for replanting at the Monument with work to begin in late April. Funds were provided by the Soil and Moisture Control program of the USDA.25 A year later, in May 1943, Associate Regional Forester Charles Shevlin assessed the transplanted sod and determined that it was “entirely successful, having healed more completely the gullies where it was placed.” The results of the sodding program in 1942, Shevlin stated, were particularly strong in regard to erosion control, although full prairie restoration was still in the future:

Active erosion on the south is almost totally absent at this time, although the sod is generally thin and in many places lacking. However, weeds are thick, and during the past several years, have formed a fairly good mat which does a great deal to prevent sheet and gully erosion. If funds and a plentiful supply of labor were available, additional sodding or spot planting of native grasses could profitably be done to hasten the return of the area to its original condition. It is the writer’s opinion, however, that as the soil is built up, the native grasses will continue to spread and will eventually choke out the weeds. This process may take a great deal of time, but we have plenty of that.26

Shevlin revisited the site in September 1943 together with Nebraska State Conservationist E.G. Jones and NPS Regional Conservationist D.E. Hutchinson, an authority on native grasses. Hutchinson described the state of the grasses on the prairie as excellent. As Shevlin reported, “The extent to which the native grasses have taken over came as an agreeable surprise. At the present time 90% of the non-wooded area is covered with a fine stand of big and little blue stem, Indian grass, switch grass, side oats grass, Canada wild rye and other associated native species.” The group discussed the incursion of weeds in the prairie; although noting that native grasses, for the most part, were crowding out the weeds, some areas of intense bind weed concentration could profitably be attacked with sodium chlorate.27

24 Memoranda between Hummel and Chilen throughout the summer and early fall of 1939 are included in a set of documents in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 13.
25 Invitation, Bid, and Acceptance Form, April 13, 1942; see also Memorandum, Associate Regional Forester George A. Walker to Guy S. Atkins, Homestead National Monument, typescript MSS, April 23, 1942; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VI-C, Cat No 6965, Box 1 Folder 14.
26 Memorandum, Charles E. Shevlin to Regional Director, May 19, 1943; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VI-C, Cat No 6965, Box 1 Folder 14.
27 Memorandum, C.E. Shevlin to Regional Director, September 17, 1943, typescript MS; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C Cat No 6965 Box 1 Folder 14.
Cub Creek Erosion Control

In addition to establishing native grasses, Chilen and Hummel identified erosion along the banks of Cub Creek and in nearby gullies as a significant problem. Photos included in the 1939 Forest Protection Requirements Report indicated the extent of the challenges, showing Cub Creek as a largely denuded ditch prone to flash floods exacerbated by runoff from a neighboring farm (Figure 11). As identified in a drawing completed in July 1939, erosion control efforts at Homestead National Monument consisted of a combination of plantings, placement of sod, and hardscape reinforcing (Figure 12). Two strategies in particular are illustrated in this drawing. For areas adjacent to Cub Creek, trees were to be left at the edge of the water, and the shallow bank rising from the creek was to be reinforced with a stone wall with fill placed between the wall and the natural bank and sod laid on top of the fill. The depressions of the several gullies adjacent to Cub Creek were to be filled with soil and tamped and a new shallow grade from the edge of the creek to the surrounding land was to be created with plantings of wild plum and strawberry to help “to keep drainage in controled [sic] area and avoid new erosion.”

In early August 1939, Chilen reported that he had secured two loads of rock from a farm owned by Scheve approximately 4.5 miles from the Monument and also had four loads of concrete that had been removed from the remaining foundation of one of the Freeman buildings. Chilen referenced the July 1939 drawing by requesting confirmation that “the walls shown on the plans are laid up dry;” three days later, Hummel assured him that the erosion control walls were to be laid up dry. In addition, in November 1939, Chilen installed a series of five check dams: low,

28 “Typical Construction Details, Erosion Control Project, Homestead National Monument Area,” hand-drawn MS, July 22, 1939; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 13.
29 Memoranda between Hummel and Chilen, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, NPS Catalog No. 6965 Box 1 Folder 13.
Figure 12: Erosion Control Plan for Cub Creek, 1939. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument
temporary dams, usually constructed of loose rock, placed across the flow of water and designed
to reduce the velocity of the water, thus reducing erosion within the streambed. A smaller set of
check dams was completed between 1940 and 1941.30

At the beginning of 1940, Hummel identified erosion control as his top priority among a
list of seventeen proposed projects at the Monument. He noted in his budget request that the
work identified on the 1939 drawing, to shore up the banks of Cub Creek and begin filling in
gullies, had been completed. He justified the continuation of work, however, by the need to
restore the Monument to its original condition when Freeman first began farming there.:  

During recent years of private ownership,” he observed, “area was cultivated and
trees were cut. As a result of this use, erosion started along Cub Creek and on
hillside. Some of the erosion control work was accomplished by ERA
[Emergency Relief Act] camp. This provides for additional work needed.

Likewise, in early 1941, Superintendent Clarence Schultz identified erosion and check dams
throughout the southern forties as his first of seventeen priority items for the year. Schultz
continued to work with seeding with native grasses and contracted for mowing the prairie
through 1941. He also began the process of eradicating exotic and non-native weeds in the
replanted prairie. Though the methods are not specified in any of the existing documents, it is
likely that the process involved the application of herbicides. By the summer of 1941, according
to a report in the Beatrice Daily Sun, NPS and WPA staff had installed approximately 100 check
dams and planted approximately 10,000 tree seedlings.

Erosion control efforts through the early 1940s also included the construction of
temporary ditches intended to direct the flow of water during high-flow events. The construction
of the check dams, combined with sodding the adjacent surfaces, were effective at the time in
slowing the water’s velocity and trapping more of it before it reached the ditches. The World
War II years, however, placed constrictions on the available labor and materials for the necessary
maintenance work. Additional funds came through the Soil and Moisture Control program in the
mid-1940s to strengthen the banks of Cub Creek and the nearby gullies and to clear Cub Creek
of debris. Erosion control maintenance efforts, seeding, and sodding continued into the late
1940s. A map prepared in 1947 indicates the location of work that had been completed since
1939 together with the locations of areas where sod should be placed in the future.

Initial Historical Research

While overseeing the work of Chilen in the initial restoration of the prairie, Hummel also
directed the work of a young historian, Charles Stout, to conduct three months of research at the
Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. Although the Region II Office’s plans for
development at the park were uncertain in this first year of efforts, Hummel did not anticipate
constructing any new buildings until a permanent Superintendent could be appointed and further

30 A handwritten list of items that were completed between 1939 and 1941 can be found in Archives of Homestead
NM, Collection 100-VI-C Cat No 6965 Box 1 Folder 14.
research could be conducted. Acting NPS Director A.E. Demarary reinforced Hummel’s reluctance to commit to any building program at this early stage:

We are deliberately refraining from any work of a construction nature until such time as additional historical data have been obtained. Inasmuch as the development of the area will be determined by historical findings, we must proceed carefully and not risk improper development which might ensue as the result of a hastily decided construction program.

Hummel also announced his plans to coordinate closely with citizens in Beatrice on the park’s development and that he expected to have Strout meet with the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce.  

Stout completed his research quickly and delivered a draft report to Hummel in Omaha in late July 1939. His forty-page report focused on the history of federal land distribution policy from the late eighteenth century through the Homestead Act of 1862, with a brief section on the operation of the Act and amendments to it through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To this primarily legislative overview, Stout appended a nine-page summary of the lives of homesteaders. No other correspondence or references pertaining to Stout’s research and historical narrative were identified in the current research. It likely was seen by NPS staff as a preliminary delineation of concepts, not the basis for future interpretation of the park.

A new phase of historical research began with the appointment of the park’s first Superintendent, Clarence H. Schultz. Schultz entered on duty on October 4, 1940, and, in early 1941, contacted the University of Nebraska Library regarding his plans to start a new research program in support of the park’s development. Schultz’ time from his appointment until he was drafted to serve in the Army in June 1942, however, was largely occupied by conservation efforts and planning work for the site’s first building.

A more comprehensive research program awaited Schultz’ temporary replacement, Russell A. Gibbs. In July 1942, Regional Chief of Planning Howard W. Baker submitted a proposal for historical research. Baker justified the proposal by observing that, despite previous research by Stout and Superintendent Schultz, “in no case has there been opportunity to devote sufficient time to proceed further than the preliminary stages.” In order to proceed with developing the monument, he went on, “the most important problem is to complete the securing of historical data which can be used as the basis for preparing plans for a typical homestead and can be a guide for the general development proposals.” The research which Baker proposed would be extensive, including a search of county, state, and General Land Office files, and

31 The Beatrice Daily Sun provides a great deal of information regarding the early park development, with multiple news articles through the spring of 1939. These include April 23, 1939, May 5, 1939, and May 8, 1939; Demarary is quoted in article on May 12, 1939. Charles Strout is not mentioned in the newspaper articles, but his 1939 manuscript is located in the Homestead NM archives.

32 A typed MS version of Stout’s research paper, clearly in an unedited draft form, together with handwritten letters to Hummel on July 10 and July 29, 1939, are located in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Cat. No. 6980, Box 1 Folder 2.

33 Clarence H. Schultz to Chief of Circulation, University of Nebraska Library, January 9, 1941; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Cat No 6965 Box 1 Folder 14.
would be oriented toward documenting both Freeman’s occupation of the site and life on a

typical homestead. Baker also proposed an archeological survey of the monument, to be

conducted after the historical research was completed, with the goal of locating the earlier

homesites on the property. As he argued in justifying the project, “in addition to historical

research work, a scientific study should be made of the area and should aim at securing every

scrap of evidence and the archeological possibilities should not be dismissed without exploratory

evacuation under competent supervision.” 34

Baker’s proposal apparently received funding and was put into practice by Acting

Superintendent Russell A. Gibbs. With building supplies and labor in short supply throughout

World War II, Gibbs was able to devote a greater portion of his time from November 1942 to

September 1944 conducting historical research into the history of homesteading. In coordination

with the Region II Office, Gibbs developed a research program divided into specific subjects,

including, among others, the history of the Homestead Act, the administration of the Act, and the

life of homesteaders. In addition, Gibbs conducted oral history interviews with several of Daniel

Freeman’s children and others with memories of homesteading in the region. 35

Gibbs prepared a draft preliminary historical narrative which he submitted to the Region

II Office for review in July 1943. This first report also contained recommendations regarding a

program for future research oriented toward future interpretation and museum exhibits. This

program included eight special studies. Unfortunately, the original report could not be found in

the current research; subsequent correspondence indicates that the topics included origins of the

Homestead Act, administration and operation of the Homestead Act, history of Freeman and the

first homestead, homestead society, and political and economic significance of the Homestead

Act. In his review of the preliminary document, Acting Regional Historian Merrill J. Mattes

acknowledged that the seven studies


will provide a comprehensive survey of the homestead movement in American

history; not an exhaustive survey, since the subject is too vast, but one sufficiently

comprehensive to enable us to plan intelligently as to an interpretive program and

ultimate physical improvements. 36

Although Gibbs was not a formally trained historian, both Mattes and Acting NPS Chief

Historian Charles W. Porter III reviewed Gibbs’ several manuscripts and offered suggestions and

encouragement for the continuation of the park’s research program.

Mattes was active in reviewing the work and making recommendations to the Regional

Director and the Chief Historian through the mid-1940s. In the spring of 1944, Mattes reviewed

34 Project Construction Program Proposal Form, July 22, 1942; Archives of Homestead National Monument,

Collection 100-VII-D-1, Cat. No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 7.

35 During his tenure, Gibbs submitted monthly reports to the Region II Office in which he described his research

efforts; reference to interviews with two of Daniel Freeman’s children is in his memorandum of April 1, 1943, and

references to other interviews are in his memorandum of August 1, 1943. These and other memoranda are located in

Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-II-B, Cat. No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 2.

36 Memorandum, Merrill J. Mattes to Regional Director, Region Two, September 11, 1943 (emphasis in original);

Archives of Homestead National Monument, 100-V-E-1, Cat. No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25. See also Gibbs’ report on

April 1, 1944; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-II-B, Cat. No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 3.
Gibbs’ article on Daniel Freeman and his homestead. Mattes acknowledged the tendency to overemphasize Freeman to the detriment of the larger story of homesteading: “The personal history of the man is not of primary importance except insofar as his career as a homesteader was typical, but inasmuch as the visiting public will be greatly interested in Daniel Freeman it behooves us to gather all of the data concerning him that we can.” Recognizing that Freeman was an eccentric character, Mattes speculated on how to handle him in the interpretation of the site:

Mr. Gibbs has adopted a restrained attitude and I believe that his impression of Freeman is rather well balanced, as being an erratic character who loomed rather large in local history. My impression of the man from the mere facts of his behavior is that he was definitely a 'paranoiac.' His immense ego, his endless quarreling and litigation and his theatrical adoption of 'the first homesteader' title stamp him as rather a mental case. This aspect of the man I mention because Mr. Gibbs is inclined to be more charitable with him and I think that all of his aspects should be brought into the picture. We are not concerned with moral values particularly and I am not suggesting that the paper should be written with the object of condemning Freeman. I do think, though, that the fact that he was not a model citizen in all respects should have a bearing on the extent to which he will be brought into the interpretive picture.37

Gibbs remained as the Acting Superintendent at Homestead until the summer of 1944, before entering on duty as Custodian of Fort Jefferson National Monument in Florida. He compiled a substantial amount of research on homesteading, and his extensive research files are held in the archives of Homestead National Monument. After Gibbs left Homestead, Elmer L. Hevelone, a local banker in Beatrice who was instrumental in securing passage of the Monument’s enabling legislation and who facilitated the sale of the Freeman’s property to the Department of the Interior, agreed to serve as temporary custodian. He was hired by the Region II Office, though “the duties required of you materially outweighed the nominal compensation we were authorized to pay.” Hevelone remained on duty until February 28, 1946, nearly a month after Superintendent Schultz returned to duty, to allow for a smooth transition. Hevelone, however, served only as a custodian and was not involved in any of Gibb’s research efforts. Following Gibb’s departure, park staff conducted little in the way of historical research until the appointment of a Park Historian, Donald G. Warman, in 1958.

Buildings

During the initial planning for Homestead National Monument, from 1939 into the early 1940s, work was directed primarily from the Region II Office in Omaha with no permanent presence in Beatrice. After Superintendent Clarence Schultz was appointed in October 1940, he had no office space at the monument. Instead, he set up an office in a former CCC camp at what was then known as Dempster Park.38 Located approximately three miles east of the monument

37 Memorandum. Merrill J. Mattes to Regional Director, Region Two, April 13, 1944; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-V-E-1, Cat. No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25.
38 Beatrice Daily Sun, May 8, 1941.
on the north side of State Highway 4, the site was redeveloped in the 1950s as a Shriners Center and now is in private hands. Only a flagpole and manmade pond remain from the CCC occupation of the site (Figure 13).

![Figure 13. The former CCC camp location at Dempster Park. Photo by the author.](image)

Although NPS staff at the park and the Region II Office were reluctant to commit to a program of building museum and interpretation buildings, the need for a utility building was recognized almost immediately. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Edward Hummel initiated an ambitious landscape conservation program focused on restoring the prairie and controlling erosion. The National Park Service contracted much of this work initially to local farmers, but Clarence Schultz, the inaugural Superintendent, soon began planning for a building that could store equipment along with oil and gas for the use of the park. In his end-of-the-year budget request in December 1940, he urged the construction of a Utility Building on the property. This building, he recommended, should contain four rooms: gas and oil storage, pump room, workshop and tool room, and a three-car garage. As he noted in his justification statement, “The building is essential for the operation of the Monument.”

The Region II Office quickly approved construction of the building in the winter of 1941, and Assistant Regional Architect William I. Williams produced plans in time for building to begin in March. Unfortunately, construction started as a joint effort of Superintendent Schultz and WPA Foreman John Albert, neither of whom had experience with building construction. The

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39 Project Construction Program Proposal Form, December 10, 1940; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Cat. No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 4.
WPA workers also had little building experience. Williams visited the site in late April and found that although several footings had been built, all were either laid incorrectly or in the wrong place. Likewise, “Much of the earlier brick and tile work had to be torn down and re-laid due to unskilled labor, improper supervision and the back-up tile being oversize.” Despite these early delays and exceptionally heavy rains in June, Williams was able to oversee the completion of the building by mid-July 1941. According to an article in the local newspaper in May 1941, the building was one part of a larger construction program and would temporarily serve multiple purposes: “Until the administration and museum building is constructed, it will also serve as the monument headquarters.”

As completed, the Utility Building (Building No. 1) is a one-story brick building with a side gable roof (Figure 14). Oriented on a north-south axis, the building opens to a parking area on the west with three single garage doors at the south end, and three pedestrian doors to the north. The building rests on a placed concrete slab, with wooden trusses supporting the roof and originally had steel framed windows. The building has remained with few changes since its completion in the summer of 1941.

![Figure 14: 1941 Photograph of Utility Building. Source: Files of Homestead National Monument](image)

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41 *Beatrice Daily Sun*, May 8, 1941.
Two other infrastructure programs were completed in association with the Utility Building. First, in the absence of a municipal water supply, a well was completed to provide reliable water service. As planned, it was approximately thirty-five feet deep and thirty-six inches in diameter. At the same time, WPA crews, using plans prepared by the NPS Region II Office in Omaha, constructed a temporary entrance road from what was then the alignment of Highway 4.

State Highway 4 extends west from Beatrice, primarily following section lines as it makes its way across the state just past Holdredge, Nebraska. The highway angles to the northwest as it passes Homestead National Monument, following the course of a freight road that was created in the mid-nineteenth century. When the monument was created, Highway 4 cut through the east forty and north forty before crossing Cub Creek immediately south of the current Education Center (See Figure 3). National Park Service officials saw the location of Highway 4 as a problem from the earliest stages of planning for the monument. According to an article in the Beatrice Daily Sun in early May 1941, “A part of the long term plan is to divert highway 4 around the north part of the homestead and to restore the old freight road to its condition as of Freeman’s day.” Both components of this plan, removing modern Highway 4 and recreating the original freight road, remained joined in Regional and park planning efforts into the late 1940s.

Figure 15: 1940 drawings of proposed entrance signs for Homestead National Monument. Source: NPS Electronic Technical Information Center

42 Beatrice Daily Sun, May 8, 1941.
43 See the Project Construction Program Proposal Form as recommended by Superintendent Schultz on July 8, 1949; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Cat. No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 12.
Although Regional and park officials saw the presence of a modern highway within the park as a hindrance to the protection of the prairie and the interpretation of the site, it also provided access to the site and afforded promotional opportunities. In the fall of 1940, regional officials recommended an entrance road from Highway 4, lying south of Cub Creek, to the proposed headquarters site on the north side of the creek, with a ninety-foot timber bridge to carry the road across the creek and a parking area at the headquarters site, which, at the time, was the new Utility Building. This entrance road and bridge combination was designed to be temporary until Highway 4 could be relocated. The purpose of this construction project was to provide access to the new Utility Building, which was completed in July 1941. At the same time, regional officials provided entrance signs from Highway 4 to the Utility Building, which served as the temporary headquarters and visitor information center; these signs were completed by June 30, 1941 (Figure 15).

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44 Project Construction Program Proposal Form, December 1940, with Memorandum from Regional Director to Clarence H. Schultz, December 19, 1940; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Cat. No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 4.
Chapter 4: Early Conservation Efforts: 1946-1978

Staff from the Region II Office in Omaha began development work at Homestead National Monument in the spring of 1939. Led by Regional Historian Edwin Hummel, these early efforts blended environmental conservation and historical research. For Hummel and his colleagues, the lines of distinction between the two efforts were very fine. Indeed, much of the conservation work, particularly efforts to restore native grasses, was done initially as a component of the historical restoration program. Hummel stated as his goal from the outset the restoration of the farmstead as close as possible to its appearance when Daniel Freeman began farming in the 1860s. Hummel’s efforts, however, also coincided with the larger, national project to combat the problems associated with the Dust Bowl earlier in the decade: severe erosion that led to the nearly complete loss of topsoil in vast areas during a prolonged drought. By the mid-1940s, particularly as World War II ended and development efforts at Homestead National Monument resumed, the work of the Soil Conservation Service had been successful throughout the Great Plains, and the pressure for emergency stabilization and erosion control consequently waned. Conservation work at Homestead National Monument continued throughout the post-war years, though, as a component of the site’s historical rehabilitation and interpretation and as an end in itself.

During World War II, the nation’s energy, its manpower, and its attention were naturally focused on the war effort. The National Park Service faced immense challenges during the war, which was reflected in the conditions at the individual parks. An important source of labor at the parks during the 1930s came from the several emergency relief programs of the New Deal, but, as early as 1941, Congress began trying to eliminate the Civilian Conservation Corps and other relief programs. While Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and NPS Director Newton Drury sought to retain at least a portion of the programs to support the parks, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 swiftly put those hopes to rest. By the summer of 1942, these programs had been effectively eliminated, and the gradual transfer of equipment and materials to the armed services was underway. At the same time, in the summer of 1942, NPS faced additional disruption when the agency had to relocate its headquarters to Chicago, Illinois, to allow additional office space in the District of Columbia for the war effort. Only Associate Director Arthur Demaray and a half-dozen staff remained in Washington D.C. to serve as liaisons.

Throughout the nation, NPS faced challenges from multiple sources during the early and mid-1940s. Men from the headquarters office, from regional offices, and from the individual parks were called up for military duty which often lasted for the entire war. Rationing of gasoline and rubber meant that those who remained behind had limited ability to travel to the parks, drastically reducing visitation. Perhaps the most far-reaching of the challenges facing NPS as an agency during the war years, however, were the dramatically reduced budgets. From a high in 1940 of $33,577,00, NPS appropriations fell to a low of $4,740,000 in 1945. According to Conrad Wirth, who served as Director of NPS from 1951 to 1964, the agency’s budget was “cut below the minimum needed for preservation alone.” This lack of funds meant that individual parks were hard-pressed to maintain their buildings and roads in useable condition.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980; copyright returned to the author 1984; viewed online: https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/wirth2/index.htm),
Summary of Early Conservation Efforts
Because the regional office in Omaha had only begun developing Homestead National Monument in 1939 and 1940, the park’s facilities faced little deterioration compared to more well-established units. Its only building was a Utility Building, completed in 1941 and, thus, still a new building by the time the war ended. Moreover, before the war effort dramatically reduced the amount of work that could be completed at Homestead, first the Region II Office and then the park under the direction of Superintendent Clarence Schultz made a good start on restoring the prairie. As detailed in Chapter 3, the goals of the early conservation efforts were two-fold: re-establish native grasses on the open areas of Homestead in the central and east forties, and limit erosion in the areas around Cub Creek in the west and north forties.

Superintendent Clarence Schultz was inducted into the U.S. Army in April 1942. His replacements during his four-year tour of duty served largely as caretakers, both by direction from the Region II Office and as a result of lack of funds to do anything more. Russell Gibbs, in particular, focused his energies on historical research, generating voluminous notes and draft chapters while traveling infrequently from Beatrice. The promising efforts to restore the property to its prairie state, begun with gusto in 1940 and 1941, were put on hold, aside from maintaining the early seeding and sodding projects, monitoring the erosion on Cub Creek and its gullies, and mowing the grasses every summer. Once Superintendent Schultz returned to Homestead in early February 1946, he went back to work planning with the Region II Office to restart the site’s conservation program. The first year was spent largely in planning for restoration efforts due, in part, to the miniscule amount of money that was available to the entire region for soil conservation work, what was then identified as soil and moisture control (S&MC) work. Homestead received just $1,025 in 1946, which the park applied to work on Cub Creek. A number of snags had developed from the accumulation of logs and other debris where the creek passed through the park. These snags had the potential to create flooding and accelerate the process of streambank erosion. Work in 1946, therefore, consisted largely of beginning to clear debris from Cub Creek and installing riprap along certain sections of the creek to serve as buffers against erosion.¹

Initial Post-War Conservation
Even though funds remained limited, S&MC work at Homestead National Monument resumed in 1947. The most important component of the work was the continuation and extension of planting new grass seed and establishing new sod, while also continuing to armor the banks of Cub Creek with rip rap. In March 1947, Superintendent Schultz received permission from the Region II Office to hire a temporary foreman, Frank Maranville, who would oversee the work which began in the spring. Under Maranville’s direction, and with a $1,000 budget, work proceeded on both fronts quickly during the spring of 1947. Seeding and sodding work relied on earlier check dams. These low dams slowed the flow of water into the creek, allowing moisture

¹ Justification for Individual Cost Projects, Region Two Office, Homestead National Monument, February 1946 and December 1946; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 15.

chapter 8. For additional information on the NPS during WWII, see Janet A. McDonnell, “‘Far-Reaching Effects;' The United States Military and the National Parks During World War II,” The George Wright Forum 32 (2015), 89-110.
to seep into the soil and building up small amounts of sediment. This provided the basis for the establishment of sod, most of which Maranville, at Schultz’ direction, secured from a flat area north of the Utility Building, where the Education Center now stands, and from portions of the open prairie in the central and east forties, where the earlier sodding and seeding efforts had been successful.

Maranville moved quickly on the sodding work in April and May 1947, and it was complete by early June. Torrential rains that spring put the new work to the test, and, according to Regional Forester Frank W. Childs, the newly placed sod at the check dams passed with flying colors. One of these rainstorms, Childs noted, was severe enough to send the waters of Cub Creek above the level of the bridge that carried Highway 4, in its original alignment. Despite the intensity of these spring floods, Childs reported that he was surprised to note, however, the amount of silt that has already accumulated behind the sod dams, which, of course, have not as yet been in place long enough to have permitted the grass to take firm root. The success of the sodding work can be credited largely to the Custodian’s [Schultz] sound judgment in digging up the sod to the full depth of the grass roots, which resulted in the transplanting of heavy compact sod clumps which already have withstood severe washing. The moisture that was building up behind these sod dams, moreover, allowed for a more successful planting of grass seed.3

In the spring of 1947, Schultz arranged for the delivery of eighty-eight tons of stone for Cub Creek. Schultz coordinated with Region II Office staff to identify three locations on the south bank of Cub Creek which needed armoring with stone walls to prevent additional bank erosion. These walls averaged twenty-five feet long and seven feet high. Childs admitted that the limited funds did not allow for the complete anchoring of these stone walls to the banks but opined that they “may prove entirely adequate since the new walls have been subjected to four stages of flood conditions without evidence of shifting or washing around the ends.” Childs also explained that an additional benefit of the stone work was that “considerable silt has accumulated behind the rocks,” which could provide the basis for new plants. As an important secondary component of the overall S&MC program in the late 1940s, Schultz also coordinated with two farmers whose land lay along the park’s southern border. Runoff from this farm contributed to the severe erosion in Cub Creek. National Park Service staff advised and provided support to the farmers, who began terracing their land that bordered on Homestead National Monument, slowing the flow of runoff water.4

3 Memorandum, Frank W. Childs to Regional Director, Region Two, June 12, 1947; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1, Folder 16. See also “Soil and Moisture Conservation Program, Homestead National Monument, Fiscal Year 1947,” unsigned and undated typescript MS in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1, Folder 16.
4 Ibid.
Gage County Soil Conservation District

This coordination with adjacent landowners came in part through the mediation of the Gage County Soil Conservation District (SCD). Soil Conservation Districts were one of the key offshoots of the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (P.L. 74-46) which created the Soil Conservation Service as an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). After the passage of the Act, USDA managers quickly began looking for ways to extend the reach of the new agency and settled on the creation of local entities that could serve as liaisons between the federal agency, local governments, and individual farmers and landowners. It took nearly two years to put the program in place. The first Soil Conservation District was created in North Carolina in August 1937. The Gage County Soil Conservation District was created in the late 1930s, and staff under the leadership of John Clymer worked closely with NPS staff to advise on measures to control erosion along Cub Creek. At the urging of NPS’ Washington Office, Superintendent Schultz first approached Mr. Clymer in June 1950 and again in May 1951 with the suggestion of entering into a Cooperative Agreement with NPS. Clymer declined, declaring that the high level of cooperation seemed sufficient, and “that the cooperative agreement would complicate his administrative and clerical problems.”

Clymer transferred to a position in USDA’s Lincoln Regional Office later in 1951, however, and his replacement, L. Dexter Haws, strongly supported the idea of a cooperative agreement with NPS. According to Superintendent Schultz, Haws had reported that USDA’s Washington Office had a policy of urging agreements among federal land-owning agencies. While the Gage County Soil Conservation District would gain little through the Cooperative Agreement, it would solidify the coordinated efforts between the Gage County SCD and Homestead National Monument to curb runoff from the surrounding farms. A draft agreement was completed in March 1952 and forwarded to the office of NPS Director Conrad Wirth, which was quickly approved.

Cub Creek Erosion Control: 1951-1975

Budget constraints over the next several years did not allow a repeat of this burst of S&MC activity at Homestead National Monument. With appropriations for seeding, sodding, and bank stabilization measuring only in the hundreds of dollars through the late 1940s, Homestead staff could do little more than maintain the work that had already been completed. In 1951, however, Region II Office staff developed a plan to combat erosion along Cub Creek using more natural methods. Instead of hauling in tons of rock, the Region II Office directed Schultz to begin planting willow tree cuttings and rooted willow trees along the banks; the directive came with a budget of $1,034.60. In January 1952, the Region II Office prepared a Project Program that identified six sites along Cub Creek that “cut and crumble with every sizable rise of the

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5 See “More Than 80 Years Helping People Help the Land: A Brief History of NRCS,” on USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021392
6 Memorandum, Clarence Schultz to Regional Director, February 11, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No 6965, Box 1, Folder 19.
7 Ibid.; see also Memorandum, Acting Assistant Regional Director to Director, March 19, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1, Folder 19.
stream,” where willow shoots should be planted (Figure 16). Work began at the end of March 1952, when thousands of willow cuttings and rooted trees were delivered to the park. By late April, Homestead staff had planted approximately 11,000 cuttings despite facing occasional heavy rains (Figure 17). At the same time, NPS staff used fifty sticks of dynamite to enlarge a channel on the south side of Cub Creek opposite the Utility Building. They planned to then build a brush dam across the existing channel that would divert the flow of the Creek further south, away from the Utility Building.

Figure 16: 1952 Map showing erosion control locations. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument

The efforts to control erosion along Cub Creek, however, continued with only limited success into the 1960s. The willows planted in 1952 largely took root and helped to slow the rate of erosion, but the young plants proved attractive to a series of unwanted visitors. An invasion of muskrats in the summer of 1953, and of beavers in late 1957, resulted in the loss of many of the new trees. When faced with the invasion of muskrats in August 1953, Superintendent Schultz sought advice from the Regional Director, who responded that Superintendents had the authority to “destroy in the most humane manner or otherwise dispose of” wild or exotic animals which were proving destructive and suggested that Schultz consult a local Game Warden. Later that month, Schultz reported that Monument staff had opened a new channel, which lowered the level

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8 Homestead National Monument, Soil and Moisture Conservation Project Program—1952 Fiscal year, attached to Memorandum, Assistant Regional Director to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, January 24, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1, Folder 19.
9 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, April 5, 1952; Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, April 28, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No 6965, Box 1, Folder 19.
of the water, making the area less attractive to the muskrats. National Park Service staff attempted to use willows again in the mid- and late 1960s, including planting 2,000 more willows along Cub Creek in 1966. By the mid-1970s, however, NPS finally determined that this approach was unsuccessful and abandoned it.

Both Park and Regional staff also sought to control erosion by managing the flow of water in Cub Creek as it passed through the Monument. Runoff from neighboring farms combined with the naturally flashy conditions of the creek to cause flooding. While park staff continued to coordinate with the Gage County Soil Conservation District through the Cooperative Agreement, the Nebraska State Soil and Moisture Commission signaled their intent to cooperate as well by identifying the Cub Creek watershed as their top priority in 1962. The State commission announced that the key to preventing floods on Monument property was to work more consistently with the neighboring farms on creating terraces and ponds that would

Figure 17: 1952 Photograph of Cub Creek showing willow plantings. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument

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10 Memoranda between Superintendent, Homestead National Monument and Regional Director, August 1953, in Federal Records Center (Lenexa, Kansas; FRC), 79-88-0002, Box 10/14, N-1427; see also “Beaver Invading Homestead,” Beatrice Daily Sun, December 27, 1957, page 1.

11 Historian L. Clifford Soubier reported in 1968 that staff from the Soil Conservation Service and the University of Nebraska Forestry Department both advised that “attempting to control the erosion with vegetation is risky at best;” Memorandum, Historian, Homestead to Acting Superintendent, Homestead, November 12, 1968; FRC 79-87-0003, Box 10, D54, Book 2. See also untitled overview of Homestead National Monument, June 1975, typescript MS, Section III-A; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-A, Catalog No. 7590, Box 1 Folder 1.
help to slow runoff into Cub Creek. They acknowledged the extent of the problem by predicting that the program would take approximately ten years to enact fully.\(^{12}\)

A visit by the Regional Engineer in early 1964, however, suggested that these terracing efforts may have been counter-productive, making the impacts of runoff even worse by creating an even greater rate of flow. Regional Engineer C.J. Novak, in consultation with Superintendent Shaver, recommended additional remedial action that included building a diversion structure on a neighboring farm to convey runoff water to an existing structure that was then conveying water from a roadside borrow pit at the Monument’s western boundary. This structure, according to the Regional Engineer, was in good condition and had sufficient capacity to carry runoff from the eighty acres of the neighboring farm that was causing much of the problem for the park. If the Superintendent, in coordination with the Soil Conservation District, was not able to secure permission from the neighboring farmer to build the diversion structure, the alternate was to construct a zig-zagged diversion dike through a strip of woodland between the Monument’s boundary and Cub Creek.\(^{13}\) Apparently, discussions with the neighboring landowners did not result in approval to use the adjoining lands for a diversion channel, and, by late 1964 and early 1965, the Midwest Regional Office, together with park staff, began planning for a diversion dike within the Monument grounds. Work on the project began in late July 1965. Park staff coordinated with the Soil and Conservation District on designing the project and contracted for the work, which involved clearing land at the southwestern edge of the Monument and staking out a 660-foot dike to be planted in Virginia wildrye grass when completed.\(^{14}\)

**Prairie Restoration: 1958-1978**

Efforts to re-establish a prairie with native grasses at the principal open areas of Homestead National Monument were considered generally successful through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Indeed, these efforts were identified as one of the points of success when the park reached its 20th anniversary of development as Homestead National Monument of America in early January 1959. It was the first attempt at restoring a prairie on NPS property, and only the second in the United States, when it began in 1939. By the 1960s, the prairie on some portions of the Homestead had matured. Already, by that time, the principal problem identified in memoranda between Homestead National Monument and the Midwest Regional Office was weed control, particularly bind weed and giant ragweed. Although some control efforts through the 1960s included natural means such as timely mowing and manually removing seed pods once they formed, the bulk of the park’s weed control strategy beginning in the mid-1950s involved

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\(^{12}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY1962, May 29, 1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 12.

\(^{13}\) Memorandum, Regional Engineer to Regional Director, February 14, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 7.

\(^{14}\) Trip Report, Forester to Associate Regional Director, August 4, 1965; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 8. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY1966; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 16. See also Memorandum, Regional Chief of Maintenance and Staff to Associate Regional Director, December 21, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 7.
regular spraying with herbicides, particularly the chemical known as 2,4-D, which was developed and first used in the United States in 1945.\textsuperscript{15}

Time, of course, is both the means and the measure of success, as it took decades of growth and maturing to see the emergence of a natural prairie. As signs of success began to appear in the 1950s, particularly in the gentle slope of the central and eastern forties, NPS staff at the park and the Midwest Regional Office began to study the prairie more intensively and seek ways to consolidate the gains. In the fall of 1958, Superintendent Ralph Shaver worked with Regional Soil Conservationist Fred Dickinson to develop a Vegetative Management Plan for the park. The purpose of this plan was to guide future actions at the park in the ongoing effort to recreate the natural setting of the 1860s when Daniel Freeman took occupancy of his homestead.\textsuperscript{16} In accordance with the Vegetative Management Plan, mowing the prairie continued to be an important tool in the battle against weeds, and park staff regularly let contracts for mowing through the 1960s. In 1965, nearly the entire prairie was mowed except for the southeastern corner; this was the last year the entire prairie was mowed, though localized mowing and spot treatment with herbicides for weed control took place until 1978.\textsuperscript{17}

The late 1960s also saw renewed attempts at revegetating portions of the prairie through new plantings. In 1964, Superintendent Vernon Hennesay was appointed to serve on the Nebraska Centennial Native Grass Sub-Committee, replacing the Regional Landscape Architect. As part of his committee participation, Hennesay agreed to install ten plots of native grasses on the Monument grounds.\textsuperscript{18} Plans for this program continued through the late 1960s and were made an integral part of the Monument’s interpretive approach. Dubbed the Grasslands Environmental Study Area (ESA) and created in 1969 under Superintendent John Rohn, approximately ten acres immediately southeast of the footbridge across Cub Creek were seeded to native grasses (Figure 18). Many of the grasses planted in this test area did not survive, and portions of the ten acres were then plowed under and reseeded in 1975.

\textsuperscript{15} See, for example, Monthly Narrative Reports for June 1960 and July 1961, and Trip Report, Regional Chief of Park Protection to Regional Director, July 23, 1963; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584 Box 1, and Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 6. See also James Stubbendieck and Gary Willson, \textit{An Identification of Prairie in National Park Units in the Great Plains} (NPS Occasional Paper No. 7, 1986), available online: https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/472539.

\textsuperscript{16} “Homestead Completes 20th Year,” \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun}, January 2, 1959, page 2. See also Monthly Narrative Report for September 1958, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15.

\textsuperscript{17} Stubbendieck and Willson. See also Memorandum, Forester to Associate Regional Director, August 4, 1965; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 8: “the prairie was being mowed as a measure for maintaining the grass cover and eliminating weeds, in accordance with the vegetative management plan for the area.”

\textsuperscript{18} Superintendent’s Annual Report, FY1965, May 28, 1965; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 15. See also \textit{Progress: Missouri River Basin}, Annual Report 1965, 120.
In late 1969, Park Historian Clifford Soubier prepared an impassioned interpretive guide to the ESA in which he connected the agricultural practices of homesteading with an awareness of a growing environmental crisis. Soubier explained that the original prairie grasses that had developed over countless generations were nearly eliminated over the course of one or two generations in the late nineteenth century, and that the destruction of the American prairie that resulted in the Dust Bowl was due to a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the prairie environment. The ESA, he continued, would help to correct this misunderstanding by creating a new approach to outdoor education:

Something a little different is intended with the ESA. Not restricted to “nature studies” in the usual sense, the ESA is intended to show the interrelationship of all elements of the environment, both living and nonliving, their mutual dependence, and man’s relationship to them.19

A 1975 summary of activities and conditions at the Monument noted the limited gains in restoring the prairie, but also described the frustrations after nearly four decades of work:

Native grasses have dominated more of the prairie in the past few years, but several problem areas need further attention. A plot located at the junction of the main prairie trail and the path to the squatter’s cabin site has given the park many headaches with its serious infestation of weeds.”20

A degree of hope was pinned on a study that was proposed and contracted in 1975. Dr. Roger Q. Landers, Jr., a professor in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at Iowa State

20 Untitled overview of Homestead National Monument, June 1975, typescript MS, Section III-B, page 2; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-A, Catalog No. 7590, Box 1 Folder 1.
University, led a team that studied the status of native prairie areas that had been restored on several National Park System units throughout the Midwest, including Homestead.²¹

**Prescribed Burns**

A new tool in the management and restoration of the prairie at Homestead emerged in the 1960s: fire. Although the use of deliberately-set fires to manage vegetation for a variety of reasons was an ancient one, it was slow to gain a foothold in the management of forests and prairies in the United States by federal land managers through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its gradual acceptance through the early and mid-twentieth century coincided with an awareness at Homestead that the earlier methods of restoring the prairie to the conditions which existed at the time of Daniel Freeman’s arrival were only minimally effective. By the late 1960s, a different approach was required.

American Indians and early land managers in the southeastern United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries traditionally used fire to improve soil quality and boost crops. Later in the nineteenth century, wealthy northern industrialists began purchasing former plantations in the southeast for use as recreation properties, primarily hunting, while also seeking to make them productive by planting stands of timber. These new plantation owners in the post-bellum South adopted the traditional practice of controlled burns to maintain and improve their lands for both commercial timber production and hunting habitat. The nation’s leading foresters at the time, however, strongly opposed the idea of deliberately setting fires, seeing only the destructive power of fires and not its restorative capacity. Adopting the U.S. Army’s approach to wildfires in the late nineteenth century when it was responsible for the early Western parks, the U.S. Forest Service from the early twentieth century sought to suppress all fires. Having fought massive wildfires in the American West in the late nineteenth century, the U.S. Forest Service in particular sought always to minimize any opportunities for fire and to extinguish forest fires as quickly as possible.

In 1923, however, the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, predecessor agency to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), began a study of the decline of bobwhite, a species of quail. The study quickly focused on the degradation of habitat as a major factor in the species’ decline, which was soon attributed to a lack of fire in the forests where the bobwhite typically made their nests. The report, which was released in 1931, urged the inclusion of fire in the forest management practices in order to preserve the natural habitat for a range of wildlife species. Initially opposed vigorously by the nation’s foresters, the report and its findings gradually gained acceptance through the late 1930s and 1940s.²²

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²¹ See proposal and Memorandum of Understanding between MWRO and Iowa State University, May 15, 1975; Archives of Homestead NM; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-A, Catalog No. 7590, Box 1 Folder 1.

Some foresters in the U.S. Forest Service began to accept the role of fire, both the allowance of wildfires and the use of controlled or prescribed burns, by the 1940s. The National Park Service, however, held to a strict fire suppression policy into the 1950s. Based originally in the vast parks of the west and with a strong conservationist impulse combined with an emphasis on attracting as many people as possible to the parks, early NPS leaders sought always to preserve the forests as they found them. Fires, in this view, destroyed the forests and the ability of visitors to enjoy them and, therefore, must be suppressed. This approach remained firmly in place well into the 1950s, while occasional studies in the early and mid-1950s began to show both the positive potential for fire in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and the negative potential for making any wildfires that did occur dramatically worse.

In the early 1950s, Dr. Bill Robertson conducted the first studies of the value of managed fires in preserving the slash pine ecosystem in Everglades National Park, Florida, and, in 1958, the park became the first unit of the National Park System to use a controlled burn. The results of this initial managed fire showed the benefits in maintaining the ecosystem and reducing the threat of uncontrolled fires by removing the accumulation of hazardous fuel in the form of dead and dying vegetation. In 1955, the McGee Fire near Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in California burned approximately 13,000 acres and threatened the Grant Grove of giant sequoia trees. This fire, and the scientific studies which were published in its wake that highlighted the role of accumulated underbrush in exacerbating the fire, led NPS officials to reevaluate the strict fire suppression policies then in place. By the early 1960s, NPS Science Advisor A. Starker Leopold chaired a committee focused on providing guidance for the management of wildlife in the National Park System. The Leopold Committee Report, which was released in 1963 and influenced a generation of NPS managers, placed great emphasis on the maintenance of wildlife habitats among other management policies. As the committee explained, “Of the various methods of manipulating vegetation, the controlled use of fire is the most ‘natural’ and much the cheapest and easiest to apply.” While admitting the challenges of implementing a controlled burn for the first time after fuel had accumulated from years of fire suppression, the committee, nonetheless, touted its value.23

The restored prairie at Homestead National Monument was beginning to mature in the 1950s at the same that NPS fire policies were changing. In 1951, Soil Conservation Service Regional Range Conservationist E.J. Dyksterhuis visited Homestead National Monument and provided Superintendent Schultz with a number of guidelines for the management of the park’s prairie restoration program. Amid proscriptions on grazing by domestic livestock and the use of chemical herbicides, Dyksterhuis noted that fire had a natural relationship to mature prairies: “There can be no true prairie without a fire hazard, however, true prairie evolved with occasional fires so an occasional accidental fire now tends to simulate normal conditions.”24 In the early 1950s, however, few NPS officials were willing to accept fires, whether accidental or intentional,

24 Memorandum, E.J. Dyksterhuis to C.H. Schultz, July 20, 1951; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 19.
as beneficial, and Dyksterhuis’ recommendations took more than a decade to implement. Instead, park and regional staff, recognizing the potential for fire in the growing density of the Monument’s prairie grasses, contracted with a local farmer, Frank. R. Thimm, to mow the non-eroded areas of the property, primarily in the central forty, in 1951.25 Again in 1952, Superintendent Schultz wrote to the Regional Director recommending “the cutting of native hay in the field areas at Homestead National Monument for the purpose of fire hazard reduction. This is a continuation of the practice begun in the 1951 crop year.”26

Mowing continued to be used through the 1950s to reduce the hazard of fire and to control the growth of weeds. By the 1960s, as described earlier in this chapter, the elimination of weeds became a greater priority, and success was elusive. The park again let contracts for mowing portions of the prairie in 1967 and 1968, partly to reduce weeds. In late 1969, however, two staff members of the Soil Conservation Service visited Homestead National Monument to inspect the native grasses test plots described earlier in this chapter. While at the park, they discussed with Superintendent John Higgins the possible use of periodic fires to help the development of native grasses throughout the prairie. The SCS staff pointed out that the accumulation of litter, or dead grasses, on the ground “had reached a point where it appears to be reducing the vigor of the remaining plants. “More recent studies,” they told Superintendent Higgins, “have found that period fires are far superior for the maintenance of a vigorous native stand.” On the basis of this discussion, the Superintendent requested permission from the Midwest Regional Office to begin planning for the park’s first controlled burn. The work, which would have the twin goals of reducing litter and eliminating invading brome grass, would be done in accordance with technical standards and specifications provided by SCS.27

In January 1970, the Midwest Regional Office gave provisional concurrence and allowed planning for the controlled burn to continue. Although advising that the park would need a Vegetation Management Plan for the long-term maintenance of the prairie, the Acting Assistant Regional Director agreed that the existing practices, which relied on periodic mowing, although effective, could stand improvement. The Midwest Regional Office then sent Resource Management Specialist Fred Dickison to Homestead on April 14, 1970, where he met with Superintendent Higgins, Maintenance Worker Raymond Norman, and Peter Jensen and D.E. Hutchinson with the Soil Conservation Service. Together, they developed a plan which used the technical specifications for controlled burning as developed by the SCS and the U.S. Forest Service. Dickison approved the plan on behalf of MWRO. In accordance with the plan, and in advance of the burn, Maintenance Worker Norman mowed a ten-foot swath around the entire prairie area in the center and east forties and dug a trench at the outside edge of the swath to act as a fire break. On April 28, 1970, the conditions were favorable: temperatures between sixty and

25 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, June 8, 1951; Clarence H. Schultz to Frank R. Thimm, August 10, 1951, with a map identifying areas to be mowed and those to be avoided; see also Monthly Narrative Report for August 1951, which contains the heading “Hay Cutting for Fire Hazard Reduction,” September 13, 1951; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 19.
26 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, May 19, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 19. See also Stubbendieck and Willson, 1986.
27 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, December 8, 1969; FRC, 79-87-0003, Box 10 D54, Book 2.
seventy degrees Fahrenheit, with a steady southwest wind at ten miles per hour. Two members of the Beatrice Rural Fire Department were on site with a 1,500-gallon water tanker, and, at 1 p.m., the fire was lit at what was then the eastern edge of the park boundary, immediately west of the current Heritage Center. The fire then burned toward the southwest, into the wind. As the fire’s advance slowed, a second ignition was made at the west edge of the prairie at 3 p.m., and the work was completed by approximately 3:30 p.m.28

The results of this initial controlled burn at Homestead National Monument’s restored prairie were mixed. An initial assessment in June 1970 indicated that approximately seventy percent of the brome grass had been destroyed, along with approximately seventy-five percent of the invasive juniper trees, while the native grasses appeared to be growing with vigor. A 1986 study, however, concluded that, although approximately three-quarters of the eastern red cedar also appeared to be destroyed by the fire, many of them quickly re-sprouted. Perhaps more significant than initial effectiveness, however, was the experience that it gave the Homestead National Monument staff in the use of prescribed burning. The initial assessment in June 1970 outlined several recommendations on the basis of its first experiment with the process, including scheduling the burn when the brome grass is less than two inches high. “From our limited experience here at Homestead,” Superintendent Higgins concluded, “it appears that fire can be an extremely useful resource management tool and should be considered in other Service areas for vegetative management.”29

Although the initial prescribed burn at Homestead National Monument in 1970 was only moderately successful, resulting in a strong growth of native grasses but allowing woody species to revegetate, NPS officials at parks throughout the nation increasingly turned to controlled fires for various types of habitat management in the 1970s. Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota, for example, began a regular program of controlled burns in 1973; a study of prairie management at Homestead National Monument in the mid-1970s argued that the program at Pipestone resulted “in an increasing verification of fire management theories.” The use of fire in the restoration of prairies in the Midwest received additional support with the release of two studies in 1975. As described earlier in this chapter, Professor Roger Q. Landers at Iowa State University received NPS funding to conduct a study of the status and management of native prairie areas at National Park System units throughout the Midwest. In addition, Max W. Holden, a staff natural resource scientist at MWRO and, later, the long-serving Resource Management Specialist at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan, produced an unpublished study of the role of fire in maintaining native prairie vegetation. While Holden’s study contained background information, the Landers report provided the park with more specific guidance as to the use of fire in restoring a natural balance to the restored prairie at Homestead National Monument. Research by both Landers and Holden explicated the relationship between specific annual gestation and growing cycles and fire.

28 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Director, Midwest Region, June 4, 1970; see also Memorandum, Resource Management Specialist, Park Support Services to Director, Midwest Region, April 28, 1970; Memorandum, Acting Assistant Regional Director for Park Management to Superintendent, Homestead, April 8, 1970; FRC, 79-87-0003, Box 10, D54, Book 2. See also “Controlled Grass Fire at Homestead,” Beatrice Daily Sun, April 26, 1970, page 2.

29 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Director, Midwest Region, June 4, 1970; FRC, 79-87-0003, Box 10, D54, Book 2. See also Stubbendieck and Willson, 39.
The report by Roger Landers proved foundational for the future management of natural resources at Homestead National Monument as described later in Chapter 8. The goal of Landers’ study in 1975 was to examine prairie restoration efforts at National Park System units throughout the Midwest Region and to make recommendations for future work. For his report on Homestead National Monument, Landers provided a review of the land management practices as background for his recommendations, noting that the land was cultivated from the 1860s through 1937. Moreover, he described that the rows were oriented perpendicular to Cub Creek toward the east where the land gains elevation. These rows allowed water during high rain events to drain directly into Cub Creek which, combined with run-off from adjoining farms, created severe erosion. Moreover, the orientation of the agricultural rows leading toward the bank of Cub Creek allowed the deposition of silt along the east bank of the creek, creating a situation of poor drainage which is not conducive to growing native prairie grasses.

Landers went on to review such correspondence from the park through the 1950s and 1960s as he could to identify previous prairie restoration efforts. He focused his attention on efforts to mow the property for weed control, noting that the last time that the entire prairie area of Homestead National Monument was mowed was in 1965. The best example of mixed native prairie grasses, in his opinion, was in the sloped area at the southern edge of the park which, he suggested, was one of the oldest sections of restored prairie in the nation: “The mixture appears in places as if it had never been cultivated. It is an excellent example of prairie restoration to approximate the original.” On the other hand, the ten-acre plot that had been planted to native grasses in 1969 along the east bank of Cub Creek near the foot bridge was, within a few years, largely overgrown with weeds. This, he believed, was a result of poor drainage.

His overview of the history of the prairie restoration next focused on 1970, when seventy acres of the prairie lying south of the original route of Highway 4 was burned as described earlier in this chapter. This initial burn, he observed, removed many small trees, but, within a few years, “vigorous sprouting of other woody plants in the area occurred suggesting one burn is not very effective against most of the hardwoods.” Based on his review of prairie restoration efforts at Homestead National Monument since the late 1930s, Landers provided six recommendations. Chief among these was to continue the practice of prescribed burns, with intervals between burns for various areas of the park of up to four or five years. He also strongly urged the park to set up photograph stations at various locations of the prairie to provide future park managers with information about changes in the prairie’s vegetation over the years; the lack of such information from the first three decades of the park’s operations made it more difficult to establish what had worked in the past. In addition, he recommended against re-planting the ten-acre test plot near the Cub Creek foot bridge in native prairie grasses and against mowing the prairie near the Freeman School more than once per year. He also urged the park to establish a collection of plants and animals for use in interpretive programs, and to maintain a display of native plants along the trail. With these recommendations, Landers’ report set the stage for the modern era of resource management planning at Homestead National Monument from the late 1970s to the present.

Chapter 5: Early Research and Interpretation

Given the subtle beauty of the restored prairie, and the nearly complete absence of historic buildings, it would be easy to think that the focus of Homestead National Monument is natural, not historical. The emphasis placed on the native grasses within the peaceful sweep of the restored prairie as it rises from Cub Creek’s wooded meanders can readily distract from the historical significance of the site. Homestead National Monument of America was added to the National Park System in the mid-1930s not for its beauty but as the site of one of the first properties claimed under the Homestead Act of 1862. This piece of land, according to the park’s enabling legislation, was to be “maintained as an appropriate monument to retain for posterity a proper memorial emblematical of the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed in the settlement, cultivation, and civilization of the great West.” The park, therefore, has an educational mission at its foundation: to help future generations understand homesteading. Initially focused narrowly on the original homesteader of this property, Daniel Freeman, the interpretive program of Homestead National Monument quickly broadened to include homesteading more generally and the origins and lasting effects of the Homestead Act of 1862. Over the nine decades since development efforts began, NPS staff at Homestead National Monument have employed a range of interpretive approaches to convey the conditions the homesteaders faced, the history of this particular plot of this land, and the national sweep of homesteading from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. These approaches have included exhibits, tours of the prairie, successive generations of the latest in audio-visual technologies, and living history demonstrations. No matter the means, all these interpretive approaches are based on a core of historical research conducted by historians at the park and the Midwest Regional Office from the beginning.

Research: 1946-1970

Historical research has played a vital role in the management of Homestead National Monument from its earliest development to the present. Although there have been periods of more and less research activity, and greater or lesser emphasis on historical interpretation, the legislative foundation of the park has always been clear. Homestead National Monument was established as a historical site commemorating an important aspect of American history: the role of the Homestead Act of 1862 in the development of the nation. In addition, the site was created in part due to a historical claim: that this 160-acre parcel was the first property in the nation to be claimed, settled, and proved under the Homestead Act of 1862. Both the broad and the narrow historical issues required a foundation in research.

Chapter 3 documented the initial research efforts at Homestead National Monument. General leadership for the initial development of the park, beginning in the spring of 1939, came from the NPS Region II Office in Omaha and was assigned to Edwin A. Hummel, who served as Regional Historian from 1939 to 1949. While acknowledging the need to restore the prairie in order to create the environmental setting within which to interpret Daniel Freeman and earlier homesteading, Hummel clearly understood the need to provide a firm historical basis for interpreting the new park. In accordance with guidance from the Regional Director and NPS’ Washington Office, Hummel deliberately refrained from any plans for new buildings until the
historical basis for the park was firmly established. Among his first actions, in the spring of 1939, was to contract for a historical overview of the Freeman farm in the context of homesteading and the settlement of Nebraska generally. This document, completed in the summer of 1939, was preliminary in nature with an emphasis on the legislative origins of the Homestead Act and a brief overview of the lives of homesteaders. When the park’s first Superintendent, Clarence H Schultz, entered on duty in October 1940, he quickly prepared a plan for a research program. Schultz’ attention, however, was soon pulled away to pressing conservation matters, and his induction into the U.S. Army in June 1942 put an end to his research program.

Russell Gibbs served as Acting Superintendent from November 1942 to September 1944, and, under the direction of Regional Chief of Planning Howard W. Baker embarked on a substantial research program. This research included library and archival work, primarily in Lincoln, Nebraska, and oral history interviews with several of Daniel Freeman’s children and others who remembered homesteading in the area. As he prepared his historical narratives, Gibbs helped to suggest a broader research project that would support interpretation and exhibit programs. Before he left Homestead National Monument in the summer of 1944 to begin serving as Custodian of Fort Jefferson National Monument in Florida, he left behind several historic narratives on specific themes related to homesteading generally and the Freeman Homestead specifically, together with a vast array of notes.

**Archeological Survey**

After Gibbs left, a local civic leader, Elmer L. Hevelone, served as Custodian until Superintendent Clarence Schultz returned from his tour of duty in World War II in February 1946. Hevelone did not continue the research program which Gibbs initiated. Schultz, though he recognized the importance of historical research, also relied primarily on the work that Gibbs had done rather than initiating a new research program. When he was proposing the ambitious research program at Homestead, Regional Chief of Planning Baker also urged that it “should aim at securing every scrap of evidence and the archeological possibilities should not be dismissed without exploratory excavation under competent supervision.”

In early 1948, Superintendent Schultz coordinated with Region II Historian Olaf T. Hagen to develop an archeological excavation at Homestead National Monument. Together, they identified four sites as being of the greatest historical interest: Daniel Freeman’s 1867 cabin, a squatter’s cabin which was on the site before Freeman arrived in 1862 and where the Freemans lived until they finished their own cabin, a brick kiln which Freeman operated in the 1870s, and the Freeman’s brick home, built in 1876. The park and the Region II Office then coordinated with the Smithsonian Institution River Basin Survey program and secured the services of Archeologist J. Joseph Bauxar, with the Region II Office providing funds for his work in April 1948.

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1. Project Construction Program Proposal Form, July 22, 1942; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Cat. No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 7.
The River Basin Surveys were a joint program between NPS and the Smithsonian Institution created in 1945 and designed to salvage archeological resources in areas that had been condemned for dam and reservoir construction. With the need for electric power constantly on the rise and with the threat of floods on the Missouri River and its tributaries a constant presence, the federal government planned a series of dams that could be used for a combination of hydroelectric power, flood control, navigation improvements, and irrigation. As a component of the overall River Basin Survey program, an agreement between NPS and the Smithsonian Institution on August 7, 1945 provided for the salvage of archeological and paleontological materials in the areas that would be flooded by the Missouri River Basin projects; this work continued from 1946 until 1969. At that point, the Smithsonian Institution transferred the Lincoln Field Office of the Missouri Basin Project to NPS, which created the Midwest Archeological Center, where the majority of Homestead National Monument’s archeological collection is curated and stored. Archeology as a science goes back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but the practice of historical archeology is relatively new and emerged in the early and mid-twentieth century. Although definitions vary, historical archeology typically involves the study of the more recent past, when written and oral testimony can help to guide formal excavations. In the United States, the field of historical archeology received a substantial boost with the River Basin Survey, which funded hundreds of studies, primarily throughout the Midwest.

Bauxar, with a crew of three technicians, and in coordination with NPS Archeologist Jesse D. Jennings, worked at the site for seven weeks, from April 7 to May 26, 1948. The archeologists used the historical research that regional and park staff had compiled since 1940 to identify the likely locations of the four subject sites. In addition, they drew upon the recollections of two Freeman family members who had talked to park staff earlier in the 1940s: Mrs. D.W. Carre, Daniel Freeman’s oldest child, who was born in the squatter’s cabin, and Sam Freeman, the second child, who was born in the Freeman cabin in 1869. The purpose of the project was to verify the recollections of Mrs. Carre and Mr. Freeman as to the locations of the several buildings and to contribute to the overall interpretation of Homestead. Excavations at each of the sites consisted of a series of trenches which were laid out initially based on the oral testimony by the Freeman heirs. Power machinery was used to remove the layer of sod which had accumulated over eight years of prairie restoration to gain access to the layer where plows had disturbed the soil in previous generations. Side trenches were also excavated wherever the archeologists encountered concentrations of artifacts or other evidence of habitation.

As a result of the excavations in the spring of 1948, the Smithsonian Institution archeologists verified the location of Daniel Freeman’s cabin. The remains of the 1876 brick house were clearly visible. The excavations were not, however, successful in verifying the locations of the brick kiln and the squatter’s cabin. The time available for the excavations was too limited for a more comprehensive study, particularly of ephemeral sites with limited footprints. Despite the sparse results, however, Bauxar found reasons to be optimistic about the importance of the study. As he explained, exploratory trenches such as the ones that they excavated “frequently reveals evidence not anticipated,” including two unidentified early features at the purported location of the squatter’s cabin. In addition, Bauxar claimed that the

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study has implications for the field of historical archeology: “Of more far-reaching significance than the recovery of data pertinent to the specific problems concerned is the demonstration of the advantageous applicability and positive potentiability [sic] of the use of the archeological approach in historical research.”

Historical Handbook
Homestead National Monument operated without a historian on staff for nearly twenty years. In 1958, however, the park was planning for the Service-wide improvements of the Mission 66 program. As a part of this program, with the injection of badly-need funding, Superintendent Ralph Shaver announced the appointment of Donald G. Warman as the site’s first Historian. Warman was born in Chicago and received his BA from Park College in Parkville, Missouri, in 1953. Following two years in the U.S. Army, he received his MA in History from the University of South Dakota in 1957. He had also served as a seasonal ranger-historian at Scotts Bluff National Monument in far western Nebraska before entering on duty at Homestead National Monument on August 24, 1958. Once on staff, Warman was tasked with expanding the site’s interpretive program; in particular, he began work quickly on planning for the exhibits in the new Visitor Center, which was a key component of the Mission 66 program at Homestead National Monument.

Working with the park’s collection of artifacts and preparing for exhibits in the new Visitor Center occupied much of Warman’s time through 1959. In 1960, however, Warman recommenced the park’s research program with work at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. According to the Annual Report for 1960, Warman’s research identified information about the original vegetative cover of the Monument, and “led to the conclusion that the ‘old territorial road’ did not, in fact, traverse Homestead National Monument as Historian’s [sic] had previously thought it may have done.” As interesting as this discovery was, the larger purpose of Warman’s research was to produce a draft Historical Handbook for Homestead National Monument. Historical Handbooks were an important component in the National Park Service’s education mission at the time. The Field Division of Education of the National Park Service was created in 1929 to hire and train park naturalists and to produce a series of reports that would provide the basis for interpretation and exhibits at the parks. After NPS began to acquire historical sites in 1933, this series of educationally oriented reports came to include studies of history and archeology as well. In 1949, the first of the Historical Handbooks were published, including Custer Battlefield National Monument, Montana; Jamestown National Historic Site, Virginia; and The Lincoln Museum and Ford’s Theater, District of Columbia. These were well-

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4 Ibid., 27, 28. In 2003, Historian Todd Arrington conducted an oral history interview with Bauxar by telephone: “Mr. Bauxar is now in his mid-90s and living in California. He was very kind and, considering his age, remembered a good deal of information about his time here in the 1940s;” Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2003, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 48.

5 “Homestead Park Historian is Named,” Beatrice Daily Sun, August 28, 1958, page 1; see also Monthly Narrative Report for August 1958, September 3, 1958, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15.

6 See Chapter 6 for a more complete discussion of the Mission 66 program at Homestead National Monument.

7 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for July 1, 1959 through June 1, 1960, May 31, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 10.
illustrated volumes, with writing designed to be based in scholarly rigor but accessible to the general reading public.\(^8\)

Warman produced a draft Historical Handbook for Homestead National Monument as part of the site’s Mission 66 program. He completed his draft narrative, together with a selection of photographs and illustrations, in early 1961, and Superintendent Shaver submitted it to the Region II Office for review. The document was edited by Regional Historian Merrill Mattes and Regional Publications Officer Burton Coale. Although the text required editing, and Mattes and Coale recommended changes to some of the illustrations, both approved the text as edited and sent the revised version back to Shaver in June 1961 to have the document re-typed for submittal to the Washington Office.\(^9\) Warman, however, resigned his position in August 1961, when he accepted an offer to teach history at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. His replacement, Cecil Halliday, did not enter on duty until July 1962.\(^10\) In the meantime, Historian Ray Mattison, who had briefly served as Acting Superintendent in the early 1950s and was then serving in the Region II Office, took on the responsibility of revising the park’s Historical Handbook at the request of Region II Office officials. In addition to completing the edits requested by Mattes and Coale in 1961, Mattison shifted the document’s fundamental presentation of homesteading.

In May 1962, Mattison submitted the revised manuscript to the Regional Chief of Interpretation for subsequent transmittal to the Washington Office. In his memorandum accompanying the manuscript, Mattison waded into the contentious historiography of the Homestead Act of 1862.\(^11\) By the early 1960s, the general consensus of the Homestead Act among historians was that it was a failure in terms of its impact on land distribution and was plagued by fraud and corruption. A recent revisionist history of homesteading, drawing largely on records made available through the Homestead Land Records Project organized and co-sponsored by Homestead National Monument, summarizes in four general categories the received wisdom of homesteading as Mattison understood it:

1. Homesteading was not significant in the formation of farms, as most farmers purchased their land;
2. Most homesteaders did not prove up their claims;
3. Fraud and corruption were endemic in the homesteading process;
4. Homesteading caused Indian land dispossession.\(^12\)

These four claims were all backed by statistical studies of the records that were available at the time and led to dismissive and negative attitudes about homesteading on the part of scholars, beginning in the late 1940s and continuing to the present. In his revision of Warman’s Historical Handbook, Mattison was expressly influenced by the scholars who argued for this...
negative assessment of homesteading; he noted in his cover memorandum that this approach contradicted the official position of the Bureau of Land Management. As he explained to the Regional Chief of Interpretation,

I believe in this handbook it should be strongly emphasized that (1) Homestead National Monument is located in a region where the Homestead Law was a relative success; (2) that most homesteading was done after 1890 in the semi-arid regions of the West where the law was inadequate; (3) that in the overall distribution of public lands, the Homestead Act has been generally overrated; (4) the Law fell far short of attaining the objectives that its sponsors had hoped to achieve.

Mattison stated that he drew his conclusions from statistical studies of homesteading from the past decade, and he provided a series of graphs; he argued emphatically for their inclusion as a way “to put the Homestead Law in perspective in the handbook.” He also offered to provide “a documented manuscript of the handbook” should the Washington Office wish it. Finally, he noted that his handbook placed less emphasis on the life of the average homesteader and more on the operation of the Homestead Act in the history of the West “than in the original [Warman] submission.”

A week later, Assistant Regional Director George E. Baggley forwarded Mattison’s manuscript to NPS Director Conrad L. Wirth. In his transmittal memorandum, Baggley argued that Mattison “has not attempted to dramatize or overglamorize the effect of the Homestead Act and the role of Daniel Freeman as a first homesteader.” He also argued that every effort should be made to have the Historical Handbook ready for publication by 1963, “which is also being observed as a centennial for the Homestead Act.”

At this point, the manuscript languished in the Washington Office. In early 1964, however, George B. Hartzog, Jr. replaced Conrad Wirth as NPS Director and soon began placing a greater emphasis on producing historical handbooks for popular consumption. In the spring of 1966, Regional Publications Specialist Coale contacted Historian Len Brown at Homestead National Monument, requesting Brown’s assistance in re-starting the process. Coale noted that both Warman’s and Mattison’s manuscripts were then in circulation, and that “For some reason, unknown to me, Warman’s manuscript was rejected by the historians in this [MWRO] office. I therefore think we should use Ray Mattison’s manuscript as a jumping-off place for a new publication.” Coale went on to observe that the Washington Office was placing a greater emphasis on historical handbooks, particularly their popular appeal, and that the publications office in the Washington Office “will not consider a publication as an historical or natural history handbook unless it has been given the creative writing ‘treatment’ by an outfit in New York.” The cost of this editorial work, “which may run as high as $500,” had to come from the region or the park that sponsored the book; “if the area can’t afford it, the material is then returned without further consideration.” Coale, therefore, recommended that Historian Brown and Homestead

13 Memorandum, Historian to Regional Chief of Interpretation, Region Two, May 8, 1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1 Folder 7.
14 Memorandum, Assistant Regional Director, Region Two, to The Director, May 17, 1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1, Folder 7.
Superintendent John Rohn coordinate with the newly-formed Homestead Historical Association, which served as a Cooperating Association, to secure funding.\textsuperscript{15}

The book remained in limbo in the Washington Office (WASO) until the summer of 1969. Having two versions added to the complications. While both Homestead and MWRO staff changed over the next three years, Regional Publications Specialist Burt Coale remained in place. During this time, Ray Mattison left NPS to serve as Superintendent of the North Dakota State Historical Society, and Historian Len Brown transferred to the Washington Service Center; Clifford Soubier replaced Brown as Historian at Homestead National Monument. In July 1969, Coale contacted Soubier, requesting a copy of Donald Warman’s version of the handbook, explaining that he had heard that WASO History Editor Ray Baker found several statements in Mattison’s version that could not be documented. Instead, he would have Len Brown complete the editing to Warman’s version. In the meantime, however, a reviewer with the Bureau of Land Management provided a highly critical assessment of Warman’s manuscript. In response, Historian Baker recommended using Mattison’s manuscript but with substantial editing. Baker and other colleague in the WASO Office of Publications then recommended that Historian Soubier be detailed to WASO to complete the revisions, “and perhaps inject a little environmental education into the manuscript, which I am certain is missing in it now.”\textsuperscript{16}

In late August 1969, after meeting with Baker and Brown in Washington, Coale formally asked Soubier to write additional paragraphs for a revised version of Mattison’s version of the Historical Handbook. As evidenced by other work he did while on staff at Homestead, Soubier was passionate about environmental protection and attuned to the relationship between frontier settlement and the environment. He provided two passages to Coale in September 1969, and, in both of them, brought these concerns together. One of the passages in particular illustrates Soubier’s approach:

There are certain words which have acquired a special meaning against the background of the American experience. Frontier is such a word; homestead is another. In 1862 the latter word became law and helped to settle the nation. The frontier of wilderness and buffalo is gone, but the enormous energies of the American people did not dissipate when settlement reached the Pacific ocean [sic]. Frontiers of technology and of human rights remain to challenge the courageous. As a promise of free land, the Homestead has taken its place in history. The word itself now returns to its ancient meanings: the home place, the place of house and family. But, wrought by the pioneer experience, the word is changed for all time. It speaks of a faith in the land and in the freedom born of holding the land in trust for all men.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Memorandum, Burt Coale, MWRO to Len Brown, Historian, Homestead, March 23, 1966; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1 Folder 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Memorandum-Telephone Record, Jim Murfin and Ray Baker, Office of Publications, WASO to Burt Coale, August 14, 1969. See also Cliff Soubier, Homestead to Burt Coale, MWRO, July 2, 1969; Coale to Soubier, July 29, 1969; Coale to Soubier, August 8, 1969. Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1 Folder 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Two passages are attached to a Memorandum, Soubier to Coale, September 5, 1969; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1 Folder 3.
Soubier’s text was added to the revised manuscript, which also included material from Russell Gibbs’ draft manuscript which he produced while serving as Acting Superintendent from 1942 to 1944. Len Brown had suggested this addition and, as a result, was asked to review the revised manuscript yet again in September 1969. The document received another review the following month by Professor Ray M. Robbins of the Department of History at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Although Professor Robbins’ material was incorporated in a revised manuscript, the record of the Historical Handbook of Homestead National Monument ended in late October 1969; no further mention of it was found during research for this administrative history, and the document was never published.18

The tortuous process that allowed the historical handbook for Homestead National Monument to languish, and eventually be abandoned, had implications for the park that lingered for decades. The historical handbook, which was intended to provide a deeper understanding of homesteading and its role in American history for the park’s interpretation program and the general public, soon became the subject of a debate among historians in the Regional and Washington offices that failed to include park staff. After Superintendent Shaver submitted a revised version of Donald Warman’s initial draft in 1961, the park’s superintendents throughout the 1960s were responsible primarily for supplying funds for the handbook’s editing but not for the content itself. Without a chance to influence the project, the superintendents were not able to see that the handbook benefited the park’s ability to tell the story of homesteading. In addition, the dismissal of Warman’s draft in favor of a more skeptical, if not negative, understanding of homesteading cast doubts on the value of the story told at the park. The skepticism about homesteading as expressed by NPS historians reflected back to the park and resulted in a loss of momentum for its historical interpretation. Without a solid historical basis for interpreting homesteading and its impact on American history, the focus of the park’s interpretation program more easily turned toward environmental history and the park’s natural resources.

Administrative History

During planning for the park’s Mission 66 redevelopment, Region Two Historian Mattison also prepared the park’s first Administrative History. In 1954, Mattison had served briefly as the park’s Acting Superintendent following the departure of the park’s first Superintendent, Clarence Schultz and, as shown in his work on the Historical Handbook, retained his association with the site as Region II Historian. Superintendent Hotchkiss was also deeply involved in the preparation of the Administrative History and, in the spring of 1961, contacted NPS Chief Historian Herbert Kahler regarding obtaining early records pertaining to Homestead National Monument. Kahler replied with copies of legislative records and other files pertaining to the park, and he provided additional suggestions as well. In particular, he observed that the Bureau of Land Management had recently challenged the claim that Homestead National Monument was the nation’s first homestead taken under the Homestead Act. He doubted that

18 Memorandum, Acting Assistant Regional Director, Operations Midwest Region to The Director, September 11, 1969 and October 20, 1969. The last reference to the Historical Handbook is a letter from Coale to the President of the Faculty Women’s Club at South Dakota State University, requesting assistance with identifying illustrations; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-2, Catalog No. 7635, Box 1 Folder 3. There is no record of the Historical Handbook having been produced.
research would substantiate Daniel Freeman’s claim to be the nation’s first homesteader, and he urged the park to focus its interpretive efforts on “the story of the free land made possible by the Homestead Act. . . .If the emphasis is placed on the free land policy of the United States and its part in the settlement of the West, it will make little difference was whether Daniel Freeman’s claim was first or just one of the early ones.”

While Mattison’s Administrative History did not venture into the park’s interpretation of Freeman and the overall homestead story, he included in it several paragraphs related to Freeman’s claim and the claims made by others to have been the nation’s first homesteader. His conclusion was that no final determination could be made among the several claimants to the title of the nation’s first homesteader. This discussion, however, was a small component of the Administrative History, focused primarily on the park’s local origins and legislative history with smaller sections on the actions of Superintendent Schultz and the initial Mission 66 planning. He completed the study in the summer of 1961, which Superintendent Hotchkiss then forwarded to the Regional Director. In his transmittal memorandum, Superintendent Hotchkiss explained that two of the proposed chapters, on initial development and wartime problems, and on the post-war years, could not be completed because “There is no information whatsoever in our files which would permit us to write such a history. Our earliest files go back to about 1948, and before that we have no records at all.”

Mattison’s Administrative History was then published as a long article in *Nebraska History*, the journal of the Nebraska State Historical Society, in 1962.

**Interpretation: Early Steps**

Historic sites still represented a new direction for NPS when Congress approved the legislation establishing Homestead National Monument in March 1936. Even the idea of interpretation and education at National Parks was barely a decade old at the time. NPS Director Horace Albright, however, was enthusiastic about the possibilities of historic preservation, and saw historical sites as a natural extension of the idea of National Parks. His successor, Arno B. Cammerer, likewise, eagerly supported the selection and development of historic sites throughout the nation as a new branch of the Service developed policies and procedures to manage them. As a result, developing Homestead National Monument physically and planning for its interpretation were parts of the NPS’ experimental approach with regard to historic sites when Regional Historian Edwin A. Hummel was assigned the task of developing the site in early 1939.

Historic site interpretation often appears such a straightforward thing: guides leading tours through an old building, pointing out furnishings, and telling stories about the former inhabitants. It is, of course, far more complicated than that and has been greatly contested throughout the history of the National Park Service. NPS began to develop an approach to interpretation and public education at parks in 1919 and 1920. In doing so, NPS Director Stephen Mather had to overcome strong opposition from politically influential figures who sought to

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20 Memorandum, Superintendent to Regional Director, August 21, 1961; Files of Homestead NM, H14.
maintain the parks as places of recreation and esthetic enjoyment. The idea gained traction in the early 1920s, though, that NPS staff at the parks could and should help visitors gain a greater understanding of the natural wonders that surrounded them. Interpretation was, therefore, oriented primarily toward natural resources in its early years. The National Park Service’s interpretive program grew quickly through the early 1920s, and an Education Division was created in 1923; two years later, it was one of three co-equal divisions within NPS. Based in Berkeley, California, the Division was headed by the NPS Chief Naturalist. Finally, in 1930, Director Albright replaced the original Education Division with the Branch of Research and Education, which he relocated to the Washington, DC Office (WASO). The principal objective of interpretation, according to a 1929 NPS committee report, is “to make possible the maximum of understanding and appreciation of the greater characteristic park features by the visitor, together with the stimulation of his thinking.”

Given the foundations of the NPS interpretive program in the great western parks, the introduction of historical sites within the National Park Service provided new challenges. Historical sites, Albright and his staff realized, required a different approach as they were in greater need of interpretation for their understanding and enjoyment than parks where recreation and esthetic pleasure would satisfy many visitors. In order to lead NPS in developing new approaches, Director Albright appointed Verne Chatelain as the first NPS Chief Historian in 1931. Chatelain, according to Barry Mackintosh, “regarded interpretive potential as paramount in selecting historical additions to the National Park System.”

Chatelain’s vision was of the National Park System offering educational opportunities for understanding key episodes in American prehistory and history. As described in an early history of the National Park System, Chatelain recognized that it was desirable to extend the system to include most historic sites of national importance and to integrate the various pre-Columbian, colonial, military and other historically significant areas into a unified system which would tell the story of the United States from the earliest times.

The role of historic sites within NPS gained more prominence in the early 1930s, particularly after 1933, when President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order that brought all historical monuments and parks, including national battlefields, under the authority of NPS. The range of NPS historical sites became much larger, and their interpretive potential and popularity with visitors inspired NPS to seek additional sites. Under the direction of NPS Director Cammerer, the Branch of Historic Sites was established on July 1, 1935; less than two months later, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which gave NPS an even clearer Congressional mandate to care for and interpret historic sites, including creating museums and developing educational programs.

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22 The 1929 quotation is from “General Plan of Administration for the Educational Division,” June 4, 1929, quoted in Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (History Division, National Park Service, 1986), 83-84.
23 Ibid., 21.
25 Ibid., 35; see also Mackintosh, 22.
Potential for Reconstruction

One of the key difficulties new historic sites posed for NPS was their condition. The first historic site Director Albright brought into the National Park System, George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Virginia, exemplified the challenges. Although the overall site was clearly identified, the specific location of the house was not. A private association, however, was committed to reconstructing a house of the type in which President Washington might have been born. The accuracy of the location and the type of house was almost immediately called into question, both within and without NPS, and it has continued to confuse visitors. Throughout the 1930s, NPS officials debated “the extent to which altered sites and structures should be restored or reconstructed.”26 As the debate progressed, NPS officials became increasingly wary of historical reconstruction.

Regional Historian Hummel was clearly aware of these debates in 1939 when he announced that NPS had no immediate plans to recreate any of the buildings at Homestead National Monument from Daniel Freeman’s time.27 This decision led to an early emphasis on historical research to understand the general context of homesteading and the specifics of Daniel Freeman and his farm. As efforts to restore the prairie continued into the early 1940s, the question of whether and how to rebuild period-appropriate agricultural buildings at Homestead National Monument was the subject of debate within NPS. In July 1942, Acting Supervisor of Historic Sites Herbert Kahler, who later served as NPS Chief Historian from 1951 to 1964, summarized the debates in a memorandum to NPS Director Arthur E. Demaray. After acknowledging “the divergent views expressed by Service officials on the policy and procedure of planning the exhibits and interpretive features of Homestead National Monument” and noting that there were no fixed rules regarding the restoration and reconstruction of historic buildings, Kahler went on to discuss the particular situation of the Monument. The site is unlike many of the Service’s historical sites, he observed, in that the location itself “is not of great historic significance;” it was, he explained, just one of many isolated farms on small plots throughout the Midwest. “Those of us who have viewed the site at Homestead,” he recalled, “have been struck by the bleak scene, bare of all buildings and distinguishing landmarks, as plain and obscure as any anonymous segment of the plains which might be seen from a train window in Kansas or Nebraska.” Instead, in his opinion, its significance was in what it represents: the process of homesteading, which has great national significance. Freeman’s farm, he concluded, is “but a representative segment abstracted from a larger canvas which depicts a pageant of history truly of national sweep.”28

In his memorandum, though, Kahler did not rule out the possibility of reconstructing a typical homestead farm, adding that the site’s construction plan called for several years of study of homesteads by historians and architects. He predicted that there may be public pressure to reconstruct typical farm buildings at the site since this seemed to be expected: “that is an erroneous impression which grows out of the cumulative experiences of the American public with numerous other historical reconstructions, not consonant with Park Service policies and ideals on restoration.” Sufficient time and research would be required, he recommended, to make

26 Mackintosh, 26.
27 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this approach.
28 Herbert E. Kahler, Memorandum for the Director, July 6, 1942; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-1, Catalog No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25.
sure that any reconstructions would not just meet the highest standards of accuracy, but would also allow the visitors to gain an immersive experience:

we must so contrive this historical recreation that the impression felt by the visitor is not merely one of abstract intellectual perception but is more than that, an authentic thrilling experience which the modern individual beholder relives and participates in emotionally.

This program, he concluded, must be based on solid historical and archeological research which would provide the basis for exhibits and for in-person interpretation.  

Kahler outlined his program for a comprehensive, research-based interpretive program just as Superintendent Schultz was preparing to leave for duty with the U.S. Army during World War II. While Acting Superintendent Russell Gibbs continued with a historical research program, other interpretive planning was put on hold until after the war ended. In 1947, as planning at the park was recommencing, initial park construction project proposals included reconstructing buildings associated with the Freeman farm. As the priority list was refined, however, the Region II Office removed reconstruction from the priority list entirely, deferring it until the park and the Region II Office could finalize an Interpretive Development Outline. In its place, the Region II Office included historical and archeological research, construction of a Superintendent’s Residence, a water and sewer system, and general rehabilitation projects.  

**Palmer-Epard Cabin**

While there were no plans to reconstruct a historic building at Homestead National Monument, Superintendent Schultz was interested in providing for the historical interpretation of the site and was open to the possibility of relocating a historic building. In 1941, Schultz heard about a cabin located approximately fourteen miles northeast of Beatrice. The cabin had been built by a homesteader, George Washington Palmer, in the fall of 1867. Palmer brought his wife and children to the homestead in the spring of 1868; by 1873, the couple had five children including Herbert Palmer, born in 1872. George Washington Palmer sold the cabin and surrounding property in 1895 to his nephews, Eugene Mumford and William Foreman. In approximately 1900, the property was again sold to Lawrence and Ida Mumford Epard. The Epards then lived in the cabin until Lawrence’s death in 1936. Their son J.B. Epard inherited the property at that time. Superintendent Schultz investigated the cabin after hearing about it in the fall of 1941. Epard, however, was asking $1,000 for the cabin only, and Schultz did not have that much money in his budget. He examined other cabins in Gage and Jefferson Counties, but none was as well preserved as the Palmer-Epard cabin. At that time, Epard was not interested in donating the cabin to NPS, and the matter lay dormant throughout WWII.  

In the summer of 1948, Schultz met at Homestead National Monument with NPS Chief Historian Ronald F. Lee, Acting Region II Historian Olaf Hagen, and Regional Historian Merrill

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29 Ibid. A handwritten note at the end the document reads “I concur, A.E.D. [presumably Arthur E. Demaray]

30 Memorandum, Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam to the Director, April 25, 1947; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Catalog No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 9.

Mattes, then serving as NPS Historian for the Missouri River Basin Survey. While recognizing that the Monument’s interpretive plan had not yet been finalized, all agreed on the usefulness of having an authentic homestead-era farm building for interpretive purposes. On the basis of this meeting, Regional Director Howard D. Baker authorized funds from the Missouri River Basin Survey to allow Superintendent Schultz to travel to proposed reservoir sites in Nebraska in order to locate and evaluate potential buildings for relocation.\textsuperscript{32} Schultz, with the input of Regional Historian Mattes, examined several potential buildings and rejected most on the basis of age or condition. Finally, in late spring of 1950, Schultz returned to J.B. Epard’s farm and Epard agreed to donate the cabin to NPS. John B. Epard offered to donate the building to NPS “on the condition that it be off his farm before ‘corn listing time.’” NPS Director Newton B. Drury approved the donation on May 9, 1950. On the same day, the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce agreed to contribute $200 to the relocation of the building, and NPS paid the remaining $95 charged by the contractor (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{33} 

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure19.png}
\caption{A 1950 photograph of the Palmer-Epard Cabin. Source: \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{32} Memorandum, Regional Director Howard W. Baker to Custodian, Homestead National Monument, September 24, 1948; see also follow-up memoranda, October 1, 1948 and October 8, 1948. Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-V-E-1, Catalog No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25.

\textsuperscript{33} Pope and Brown, 7. See also “Log Cabin Starts Move to Freeman Homestead,” \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun}, June 6, 1950, page 1. See also Monthly Narrative Report for May 1950, June 14, 1950; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-2-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 8. The analysis of a rejected cabin can be seen in Memorandum, Clarence M. Schultz to Regional Director, January 6, 1949; Archives of Homestead National Monument, Collection 100-V-E-1, Catalog No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25.
The building, which had been modernized but still retained its essential architectural character, was restored over the course of the next year, including removing modern siding, re-chinking logs, and repairing the roof, walls, and windows to make them waterproof. Artifacts in the Monument’s Mayerhoff-Dietz collection, donated by Gage County in 1948 (see Chapter 7), were used to furnish the building. It opened to the public in the summer of 1952 and served as one of the components of Homestead National Monument’s interpretive program.34

The Palmer-Epard Cabin supplemented the Homestead National Monument’s other interpretive programs, which were still in development in the early and mid-1950s. Through the latter part of the 1950s, interpretation at Homestead National Monument consisted of several components. The Utility Building, which was completed in 1941 largely to serve as a maintenance facility and temporary office space, also served as an initial visitor contact station with exhibits. The exhibits in the Utility Building, as with those in the Palmer-Epard Cabin, drew primarily from the Mayerhoff-Dietz collection; other exhibits included photographs or other graphic materials that the park had acquired more recently. Homestead National Monument staff changed the exhibits occasionally to make it more appealing to local Beatrice residents who brought guests to see the site. The ability to rotate the exhibits was limited, however, by a shortage of staff time and by the many thousands of artifacts that were, as yet, unprocessed and, therefore, could not be used.35

The more severe restriction for exhibits in the Utility Building through the early 1960s was space. The building was intended to provide space for equipment and an office; increased interest in the site through the late 1940s and the early 1950s required a degree of improvisation when it came to exhibits. A revised draft Master Plan for Homestead National Monument, prepared in 1959, provided a description of the site’s exhibit on the eve of the new Mission 66 Visitor Center:

The present museum facilities are located in one room of the utility building. This room, adjoining the Superintendent’s office, measures approximately twelve by fourteen feet. Two store display cases and one small display case contain a limited number of homestead artifacts and photographs. One wall is covered with painted pegboard, and serves as a display rack for various small agricultural implements used by the homesteaders. One section of the garage is also used for the display of artifacts, which are mounted on the wall of the tool room and shown in an old store showcase.36

34 See untitled monthly or annual summary, June 20, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 3. See also restoration update in Monthly Narrative Report for August 1951, September 13, 1951; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 9.
35 “A gradual change of the exhibits in the temporary museum and the Palmer Epard historical cabin is being made so as to hold the interest of the local people who bring their guests to the Monument,” Monthly Narrative Report, December 2, 1955; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 13. See also 1957 Annual Report on Information and Interpretive Services, January 14, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-B, Catalog No. 7581, Box 1 Folder 16.
36 Master Plan Redraft, June 12, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-C, Catalog No. 7614, Box 1 Folder 3.
Prairie Trail

Two other approaches to interpretation were introduced in the mid-1950s. In 1955, with the prairie restoration coming to fruition, Superintendent George Blake initiated the development of a self-guided trail. The park created a pilot program in the early summer of 1955, at the same time as the original alignment of Nebraska Highway 4 was being altered to its present course. The initial self-guided trail extended from the Utility Building across what was then the Highway 4 bridge into the prairie, where it formed a small loop. Park staff mowed a path through the prairie grasses and improved the trail with gravel and drainage tiles. Interpretation focused exclusively on the park’s natural resources, with signs identifying species of prairie grasses and trees. As Superintendent Blake observed in his annual report, the “work done on this, is of a temporary nature to actually determine if a self-guiding trail will be practical and of interest to the public.” While the confusion of the adjacent highway construction meant that the trail “has not been given a fair trial to find out the visitors’ opinion,” Blake expressed confidence that the trail would be appreciated.\(^37\)

The initial trail proved popular through 1955 and 1956. Late in 1956, Superintendent Ralph Shaver, who replaced Superintendent Blake in April 1956, coordinated with Regional Historian Merrill Mattes to develop new trailside exhibits. The goal of the new exhibits was to extend the trail further to the east to the historical points on the property. Superintendent Shaver prepared the initial exhibit content and sent the material to Mattes for review. Mattes then sent the material to the WASO Branch of Museums. The Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC) in San Francisco, California, provided the plans for exhibit shelters (Figure 20). Region Two Office staff awarded the contract for constructing the exhibit shelters in November 1957, and they were constructed and installed in time for the 1958 season. These were substantial structures of wood, with a shallow gable roof protecting a large rectangular area for the interpretive sign, which was framed by broad wooden legs that raised the exhibit panel approximately two feet off the ground (Figure 20). As completed in June 1958, the program included trailside exhibit signs for the Freeman cabin, the brick Freeman house, farm buildings, the Agnes Freeman Suiter cabin, and the site of the squatter’s cabin. The trail extended approximately 0.8 miles through the prairie and the wooded area along Cub Creek. At the same time, the Monument replaced two entrance signs and two directional signs on nearby roads, which had deteriorated since their original construction in the early 1940s.\(^38\) By the early 1960s, all of the wooden signs were replaced with cast aluminum interpretive signs using Metalphoto, a brand of photosensitive anodized aluminum, for the illustrations.\(^39\)

\(^{37}\) Annual Report for 1955, June 30, 1955; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 5.

\(^{38}\) “Completion Report and Supporting Documents: Signs and Markers, Homestead National Monument, Beatrice, Nebraska,” June 1958; Homestead NM Archive. See also Monthly Narrative Report for January 1957, November 1957, March 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15. See also Master Plan Redraft, June 12, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.007003, Catalog No. 7614, Box 1 Folder 3.

\(^{39}\) Memorandum, Regional Naturalist to Assistant Regional Director, November 23, 1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 6.
A second development in the 1950s was technological. By the mid-1950s, a number of parks were beginning to use visitor-activated audiovisual devices to assist in interpretation. Essentially automated slide projectors with a speaker for voice narration, these devices allowed for base-level orientation to a site. Because they could be prepared in advance with input from park and Region Two Office staff, they provided an assured and consistent quality.\textsuperscript{40}

Homestead National Monument staff began preparing for the use of an automated slide project in late 1956. The \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun} ran an article on behalf of the park in November 1956, seeking the loan of historic photographs showing the homesteading era. The photographs were needed, according to the article, “to make slides to be used in a projector at the Homestead National Monument.” Superintendent Shaver explained that several subjects in particular would be helpful, including farm activities, domestic work, animal husbandry, blacksmithing, wagon trains, and images of the Freeman family.\textsuperscript{41} Over the winter, the Superintendent prepared the slides and a script for narration which he forwarded to the Region Two Office for review in April 1957. The vehicle for the narrated slide program would be an Admatic machine, which had a capacity for thirty slides and ten minutes of narration. The slide program was reviewed at the Region Two Office and at WASO through the summer of 1957, and the machine and finished

\textsuperscript{40} Mackintosh, 39.

\textsuperscript{41} “Homestead is Looking For Old Photographs of Pioneer Days,” \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun}, November 13, 1956, page 1.
Figure 21: David Shaver, son of Superintendent Ralph Shaver, looking at the Admatic slide machine. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun

Figure 22: Herbert Palmer, last child born in the Palmer-Epard Cabin in 1872, viewing the Admatic slide machine in 1958. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument
program were delivered to the park in September 1957. Superintendent Shaver received assistance from the Washington Audio-Visual Laboratory in setting up the equipment. Despite technical challenges and electrical difficulties, the Admatic was ready in late fall. The machine, with thirty slides and eight minutes of narration, was put in operation on December 10, 1957 (Figures 21, 22).

Unfortunately, the Admatic machine, despite its interpretive potential, was notoriously unreliable and frequently broke down. It was inoperable for a significant portion of the 1960 season as technicians sought to identify the problem. The larger problems identified in 1960 were its size and the inability to adapt it to particular situations. Physical space in the Utility Building was extremely limited, and the Admatic machine, together with those watching it, took up a great deal of the available space. The annual interpretive report for 1960, prepared on the eve of the opening of the new Visitor Center, described the problems succinctly:

The major flaw at present is the inflexibility of the audio-visual presentation. The Admatic program is by its very nature fixed and not adaptable to special needs and situations, and it occasionally causes a bottleneck during period of heavy traffic. However, until more flexible facilities are available in the new Visitor Center, the Admatic serves a necessary function. Although other audio-visual equipment is on hand, lack of space and seating facilities prevent its use on-site.

While early visitors had no opportunities for formal tours, NPS staff contact was an important component of Homestead National Monument’s interpretive program. Various records during the mid-1950s indicate that the Superintendent interacted with eighty to ninety percent of the visitors to the site, providing them with basic information and pointing out features of the exhibits in the Utility Building and on the grounds. The first seasonal tour leader was hired at Homestead National Monument in June 1952: James R. Rinne was then a junior history major at Doane College in Crete, Nebraska. Each summer thereafter, a seasonal employee, typically a student or recent graduate in history, served at Homestead National Monument, providing interpretive services. Finally, in 1958, with funds provided under the Mission 66 program and twenty-one years after the park was established, the Region Two Office hired the first full-time permanent Historian for the Monument. Donald Warman came to Homestead National Monument from Scotts Bluff National Monument near Gering, Nebraska, where he had served as a seasonal ranger-historian. A U.S. Army veteran, Warman had received his M.A. degree from the University of South Dakota in 1957. Warman was tasked with assisting the Superintendent in providing interpretation to visitors, though his principal role was to develop an exhibit plan for the proposed new Visitor Center and to complete the cataloging of the park’s museum collection.

42 Monthly Narrative Report, April 4, 1957, and January 2, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 14. See also photo caption, Beatrice Daily Sun, October 14, 1957, page 1.
43 Annual Report on Information and Interpretive Services, January 4, 1961; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-B, Catalog No. 7581, Box 1 Folder 19.
44 Monthly Narrative Report, July 14, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 10.
Mission 66: Visitor Center Exhibits

Planning and Development

The principal focus of interpretive activity in the late 1950s and early 1960s was preparing for the new Visitor Center. The Mission 66 program was a massive, Service-wide attempt to revitalize the National Park System in the post-WWII era. NPS Director Newton Drury first identified the crisis facing the Service in 1949. The return of peace after the war, the booming post-war economy, and the proliferation of automobiles led to a vast increase in the number of visitors to the National Parks; visitation increased nearly ten-fold from 1931 to 1948, rising from 3,500,000 to near 30,000,000, and continued to rise through the 1950s. Unfortunately, after the heyday of the New Deal, when funds for the parks were plentiful, the drastically reduced wartime budgets remained in place for a decade after the war ended in 1945. The increased visitation at the nation’s parks placed enormous pressures on basic maintenance and preservation that could not be met. The financial stress placed on infrastructure, moreover, meant that parks were unable to keep pace with the increased public demands for interpretation.46

After Drury first described the crisis in 1949, conditions at the parks only became worse in the early 1950s. The situation gained the attention of the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in early 1954, when he requested a briefing from Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay. With growing support from within the Eisenhower administration, NPS Director Conrad Wirth initiated planning for “a comprehensive program to launch the Park Service into the modern age” in early 1955. Wirth proposed a complete ten-year budget for improvements, rather than annual budgets, with enough funding for National Park System units throughout the nation to draw the interest of members of Congress, who always sought funding for their districts. As Architectural Historian Sarah Allaback observed, “Congressmen who wanted real improvements for the parks in their districts would support increased appropriations for the entire construction period.” In Wirth’s proposal, the fifty-year anniversary of the National Park Service in 1966 would provide the end-point for the ten-year budget period, and the scale of the proposed improvements would allow Congress and NPS to generate a great deal of public support. The program included a nearly $700,000,000 budget that provided for new and repaired roads and bridges, new employees, new and renovated facilities, improved employee housing, and obtaining land for new parks. It would also provide a degree of uniformity across the National Park System, with each unit having “a uniform entrance marker listing park resources, a minimum number of employees, paved trails to popular points of interest, and other amenities; visitors could expect the same basic facilities in every park.”47

Internal NPS planning began in early 1955, and President Eisenhower gave his approval in January 1956. The Mission 66 program was announced to the public the next month. Coordinating with Region Two Office staff, Superintendent Blake began work immediately to begin developing a Mission 66 Prospectus for Homestead National Monument outlining the park’s needs and how it would use Mission 66 funding. Superintendent Shaver entered on duty in April 1956 and continued the planning effort. The Mission 66 Prospectus was initially completed

47 Ibid.
in May 1956 and approved by the Region Two Office a year later. It was then revised by WASO and approved in June 1958, though the proposed budget was reduced in early 1959.\textsuperscript{48}

Homestead’s Mission 66 proposal contained several components including new staff positions, new buildings, a new footbridge over Cub Creek, and expanded prairie trails. By early 1956, the park’s permanent staff included the Superintendent and a part-time clerk-typist, with the addition of a seasonal ranger and seasonal laborer during the summer months. As proposed, the new staff would be organized into three divisions: Interpretation and Protection, Administration, and Maintenance, each reporting to the Superintendent. The Interpretation and Protection Division included a new permanent Historian, two seasonal Historian-Rangers, and one seasonal Ranger. The Administration Division would include a permanent, full-time Clerk-Typist, and the Maintenance Division would include a permanent, full-time Laborer and a seasonal Laborer. The proposed staff changes were implemented over the course of several years. Donald Warman entered on duty as Historian in August 1956, but Clerk-Typist Evelyn B. Carlson, who had been employed on a part-time basis in May 1953, was not appointed permanent Clerk-Typist until August 1960. A full-time Maintenance Worker, Raymond E. Norman, was not hired until November 1962.

Homestead’s Mission 66 proposal included two new buildings, both to be located at the headquarters area near the existing Utility Building. With the proposed addition of a new permanent Historian, the Mission 66 plan at Homestead called for a second residence in addition to the Superintendent’s residence, which was built in 1950. After several delays, this second residence was finally completed in late 1965.\textsuperscript{49} Of greater importance to the park’s interpretive program, however, the Mission 66 proposal included a new Visitor Center. This new building would allow expansion of the park’s interpretive program by providing significantly more space for exhibits and the audio-visual program, together with providing office space for the new positions funded under Mission 66. The program also proposed additional infrastructure, including a new footbridge across Cub Creek, an extension of the water and sewer system, and paving new and existing parking areas and trails. The Mission 66 program at Homestead specifically did not include provisions for camping, and picnicking “is being discouraged as much as possible.”\textsuperscript{50}

The Mission 66 Prospectus developed in 1956 provided only the outlines of an interpretive program based at the new Visitor Center. According to the Prospectus, the new building would serve as “the hub” of the new program, which would include an exhibit to fulfill the requirements of the enabling legislation regarding interpreting the hardships of pioneer life. The exhibit would contain small agricultural implements in a museum setting, together with a large-scale outdoor exhibit to supplement the Palmer-Epard Cabin. The Visitor Center would also house a library of materials as required by the enabling legislation. The prairie trails would

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{48} “Mission 66 Prospectus: Homestead National Monument, May 17, 1956;” annotations in pencil on the cover page note that the document was approved May 9, 1957, then revised April 17, 1958, and approved by WASO June 13, 1958; pencil annotations to the budget are dated January 1959. Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-C, Catalog No. 7586, Box 1, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{49} The construction of buildings will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{50} “Mission 66 Prospectus,” 12.
\end{footnotesize}
remain in place, for which tours could be arranged in advance, and restoration of the Freeman farm buildings was specifically excluded.

Details of the interpretive program for the new building, particularly for the exhibit, were worked out in the late 1950s and 1960s after Historian Donald Warman entered on duty. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, one of his first duties was to update and complete the cataloging of the museum collections. Historian Warman took the lead on organizing the site’s museum collection into a unified system. Superintendent Shaver provided the assistance of seasonal ranger-historians when available, and Clerk-Typist Evelyn Carlson organized and typed the labels and records. In late 1957, WASO Museum Curator Vera Craig visited the park to help set up the records system and took advantage of the opportunity to work with MWRO Museum Curator Newell Joyner, formerly the long-time superintendent of Devil’s Tower National Monument in Wyoming. Joyner returned to Homestead in June 1958 to provide further assistance. Warman substantially completed the museum cataloging project in late May 1959, and the record was officially declared complete as of January 1, 1960, with a total of 1,649 accessioned records.51

With the artifact cataloging well under way, Warman and Shaver began work on the exhibit planning. In November 1958, they traveled to Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa and Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota, two parks which were then also moving ahead with Mission 66 projects, to examine museum exhibits and plans and interpretive programs at those parks. On the way back to Beatrice, they spent two days at the Region Two Office in Omaha to review the status of exhibit planning and the Museum Prospectus. As a result of their meeting with Regional staff, they developed a priority list for the Mission 66 development program that included completing the artifact catalog, revising the park’s development outline, completing the Museum Prospectus, and creating the final exhibit plan. In a meeting at the park in the summer of 1959 with Regional Resource Management Specialist Fred Dickison, Regional Historian Merrill Mattes, and Regional Landscape Architect Weldon Gratten, Warman and the new Homestead National Monument Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss also discussed plans to complete revisions to the park’s Master Plan, which had first been prepared in 1951 and needed to be updated for the Mission 66 developments. The revised narrative portions of this document would then allow for a more complete coordination with WASO and the Western Office of Design and Construction, which would oversee the design and development of the new Visitor Center and the exhibits.52

The Museum Prospectus was completed in early 1960, incorporating the results of the artifact cataloging project. In June 1960, a History Exhibit Planning Team from the Washington Office spent a week at Homestead National Monument. The team, consisting of Museum Specialist Dr. Alan E. Kent and Exhibit Specialist Daniel D. Feaser, was one of three teams

51 Memorandum, Museum Curator Newell F. Joyner to Assistant Regional Director, June 13, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 1. Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for FY1959, FY1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folders 9 and 10.
52 Monthly Narrative Report for November 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15. Regional Director Howard Baker to Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2. Regional Landscape Architect to Assistant Regional Director, July 17, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2.
established to create exhibits for the new Mission 66 visitor centers. The Museum Branch was deluged with requests for plans for new museums at the onset of Mission 66 planning in early 1956 and created the three two-person teams as a way to work with individual parks to meet the need. Each team was comprised of a curator and a designer and worked within a standard format for exhibit plans. The teams spent time at each park to learn more about each park and to get input from the park staff. Their workload was staggering; in the year before arriving at Homestead National Monument, Kent and Fraser had completed museum exhibit plans for Independence National Historical Park in Pennsylvania, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in Missouri, Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania, and Manassas National Battlefield in Virginia. As former Branch of Museums Chief Ralph Lewis described, “The teams were expected to propose exhibits of endless variety and originality while maintaining existing standards that tended to limit change.”

Kent and Feaser were at Homestead National Monument for the last two weeks of June 1960, developing plans and designs for the new exhibit. While on site, they joined with Superintendent Hotchkiss as they “motored to Fairbury, Nebraska, to visit the Jefferson County Museum” to look at farm implements and, with Historian Warman, visited the House of Yesterday in Hastings, Pioneer Village in Minden, and the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. At these latter sites, “work was accomplished in the collection of data and information for use in the Homestead Visitor Center.” Working steadily during their time at Homestead National Monument, Kent and Feaser prepared an extensive Museum Exhibit Plan (MEP) which was completed and signed by the Superintendent on June 30, 1960.

The document provided a basic description of the building’s layout, including an audio-visual room that would seat sixty and also serve as a meeting room for local organizations. In addition, the MEP contained a detailed description of twenty individual exhibits, each featuring a different topic related to homesteading or the Freeman farm. For each exhibit, the MEP identified the type of display, whether a panel, case or diorama, and any technology that would be involved; some to have lighted displays, others included audio. In addition, the MEP identified either particular items to include, whether artifacts, photographs, or printed materials, or the general type of item for Homestead staff to identify and locate. In many cases, the items were from the existing collection at Homestead, though most of the photographs were to come from the Solomon Butcher Collection at the Nebraska State Historical Society. The individual exhibits identified in the MEP were:

1. Introduction and Statement of Significance
2. Free Land in the Wilderness (colonial land distribution policies)
3. American Survey System
4. Carving the Public Domain (land distribution before the Homestead Act)
5. Leaders in the Homestead Movement
6. Passage of the Homestead Act
7. Daniel Freeman, Homesteader

54 Monthly Narrative Report for June 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1.
8. The Stage is Set for Settlement (why settlers chose to settle on the Great Plains)
9. Filing a Claim
10. Hard Beginnings: Breaking the Sod
11. The Home on the Homestead
12. The Homestead Well (the importance of water, wells, and windmills)
13. Homesteaders as Farmers
14. Conflict with the Cattlemen
15. Doing It By Hand (hand tools used by homesteaders)
16. Machines of Plenty (to include at least one scale model of an agricultural machine)
17. Women and Children
18. The Homestead School
19. Clothes for Work and Play
20. What Every Homesteader’s Wife Should Have (labor-saving machines)\(^{55}\)

In addition to the detailed description of the exhibits, the MEP also recommended acquiring a series of oil paintings by Velma Armstrong. Armstrong, born in 1913 to homesteading parents who had immigrated from the Czech Republic, grew up near Diller, Nebraska, and moved to Beatrice to work as a teacher. She began painting homesteading scenes in the 1950s, choosing to show pastoral scenes associated with homesteading and the lives of early settlers. Homestead National Monument staff were aware of her paintings and, following the recommendation from Kent and Feaser in 1960, approached her about selling her twelve oil paintings depicting homesteading. She initially agreed to sell eleven of them but reserved one that had special meaning for her. Ten paintings were acquired by the park and were on display in the Visitor Center from its opening in 1962 until 2007, when the new Heritage Center was completed. The park held a special exhibit of her paintings again in 2016.\(^{56}\)

With the MEP in hand, Homestead staff began the process of preparing the exhibit for the new Visitor Center in late 1960 and throughout 1961. This work included identifying and locating photographs and artifacts for the several displays, preparing label copy, and developing the scripts for the several audio-visual components. In an interview with the Beatrice Daily Sun about the new Visitor Center in the fall of 1960, Superintendent Hotchkiss explained that the new building would allow the park “to properly display more of the many items in our large historical collections, and they will be very well displayed, thanks to the splendid work done by the exhibit planning team of Kent and Feaser, who visited the Monument during June.” This newspaper article included the first drawing of the new Visitor Center, showing a one-story horizontal building. The article also provided the first notice of an important revision to the exhibit plan that took place after the MEP was completed in June 1960. In addition to the series of exhibits within the new Visitor Center, the building would include an open-air display shed

\(^{55}\) Homestead National Monument, Museum Exhibit Plan (prepared by Dr. Alan Kent and Mr. Daniel Feaser, June 1960); Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-B-2, Catalog No. 7587, Box 1 Folder 2.

that would serve for the display of the Monument’s collection of large agricultural machinery.\(^{57}\) Plans for this addition to the Visitor Center first emerged in the summer of 1960 from requests by Superintendent Hotchkiss, with which Regional Director Childs concurred. On July 13, 1960, Superintendent Hotchkiss requested that the Western Office of Design and Construction, which was then developing plans for the Visitor Center, add the display shed to Homestead’s development program. The proposal went back to the Region Two Office in Omaha in late 1960. In January 1961, the Acting Regional Chief of Operations requested additional details from Superintendent Hotchkiss regarding the shed, including height of the ceilings, lighting, door sizes, and information about the dimensions of the agricultural equipment for display.\(^{58}\)

**Opening and Initial Reviews**

The display shed was approved for addition to the Visitor Center, and the exterior of the building was completed by the end of 1961. The exhibits were being assembled through the spring of 1962 and were substantially completed by May 20, 1962. The plan of exhibits was expanded from the original MEP and, as completed, included twenty-four panels. The panels provided a history of homesteading and presented aspects of the everyday life of homesteaders. The lobby featured a mural painted by Gene Roncka of Omaha, Nebraska, together with two table cases containing items from the park’s permanent collections; these cases would hold rotating exhibits showing a variety of artifacts from the site’s collection.\(^{59}\) The Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1962 provided a summary of the visitor experience to Homestead National Monument with the opening of the new Visitor Center:

> Upon entering the lobby the visitor is greeted by uniformed personnel and is invited to view the audio-visual show. Following this he may enter the exhibit room, then outside to view the equipment on display in the outside display shelter. The path continues to the furnished homestead cabin, and if the visitor wishes he may continue along the walk crossing Cub Creek. From this point a mile-long self-guiding circle trail takes the visitor through native grasslands and past historic sites. Markers along the route interpret the Freeman building sites, and the native grasses which are an integral part of the homestead story.\(^{60}\)

As designed in the MEP, the new exhibit contained primarily static exhibits, though several had audio-visual components. A panel describing the process of filing a homestead claim, for example, featured five black and white transparencies which were illuminated when visitors pressed a button on the panel. A diorama on farming and a panel exhibit on schools, moreover, included audio messages activated by pressing a button; the message could be heard through two earphones at the panel, though the sound was loud enough to hear without wearing the earphones, which allowed multiple people to hear the message. A cold-roller mangle was a stand-alone exhibit in the open area and was accompanied by a slide-sound viewer with

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\(^{60}\) Annual Superintendent’s Narrative Report for FY1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 12.
earphones. According to an evaluation by the Regional Naturalist in October 1962, “Volume is deliberately set up a higher [sic] than normal level to take care of field conditions. People crowd around the display and the phones actually become a low-level speaker unit.” Finally, an outdoor speaker providing recorded information was set up near the Cub Creek footbridge which “has been very well received by the public.”

Superintendent Vernon Hennesay provided another description of the exhibit in 1964, less than two years after it opened. In a letter to Superintendent M.S. Fitzpatrick of Watters Smith State Park in Virginia, Hennesay described that the new museum has a total of twenty-nine interior displays [that] chronologically describe the homestead story. The visitor is introduced to the museum by displays which explain the public domain, the survey system employed by the government, legislation preceding the Homestead Act, and finally the Homestead Act itself. All this is done in the first ten displays. The remaining nineteen displays explore life on the homesteader’s frontier; how the homesteader lived on the prairie, the tools he used, the hardships he found, typical schools his children attended, and a brief description of his social life.

Connected to the rear of the Visitor Center is a display shed which affords protection to larger implements that would be impossible to display in the museum. The shed contains buggies, a wooden vaned windmill, a cornstalk cutter, a feed grinder, and other larger items. The shed also enables the visitor to see the transition from the homemade hand tools in the museum to the manufactured implements that mechanized the farm and made large scale farming possible.

Over the course of the next several years, official visitors provided additional commentary on the facilities and exhibits at Homestead, and most were positive. The principal criticism pertained to the audio-visual equipment. Regional Chief of History and Archeology Merrill Mattes visited the site in July 1963, one year after the opening. While not there to review the exhibits, he had “another audition of the audiovisual program at Homestead and would certainly agree that the pictures are quite inadequate and should be replaced, either by fresh prints of the originals or by a new set of photographs.” Many of the photos, he noted, had developed a green tone, “which may result from normal fading.” Later that year, the Regional Chief of Natural History Edwin Alberts visited Homestead while on annual leave. Alberts agreed that the audio-visual program was a “stop gap” presentation but thought that it was “far better than any of the critical remarks would suggest although certainly it can be improved considerably.” The principal criticisms, in his opinion, were difficulties with the sound quality. In addition, the organization of the exhibits had come into question, particularly the large amount of attention paid to Daniel Freeman. Alberts, however, did not find the coverage excessive, “Since the Daniel Freeman story is not treated at any length in the exhibit room.” Despite the

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61 Regional Naturalist Field Notes, Audio-Visual Equipment, Homestead, As of October 22, 1962,” Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 5.

62 Vernon Hennesay to M.S. Fitzpatrick, April 21, 1965; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 11, D6215.
quality of the photographs, Alberts found that “the present program core—prepared by former Historian Warman—has much merit and should require only minor modification.”

Midwest Region Historian Ray Mattison visited Homestead in April 1964. Mattison was then in the process of working with the Regional Office and WASO on revisions to the Historical Handbook for Homestead and, thus, was particularly attuned to the depiction of homesteading in the Visitor Center exhibit. While praising the effectiveness of the story in regard to eastern Nebraska, he criticized the lack of attention to the broader, national scope of homesteading. “One leaves the Visitor Center,” he observed, “with the impression that the original homestead law was an overwhelming success, and that homesteading came to an end about 1890.” He identified the reliance on photographs from the Solomon Butcher Collection at the Nebraska State Historical Society, which focused on the early years in Nebraska, as part of the cause for this impression. He argued that, nationally, the majority of homesteads were taken after 1890 in more arid areas further west with the benefit of later amendments to the original Homestead Act. He recommended only minor immediate changes, however, including adding photos from other states to replace some of the Nebraska photographs, and adjusting two of the panels to include post-1890 components of the homesteading story. “Perhaps at a later date,” he suggested, “we should consider a restudy of the other exhibits.”

Rather than making wholesale changes to the exhibits at that point, Mattison suggested adjusting the audio-visual program. Arguing that the original audio-visual program “contributes little toward summarizing the total homestead story,” Mattison suggested a revision to the narration that would summarize the story of homesteading after 1890 and connect the story of Daniel Freeman to the broader homestead movement. In order to help the process, Mattison prepared an entirely new script for the audio-visual narration, which he hoped the new Historian, Thomas Walsh, could discuss on his forthcoming trip to WASO. He also wrote a preliminary draft of the script for the audio-visual programs to be presented to school groups, “The Sod House Frontier” and “The Pioneer School,” both of which were subsequently prepared by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

In 1965, Superintendent John Rohn responded positively to Mattison’s suggestions with a series of goals for changes to the Visitor Center exhibits. Reflecting the current state of scholarship regarding the Homestead Act, with its pessimistic perception, he urged a greater balance in the direction of the exhibits to show both the benefits and the problems of the Homestead Act. “We personally feel,” he explained, “the Act should be viewed as an experiment by men in a democratic society,” with examples of both abuse and of successful landownership, while also bringing settlers from around the world to the Great Plains. His biggest concern, however, was to make the Visitor Center exhibits more interactive to allow greater involvement by the visitors. As he observed, “the current stress in the National Park Service is on audio-visual.” He recommended increasing the number of panels with audio-visual components. More

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63 Regional Chief of Natural History Edwin C. Alberts to Assistant Regional Director, October 7, 1963; Regional Chief of History and Archeology Merrill J. Mattes to Assistant Regional Director, July 15, 1963; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 6.

64 Memorandum, Acting Regional Historian Ray H. Mattison to Associate Regional Director, May 4, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 7.
importantly than this, however, he recommended increasing the experiential basis of the exhibits, to

Set up exhibits where people can touch and do, as well as look. Take a corn sheller, put a few ears of corn down beside it and let people try it out. Put a few old books in good condition down, let people page through them. Let the kids write on an old slate board with a pencil. Have a piece of sod that people can touch, feel and smell. How many people know how much a sod brick weighed?

Homestead, he argued, “should be one of the best museums in the National Park Service system. We think we ought to experiment more than we have in the past.”

At the same time that park and regional staff were debating the nature of the Homestead Act and how best to interpret it, the park was faced with a challenging offer. In 1965, Frank Smith, a Beatrice realtor, offered to encourage the Nebraska State Board of Realtors to donate to a fund with the idea of acquiring a sod house. The Midwest Regional Office, however, quashed the suggestion in short order. As quoted in a letter which Superintendent Hennesay wrote back to Smith, the Midwest Regional Office explained that although “there is nothing more typical of homesteading in the western grasslands than a sod house, we must not forget that the Monument was established to commemorate the whole homestead movement.” In his opinion, if the park were to accept a sod house, then it would have a hard time refusing an adobe house or dugout from southwestern homesteads or “the ubiquitous tarpaper shack [that] was a hallmark of early Twentieth Century homesteads in much of the great Basin [sic] and Snake River plains area.” Hennesay added that the Palmer-Epard Cabin already served to demonstrate the rigors that homesteaders faced and that a sod house would be repetitious. Instead, Hennesay suggested that the Board of Realtors consider making a contribution toward securing the Freeman School for the Homestead National Monument, and perhaps move it to the site.

Living History and Environmental Education

Rather than a large-scale revision, however, the exhibits were given maintenance and slight adjustments through the 1960s. This included replacing selected photographs, repairing cracked finishes, correcting inaccurate spellings, and repainting panels and cases. As Superintendent Rohn commented in a 1967 memorandum, “No comprehensive revision of the Museum is planned.” Instead, Rohn, in his comments through the mid- and late 1960s, was investigating the possibility of a living history program at Homestead National Monument, a concept that was then beginning to generate interest in the National Park Service. This approach to museum interpretation is intensely experiential: interpreters, often in period attire, perform the kinds of activities appropriate to a particular period. The intent of this approach is to engage

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65 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 27, 1965; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 11 D6215, Book 3.
66 Vernon E. Hennesay to Frank W. Smith, Jr., August 7, 1964; Files of Homestead NM, H30.
67 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, June 1, 1967; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 11 D6215, Book 3.
visitors with appeals to sight, sounds, and smells in a way to help them understand the past in a more intense way than can be gained through traditional museum exhibits and publications.

The idea of a living history program at Homestead National Monument was raised as early as 1958. A team of staff members from the Region Two Office in Omaha conducted a management review of the park in February 1958, at the outset of Mission 66 planning. Among the recommendations of the team, which was led by Regional Chief of Operations George Baggley, was to conduct a feasibility study “of the installation of a live exhibit as a part of the interpretive program for the area. Such a live exhibit would consist of a series of period buildings, fences, and related items, including farm machinery, farm animals, and other contemporary features.”68 There were no further mentions of this recommendation, and the attentions of the Historian and other park staff were focused on planning for the new Visitor Center and did not pursue it.

The idea gained new life nationally, however, in the late 1960s. In 1965, Marion Clawson, an economist and former Director of the Bureau of Land Management, published an article in Agricultural History promoting the idea of federally-operated historical farms throughout the nation. Clawson was nationally prominent in the field of land management planning and drew the attention of the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture, and the Smithsonian Institution for his proposal. In the summer of 1966, NPS Historian Roy Applebaum, with the full support of NPS Director George Hartzog, responded to Clawson’s proposal by leading a Service-wide team that drafted plans for creating living history programs at National Park Service units. The team identified twelve existing units where living history activities would be appropriate, including Homestead National Monument. Director Hartzog and William Everhart, whom Hartzog had tasked in 1962 with creating a new Division of Interpretation, enthusiastically supported and encouraged the development of these programs in the late 1960s. Among the first parks to implement living history programs in the National Park System were Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Indiana and Booker T. Washington National Monument in Virginia.69

In his wide-ranging response to Mattison’s critique of the new exhibits at Homestead, Superintendent Rohn was opening the door to a living history program at the park. The idea remained dormant for several years, however, despite occasional suggestions as to its applicability. In October 1967, for example, Chief of Planning and Interpretive Services Marc Sagan discussed the furnishings plans for the Barracks at Fort Laramie National Historic Site in Wyoming and the Palmer-Epard Cabin at Homestead National Monument. He suggested that both sites offered numerous opportunities to bring the ‘living history’ concept into play.

Accordingly, we don’t want to consider the Palmer-Epard Cabin in a vacuum. Is there an opportunity to plant outside it, plow, shuck corn, etc.? [Homestead] Historian Soubier widely perceives this approach when he stresses activities

68 Memorandum, Region Two Management Review Team to Regional Director, August 7, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 1.
69 Mackintosh, page 56.
outside the structure. Possibilities for demonstrations by interpreters in period
dress both inside and outside the cabin should be kept in mind.70

Historian Clifford Soubier entered on duty December 15, 1967, transferring from the
Horace M. Albright Training Center.71 Although his initial NPS duty was as a museum curator,
he had moved, by the late 1960s, to interpretation and interpretive planning. By the mid- and late
1960s, as greater awareness of environmental issues and conservation was spreading throughout
the nation, Soubier helped lead the Monument’s interpretive program toward an increased
emphasis on the role of natural history at the site. The self-guided trail through the restored
prairie was, by then, more than a decade old and focused primarily on the National Park
Service’s efforts at restoration combined with interpretation of the historic sites associated with
the Freeman family. Soubier, with the strong support of Superintendent Rohn, sought to bring a
greater awareness of the historical relationship between human activities and changes in the
environment.

In early 1969, Soubier developed a new “Trail Companion” which visitors could bring
with them as they toured the grounds from the agricultural implement shed at the Visitor Center,
past the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and onto the prairie trail. Working from the artifacts or the
surrounding landscape, Soubier sought to capture the imagination of the visitors by suggesting
how the artifacts were used and how the homesteaders felt and experienced their surroundings.
In describing life for a large homesteading family in a cabin similar to the Palmer-Epard Cabin,
for example, he explained that

A 12’x14’ cabin is a trifle cramped for a family of twelve, but requires a
minimum of firewood. Like the sod houses built on the treeless land farther west,
the cabin made use of what was at hand, and it sufficed.

Soubier infused his discussion of the natural world of the prairie and Cub Creek with a sense of
what was lost. In the comments on Cub Creek, for example, he noted that

Once, the creeks and rivers flowed at the level of the land, and fish could be seen
in the clear waters. Intensive modern use of the land has turned them into muddy
washouts. Cub Creek flows into the Big Blue River—which once really was blue.

The prairie, meanwhile, was in the process of being restored, a long and, necessarily incomplete,
process:

The few acres of prairie at Homestead, once plowed and grazed, have been
restored to their former state—almost. It is a long process, and will never be
complete, because once the delicate interrelationship of soil and life is disturbed,
something is lost. Indestructible as the grasses may have seemed to the pioneer
who first sank his plow in the tough sod, they had formed to the land over

70 Memorandum, Chief, Division of Planning and Interpretive Services to Chief, Branch of Museum Operations,
71 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for 1967, handwritten draft; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection
100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 17.
millennia. Many varieties require just the right conditions to grow, and now they must compete with plant life new to the region. . . .The land is subdued now, and this resurrected bit of primitive America is an island amidst the works of man.72

Soubier left Homestead in late 1969, but the park and NPS continued to promote environmental education in interpretation. Under Superintendent Vince Halvorson, the prairie trail continued to be an important component in the park’s interpretive program and meshed well with the growing interest in living history in the early 1970s. Regional Chief of Interpretation Thomas Richter, who started his NPS career as a seasonal interpreter at Homestead in 1973, recalled that tours of the prairie had been a feature of the park’s interpretive program for years. The park developed a new trail in the early 1970s, however, through the woodlands:

And, it was meant to be an environmental awareness trail. This was in the era that the Park Service, national, was strong into environmental education. In fact, that was part of my first training in ’73. We had a training specialist in environmental education that came out and did some training. So, the park constructed this trail.

This new environmental trail of the early 1970s included a small footbridge across Cub Creek. Unfortunately, a flood on Cub Creek soon destroyed the footbridge, and the trail was abandoned. As Richter recalled, the intent of the environmental education program was a balance of natural resource awareness and historical interpretation:

you had to recognize the importance of the environment to the homesteaders. . . .it was a life or death situation, sometimes, in terms of their ability to succeed or not. And also, the homestead movement certainly had a drastic impact on our natural resources in the Midwest and in the far West in terms of plowing up a lot of the natural prairie. So, I saw it all as a need just . . .to expand on the significance of the Homestead Act.73

The park’s efforts to augment the role of natural resources in interpretation while conveying a sense of historical significance mirrored the Service-wide efforts to develop living history programs, as both sought to provide what was then considered to be a more holistic approach. The idea was to find ways to engage the visitors with more than text and exhibits, and to encourage them to better understand the role that the natural world played in the lives of people of previous generations. While noble in their aims, the plans occasionally missed their targets. The comments by Chief of Planning and Interpretive Services Sagan regarding the Palmer-Epard Cabin, for example, followed closely on a brief flurry of activity earlier in 1967 about the possibility of keeping horses at Homestead National Monument. Director Hartzog asked Midwest Regional Director Fred Fagergren to consider re-introducing horses there, and Fagergren circulated the suggestion to Superintendent Rohn and others in the Midwest Regional Office. In July 1967, Rohn replied with a detailed analysis, saying that research by Russell Gibbs and others indicated clearly that Daniel Freeman raised and used horses at his farm. Rohn, who apparently had horses of his own, added “Personally, I would enjoy having two to five head of

73 Thomas P. Richter, oral history interview, May 17, 2019; files of Homestead NM.
horses to add local and historical color as well as to ride or hitch for recreation and exercise.” As Rohn also indicated, however, the potential problems were legion. Land for grazing and stabling would have to be found, whether within the park boundary or on leased land, and acquiring, feeding, and caring for horses is expensive (Figure 23). The most fundamental question, though, was how this program would affect understanding of the period of interpretation. With the NPS aim of restoring the prairie to its condition when Freeman first arrived, showing horses grazing in the way that Freeman later used the land could cause confusion. By late July, Fagergren was able to reply definitively to Director Hartzog that horses would not be appropriate at Homestead National Monument.74

**Figure 23:** 1967 map showing proposed horse trails. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument

Although the Monument would not serve as an equestrian center, the idea did not die immediately. At a conference at Gettysburg National Military Park in the fall of 1967, NPS Director Hertzog again urged all Regional Directors to “explore all possible means of implementing some living demonstrations.” As the Acting Regional Director admitted in a memorandum to Superintendent Rohn in the fall of 1967, Homestead National Monument posed a challenge to the idea of a living history farm, given the longstanding intent to restore the native prairie and maintain it in unbroken, unplowed condition. Small crop areas could be possible, however, and the Acting Regional Director indicated that funds could be made available to hire staff for living history demonstrations and to purchase historic farming equipment. Superintendent Rohn responded positively and gave two reasons why a living history program

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74 Correspondence pertaining to horses is found in Federal Records Center, 79-88-0002, N1427. A reference to Superintendent Rohn owning horses is found in Regional Director Fagergren’s initial memo of March 3, 1967: “Incidentally, I think John Rohn would like to raise some horses. He rents and keeps horses across the way there.”
would be appropriate at the Monument: it would be an attraction for visitors, and it would facilitate an interpretation of natural history “without downgrading the historical significance.” Although Rohn discounted the idea of raising crops because it was not the kind of activity that would attract more people, he was not ready to give up on horses entirely. He thought that regular events that involved harnessing horses and providing rides in a buggy or wagon would be appealing. Rather than keep horses at the park, however, he suggested either cooperating with a concessioner who could provide horses for demonstration purposes or having the Homestead Historical Association arrange for it. To provide room for horse-drawn tours, he recommended looking into the purchase of the forty acres of private land lying between the existing Visitor Center and the Freeman Brick School.75

Despite Superintendent Rohn’s enthusiasm in the late 1960s, Homestead National Monument did not add a living history component to the interpretive program until the early 1970s. Rohn’s successor, Superintendent Vince Halvorson, embraced living history as a part of the interpretive program. As Regional Chief of Interpretation Richter recalled, Halvorson “was very engaged in the interpretive program. . . You know, he really changed the course of the program.” Earlier approaches to interpretation at the park, he recalled, had depended largely on school teachers who brought their classes to the park; Halvorson, in an attempt to engage more young people, turned away from relying on teachers and instead hired younger interpretive staff.76

In 1972, the summer interpretive program included farm demonstrations featuring lard rendering, candle dipping, and lye soap making. Female interpreters dressed in period costumes conducted the demonstrations, which were offered only on weekends. In 1973, the park purchased two female pioneer costumes and one male sodbuster costume from the Harpers Ferry Historical Association “to add authenticity to our living history program.” In addition to the demonstration activities initiated in 1972, interpreters in 1973 first prepared a “pioneer garden plot and a farm cash crop plot” near the Palmer-Epard Cabin. In 1974, park staff added live cooking demonstrations over an open campfire to the summer interpretive program, and visitors were able to take part in the candle dipping and soap making activities. At the same time, the garden and cash crop plot programs were expanded to include potatoes, peanuts, cotton, and broom corn, while flax and wheat seed were sowed using a horse-pulled seeder. By 1975, staff began taking living history activities to off-site programs. Living history remained an important component of Homestead’s interpretive program throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, including an expanded set of activities incorporated into the inaugural Homestead Days event in 1978.

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75 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, Homestead, November 28, 1967; Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, December 13, 1967; Federal Records Center, 079-88-0002 N1427.
76 Thomas P. Richter, oral history interview, May 17, 2019; files of Homestead NM.
Chapter 6: Buildings, Infrastructure, and Land Protection

All original buildings on the Freeman farm were removed before NPS began developing Homestead National Monument in 1939. The brick house which the Freemans built in 1876, and which had replaced their earlier cabin, had burned decades before. Early newspaper photographs of the property shortly after NPS took possession of the property show small outbuildings, including a chicken house, but they were removed before work began. As officials from the Region II Office in Omaha began planning for development at Homestead National Monument, therefore, they had a blank slate in terms of the built environment. As discussed in Chapter 4, Regional Historian Edwin Hummel, who oversaw the initial work at the park, deliberately refrained from planning for any reconstruction of the original buildings. Although reconstruction of buildings was a popular approach at many historic sites at the time, it was not, Hummel explained, the way that NPS handled historic sites without substantial historical research. As the site developed through the 1940s under the guidance of inaugural Superintendent Clarence Schultz, efforts to restore it to the time when Daniel Freeman first homesteaded the property focused on the natural environment, the prairie and its grasses, rather than on the buildings where he lived and worked.

All construction activities, therefore, focused on new buildings rather than on recreating historic buildings. At the same time, though, Superintendent Schultz recognized the interpretive potential of having a historic building on the premises. The enabling legislation instructed NPS to use the park to demonstrate in part “the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed,” and few things can do that as effectively as showing how a family lived in the houses of the period. Rather than build a reproduction, however, Schultz focused on locating an existing house from the early homesteading area to serve as a representative building for the purposes of interpretation. As a result, Schultz arranged for the donation of an 1867 cabin and its relocation to the park in 1950, as described in Chapter 5. Although the new buildings at Homestead National Monument have needed occasional maintenance, upgrades, and infrastructure improvements, the Palmer-Epard Cabin has required extensive and repeated preservation and restoration efforts from the 1950s to the present.

Chapter 3 includes a description of the Monument’s first building, constructed in 1941. Designed to serve as a utility building, it was located in the northern section of the west forty portion of the park, northwest of Cub Creek in an area identified almost immediately as the future headquarters location. Designed by Regional Architect William I. Williams, who also oversaw its construction, the Utility Building was completed in July 1941. Built with four rooms, all intended for the storage and maintenance of equipment and fuel, Schultz recognized that it would serve multiple purposes on a temporary basis, including as the monument headquarters. As described in Chapter 4, by the late 1940s, the Utility Building also housed the park’s only exhibit space where visitors could learn something about the park and the lives of the homesteaders. By the late 1950s, Historian Donald Warman began providing a rotating series of exhibits in the building, which he expanded into the garage space. The building also housed the site’s initial audio-visual program, an Admatic machine providing automated slide images and a brief narration.
The Utility Building remained largely unchanged through the 1940s and well into the 1950s. In 1959, however, with visitation and staff increasing, park staff secured permission from the Region Two Office to make two changes. The most significant change was to add a staff restroom in the building. The Regional Chief of Operations agreed that it was a wise addition, and “will also serve to fulfill your immediate need for a usable public rest room during the winter while the unheated comfort station must remain closed.” The staff restroom was completed in December 1959. At the same time, in the wake of the park’s first Historian entering on duty in 1958, a separate entrance was created to the Historian’s office on the north side of the building.¹

**Employee Residences**

Superintendent Schultz returned to Homestead in 1946 after his military service during WWII. As the only staff on site, it was important that he be available on short notice to respond to emergencies, and planning for a Superintendent’s residence at the site began in the late 1940s. The first phase of the work was to install a septic system and a water system for the site. Construction on the septic system began in March 1950 and was completed later in the spring. The water system, meanwhile, was installed during May and June 1950. Regional Architect Raymond Lovelady prepared the drawings for the new buildings through the winter of 1949-1950; the Region II Office approved the plans on March 14, 1950. Lovelady and Schultz released invitations to bid in late March 1950 and received only two bids, both substantially above the government estimate. According to a report in the *Beatrice Daily Sun*, the factor driving the high prices was the inclusion of radiant heating panels in the floors. Lovelady then revised the plans to incorporate forced-air heating and reissued the invitations to bid in April; this resulted in no bids. Finally, in June 1950, the plans were revised again, and the government estimate raised to $20,000. The invitations to bid were released later that month, and, in late July, Bartels Brothers Construction Company of Plymouth, Nebraska offered a price of $17,700.50 and were the only bidders. After the contract was awarded, the firm worked quickly, and the building was completed on January 30, 1951.²

The Superintendent’s Residence is a one-story frame building with a brick veneer beneath a side gable roof. The house rests on a concrete slab foundation and originally had no garage. After completion in 1951, the Superintendent’s residence underwent several alterations. As early as 1955, the hot and humid Nebraska summers began to take their toll, and Superintendent George Blake made a formal request to the Regional Director to have an air conditioning unit installed. Blake initially received a summary denial in short order: funds were limited, no air conditioning had been authorized for other employee’s quarters, and rents would have to be increased. “In the circumstances,” Regional Director Howard Baker counseled Blake, “we suggest that you give up the idea of an air conditioning unit, at least for the time being.” By

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¹ Memorandum, Regional Chief of Operations, Region Two to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, October 10, 1959; Files of Homestead NM, H30. See also Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for FY 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 10.

June, however, the Region Two Office relented, and Blake received his air conditioning unit. Finally, in 1961, with funds from the Mission 66 program, the Region Two Office authorized the installation of central air conditioning in the Superintendent’s house. At the same time, Mission 66 funds were authorized to construct a garage addition to the Superintendent’s residence. Located on the south side of the house, the one-car garage addition has a gabled roof, is recessed behind the façade of the house, and opens to the south (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Superintendent’s Residence, 2018. Photograph by the author.

The first effect of the Mission 66 program at Homestead National Monument was the hiring of a permanent Historian in 1958. An on-site residence for this position, however, was delayed for several years while several incumbents served in that position. Although the second employee residence was included in the initial program for Mission 66 in 1957, its planning and implementation were delayed while the footbridge over Cub Creek and the new Visitor Center were pushed forward. In early 1961, however, all proposed developments under Mission 66, including the employee residence, were included in a single invitation to bid. Contracts for the footbridge over Cub Creek, the Visitor Center, and the garage and air conditioning improvements to the Superintendent’s residence were awarded, but all bids for the water and sewer improvements and the employee residence were above the government estimate and were

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3 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, May 21, 1955, and May 25, 1955; Files of Homestead NM, D5023. Purchase Order for air conditioning unit from Region Two Office, Federal Office Building, Omaha, Nebraska to International Harvester Company, Omaha, Nebraska, for $199.50; Files of Homestead NM, D5023.

4 Memorandum, Supervisory Construction Management Engineer, WODC to Superintendent, Homestead, January 24, 1961; Files of Homestead NM, D34.
rejected. The government estimate for the employee’s residence was $18,800; Pat Hutson Construction of Fairbury, Nebraska, who won the bid for the Visitor Center and garage addition to the Superintendent’s residence, submitted the only bid at $26,000. Rather than negotiate to reduce the price, park and regional officials decided to put the employee’s residence on hold while other Mission 66 work went forward.⁵

From 1961 through the summer of 1962, the park’s energies were directed first toward completion of the Visitor Center and the Cub Creek footbridge and then toward establishing the new interpretive program that included the new Visitor Center exhibit. In 1963, meanwhile, the park faced significant staff turnover. Superintendent Hotchkiss left Homestead in May to take a position as Superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park in North Dakota, and Historian Cecil Halliday was on staff only from July 22, 1962 to February 16, 1963. Thomas R. Welsh entered on duty as Historian on March 3, 1963 and served as Acting Superintendent from May to September 1963, when Vernon Hennesay entered on duty as Superintendent. In the midst of this confusion at the park, NPS Chief Architect John Cabot commented on the delayed process for the employee’s residence and observed that several projects at Homestead National Monument had been delayed by bids that exceeded the government estimates “for unascertainable reasons.” Cabot indicated skepticism over the need for a second residence at the park and suggested that it “should only be re-advertised if you are convinced that bids can be expected within the ceiling limitation.” All plans and specifications, he suggested, “must be closely scrutinized to eliminate every possible item that could contribute to a high bid.”⁶

Later in February 1964, Superintendent Vernon Hennesay argued in a memorandum to the Regional Director that the new residence was too close to the existing Superintendent’s residence, and nearly touched the park’s boundary. “There would be no privacy whatever,” he claimed. Hennesay recommended that the new employee residence be located east of the Utility Building instead. Any difficulties and expenses involved in extending the utilities connections would be minimal, he argued, “compared to the inconvenience imposed on the personnel if the site is not changed. I also feel very strongly that a residence in the approved location for Residence #6 [new employee residence] would definitely have an effect on the morale of the employees in the area.” The response from the Midwest Regional Office was a decisive no: “To place the proposed residence to the east closer to the exhibit shed and foot trail appears to be unwise.” Comparing the proximity of the two buildings to “normal urban living,” the Regional Programs Coordinator argued that having a home with a family play area so close to exhibits and

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⁵ Monthly Narrative Report for June 1961; Archives of Homestead NM. See also Press Release, September 6, 1957 announcing the components of the Mission 66 program; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1. For the unitary bid package strategy, see Annual Narrative Report for FY 1961: “Homestead National Monument was the Region Two area selected for a pilot study of the new ‘package’ approach to Master Planning. This was accomplished early in April by a team composed of representatives from WODC, Region Two Office and Homestead National Monument;” Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 11. Details of the bid are in Memorandum, Project Supervisor Roberson to Chief, Western Office, Design and Construction, September 1, 1961; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22.

⁶ Memorandum, Chief Architect John B. Cabot to Regional Director, Midwest, February 5, 1964; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 7 D3415, Book 3.
a public use area would be undesirable. Finally, he announced, funds for construction were short, and the adjustment in the utilities could not be supported.7

The issue lay dormant through the summer, but, in the fall, park and Regional officials began discussing the new building again. In October, Regional Property Management Specialist Joe Riha contacted Harvey Reynolds at the Western Office of Design and Construction about initiating the development of plans and specifications for the second residence. Reynolds began the process immediately, and, later in October, WODC Chief Architect Jerry Riddell, after receiving permission to proceed from WASO, prepared a Preliminary Construction and Specification Outline for the new employee residence. The plans were for a one-story building framed with western red cedar on a concrete slab foundation with redwood exterior siding and a carport.8 The plans were reviewed by the Midwest Regional Office, which approved them but recommended that the bid include options for either a garage or a carport.9

Bids for the building’s construction were issued twice in the spring of 1965, and both were rejected as being above the amount allocated by Congress. Finally, in June 1965, Gaylan Koch of DeWitt, Nebraska, submitted a bid that was $1,000 over the Congressional limit but only $200 above the engineer’s estimate. The Midwest Regional Office negotiated with Koch, the sole bidder, and agreed upon a price of $18,731.50. The contract was signed on June 14, 1965. Groundbreaking for the new building took place on August 2, with a completion deadline of November 15. Despite delays in June due to rainy weather, Koch completed the residence on time and to the satisfaction of the park and MWRO. Several minor changes were approved, primarily for using higher grade finishes, increasing the cross sectional area of the concrete foundation footings, and using ponderosa pine for the exterior siding rather than red cedar.10 In addition, the building has an attached one-car garage rather than a carport as originally designed, using an existing blacktop spur from the main park entrance as the driveway. The source of this change was not discovered during research for this Administrative History (Figure 25).

Cub Creek Footbridge

As described in Chapter 4, Cub Creek is a flashy waterway, with the potential to rise rapidly during heavy rain events and flood its banks. As a result, foot bridges that allow visitors to cross the creek to hike the prairie trail were prone to being either damaged or washed away entirely. In the late 1950s, visitors could cross Cub Creek either by using the new Highway 4

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7 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, February 27, 1964; Memorandum, Regional Programs Coordinator to Superintendent, March 17, 1964; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 7 D3415, Book 3.
8 Memorandum, Property Management to Harvey Reynolds, October 15, 1964, with a handwritten response below from Henry Reynolds, October 16, 1964; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 7 D3415, Book 3. See also Memorandum, Chief Architect, WODC to Regional Director, Midwest Region, October 27, 1964; Files of Homestead NM, D34.
9 Memorandum, Assist. to the Regional Director, Develop to Chief, WODC, November 19, 1964; Federal Records Center, 79-87-0003, Box 7 D3415, Book 3.
10 Completion Report in Memorandum from Acting Regional Chief of Maintenance to Superintendent, Homestead, November 23, 1965; Files of Homestead NM, D34. See also set of photographs of the construction of the residence, November 11, 1965, Files of Homestead NM, D34; Monthly Narrative Report for August 1965. Contractual documents are located in an extensive file for the building in Files of Homestead NM, D34.
bridge or by taking a trail directly across the creek on rocks. In a 1959 letter to the incoming Superintendent, Warren Hotchkiss, that outlined the existing conditions and planned improvements, Regional Director Howard Baker expressed that this trail crossing posed a “small hazard. . . .However, no falls have been reported here as apparently all visitors realize wet rocks are something to treat with respect.”

Wisely opting not to continue trusting to good luck, the park and the Midwest Regional Office agreed to include a new foot bridge across Cub Creek as one of the key components in initial plans for the Mission 66 program at Homestead National Monument in 1957. By 1960, however, there were difference of opinion between Superintendent Hotchkiss and Midwest Regional Office staff over the type of bridge that should be built. Given the frequency of floods on Cub Creek, Superintendent Hotchkiss strongly recommended a suspension type bridge, one which would be high enough above the water to avoid the high water episodes. Regional officials concurred in this recommendation, “if the structure can be made to harmonize with the Homestead atmosphere, and stiffened enough to overcome the tendency to sway and undulate when a group of youngsters attempt to make it do so.” Flooding was the key issue, and Acting Regional Director M. H. Harvey suggested to WODC the possibility of a lower bridge that could be flooded but would not wash away. As Assistant Programs Officer Harvey Reynolds suggested

Figure 25: Employee Residence, 2018. Photograph by the author.

11 Howard W. Baker to Warren D. Hotchkiss, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2. See also “Construction Begins on Homestead Bridge,” Beatrice Daily Sun, August 9, 1961, page 1; this article references also a “low water bridge to the south. It frequently would flood during the high water.”
in a report to the Regional Director, however, the park and the Region Two Office needed to make a joint recommendation to WODC “which should include special design problems on the trail approaches caused by recurrent floods.” The differences between the park and the Region Two Office were settled by early 1961, with Superintendent Hotchkiss’ call for a suspension type bridge being heeded.

The Region Two Office issued an invitation to bid for all park Mission 66 projects as a single package, including the Visitor Center, the employee residence, and the Cub Creek foot bridge. Bids were opened in June 1961, and, on June 21, 1961, the park entered into a contract with J. & L. Engineering Company of Beatrice for a total project cost of $9,550. The contractors began work on July 6, 1961, and work proceeded quickly on building the concrete abutments for the foot bridge on both sides of the creek. The steel spans were manufactured by the Lincoln Steel Corporation of Lincoln, Nebraska during the summer and brought to the site for installation. Construction work had to pause during much of August while waiting for the spans to be built and shipped, but the materials finally arrived later in the month. The contractor erected the steel vertical supports and the girders across the creek at the beginning of September, and the wooden flooring was installed immediately afterward. Superintendent Hotchkiss and Project Supervisor F.R. Roberson announced that the project was complete on September 7, 1961. Since its completion, the bridge has been repainted several times, and, in 1983, the cables were replaced to bring the bridge into compliance with federal standards. Three years later, in 1986, a July flood caused severe erosion along the Cub Creek bank beneath the bridge. A crew consisting of NPS staff and contractors placed 237 tons of rock in gabions in the eroded area beneath the bridge to stabilize the bank (Figure 26). The bridge received substantial maintenance again in 2010. The park contracted to have the bridge sandblasted, primed, and painted and the decking replaced with recycled materials.

Visitor Center

For nearly a quarter-century after inauguration of the park’s planning in early 1939, the only visitor contact facility at Homestead National Monument was the 1941 Utility Building. This building was designed primarily to house the equipment necessary for maintenance and restoration of the prairie, while it also served as a temporary office space for the Superintendent. By the early 1950s, however, visitation was increasing, and the needs for interpretation were becoming more pressing. In the early 1950s, the Superintendent began placing exhibits in the building to help interpret the site and provide visitors with an orientation. Later in the 1950s, the exhibits were augmented with an automatic narrated slide program. This program provided

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12 Harvey quotation in Memorandum, Acting Regional Director, Region Two to Chief West Office, Division of Design and Construction, May 13, 1960; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22. Reynolds quote in Memorandum, Assistant Program Officer to Regional Director, April 21, 1960.
13 See weekly field reports detailing the progress of construction through the summer of 1961, files of Homestead NM, D5217; the final report is dated September 19, 1961, when all minor corrections were completed. The contract award is a letter from Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss to J & L Engineering Company, Inc., June 26, 1961; files of Homestead NM, D5217.
14 Semiannual Report to Congress, June 24, 1986; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 32.
additional interpretation for the visitors, but it placed a greater strain on the available space, a challenge that was exacerbated by the appointment of the park’s first Historian, whose office was also carved out of the existing Utility Building.

As early as 1952, Region II Office staff and Superintendent Schultz discussed the possibility of a new Administration Building which would also have space for exhibits. As described earlier in Chapter 4, however, the late 1940s and 1950s were challenging years for NPS, and individual sites with stagnant budgets were forced to cover the demands of dramatically increased visitation. The potential costs of delayed maintenance came to take priority over the possibility of new construction, and nothing came of this initial proposal for a new Administration Building at Homestead National Monument. A change in fortunes was on the horizon, however, with the first discussions of the Mission 66 program. As described in Chapter 5, Mission 66 was a comprehensive program that planned for wide-ranging improvements at parks throughout the nation between 1956 and 1966, the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the National Park Service. In the face of stingy annual budgets doled out by Congress seeking to hold the reins on spending, and understanding the popular appeal of national parks and historic sites in the growing age of tourism, NPS Director Conrad Wirth proposed a program that broke the bounds of current thinking and planning. Instead of requesting increases to annual budgets, Wirth proposed something entirely different: a decade-long budget with

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16 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, September 15, 1952; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Catalog No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 13.
enough funding for tangible, visible improvements on a local level throughout the nation that members of Congress could support as serving their constituencies.

Wirth assembled a planning team in early 1955 that worked quickly to develop plans for a wide array of improvements at nearly all units of the National Park System, including new facilities, maintenance of existing facilities, infrastructure improvements, and new staff positions. One of the key innovations of this program was the Visitor Center, a new type of building that served multiple purposes including visitor orientation, exhibit and interpretation spaces, administrative offices, rest rooms, educational book stores, and automobile parking. Appropriate for a new type of building, NPS planners in the mid-1950s turned away from the traditional rustic look that dominated park buildings in the 1920s and 1930s and turned, instead, to modern approaches to architecture that included the use of glass, steel, and concrete, simplicity of forms, and an emphasis on horizontality. Differing sharply from the park buildings of the 1920s and 1930s, the new Visitor Centers of the Mission 66 era were justified largely on the same concept: to blend into the environment. Earlier architects sought to achieve this goal in large part through materials; in the 1950s and 1960s, this was achieved mostly through the plainness of the designs. As Director Wirth insisted, the buildings should not be the subject of a visit but should serve to house the important interpretive and visitor service functions without drawing attention to itself. At the same time, while enjoying a level of Congressional funding not seen since the 1930s, NPS officials were aware that funds were not unlimited and that the new facilities would need to accommodate a rapidly increasing number of visitors in the coming decades. As Sarah Allaback, author of the principal study of Mission 66 architecture, has observed,

The Park Service need to serve huge numbers of people as quickly as possible, and, despite increased funding, it had to do so on a limited budget. The materials that modern buildings were composed of—inexpensive steel, concrete, and glass—allowed more facilities to be built for more parks. In its publication Grist, the Park Service praised concrete as ‘low-cost, long-lived beauty treatment for parks.’

The plan for Homestead’s Mission 66 program was to have everything completed in time for the centennial celebration of the signing of the Homestead Act in 1962. The location of the new building, in the north forty adjacent to the Superintendent’s House, Utility Building, and Palmer-Epard Cabin, was clear from the outset (Figure 27) In order to make this happen, Superintendent Shaver was urged in late 1957 to begin the planning process by preparing Project Construction Program (PCP) proposals and statements of requirements for each of the projects. The Acting Regional Chief of Operations offered to provide any assistance necessary as the Superintendent began the planning efforts. Frequent memoranda between the park and the Region II Office bear out the validity of this offer. Planners with WODC were actively involved in developing budgets for Homestead’s Mission 66 program by 1958. As late as November 1958, the proposed budget for the Visitor Center was $210,000, which included

17 Allaback Mission 66 Visitor Centers, Chapter 1.
18 Memorandum, Acting Regional Chief of Operations, Region Two to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, October 15, 1957; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22.
$55,000 for exhibit development. This figure was adjusted upward by $10,000 in early 1960 to fund the cost of two dioramas in the exhibit.  

In 1960, however, as budgets began to constrict in the wake of the massive expenditures nationwide, the size of the Homestead Visitor Center as originally planned was reduced, as was the scope of exhibits. In early 1961, the budgets associated with these reductions in the scope of Homestead’s Mission 66 program had not yet been released. Superintendent Hotchkiss sought to maintain the budget for exhibits and thus maintain the plan developed by the Museum Planning Team which had worked at Homestead the previous summer. Unfortunately for the park, the Region Two Office reduced the budget for exhibits from $63,500 to $55,000. The loss of $8,500 in the exhibit budget was difficult to bear, but with construction due to start later that year, in order to have the program completed in time for the 1962 Homestead Centennial celebration, WODC was faced with sharply revising its design for the exhibits.

With the reduced budget in place by the winter of 1961, WODC prepared plans through the spring. The Region Two Office released the invitations to bid in late May 1961, and bids were opened on June 22, 1961. The Pat Hutson Construction Company of Fairbury, Nebraska, won the bid for the construction of the Visitor Center together with improvements to the

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19 Memorandum, Acting Plans and Product Control Officer, WODC to Regional Director, Region Two, November 28, 1958; Memorandum, Assistant Regional Director, Region Two to The Director, February 1, 1960; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22.
20 Memorandum, Superintendent to Regional Director, November 21, 1960 and January 31, 1961; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22.
Superintendent’s residence, including a garage addition and the installation of central air conditioning, for a total price of $103,320. In October 1961, the site’s Mission 66 construction budget again came up for discussion between the Region Two Office and WASO, particularly with regard to the exhibits. In a memorandum to the Regional Director, NPS Assistant Director Jackson E. Price discussed the budget difficulties entailed in the sharply increased costs for exhibit preparation. Although the estimate for the exhibit preparations at Homestead had dropped by $8,500, the Western Museum Laboratory, where the exhibits were being prepared, could not release the funds back to the Region “without curtailing the exhibits project.” The reduced size of the Visitor Center, he explained, made it a reasonable request, but the “sharp rise in the cost of exhibits” made the request not feasible. Instead, he counseled, the fact that the bid for the Visitor Center portion of the project was $14,000 less than the estimate, that savings could be used to offset the difference in exhibit costs.21

![Figure 28: Nebraska Governor Morrison with Assistant Regional Director Baggley and Chamber of Commerce President Boyd at Visitor Center Groundbreaking Ceremony, 1961. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument](image)

Work on the Visitor Center began in late July 1961, including removing sod and digging footings. The park held a groundbreaking ceremony on July 23, 1961, with Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison and Assistant Regional Director George Baggley in attendance (Figure 28). Both spoke about the forward movement of the Homestead Act and its relevance for the present. Governor Morrison, in his address, explained the significance of the Homestead Act and its role in creating opportunities, and asserted that, while Americans no longer have the opportunity to move further west, they do have a range of other opportunities including making the land more

21 Memorandum, Assistant Director to Regional Director, Region Two, October 2, 1961; Federal Records Center, 079-87-0003, Box 4, D22.
productive. Baggley spoke after Governor Morrison and, according to a newspaper account, “said that we are now in the space age and the period when America must move onward.” Once begun, construction of the building moved quickly. The interior framing and much of the roofing was completed by early November 1961. By the end of April 1962, the building, including the exterior display shed for large agricultural items, was nearly complete, except for miscellaneous items. This was well ahead of the construction deadline of May 30. The work included laying concrete sidewalks and benches and grading and paving the parking area at the front of the Visitor Center and the entrances to the residences (Figures 29, 30).

23 “Design and Construction,” undated typescript document c. July 30, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Box 1 Folder 18. See also Monthly Narrative Reports for October 1961, April 1962 and Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for FY 1962, Collection 100-II-B-1, Box 1 Folder 19 and Box 2 Folder 1, and Collection 100-II-B-2, Box 1 Folder 12.
Palmer-Epard Cabin

The construction program at Homestead National Monument from the early 1950s through the mid-1960s was focused on serving park and visitor needs; the new buildings were not themselves part of the interpretive program. As a historical site, however, both park and Midwest Regional Office staff recognized the value of historic buildings for interpretation. Few things convey the nature of life in a place and time so effectively as a home, the center of family activity. Since no historic buildings remained on the site when NPS began development operations in 1939, only two options were open: reconstruct a building that was representative of what had been on the site or relocate a historic building. By the late 1930s, with memories of the problems caused by a too-hasty reconstruction of a house at the George Washington Birthplace National Monument in what soon was revealed to be the wrong location, NPS officials were rightly concerned by the public expectation that historic sites should have reconstructed buildings. In the first several years of the Monument’s development, therefore, Region II Office and park staff deliberately made no plans to reconstruct any of the Freeman’s buildings at the site, announcing their preference to conduct substantial research first.

Instead of reconstructing a building, Superintendent Schultz, with the concurrence of Region II Office staff and WASO, opted to relocate a historic homesteader cabin to the site. Chapter 5 recounts the process by which the Palmer-Epard Cabin came to Homestead National Monument. Schultz first inspected the cabin in 1941 but did not pursue it despite its high state of preservation because then-owner John B. Epard wanted $1,000 for the building: the park’s budget at the time would not allow such an expenditure. In 1948, however, in consultation with NPS Chief Historian Ronald F. Lee, Regional Historian Olaf Hagen, and Merrill Mattes, then serving as NPS Historian for the Missouri River Basin Survey, Schultz again toured the region in search of a suitable cabin. None had the historical integrity which Epard’s cabin had, and, in 1950, Epard offered to donate it to NPS for use at Homestead National Monument. The Beatrice Chamber of Commerce donated $200 toward the cost of relocating it, and the cabin arrived on site in June 1950.

When new in 1867, the cabin was constructed of hewn hardwood logs, a mix of white and red oak, hackberry, ash, locust, walnut, and elm. Sawn lumber formed the rafters, gable end studding, and roof boards, and finished lumber was used for the attic floor, door, window frames, and window sashes. The roof likely was shingled in cedar, and bricks filled the space between the gable ends. Two windows lit the attic; the north and south walls also had windows, and the single door was located in the center of the west wall. The cabin had one room on the ground floor, and a stairway provided access to the attic. At some point after 1875, Palmer added a lean-to at the rear of the cabin, cut a doorway into the east wall, and added a double-hung window adjacent to the original front door. John Epard’s parents lived in the cabin from approximately 1900 until their deaths in the mid-1930s. During their ownership, the Epards added siding to the exterior, lathed and plastered the interior walls, and added a double window to the north wall.24

Before removing the cabin from the Epard farm, Schultz removed the interior flooring, wall plaster, and siding. At the park, he had a reinforced concrete foundation prepared, ten inches wide and four feet deep, reinforced with three-eighths inch rebar. The initial location of the cabin was along the west bank of Cub Creek, approximately within what is now the alignment of

24 Pope and Brown, 5-6.
Highway 4 (Figure 31). Once it was on its foundation on June 15, 1950, Schultz began restoring the cabin to its 1867 appearance. He secured a supply of lumber that was contemporary with the cabin, and accepted a donation of window sashes, cut nails, and weathered shingles that had come from buildings built by a Mennonite group in 1876. Schultz, with the assistance of park laborer Cornelius Franz and a local high school teacher, replaced the modern windows with window sashes from the 1860s. They used the contemporary logs to close the door that had been made on the east wall and the double-hung window, bolting the logs to the house with six-inch screws driven diagonally. Schultz, in his narrative of the restoration work, admitted the crudity of their efforts but defended them as suggestive of the “‘hardships and severity of pioneer life in the region.’”

The cabin was in generally sound condition when it arrived at the park in 1950; it has required extensive maintenance since then. The most persistent problem has been the infiltration of moisture, which has caused a range of problems. Although the cabin walls were placed on concrete foundations, the original earthen floor was an important part of the interpretation and was reinstated after the building was moved to the site. This contact with the earth allowed constant wicking of moisture from the floor into the wood materials of the walls which, over the years, has led to disintegration of some logs, insect infestations, loosening of the chinking between the logs, and decay of the interior whitewash.

Early maintenance focused on protecting the wood. Beginning in 1951, the log exteriors were treated with a five-percent solution of pentachlorophenol in an oil base. This mixture, which was prescribed by Regional architectural staff, was designed to preserve the logs and protect them from moisture and insects and continued to be applied into the late 1960s. In addition, park staff replaced loose chinking regularly and applied new whitewash to the interior walls. In the summer of 1954, the cabin was moved to a new location in anticipation of the relocation of Highway 4. Originally located near where the 1962 Visitor Center was built, it was deemed to be too close to the new Highway 4 alignment. The new foundation was excavated, and new concrete footings were installed in June 1954. The cabin was relocated to the new foundation in early August and provided with a new packed earthen floor. At the same time, Schultz drew from the park’s supply of contemporary logs to replace sections of some of the base logs that had deteriorated due to moisture. The walls were then whitewashed and new chinking placed between the logs.26 All of the chinking between the logs was removed in 1957 and replaced with a mixture of cement, lime, and sand; this was necessary “to prevent water from seeping between the old mortar and logs.”27

George Washington Palmer’s youngest son, Herbert Palmer, was born in the family cabin in 1872. Herbert Palmer remained in the Beatrice area, serving as the custodian of the Gage County courthouse into the early 1950s. He was a friend of the park and frequently offered his recollections of the cabin and its furnishings. In late 1958, at his suggestion, the park re-opened the attic space and built a new stairway to replace the original one which had been removed during the Epard ownership. The staircase was then enclosed, again at Herbert Palmer’s suggestion, in November 1959. Palmer died early the next year, on February 3, 1960 at age 87.28

Placed in a new location in 1954 when Highway 4 was shifted to the north, the cabin had to be moved again in 1962 to make way for the new Visitor Center (Figure 32). The cabin was relocated a short distance away, adjacent to the rear of the new building and close to the outdoor display shed for agricultural implements. It was located along the path from the Visitor Center to the new Cub Creek foot bridge which led to the self-guided interpretive trail through the prairie.

Problems with a leaking roof and deteriorating chinking arose in late 1966. In November, Regional Director Fred Fagergren appealed to NPS Director George Hartzog for support from a historical architect, asserting that the preservation of the cabin required immediate attention. The most challenging issue, he explained, was to match the original shingles.29 The NPS historic architectural section was then being reorganized and was unable to offer immediate assistance to the Midwest Regional Office. In early 1967, Regional Landscape Architect Murray George coordinated with Superintendent John Rohn to identify the type of shingles that were on the roof; in his record of the initial telephone call, Superintendent Rohn opined that “Apparently WASO

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26 Monthly Narrative Reports for June 1954 and August 1954; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folders 9 and 11. The first use of pentachlorophenol is recorded in Monthly Narrative Report for September 1951, and Pope and Brown note its ongoing use in 1968.

27 Pope and Brown, 9.

28 “Revise Cabin at Homestead,” Beatrice Daily Sun, April 28, 1959, page 1; “Improvements Add to Cabin’s Authenticity,” Beatrice Daily Sun, November 5, 1959, page 1. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 10.

29 Memorandum, Regional Director to The Director, November 16, 1966; Federal Records Center, 079-88-001, Box 10, H30.
Historian Clifford Soubier provided George with a sample of the shingles, which Superintendent Schultz, in 1953, noted were cedar, attached with cut nails. He also reported that the park had three bundles of spare shingles. The roof rafters, moreover, were in good condition. Originally joined without a ridge-pole, during the 1953 restoration, Superintendent Schultz had attached steel gusset plates to hold the rafters in place.³¹

When he received the sample shingles from Soubier, Landscape Architect George had them examined informally by a forester who identified one, an older sample, as white cedar, and a newer one as western red cedar. Red cedar, he noted, is currently available. Given the immediate need for re-shingling, George identified three alternatives: use red cedar and modern galvanized nails, formally identify the wood species of the old shingles but still replace with modern red cedar, and work to identify current sources of the wood used in the original shingles.

³⁰ Record of Telephone Call, Murray George to John Rohn, January 9, 1967; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No 7584, Box 2 Folder 6. George recorded a more positive description of the call; Federal Records Center, 079-88-001, Box 10, H30.
³¹ Memorandum, Historian, Homestead to Regional Director, February 6, 1967; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No 7584, Box 2 Folder 6.
for use in replacement shingles. Finally, in March 1967, Historical Architect Henry Judd was available to consult on the project and recommended replacing the shingles with modern western red cedar. However, rather than the standard sized shingles, Judd recommended working with west coast suppliers who still had “downfall” shakes, which are thinner than what was then commercially available. Judd cautioned that it might take several months to secure the needed five squares of shingles. The shingles finally arrived in the summer of 1967, and the new shingles were installed later that year.

At the same time, the chinking between the logs had deteriorated and needed to be replaced. Regional maintenance staff recommended removing the earlier concrete chinking, and replacing it with a mix of straw, mud, and lime mortar, which they believed to be more historically accurate. Historical Architect Judd concurred in the recommendation, and the work was completed in the summer of 1967.

These preservation issues with the Palmer-Epard Cabin had been observed through the early 1960s, and, in 1966, the Midwest Regional Office included an allocation for a Historic Structures Report (HSR) for the cabin in its FY1968 budget. In March 1967, Historian Clifford Soubier prepared a proposal for the work, citing the pressing issues of shingles, chinking, and the earthen floor that threatened the preservation of the cabin. In addition, he recommended the completion of a Furnishings Plan, since “The propriety of the furnishings has been questioned by qualified Service personnel.” The WASO Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation approved the study in May, though they determined that the Furnishings Plan should be requested separately and suggested that the park Historian prepare Part I, the historic overview, using local sources rather than wait for WASO staff to complete the work. Soubier completed the work quickly, and the brief outline report was approved by the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation in September 1967.

Part II of the HSR is a more extensive document. Completed in 1968 and prepared by Architect Charles S. Pope and Historian Lenard E. Brown, it included a longer historical overview than Soubier provided, with additional information about acquisition of the cabin by NPS in 1950. Part II of the report also provided a detailed examination of the pressing preservation issues and recommended corrective actions. For the dampness, the HSR recommended excavating a four-foot-deep trench around the concrete foundation and applying 3/8-inch asbestos board to the exterior as a water barrier, with metal flashing between the foundation and the bottom log that would lap over the edge of the board to direct water away.

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32 Handwritten memorandum by Murray George and dated March 7, 1967, stapled to the memorandum from Historian to Regional Director, February 6, 1967; Federal Records Center, 079-88-001, Box 10, H30.
from the log. Drain tile and gravel would then be placed around the foundation, and the ground regraded to slope away from the foundation. As for the chinking, the report recommended a mix of three parts lime to seven parts sand to be used for future repairs.\textsuperscript{36}

The park received two separate Furnishings Plans for the Palmer-Epard Cabin in 1968. Park Historian Clifford Soubier produced a plan that focused primarily on the interpretation of the cabin. Soubier emphasized the importance of conveying the nature of living in a homestead cabin. In his introduction, Soubier sought to eliminate an interpretation that was based on hardship and privation and urged a focus on the strategies that immigrants from widely divergent backgrounds adopted to thrive in their new environments. The homesteaders, he argued, did not wallow in their misery. Many were immigrants fresh from Europe where they were accustomed to neat homes and villages. However hastily built the dwelling, the inhabitants set about immediately to make it livable. This should be the keynote in the furnishings plan. Life on the frontier was a battle and a compromise with hardship to be sure but one should wonder in looking at the cabin, why the settlers bothered to live at all.

“When he steps through the door of the cabin,” Soubier concluded, “the visitor should feel, not only the struggle of existing in a small one-room house, but that this is where a family found shelter from the struggle without.”\textsuperscript{37}

Soubier prepared his Historic Furnishings Report as a component of his HSR. In the summer of 1968, Historian Lenard Brown also completed a Furnishings Report. Brown’s study included a more extensive review of other known homesteader cabins in Kansas and Nebraska in the 1860s and 1870s and how they were furnished. Brown then described the types of furnishings that should be in the Palmer-Epard Cabin based on this review, including a stove, a bed and mattress, a table and chairs, storage including cupboards, shelves, and pegs, trunks and chests, kitchen equipment and eating utensils, and other miscellaneous furnishings. Echoing Soubier’s emphasis on the lived experiences of the homesteaders, Brown concluded that

Each cabin would be different and reflect the personality of the family that lived there. All would have a few things in common. First, they would be crowded, as Henry and Rosie Ise’s home was crowded; the furniture would combine the rough and fine together, with the polished oak chest and the homemade table near each other; third, the furnishings would be sufficient, but not excessive, with just enough but none too much; and finally the cabin would show that this was a transitional stage in which life was hard and harsh, but not hopeless.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Pope and Brown, 11-13.

\textsuperscript{37} Clifford Soubier, “Furnishings Plan, Palmer-Epard Cabin, Homestead National Monument,” n.d. [c.1967], with Supplement, February 19, 1968; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-D-1, Catalog No. 7600, Box 1 Folder 11.

\textsuperscript{38} Lenard E. Brown, “Palmer-Epard Cabin, Homestead National Monument,” June 1968, page 14; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-D-1, Catalog No. 7599, Box 1 Folder 13.
An examination of the building in 1971 by Ronald R. Switzer, Director of the Betrand Conservation Laboratory, called into question whether the changes recommended in the HSR had been implemented. The concrete foundation, according to Switzer, appeared not to have been treated with moisture retardant, allowing moisture from the ground to migrate through the concrete foundation and into the timbers of the cabin. As a result, he noted dry rot in several locations of the base logs. He recommended replacing the existing concrete foundation with a concrete slab treated with impermeable materials on the top and bottom, together with a concrete apron extending outward from the slab for approximately eighteen inches. Once the new foundation was in place, he recommended treating the dry rot by injecting a wax or resin containing a toxic compound that that would attack the fungi which caused the dry rot. Until that was possible, however, he suggested more familiar methods: “it would be advisable to apply a good coat of Monsanto Penta (pentachlorophenol) and research the situation more thoroughly.”

Switzer’s recommendations were more theoretical in orientation, discussing possible ramifications of different treatments rather than making firm treatment determinations. They appear not to have been heeded. In 1977, however, Midwest Regional Restoration Specialist Ray Kunkel led a major restoration project at the Palmer-Epard Cabin with the assistance of Regional Historian Andy Ketterson. This project entailed removing all existing chinking, repairing deteriorated sections of the logs and trim, applying wood preservative to the log exterior and the wooden roof shingles, replacing the earthen floor, and whitewashing the interior walls. Work began in early May 1977 with shoring up the walls from the exterior before beginning to remove the existing chinking. The existing chinking was composed of mortar of various types; cement mortar had been used on the lower logs to prevent deterioration but had the opposite effect because it trapped moisture within the logs. All trim around the doors and windows was removed due to its advanced deterioration. The trim was rebuilt and replaced before the new chinking was applied. The new exterior mortar was a mixture of sand, hydrated lime, white masonry cement, and a small amount of fabric, and the edges of the logs were scarred with a hatchet before galvanized nails were driven into the logs to give the mortar additional surfaces to bond to.

Unfortunately, the park had no more supply of historic logs to use for the 1977 repairs. Instead, after Superintendent Halvorson sent out a memo asking for assistance, the park was able to secure a supply of appropriate logs from Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Indiana. Restoration Specialist Kunkel used some of these logs for the repairs, but other sections of the cabin’s logs were repaired using a two-component structural paste adhesive which was allowed to harden before the restoration crew tooled the surface to resemble wood grain. The exterior logs were then treated with clear Cuprinol Wood Preservative, and the cedar shingles were treated with Cuprinol as a preservative and Hydrozo for waterproofing. Once all other structural work was completed, the existing earthen floor was replaced with a mix of alternating layers of soil and dry cement packed to a hard finish and dampened with water. Before applying alternating layers of soil and cement. Restoration Specialist Kunkel expected that this method would result in “setting the cement up and making a harder type floor. This type of floor should completely eliminate the racking that we are experiencing in the floor at the present time.”

39 Memorandum, Laboratory Director, Bertrand Conservation Laboratory to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, August 17, 1971; Files of Homestead NM, D3423.
40 Memorandum, Restoration Specialist, Maintenance and Historic Preservation to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Management, March 11, 1977; Files of Homestead NM, D30.
Finally, the interior walls were whitewashed with a mixture of glue, white plaster of Paris, and water. All work was completed during the summer of 1977.\(^{41}\)

The cabin received regular maintenance through the early 1980s, including replacing some of the chinking and re-applying whitewash in 1983. A more substantial restoration effort took place in 1987, when three of the base logs were found to be deteriorated and infested with insects. Successive corners of the cabin were lifted off the lower level of logs with a twelve-ton jack, which allowed the removal of the bottom logs. The log sections were replaced with black locust logs, roughly cut to shape with a chainsaw and then hewn by hand; the new log was bolted to the existing upper log before being lowered back into place. The chinking was replaced with a similar mixture as that used in the 1977 repairs, a mixture of hydrated lime, masonry cement, and sand, but no fabric.\(^{42}\) In 1998, the park’s maintenance staff, with the assistance of Youth Conservation Corps workers and Student Conservation Association interns, completed another significant restoration. This work entailed replacing the 1977 flooring, installing a new drainage system around the cabin, installing Impel rods in the interior log surfaces to prevent dry rot, and applying new whitewash.\(^{43}\)

Finally, in the summer of 2009, staff from the Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) in Frederick, Maryland, traveled to Homestead National Monument following the construction of the new Heritage Center. The revised General Management Plan (GMP) required the relocation of the cabin to the new Heritage Center grounds from its place near the 1962 Visitor Center. The project entailed dismantling the entire cabin prior to its relocation. The roof framing system was not the original and was rebuilt using new 2” x 6” rafters. Historic Preservation Training Center staff recommended replacing the existing shakes, which were replacements from an earlier restoration, with shingles “so as not to deviate from the existing appearance.” At the recommendation of Midwest Region Historical Architect Mark Chavez, the 2009 restoration also reversed the long-standing use of an earthen floor and instead included a wooden floor built with rough cut boards of varying widths. Approximately six inches of gravel was placed between the ground and the floor to facilitate drainage. The cabin was then placed on a new concrete foundation, and local rough split natural stone was applied to the exposed, above-grade areas of concrete to conceal any concrete along sections that were exposed above the ground. The work began in September 2009 and was nearly completed by the end of 2009.

\(^{41}\) The quotation and most information is in Trip Report Memorandum, Restoration Specialist to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, March 11, 1977; Files of Homestead NM, H30. See also Trip Report Memorandum, Restoration Specialist to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, May 4, 1977, Files of Homestead NM, H30; Trip Report Memorandum, Restoration Specialist to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, March 11, 1977, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-D-2-a, Catalog No. 8097, Box 2 Folder 2; Trip Report Memorandum, Restoration Specialist to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, March 11, 1977, Federal Records Center, 79-89-0007, Box 1, H3015. Historical Architect Vince Kaminski visited the park in late April 1977 and disagreed with the extent of Kunkel’s restoration efforts; Federal Records Center, 79-89-0007, Box 1, H3015. Superintendent Halvorson acknowledged receipt of the logs from the Superintendent of Lincoln Boyhood Home in a memorandum, June 14, 1977; Files of Homestead NM, H30.

\(^{42}\) Homestead National Monument Maintenance Division, Palmer-Epard Cabin, Log Replacement Project ’87; Files of Homestead NM, D5217.

\(^{43}\) Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report 1998, February 19, 1999; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 43.
though final finishing work waited until the spring of 2010. The park then held a public dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 29, 2010 (Figure 33).

Figure 33: Palmer-Epard Cabin, 2018. Photograph by the author

Maintenance and Infrastructure

The built environment at Homestead National Monument had been growing slowly through the 1940s and 1950s. Starting with the single Utility Building in 1941, and with the addition of the Palmer-Epard Cabin and the Superintendent’s residence in 1950 followed by the small, early self-guided prairie trail in 1955, the park was gradually growing to keep pace with the demands of the new post-war tourism traffic. These few resources, together with the ongoing prairie restoration and erosion control work, were putting a strain on the available staff which, by the mid-1950s, included only the Superintendent, a part-time Clerk/Typist, and the seasonal staff of a ranger and a laborer. When creating the Mission 66 plan in the late 1950s, park and regional staff envisioned two new buildings (Visitor Center and employee residence), a large new foot bridge over Cub Creek, and an expanded trail network. This would be a substantial campus, the care of which would tax the time and effort of the existing staff beyond what was possible.

44 Trip Report Memorandum, Deputy Superintendent, Historic Preservation and Training Center to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America, June 12, 2009; Email, Mark Engler to Truslow Brown, September 28, 2009; newspaper clipping, May 26, 2010; Files of Homestead NM, H3017. See also Homestead NM Staff Meeting Minutes, May 14, 2009 and September 8, 2009; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 2 Folder 6.
In addition to a permanent Historian, Homestead National Monument’s Mission 66 plans included a full-time maintenance staff. During the planning phase for the new Visitor Center, the services of a Historian were most vital, and Donald Warman entered on duty in August 1958. Into the early 1960s, however, maintenance personnel were hired only on a seasonal or intermittent basis. Even in 1962, when the Visitor Center was completed, the park hired a temporary Laborer and a temporary Caretaker “to help with the increased activity resulting from the MISSION 66 activities.” A search for a permanent Caretaker finally began in late 1962 but was not completed in FY 1963. Finally, on November 16, 1963, Raymond Norman entered on duty as the first permanent Custodian for Homestead National Monument.45

With an increasing number of buildings, the park’s infrastructure needs grew apace. The park first began work on a water and sewer system in 1949 in anticipation of the construction of the Superintendent’s residence. A septic system was contracted in December 1949, and construction was completed in the spring of 1950. The septic system, identified on a 1953 plan for a new public restroom building, was along the west bank of Cub Creek near what is now the Cub Creek footbridge (Figure 34). A water system based on a well and reservoir were completed in the summer of 1950 and was in use until 1999.

Figure 34: 1962 photograph of installation of water reservoir behind Utility Building. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument

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45 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Reports for FY 1962 and 1963 (quote from 1962 report); Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 12. See also Monthly Narrative Report for October 1962; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B01, Catalog No. 7584, Box 2, Folder 1.
Construction of the new Visitor Center and employee residence under the Mission 66 program would require a new water system. Bids for the new 20,000-gallon water reservoir and pump house were opened in July 1961 along with bids for the Visitor Center, foot bridge, and employee residence. All bids were above the government estimate and were not let until early 1962. The Pat Huston Company of Fairbury, Nebraska, which was then building the Visitor Center, won the revised bid and began work in March 1962. The work included excavating a hole approximately seventeen feet deep in the space behind the Visitor Center and to the east of the Utility Building and laying in it the new concrete reservoir on a bed of crushed stone. A pump house was installed in the north room of the Utility Building adjacent to the pumps for the deep well. The contract also included a chlorination system for the domestic water supply and a connection to a fire hose pump. At the same time, Midwest Regional Office engineers coordinated with the Norris Public Power Company of Beatrice to extend three-phase electric service to the park and a single-phase service to the new pump house. Telephone service was provided and installed by the Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph Company.46

The infrastructure system installed at Homestead during the Mission 66 program remained in place until the 1980s and only occasionally needed maintenance and upgrades. In 1987, for example, the park installed a new septic system. The 2000-gallon concrete tank was located at the southeast corner of the Visitor Center and two leach fields extended south of the Visitor Center. The park’s water supply relied on an eighty-foot well powered by a ½-horsepower submersible pump, with the water chlorinated by a pump-activated hypochlorinator before entering the 20,000-gallon concrete reservoir. In July 1999, Representative Doug Bereuter announced that funds had been allocated to allow the park to connect to the City of Beatrice’s water supply through the Beatrice West Public Water District, a new district formed by the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District. Many local citizens had been active in lobbying Congress to provide these funds. The Beatrice City Council gave its approval to connect the park and approximately forty-five other users along Highway 4 to city water through the new water district. Mel Fowler and Don Zieman, staff members of the Public Utility Management Office of the Denver Service Center, negotiated the agreement with the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District to connect the park.

Landscape Protection

Encroachments in the 1960s and 1970s

Park and Midwest Regional Office staff rightly focused on the resources within the park’s boundary, both natural and cultural, to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the site’s interpretation. The lands surrounding the park, although secondary to the park itself, are nonetheless important to allowing visitors to experience more fully the significance and

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46 Completion Report, Utility Extensions, Homestead National Monument, Beatrice, Nebraska, 1962; Files of Homestead NM, H30. See also Trip Report, Regional Engineer to Assistant Regional Director, June 2, 1961, pertaining to coordinating electrical service Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 4; Warren Hotchkiss, Report on Design and Construction, June 22, 1961, Archives of Homestead NM; Monthly Narrative Report for April 1962, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 2 Folder 1.
The uniqueness of the former Freeman homestead. The surrounding land is primarily open farmland with gently rolling topography and relatively few trees. These views provide a sense of time and place. As a result, lines of sight from the park, particularly from the restored prairie, are long, and the potential for visual impacts from outside the park is high. As early as the early 1960s, Regional staff were concerned about the potential for encroachments on the vista from the park. Regional Staff Historian Roy Appleman visited Homestead National Monument in the fall of 1962, shortly after the Visitor Center opened, and applauded the new exhibits. He was concerned, however, about the need “to give scenic and encroachment protection and integrity to the present area.” He estimated that approximately thirty acres on the eastern and southeastern edge of the current boundary would be needed:

Because of the terrain and topography of the Homestead area, and its immediate environs, this additional 30 acres, more or less, would give visual control to all points of the horizon from the Freeman homestead site (house site) and would make it possible to exclude encroachments on the scene. A few houses now appear on the southeast horizon, but because of the distance these can readily be screened.

Appleman observed that, already, one house had been built across Highway 4 from the Visitor Center, and “This is indicative of housing development that may be expected close to Beatrice.”

Two developments near the park in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated the potential threats to the park’s surrounding landscape. In early 1964, the Beatrice Development Corporation announced plans to seek to attract a fertilizer plant for the area. In April, Phillips Petroleum Company announced plans to build a large plant in the area to produce anhydrous ammonia for use as a fertilizer. The company purchased 150 acres in Hoag, an unincorporated township west of Beatrice and approximately two miles north of Homestead National Monument and the Freeman School. In August 1964, while the Phillips plant was under construction, Cominco Products, Inc. announced plans to purchase the lot immediately south of the Phillips plant to build a plant that would manufacture fertilizer using the anhydrous ammonia that was to be produced at the Phillips plant. Not to be outdone, Phillips announced, in September 1964, that it would build a second plant adjacent to its first to produce an ammonia nitrate-urea solution as another branded fertilizer. All three plants were in operation by early 1966.

The park took part in the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Cominco plant, working with the Homestead Historical Association to provide “an old-fashioned spade for the event, after which the spade was presented to the company’s president in [sic] behalf of Homestead National Monument.” Despite these early signs of neighborliness, the new developments

47 Memorandum, Staff Historian to Chief Division of History and Archeology, attached to Memorandum, Assistant Director to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 24, 1962; FRC, 079-88-0001 Box 15, Doc. 16.


49 Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY 1965; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 15.
definitively demonstrated the need to protect the surrounding lands. The new plants posed direct
and indirect threats to the park’s surroundings. Although the plants are not directly visible from
the prairie or the headquarters area and only partially visible from the Freeman School and
Heritage Center, the potential for reduced air quality is a regular threat. Moreover, anhydrous
ammonia is a highly toxic chemical, so the plants maintain emergency notification and
evacuation procedures in case of accidents. In 1986, for example, a truck pulling a trailer tank
with 1000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia hit the bridge over Cub Creek adjacent to the Visitor
Center and spilled the contents. Ten trees and several thousand square feet of grass were killed as
a result, and the Visitor Center was closed for nearly two hours while the gas vented. Three years
later, a spill at the plant itself resulted in emergency alerts to Homestead National Monument and
the other neighbors. According to the weekly staff meeting minutes, the leak was repaired before
evacuations were necessary, but, as a material that will seek to extract water from any available
source, “Anhydrous ammonia has the potential to suck your eyeballs out of your head.”

The indirect threats posed by these new plants consisted of the potential for rapid
development of the surrounding lands. An area information guide for Homestead National
Monument staff in 1968 revealed that the Phillips Petroleum Company had recently announced
plans to expand their facility, “indicating a trend toward expanding land prices and the need for
employee housing, thus subdivision.” This pamphlet observed that one subdivision had already
been constructed to the northeast of the park, and others were being contemplated. Pioneer
Acres subdivision was created in 1967, located on the northeast side of Highway 4, across the
street from what was then the eastern boundary of Homestead National Monument. Developed
by Koenig Construction, the subdivision consists of one street extending east from Highway 4
and two streets running north, ending in cul-de-sacs (Figure 35). Houses in the development
continued to be built through the 1970s, with several houses sited very close to the northeast side
of Highway 4. With no vegetative screening, this constitutes the park’s principal visual
intrusion.

Scenic Easements and the Freeman School
Regional Staff Historian Roy Appleman, in his 1962 assessment of the park’s
surroundings, observed that MWRO had traditionally been reluctant to expand the boundaries of
the park due to “the view that only the original homestead acreage should be in the national
monument. I submit that this is a mistaken policy and urge that it be altered.” If not, he argued,
then it would not be possible to provide adequate protection for the park. This regional policy
of not expanding the boundary of Homestead National Monument was made explicit in 1968. As
described more fully in Chapter 5, in the late 1960s, the park was exploring the living history
approach to interpretation with demonstrations of handcrafts and farm activities from the
homestead era of the late nineteenth century. The suggestion had arisen that perhaps the park’s

50 Staff Meeting Minutes, August 15, 1989; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085,
Box 1 Folder 5. See also Staff Meeting Minutes, April 18, 1986; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E,
Catalog No. 8025, Box 1 Folder 2.
51 “Homestead National Monument Area Information,” pamphlet; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-IV-C-2,
Catalog No. 6992, Box 1, Folder 41.
52 The 1984 Land Protection Plan included a recommendation to coordinate with NDR to plant historically
appropriate trees on the State Triangle to provide a visual buffer between the prairie and Pioneer Acres.
53 Memorandum, Staff Historian to Chief Division of History and Archeology, attached to Memorandum, Assistant
Director to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 24, 1962; FRC, 079-88-0001 Box 15, Doc. 16.
boundaries could be expanded to allow acquisition of the thirty-seven-acre parcel immediately west of the north forty and that this land be used as a living history farm. In a memorandum to NPS Director George B. Hartzog, Jr., Acting Regional Director Harvey B. Reynolds strongly recommended against this proposal. “The primary reason for not recommending this addition,” he argued,

is that the existing 162.73 acres is the original homestead selected for the Homestead National Monument to represent the typical quarter section that Lincoln hoped to make available to every man. The boundary acreages contained therein are in themselves a resource. They represent America’s effort to describe a man’s land in unequivocal terms so that he could always hold it unchallenged. . . . Adding a parcel of land for a living history farm would be an appendage that would just have to be explained away when interpreting the area.54

Acquiring land in fee outside the park required Congressional approval, something sought carefully, given the level of effort required. In the late 1960s, Homestead National Monument turned, instead, to scenic easements as a way to protect the integrity of the views from the park, called the viewshed. Scenic easements are one type of a less-than-fee property ownership that restricts the development and use of a parcel of land with the intent of protecting

54 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to The Director, December 27, 1968; FRC, 079-88-0001 Box 15, Doc. 5.
the land’s conservation or historic values. In the case of scenic easements, the intent of the acquisition is to protect a specific viewshed by restricting the types of developments that may obstruct it. The National Park Service first purchased scenic easements in the 1930s and 1940s that encumbered nearly 1,500 acres to protect the viewshed of Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina. Scenic easements gained in popularity in the mid- and late 1960s as the federal government provided financial incentives to states with the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, and the Internal Revenue Service began to provide tax incentives to individuals who donated conservation easements to non-profit organizations.55

Aside from the one house which Appleman noted in 1962, the park faced few threats from its surroundings for the first two decades, as development pressure so far from downtown Beatrice remained low. As a result, although scenic easements as a protection tool were available to the park in the 1950s and early 1960s, they were not widely known, and the park faced no immediate need for them. In the second half of the 1960s, however, as Congress moved toward approving an expansion of the park’s boundary to acquire the Freeman School, park and Regional officials became concerned about the quarter-mile distance between the Visitor Center and the Freeman School. In December 1966, Regional Director Fred C. Fagergren wrote to NPS Director George B. Hartzog, Jr. about the proposed legislation to add the Freeman School property to Homestead National Monument. Fagergren admitted the challenges posed by the distance between the Visitor Center and the school but argued against attempting to construct a walking trail between them. He was concerned, however, about maintaining “an open vista” between the two buildings. He recommended that

this could best be accomplished by a 660 foot scenic easement either [sic] side of the road right-of-way (approximately forty acres) which would permit the agricultural uses to continue but would prohibit the erection of buildings, signs, or other structures that might interfere with the view of the school.56

Most of 1967 was spent evaluating the Freeman School for inclusion as part of the park, deciding whether to relocate the building to the Visitor Center grounds or leave it in place, and arranging for the transfer of the property from the Tri-County School Board to the Homestead Historical Association, which agreed to hold the property on behalf of NPS until Congress approved its addition to the park. Planning for the scenic easements began in early 1968. The initial proposal included five individual parcels (Figure 36):

- Tract 01-106, on the north side of Highway 4, lying northeast of the Visitor Center
- Tract 01-107, 300 feet wide on the north side of Highway 4, extending east from SW 89th Road
- Tract 01-108, a maximum of 300 feet by 400 feet surrounding the Freeman School at the northwest corner of Highway 4 and SW 89th Road

56 Memorandum, Regional Director Fred C. Fagergren to The Director, December 7, 1966; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-D-2-a, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 7.
• Tract 01-109, a 300 foot by 300 foot parcel at the southwest corner of Highway 4 and SS 89th Road
• Tract 01-110, 300 feet wide on the south side of Highway 4, extending from SW 89th Road to the park boundary.\(^57\)

The park obtained options on easements for two of the parcels in 1968, but the owner of Tract 01-110, Edward Scheve, was apparently reluctant to convey an easement because he hoped to sell the parcel for subdivision.\(^58\)

![Figure 36: 1968 plan showing Freeman School and proposed scenic easements. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument](image)

Once the legislation passed in September 1970, however, the Midwest Regional Office initiated the process of securing the easements and was successful with the two parcels on the north side of Highway 4 across from the Visitor Center, totaling 18.18 acres. In 1984, however, the park produced its initial Land Protection Plan (LPP). At that point, three key parcels remained unprotected by easements: Tracts 01-108, 01-109, and 01-110. The LPP outlined five alternates, including no action, acquiring the parcels in fee (which was allowed in the legislation

\(^57\) See correspondence attached to Memorandum, Acting Chief, Office of Land and Water Rights to Regional Director, Midwest Region, February 16, 1968; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-D-2-a, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 8.

\(^58\) “Homestead National Monument: Area Information,” pamphlet in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-IV-C-2, Catalog No. 6992, Box 1 Folder 41. The pamphlet does not indicate for which parcels NPS had secured options.
that added Freeman School to the park), scenic easements, working with Gage County to enact protective zoning, and entering into Memoranda of Understanding with the owners. The LPP recommended acquiring Tract 01-108 surrounding the Freeman School in fee in order to provide visitor parking, while acquiring easements for Tracts 01-109 and 01-110, including access for a trail in Tract 01-110.59

The release of the LPP in late 1984 caused consternation among the park’s neighbors, particularly the owners of the three lots still under consideration. In particular, Richard Scheve, the owner of Tract 01-108 which surrounds the Freeman School, quickly contacted U.S. Representative Douglas Bereuter with concerns that the proposed scenic easement would adversely impact Scheve’s farming operations. Other owners also contacted U.S. Senator James Exon (R-NE) about their objections. Acting Regional Directors in early 1985 wrote letters to Exon and Bereuter seeking to reassure the landowners that there was no cause for their concerns.60

In addition to protecting the viewsheds between the Visitor Center and the Freeman School, the park was concerned about parking at the school. Research by experts from the University of Nebraska determined that the then-existing parking lot used when the school was operational had been placed on a remnant of virgin prairie “whose preservation would fit in nicely with the constant attempts to retain as far as possible the historic scene at the monument.” Instead, NPS hoped to place a parking lot for visitors immediately north of the school on the 1.3-acre Tract 01-108. The acquisition of this parcel in fee, therefore, became a leading priority for the park in the late 1980s. Richard Scheve, the owner of the parcel, however, refused to sell, and, by 1989, Superintendent Baynes saw no alternative to initiating condemnation proceedings against Scheve and exercising the option of eminent domain. Both Senator Exon and Representative Bereuter recommended against this approach, but, according to the minutes of a staff meeting in August 1989, “It is our consensus that other options for providing safe visitor access to the school and adequate parking have been discussed and discarded and that this is the best option currently available.”61

The park initiated condemnation proceedings against Richard Scheve in October 1989 for the parcel surrounding the Freeman School and for scenic easements on an additional twenty acres for a trail right-of-way on the south side of Highway 4 immediately west of the park’s boundary. The proceedings continued through 1991 and were completed on July 6, 1992. At that point, the park acquired 1.2 acres surrounding the Freeman School in fee and acquired scenic easements for 7.6 acres on the south side of Highway 4.62

In general, the 1980s were a time of increased awareness of the potential for increased degradation of the surrounding landscape. A 1982 “Cultural Resources Boundary Evaluation

60 See Acting Regional Director Randall R. Pope to Doug Bereuter, February 6, 1985 and Acting Regional Director James L. Ryan to J. James Exon, February 22, 1985; Files of Homestead NM, L1425.
61 Staff Meeting Minutes, August 16, 1989; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 5.
62 Staff Meeting Minutes, October 1, 1992; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 5.
Report,” prepared by Homestead National Monument staff at the request of the WASO Associate Director for Cultural Resources Management, captures the concerns bordering on pessimism at the loss of the historic setting caused by the Pioneer Acres subdivision at the park’s northeastern border and the fertilizer plants to the north of the Visitor Center:

The principle [sic] park resources and historic scene which needs to be protected is the park in total. The importance of this resource is that the homesteaders were coming upon “new land,” “virgin ground” and were making a new life from the land. To preserve that feeling it will be necessary to maintain the area surrounding the park at the present level of industrial development and residential housing.

Both the fertilizer plants and the Pioneer Acres subdivision, according to the report, “are degrading the historic prairie scene.” The surrounding farm lands, “the compatible vista provided by the present agricultural uses,” are vital to the ability of the park to convey its story, according to the report, and “To complete the sense of vastness, it is of prime concern that the area be kept as open as possible” and any further industrial or residential development had to be halted. The report included a recommendation that the scenic easements anticipated in the Freeman School legislation be acquired as soon as possible, though they would not protect “the remaining historic scene of the original homestead.”

**Highway 4 and the State Triangle**

When Homestead National Monument was established in 1936, State Highway 4 passed directly through the three southern forties on a generally east-west orientation, crossing Cub Creek to the south of the existing Cub Creek foot bridge. While interesting as an interpretive component to identify the way that Daniel Freeman experienced his homestead, having a state highway cut through the middle of a National Monument caused many logistical and safety challenges.

The Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation announced plans to realign Highway 4 in 1953, and, in the summer of 1953, the Region II Office in Omaha negotiated a Special Use Permit with the State to construct the new road on portions of the park’s property. The negotiations for conducting the work included an agreement that NPS would provide $90,000 while the State provided $8,000. Work on the project began in the spring of 1954 with the construction of a new bridge over Cub Creek followed by grading of the new road. Road construction was largely completed by the summer of 1954. An intriguing problem arose with the proposed abandonment of the original Highway 4. As described in the Superintendent’s monthly report for July 1954,

Apparently this road was established before Nebraska’s statehood and there is no record of accession by the county or state. Sections to be retained for historical and access purposes must be maintained by the Monument. Probably no formal

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63 “Cultural Resources Boundary Evaluation Report, Homestead National Monument of America,” attached to Memorandum, Acting Regional Director, Midwest Region to Associate Director, Cultural Resources Management, August 31, 1982; Files of Homestead NM, H2017. See Chapter 11 for a discussion of a 1988 study regarding the protection of the park’s surrounding landscape by the National Parks and Conservation Association.
64 See documents associated with the 1953 Special Use Permit in Files of Homestead NM, D30.
action of abandonment will be taken by county officials as no formal action of
action of acceptance for maintenance and improvement was ever made by early
day officials.65

The original portion of Highway 4 was formally closed on August 28, 1954, although the new
section of road was not paved until late in the summer of 1955. Homestead National Monument
officials announced that it would retain a portion of the road for interpretive purposes because
the alignment existed during the era of the Freeman homestead.66 This section of road was later
removed as a part of the Mission 66 activities, though a fragment remains as the Grain Growers
Highway Trail currently traverses the park.67

The relocation in 1954 moved the highway slightly to the north with a southeast-to-
northwest alignment across the east and north forties. The new diagonal alignment created three
triangles of land, separating small sections of park land on the northeast side of the highway
while leaving an eight-acre triangle on the southwest side of the highway where the north forty
extend to form the park’s T-shape (Figure 37). This eight-acre parcel remained in the hands of
the state, though it was contiguous with the park’s boundary both physically and visually:
visitors driving west on Highway 4 have no way of identifying the division between the park’s
boundary and the State of Nebraska’s property. The management of this parcel, which has
become known as the State Triangle, became a concern for park staff within several years of the
highway’s relocation, and has remained a concern for the park since then. The presence of the
new Highway 4 itself, however, soon came to constitute the more significant, and intractable,
problem for the park.

In early 1956, the Region Two Office in Omaha again negotiated with the State
Department of Roads and Irrigation to issue a Special Use Permit that would allow the State to
maintain the road within the right-of-way for a twenty-year period from August 1, 1955 to July
31, 1975. During the negotiations, the issue of the State Triangle was not raised, but
Superintendent Blake requested that a provision be inserted into the Special Use Permit that the
State would plant “grass seed to conform with that which has already been planted and
established on the Monument property.” Upon review, he agreed that this provision might be
better fulfilled by forging a close cooperation with the State’s engineers and maintenance
workers.68

The first reference to the State Triangle came in late 1958, when Superintendent Ralph
Shaver coordinated with Region Two Office staff to determine the status of ownership and the
boundaries of the parcel. The purpose of this review was to prepare “an agreeable arrangement
with the State of Nebraska to deter any potential adverse uses of the land.”69 A year later, in a

65 Monthly Narrative Report for July 1954, August 2, 1954; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1,
Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 11.
67 Monthly Narrative Report for October 1958, November 3, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-
B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15.
68 See documents associated with the Special Use Permit, which was executed in 1956 but backdated to 1955, in
Files of Homestead NM, D30.
69 Monthly Narrative Report for November 1958, December 2, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-
II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1 Folder 15.
letter to the new Superintendent, Warren Hotchkiss, Regional Director Howard W. Baker alerted
him that the Region had not yet made a “satisfactory arrangement. . .to insure that no
incompatible use will be made of the five acre triangle of State land between the highway and
the Monument boundaries.” Therefore, Hotchkiss was urged to maintain a good relationship with
State officials “in an effort to forestall any adverse use of the land.”

![Figure 37: 1964 map annotated to show the State Triangle and Highway 4. Source: files of Homestead National Monument.](image)

No discussion regarding the new alignment of Highway 4 as it cut across two corners of
the park was found in the record during research for this Administrative History. It appears to
have been a mutually agreeable compromise; former Regional Director Howard Baker pointed
out in 1972 that the State Highway Department was cooperative in the 1950s by agreeing to
relocate Highway 4, and that the headquarters “was, thus, laid out and planned in cooperation
with the State Highway Department’s relocation program for State Route #4.” Despite this
earlier cooperation, NPS concerns over the State Triangle and threats to public safety from the
increased speed of traffic on Highway 4 and the lack of a safe way to turn left into the park led
park officials to question the alignment. Former Regional Director Baker’s comments, indeed,
were meant to be passed along to Superintendent Halvorson who had begun to suggest yet
another relocation of the highway, this time away from the park entirely. This quest to relocate
Highway 4 so that it bypasses the park entirely has remained a goal of nearly every park
superintendent since Superintendent Halvorson in 1972. Indeed, Halvorson was successful in

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70 Howard W. Baker, Regional Director to Warren Hotchkiss, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM,
Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2.
71 Memorandum, Howard W. Baker to J. Leonard Volz, Director Midwest Region, January 24, 1972; Files of
Homestead NM, D30.
having a clause inserted into the new Special Use Permit, executed in May 1975, in which the State “agrees to review the existing route as it bisects the Monument proper to determine the feasibility of realignment outside the Monument boundaries at such time in the future as is practical.”

The 1975 Special Use Permit extended only ten years rather than the twenty-year term of the original and was, therefore, renegotiated in 1985. If the promised feasibility study of the 1975 Special Use Permit was ever completed, no mention was made of it in 1985. Instead, negotiations focused in part on the five-acre State Triangle. The State initially proposed an exchange of lands: if NPS would convey a deed for the right-of-way of Highway 4 to the State, the State would convey the five-acre State Triangle to NPS. Unfortunately, since NPS can acquire land from states only on a donation basis, NPS legal counsel determined that the proposed exchange did not constitute a donation. The re-negotiated Special Use Permit of 1985 instead included a provision for the State of Nebraska to lease the parcel to the park at no cost to NPS. As discussed in Chapter 8, the park was embarking on a reinvigorated approach to the restoration of the prairie in the mid-1980s with an inaugural Vegetation Survey and Prairie Management Action Plan and had just recently begun conducted prescribed burns of sections of prairie. The purpose of the prescribed burns was, in large measure, to control the spread of invasive and alien grasses from surrounding areas into the restored prairie. The lack of a physical separation between the State Triangle and the park’s restored prairie made the spread of invasive grasses much more difficult to control. By leasing the State Triangle, the park was able “to integrate prairie restoration/resource management activities on state owned lands adjoining the Monument.”

The lease, however, was only for the three-year term of the Special Use Permit in 1985 and was not renewed in the subsequent permits.

The idea of exchanging the deeded right-of-way for the five-acre State Triangle remained on the negotiating table, but, because it would require Congressional approval, NPS issued a series of short-term Special Use Permits in 1985, 1988, and 1993. In the summer of 1994, Superintendent Constantine Dillon, who entered on duty in August 1993, met with staff from the Nebraska Department of Roads to discuss two issues pertaining to Highway 4 and the park. In early July, Dillon provided a draft summary of the meeting to the Regional Director with a recommendation that NPS issue an amended Special Use Permit. The first issue Dillon discussed was the speed limit through the park, an issue first raised by Superintendent Rohn in 1965. Dillon expressed concern that a 55-mile per hour (mph) limit was too fast, given the number of people who visited the park, and asserted that NPS intended to enforce a 45-mph limit within park boundaries; he hoped that the State would enforce the same limit in the sections not on federal property. As he recalled in 2019, he pursued this goal “Because it was hazardous. You know, people trying to look for the park entrance sign and so forth, and you zoom down that road, the local people.” Secondly, he acknowledged the State’s concerns over the present alignment of Highway 4: “We agree that the long-term use of this route and the State standards

72 Special Use Permit, May 30, 1975; Files of Homestead NM, D30. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report for Calendar Year 1975; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 21.

73 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1985; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 31. See also Staff Meeting Minutes, April 18, 1985; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-III-E, Catalog No. 8025, Box 1 Folder 2.
for width and shoulders are incompatible with National Park Service policies and operations.”
This seemed an opening for the State to relocate the road away from park property.

Alas, neither issue was addressed to the park’s satisfaction at that time. In July 1994, the State Department of Roads issued a report in which it determined that neither the left-turn lane from Highway 4 nor the 45 mph speed limit was justified. Later in 1994, Dillon sought input from NPS legal counsel regarding the speed limit, which the State had refused to lower to 45 mph. The response was pessimistic, as Regional Solicitor Ralph Canaday opined that, because Highway 4 is not a park road, the State has the ability to determine both speed limits and improvements such as turn lanes. Moreover, it was his opinion that NPS should not renew the Special Use Permit because it would open itself to legal action from local residents and businesses that would have lost road access to their properties. Canady’s suggestion was to include both issues during negotiations for the next Special Use Permit in 1998. Dillon’s impatience with the process was evident in his Annual Report for 1995: “Continued issuance of a Special Use Permit for the road is no longer considered appropriate and an alternative resolution must be found.” In early 1996, Dillon sought the support of the Nebraska Congressman Douglas Bereuter to encourage the State to lower the speed limit on Highway 4 through the park and provide for a left-turn lane into the Visitor Center. He also arranged for a meeting that included Director of State Department of Roads Allan Abbot, State Senator David Maurostad, and Representative Bereuter’s aid Jim Barr, on August 8, 1996. Finally, in September 1996, in part through Representative Bereuter’s intercession, the State agreed to lower the speed limit through the park to 45 mph and to re-paint the road as a no-passing zone.

Superintendent Mark Engler entered on duty in July 1997 and continued his three predecessors’ goals, as yet unfulfilled, to relocate Highway 4 away from Homestead National Monument property. The park’s new General Management Plan (GMP), which was completed in late 1999 and released publicly in early 2000, called for the highway to be moved. During the community involvement component of the GMP process, NPS considered removing the recommendation to realign Highway 4 from the GMP in order to ensure the survival of the Heritage Center project. In late May 1999, at a public meeting at the Charles H. Gere Library in Lincoln, those in attendance opposed removing the Highway 4 realignment provision from the GMP. Beatrice radio station owner Bud Pence, in particular, was vocal in his opposition, arguing that relocating Highway 4 away from the park had been discussed for decades, and this was not the time to change course. Following discussion with Regional Director William Schenk, Superintendent Engler retained the provision in the GMP. In early February 2000, after the final

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74 Ken Gottula, Nebraska Department of Roads to Constantine J. Dillon, July 21, 1994, attached to Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Solicitor, Midwest Region, September 28, 1994; Files of Homestead NM, D30.
75 Memorandum, Regional Solicitor to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America, March 17, 1995; Files of Homestead NM, D30.
76 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1995; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40.
77 Constantine J. Dillon to Jim Barr, Agriculture and Natural Resources Coordinator for Congressman Doug Bereuter, June 19, 1996; Press Release, September 9, 1996; Dillon to Congressman Doug Bereuter, September 12, 1996; Files of Homestead NM, D30. See also Staff Meeting Minutes for Jul7 15, 1996 and September 12, 1996, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 older F12; and Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1996, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 41.
GMP was released to the public, the Gage County Board of Supervisors supported the park by passing a resolution requesting that the Nebraska Department of Roads (NDR) examine the possibility of relocating Highway 4 in such a way that it would benefit both the park and the nearby fertilizer plants. In response, NDR initiated planning activities to examine the use of Hickory Road, approximately two miles north of the park, as the preferred alternative for a new Highway 4. In October 2000, Olsson Associates of Lincoln, Nebraska, conducted an Origin-Destination study. This study consisted of surveying motorists at two points on Highway 4 and Highway 103 to the west and north of Homestead National Monument, at the park itself, and at the fertilizer plants north of the park, together with assessing traffic volume at the several locations. The results of the study indicated that a large majority, approximately eighty-two percent, of motorists would prefer the existing Highway 4 alignment over a realignment to the north using Hickory Road.\(^{78}\)

While this study did not bode well for the park’s hopes, negotiations between the park and NDR continued, in part at the urging of the Gage County Board of Supervisors. With initial planning beginning for the proposed new Heritage Center, it seemed an appropriate time to consider the overall direction and setting of Homestead National Monument. In 2001, despite the results of the Origin-Destination Study, the park and NDR discussed several options for relocating Highway 4. The NDR suggested two alternative routes to the north: Juniper Road, one mile to the north, and Hickory Road, two miles to the north, both of which were acceptable to the park. The NDR also suggested a route to the south of the park, which the park found unacceptable. Public meetings took place in various locations around Beatrice in late 2001 and early 2002, with a mixed response from the public. Merchants in the City of Beatrice were skeptical of the proposed Hickory Road realignment, fearing that it would create a bypass around downtown and hurt businesses there. Gage County, however, favored the Hickory Road alignment because it would result in the paving of the gravel road and create a better connection between factories in Dewitt, Nebraska, and the Gage County Industrial Park in Beatrice. In March 2002, NDR dropped the original three routes and proposed two others that lay within a half-mile to the north of the park, both of which the park argued would “pose challenges to Monument resources, visitors and programs.”\(^{79}\) The NDR objected to the Juniper Road option in particular based on the need to construct either railroad or river crossings, which would be prohibitively expensive, and on impacts on residential properties and the industries on SW 89th Road, which extends north from the Freeman School to the fertilizer plants.\(^{80}\)

In 2001, the park had contracted with the Massachusetts-based transportation consulting firm of Harris Miller Miller Hanson to conduct a study of traffic noise and its effect on the park. The firm’s report in January 2002 recommended that the road should be at least 3,000 feet away. However, this failed to convince NDR to realign Highway 4 to either Juniper or Hickory Roads. Despite these discouragements, Homestead National Monument enjoyed the support of State Senator Dennis Byars who, in July 2003, responded to a letter from NDR Director John Craig:

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\(^{78}\) “Highway 4/Highway 103 Origin-Destination Study, Draft Report, prepared for Nebraska Department of Roads by Olsson Associates, December 2000; Files of Homestead NM, D30. A final report was not found during the current research.

\(^{79}\) Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2002; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 47. See also “Park Officials Unhappy with Nebraska 4 Proposals,” \textit{Lincoln Journal}, March 24, 2002;

\(^{80}\) John L. Craig, NDR to State Senator Dennis Byars, June 24, 2003; files of Homestead National Monument, D30.
John, I must be honest with you. The communities of interests that are impacted by this highway are all in agreement with the highway placed on Juniper road [sic] yet the department continues to push its option. I find it interesting that on one hand the Homestead National Monument portrays the pioneer, homesteading spirit of farmers yet on the other hand the Dept. of Roads is considering a highway that would plow right through farmland and disrupt that heritage. There may be times when going through farmland is the only option but this is not one of them.81

Despite the active involvement of Senator Byars through 2004 and 2005, the deadlock remained in place as NDR held fast to its preferred alignment. The issue of a relocated Highway 4, although a park priority as a component of the GMP, remains unsolved.

In the summer of 1996, Superintendent Dillon had raised two specific issues with NDR. The first, to lower the speed limit on Highway 4 through Homestead National Monument’s boundaries to 45 mph, was accomplished by September of that year. The second, however, never happened. NDR never rebuilt or altered the existing turn lanes at the Education Center. Currently the same turn lanes that were built for the Mission 66 Visitor Center remain in place as they were originally built.

Superintendent Engler, after promoting a positive working relationship with NDR, was able to move a different turn lane project forward. Funding challenges prohibited the development of turn lanes lost to funding challenges during the construction of the Heritage Center Project. In 2011, however, with funds provided by the NPS, NDR initiated the construction of turn lanes at Highway 4 and 75th Road completing the project in 2012, five years following the opening of the Heritage Center.82

81 Dennis Byars to John Craig, July 2, 2003; Files of Homestead National Monument, D30. See also John L. Craig to Dennis Byars, June 24, 2003; Files of Homestead National Monument, D30.
82 NDR Memorandum, Robert Camazzo to Tony Ringerberg et al., October 7, 2011; Files of Homestead NM, D30. See also Staff Meeting Minutes, August 9, 2012; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.II.D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 2 Folder 6. Additional insights provided in email from Homestead Superintendent Mark Engler to the author, August 7, 2020.
Chapter 7: Collections

The legislation establishing Homestead National Monument of America required the Secretary of the Interior to create a museum with both literature and agricultural implements to help tell the story of homesteading. Though established in 1936, the origins of the park’s museum collections extend back to the late nineteenth century and a personal collection of historic artifacts. The full implementation of this legislative requirement, however, had to wait until the early 1960s. After the core of the museum collection was established by gift in 1948, the park has continued to add artifacts to the collection into the present. These continual additions to the museum collections required an intensive cataloging effort in the late 1950s and, in recent years, has inspired the inclusion of a state-of-the-art collections and archival curation facility in the 2007 Heritage Center. As of October 2019, the park’s collection contained 932,041 archival documents and 18,277 items encompassing history, archeology, ethnology, and art.

Mayerhoff-Dietz Collection

The origins of Homestead’s museum collection dates to the late nineteenth century, when Paul S. Mayerhoff began collecting American Indian and other historical artifacts as a child. Mayerhoff, who served as pastor of St. John’s German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Highland Township beginning in 1907 and later as a missionary in Arizona, returned to Beatrice in retirement in the 1920s. Learning of another collector of historic artifacts in Beatrice, Walter Dietz, in the late 1920s, the two collaborated on an exhibit of items in the basement of the Beatrice Library in 1929. Dietz died in the early 1930s and donated his collection to Mayerhoff to create a Gage County Museum. Mayerhoff curated the collection and continued to add to it through the 1930s. He displayed the exhibit at the Beatrice Junior High School during the city’s 75th Anniversary Jubilee celebration, when it received additional publicity: “the interest aroused in the frontier days at that time, prompted many persons to contribute relics that had figured in family history.” By the mid-1930s the collection had outgrown the space in the library basement and was located in “a dusty room on the third floor of the courthouse.”1 As the Jubilee celebrations wound down in late August 1932, Mayerhoff was already thinking of the city’s Centennial anniversary. In these years, when a national park at the Freeman farm remained uncertain, Mayerhoff solicited community support to establish the Julia Beatrice Kinney Museum, which would contain a Hall of History. The Centennial year of 1957, he pointed out “is now in the offing. What a Hall of History could be built up in the next 25 years as a monument to honor to our pioneers and dedicated to their memory!”2

Although the Hall of History failed to materialize, Mayerhoff remained the principal voice for local history throughout the 1930s, giving frequent talks throughout the area and continuing to manage the collection which he co-founded with Walter Dietz. With his local notoriety, he was able to attract donations of items to the collection throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, and the local newspaper frequently provided him with coverage. In late 1934, for


example, the *Beatrice Daily Sun* ran an article authored by Mayerhoff in which he appealed for donations of artifacts to the collection. The first homesteading pioneers, the retired pastor explained, “have also gone the way of all flesh.” He lamented that little remained to remind their children and grandchildren of what they endured:

What little is left undestroyed should by all means be preserved to posterity in our museum. Those outworn, outmoded, antiquated, crude often home-made things they used on their trail in their fields and cabins are the specimens we are after. Don’t throw them away or chuck them in the attic or even into the furnace. If you have Indian relics or such family antiques as I indicated entrust them or give them to our museums. We want your departed loved ones to have a little monument there.³

The passage of legislation in 1936 establishing Homestead National Monument of America gave new impetus to Mayerhoff’s drive to create a permanent home for the collection which he had been curating. In the summer of 1937, Mayerhoff was the subject of another article in the *Beatrice Daily Sun* which suggested that his exhibit could serve as the nucleus of a new museum at Homestead National Monument. Reacting to news in late July 1937 that Congress had authorized funds to purchase the Freeman farm, the newspaper iterated Senator Norris’ suggestion that a museum would be an important part of the new park and the appropriateness of using Mayerhoff’s collection to establish it. The article went on to describe the collection, highlighting clothes, ox yokes, spinning wheels, a handmade grist mill, an early washing machine, and “a nearly complete collection of early flatirons, from the single piece ones, to the gasoline burners, which are still common. Several are bolt-heaters, brought from Germany by immigrants.” The collection then numbered in the hundreds: “‘But,’ says Mayerhoff, ‘this is just a beginning.’”⁴

The work of creating a museum collection at Homestead National Monument, like so many other things, awaited the end of World War II. Before he left to serve in the U.S. Army in 1941, Superintendent Clarence Schultz was undoubtedly aware of the collection that Mayerhoff had built for a Gage County Museum. Schultz returned to the park in the late winter of 1946, and, by the end of the year, he was already making plans for the collection. In late January 1947, he appeared before the Gage County Board of Supervisors requesting a donation of the collection to Homestead National Monument so that they could be displayed in a future park museum. Schultz reminded the Board that, once donated, NPS would have complete authority over the items in the collection, even to the point of disposing of some of them. Schultz requested that he be allowed to take only certain items from the collection, leaving the rest. As Schultz recounted in a memorandum, “The Board unofficially stated that they would give the Service the entire collection when provisions for storage or display were provided but that they would not split up the collection or give [away] any part of it.”⁵

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⁴ “Many Interesting Relics,” 1937.
⁵ Memorandum for the Director, February 3, 1947; Archives of Homestead NM, Catalog No. 7584. See also report of the Board of Supervisors meeting, “Board Orders Warning Signs for Bridges,” *Beatrice Daily Sun*, January 29, 1946, page 2.
The Gage County Board of Supervisors held firm regarding its disinclination to split the collection that Mayerhoff and Dietz had collected. During the summer of 1948, NPS Museum Division Chief Ned Burns visited Homestead National Monument with Regional Historian Hagen and toured the Gage County collection at the courthouse. Burns apparently reported favorably on the collection to WASO officials and was given permission to acquire the collection. Finally, on October 13, 1948, Gage County signed over the entire collection to NPS, without reservation, by a letter of gift, and Schultz arranged for its removal to the park in November 1948. At the time of its donation, the collection consisted of several thousand artifacts, including “pioneer objects, Civil War guns and accoutrements, collections of mineral marine, and Indian objects.” In a memorandum to NPS Director Newton Drury, Schultz predicted that the collection would “serve as a nucleus in the acquisition of pioneer tools, furnishings, and agricultural implements needed for display in the projected Homestead Museum.” Immediately upon its arrival, Schultz began selecting items for display “in a temporary museum housed in the Monument offices, utilizing several outmoded display cases which were acquired with the collection.” Schultz noted that many of the items in the collection “were not suited for display at Homestead” and likely would be parceled out to other parks.

The donation of the Mayerhoff-Dietz collection to Homestead soon spurred other donations to the collection. Two unspecified groups of objects were donated in June 1951, and three other groups of pioneer objects were accepted a year later. The 1952 set of objects included a Wheeler and Wilson sewing machine, a walnut bureau with mirror, and a kitchen table. A month later, in July 1952, the widow of S.D. Kilpatrick donated an archival collection of books and manuscripts; her husband was the son of Samuel Kilpatrick, holder of the second homestead patent after Daniel Freeman. Other local families continued to donate artifacts and papers throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The Mayerhoff-Dietz collection donated in 1948 was large, but Schultz initially undertook little cataloging. When new artifacts were donated to the park in the early 1950s, however, managing the collection soon became a high priority. By this time, the original Mayerhoff-Dietz collection, which Schultz identified as the Mayerhoff collection, had been supplemented by the otherwise unidentified “Schafer pioneer collection.” In July 1952, Schultz initiated the process of cataloging the collection. He acquired lockers through surplus property channels and began preparing items for storage. He set an aggressive schedule for himself: to have all of the items cataloged and labeled by the end of September 1952. Although he did not meet this deadline, he reported in early August 1953 that he had completed the catalog cards for

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6 Monthly Narrative Report for June 1948; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1.
7 “Material for Use in Preparing the Director’s 1949 Annual Report to the Secretary,” n.d.; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 1.
8 Memorandum for the Director, November 13, 1948; Archives of Homestead NM, Catalog No. 7584.
9 See Monthly Narrative Reports for June 1951 and June 1952, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 3.
10 Monthly Narrative Report for July 1952, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 3.
both the Mayerhoff and Shafer collections and said, “The make up of catalog cards for the two other large collections are now in progress.”

Collections Management in Mission 66

The rush of planning and development activities associated with the Mission 66 program placed a great strain on small parks such as Homestead National Monument. A new directive from WASO regarding the management of museum collections in 1957, independent of Mission 66 but intersecting with the push to create new visitor centers with museum exhibits, added new challenges. Although early National Park System units had museums from the early twentieth century, their approach to cataloging the collections under their care was haphazard through the 1920s and into the early 1930s. The difficulties in keeping up with managing NPS museum collections became more pronounced after 1933, when new historical parks, particularly in the eastern United States, were added to the system. Staff within the new Museum Branch of the National Park Service attempted in the mid- and late 1930s to bring more standardization and professionalization to museum record-keeping at individual units throughout the National Park System. After releasing the first standardized museum record forms in 1932—two 5”x8” cards for each artifact, one each for accessioning and cataloging—officials continued to refine standard practices. The first attempt to codify museum record-keeping procedures within NPS came in 1941 with the release of Field Manual for Museums.

WASO officials continued to develop new procedures for accessioning and cataloging collections in the years after WWII. Driven in part by the increasing professionalization of the museum field generally, the push for more thorough accounting of museum collections was spurred also by Interior Department investigations of individual park museums that often found inadequate record keeping. Objects that were not properly cataloged would be of little use for interpretation, but the internal investigations also identified potential legal issues regarding ownership and the ability to dispose of items that were inappropriate for that park. Staff with the NPS Museum Branch worked through the early 1950s to develop a new policy regarding museum collections at parks, which they released in 1956. The new guidance required all parks to bring their museum catalog records up to date by 1960. In order to assist parks with meeting this requirement, the NPS Museum Branch prepared new catalog and accession forms and trained field staff to provide on-site guidance to park staff. This Service-wide cataloging program was first placed in the hands of Suzanne Fox, formerly a registrar at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, who worked from May 1956 to March 1957. In May 1957, she was replaced by Vera Craig, who had been on staff at Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey since 1947. The previous year, though, she had been “on loan” to the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site in Tennessee, where she prepared the first historic furnishings plan for the Andrew Johnson Home.

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11 Monthly Narrative Report for July 1953; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 11.
In addition, each regional office “recruited curators to supervise the crash program in the field.” Region Two, later the Midwest Region, hired Newell F. Joyner to consult with individual parks. Joyner, the long-time Lead Custodian at Devil’s Tower National Monument in Wyoming, was, at the time, on staff at the University of Nebraska State Museum. The process of updating the museum records at Homestead National Monument began in December 1957 when Craig suggested meeting there in order to explain to Joyner the process for setting up the new museum records system. They met with Superintendent Shaver, who recounted the results of the meeting in a memorandum to NPS Director Wirth in January 1958: “All items are to be catalogued, numbered, and appraised for value. The placing of all items on a strict accountable basis will result in a more careful evaluation of items to be received.” Shaver used this occasion to mention to Wirth that “The cataloguing will necessitate the services of a permanent historian. . . . Space and manpower is [sic] much needed.”

As discussed earlier, Donald Warman entered on duty as Historian in August 1958. Even before his arrival, however, Shafer began work on updating the park’s collection of artifacts. Newell Joyner returned to the park in June 1958. He assumed that any work at the park would have waited until a seasonal or permanent Historian could take on the project but was pleasantly surprised by the progress that Shaver had made:

It was with pleasure that I noted that the catalogue sheets (final or work copies) had been prepared for nearly 200 specimens and that considerable amount [sic] of preparatory work had been done on the location of all types of specimens as well as the assigning of numbers to previously unnumbered items.

Joyner went on to work with Superintendent Shaver on methods to remove the old labels and affix new labels using techniques which Shaver could share with seasonal historians that summer. Joyner was impressed with the work that Superintendent Shaver and Clerk/Typist Evelyn Carlson had done on the cataloging process. He was also impressed by the collection at the Monument, finding it interesting “to realize what a truly extensive and worthwhile collection of objects existed at Homestead National Monument.” Joyner returned to the Monument in October 1958 to view the park’s progress since Historian Warman came on staff and to offer suggestions. In a one-sentence paragraph in his trip report, he proclaimed: “They are doing a good job.” He stated that Superintendent Shaver, Historian Warman, and Clerk/Typist Carlson were “devoting energy to the completion of the project.” While there, he provided additional advice on labeling artifacts and on how to dispose of surplus items; procedures for such disposal, he noted, were still being developed by the Museum Branch.

The diligence of park staff paid off with the completion of cataloging ahead of the 1960 deadline which the Museum Branch had imposed. Although the park continued to receive donations of artifacts throughout the late 1950s, Superintendent Hotchkiss declared that the

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13 Ibid., 307.
14 1957 Annual Report on Information and Interpretive Services, in Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to The Director, January 14, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001. 003.002, Catalog No. 7581, Box 1 Folder 16.
15 Memorandum, Museum Curator to Assistant Regional Director, June 13, 1958 and October 22, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 1.
process of updating the site’s catalog was complete as of January 1, 1960. At that time, the collection included 1,649 artifacts, all of which had been “accessioned, numbered, described, catalogued and cross-reference files set up.” In addition to fulfilling their requirement to catalog the collection, completion of the catalog allowed the exhibit development process for the new Visitor Center to move forward. The Exhibit Planning Team of Alan Kent and Daniel Feaser developed an exhibit plan for the park in the summer of 1960. As discussed in Chapter 5, this plan was expanded based on discussions among the park, the Regional Office, and the Western Office of Design and Construction, and served as the basis for the 1962 Visitor Center exhibit. Beyond the cataloging of artifacts, park staff also reorganized the storage facilities to provide protection and accessibility for the collection. With the cataloging of all items to be retained in the park’s permanent collection, Superintendent Hotchkiss submitted a list of surplus items to the Region Two Office in Omaha; within a year, several other parks acquired many of the items from the list.

The park continued to receive donations of items throughout the 1960s, many of which were large agricultural implements and machinery. As early as 1964, Superintendent Hennesay stated that a lack of exhibit space forced him to refuse many items because the park had no storage space for these large artifacts. Museums Coordinator Joyner, however, argued that part of the problem was a lack of guidelines. He described two issues in particular. First, park staff tended to accept items based on their rarity. Second, Homestead staff had recently begun to broaden the scope of the park’s interpretation, making it less provincial and more focused on homesteading nationwide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both of these, he explained, led staff to be indiscriminate in accepting items into the collection. Instead, Joyner recommended that the park begin to develop guidelines for the acquisition of artifacts as soon as possible: “The lack of Scope of Collections [sic] Statement in the Master Plan is a serious one,” he said. The concept of a Scope of Collection Statement was then new in NPS and was under discussion at the Museum Branch. In 1965, the new Interpretive Planning Handbook recommended that each park complete one, though a requirement that parks have one was not implemented until 1978. Joyner recognized that adjusting the focus of collections could entail changes to the park’s interpretive prospectus, which might have to be changed before a Scope of Collection Statement could be prepared.

Despite Museums Coordinator Joyner’s recommendation to complete a Scope of Collection Statement in 1964, Homestead National Monument remained without an overall guidance document through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Instead, the park focused on maintaining and preserving its collection and updating the catalog as new items were received into the collection. Much of this collection management work into the 1970s took place during the winter months using Park Aids to address artifact preservation issues. The collection of large agricultural items posed a particular problem because they were protected only by an unenclosed display shed. In January 1975, for example, a

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16 1959 Annual Report on Information and Interpretation Services in Memorandum, Superintendent to The Director, January 7, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-B, Catalog No. 7581, Box 1 Folder 8. See also Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for FY 1960, May 31, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 10.

17 Memorandum, Museums Coordinator to Regional Director, August 6, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 7.
Ranger worked six hours cleaning snow from Display Shed and bringing artifacts in to dry. Maintenance man also on Display Shed for three hours in A.M. On the 14th Maintenance man and Ranger finished snow removal from Display Shed and replaced artifacts in shed.18

The display shed was enclosed in the late 1970s, but without any environmental controls, it became like a greenhouse in the summer sun. An inspection in 1978 by WASO Staff Curator Katherine Menz, however, found the collection to be in generally very good condition but no other planning for their maintenance and protection took place through the 1970s.19

Finally, in the early 1980s, WASO staff began to work on a more formal plan for treating the collection at Homestead National Monument. In September 1983, a curatorial team including several staff members at Harpers Ferry Center (HFC), Regional Curator John Hunter, and Jefferson National Expansion Memorial NHS Curator Kathryn Thomas visited Homestead. The purpose of this visit was to begin reviewing the park’s collections in preparation for a Collection Management Plan and a conservation needs survey to be prepared by HFC. Homestead National Monument seasonal staff completed a 100% inventory of the park’s collection in the summer of 1984 in anticipation of the release of the reports, but the reports were delayed by several years.20

Harpers Ferry Center released the first of its documents, a Scope of Collection Statement, in 1985. Despite having an existing Interpretive Prospectus, this Scope of Collection Statement was the first attempt to define the park’s collection, issued two decades after Museum Specialist Joyner had recommended it. The park’s first Resource Management Plan, which had been released in August 1984, included a recommendation for such a definition of the park’s collection management goals and policies. The purpose of the Scope of Collection Statement was to define the types of objects that Homestead National Monument could appropriately acquire and preserve and to outline the site’s basic collection management requirements. The Statement drew upon the period of interpretation, defined earlier in the Interpretive Prospectus as from the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 to 1890, when the U.S. Census Bureau declared the frontier had closed. The Scope of Collection Statement also drew upon two themes in defining the park’s guidelines. The first was from the Interpretive Prospectus, which the Statement defined as “the passage of the Homestead Act and its impacts on westward expansion and on the development of agriculture and industry in America.” In addition, the Scope of Collection Statement referenced the 1984 Resource Management Plan to define a second theme as “the effort to reestablish the native tallgrass prairie ecosystem so that it will be similar to that

18 Interpreter’s Monthly Narrative Report for January 1975, in Memorandum, Park Ranger, Homestead to Superintendent, Homestead, February 6, 1975; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.008.003, Catalog No. 7582, Box 1 Folder 3.
19 Trip Report Memorandum, Staff Curator to Chief, Division of Reference Services, May 19, 1978; Files of Homestead NM, H30.
20 Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1983, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 29; Monthly Report for September, 1983, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.008.003, Catalog No. 7582, Box 1 Folder 11; Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1984, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 23.
encountered by pioneers as they moved west to settle lands made available by the Homestead Act."\(^{21}\)

The Scope of Collection Statement went on to define the two principal types of collections that corresponded to these two interpretive themes: Cultural and Natural History. The primary content of the Cultural collections was historical, with objects oriented toward several themes including the homesteader’s life, technological change, the Freeman School, the Palmer-Epard Cabin’s furnishings, archival materials, and information pertaining to the history of Homestead National Monument. The definition of Cultural collections also included archeological artifacts derived primarily from investigations at the park. The Natural History collection was designed to provide basic information about plants, both native and exotic species, to assist in the restoration of the prairie, together with sediment, air, and water samples that could be useful in future studies.\(^{22}\)

Unfortunately, the park’s Collection Management Plan was delayed for several years, a point that was noted in several Annual Reports through the mid-1980s and in a report prepared by the Secretary of the Interior’s Office of Inspector General in 1986.\(^{23}\) The park continued to make progress with its collection management in the meantime, though. Two different but significant advances took place in 1986. The first advance was an addition to the 1962 Visitor Center of an enclosed space. This 1,200-square foot addition, described in Chapter 6, provided up-to-date collection storage facilities. This alleviated one of the grave deficiencies in the park’s collection management programs: much of the park’s museum collections were housed in the attic of the Utility Building and in the lunch room before construction of the addition.\(^{24}\) The addition was completed in January 1987, and park staff transferred artifacts to it in February 1987.

The second advance, in a small but portentous development, was that the park first acquired a database software package in early 1986: dBaseIII. According to the monthly meeting notes announcing that the software had been ordered, it “will enable us to load our museum catalog information and print on cards.” At the same time, the park acquired two IBM PC/XT desktop computers, at which point “Homestead joined the computer age.”\(^{25}\) The computerization of collection records was becoming a more important issue within NPS through the 1970s. Officials within the WASO Museum Branch began looking into the use of “automatic data processing” as early as the late 1960s, and computer specialists in Washington began looking at


\(^{22}\) Ibid.


\(^{24}\) See Inspection Checklist for Museum Storage and Exhibit Spaces, which the park completed in April 1986 in preparation for construction of the addition to the Visitor Center, which pointed out the severe deficiencies in adequate storage for collections; attached to Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, Midwest Region, May 2, 1986, Files of Homestead NM, H2015.

\(^{25}\) Staff Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1986 (first quote), Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E, Catalog No. 8025, Box 1 Folder 2; Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1984 (second quote), Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 23. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Thomas Hardy describes a character’s growing passion: “The disturbance was as the first floating weed to Columbus—the contemptibly little suggesting possibilities of the infinitely great.”
museum catalogs at the same time. The highly varied nature of collections throughout the National Park System, however, slowed progress. Simultaneously, in the mid-1970s, staff at HFC developed a proposal to create a National Catalog of all NPS museum collections. Held in abeyance for several years, this project finally received funding in 1977. It was conceived as a joint analog and digital project. In 1979 and 1980, a committee established to standardize a classification scheme that could be used across all National Park System units. Based on Robert Chenhall’s *Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging: A System for Classifying Man-Made Objects*, the NPS committee continued to refine its system through the early 1980s while keeping abreast of advances in computerized database management.26

DBaseIII was the first upgrade to the earliest popular computerized database software. First developed in the late 1970s, the software was acquired and redeveloped for use on Apple and IBM PC platforms in the early 1980 as dBaseII. Released in 1984 and with upgrades in the following year, dBaseIII became the most popular database software throughout the 1980s. Its close integration with the DOS operating system used on IBM PC computers allowed it to be used for both individual and institutional applications, and NPS used it for initial computerized collections management. By the mid-1980s, the National Catalog Steering Committee (NCSC) began using the dBase source code to develop a specific collection management software which they identified as the Automated National Catalog System (ANCS). Initial versions were tested as early as 1986, and the full version, identified as Version 3.0, was released in March 1988.27

Already by 1987, the park faced a mandate to computerize its collection records. Chief Ranger Richard Williams began the required inventory of the park’s museum collection in late February 1987 using the new dBaseIII software. By July, all objects in the collection had been entered into the database, and the project was completed with all objects located and identified by November. While the cataloging was in progress during 1987, HFC finally provided Homestead National Monument with a draft Collection Management Plan (CMP). The CMP, when approved in early 1988, was the first comprehensive guide to collection management at the Monument. In contrast to the earlier Scope of Collection Statement, which provided the conceptual basis for the park’s collection, the CMP provided an evaluation of the park’s collection management program on a technical basis and made specific recommendations, many of which the park implemented between the time of the 1983 site visit and the release of the draft report in 1987. The preparers of the report, who also conducted a site visit in 1983, first evaluated the park’s records management for the collection. Although generally positive, they noted that many of the objects lacked clear legal ownership data. The CMP also provided guidelines for optimum storage and exhibit conditions in terms of temperature, humidity, and light, and recommended strategies for monitoring temperature and humidity and for controlling the levels of both visible and ultra-violet light. Finally, the CMP recommended that the park secure upgraded computers in order make use of the ANCS software, which was then being made available.28

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27 See Bruce G. Harvey and Deborah Harvey, *The Ordinary Home of an Extraordinary Man: Administrative History of Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Missouri* (2017), 189 for a discussion of the early development and implementation of ANCS.
The park acquired a new computer in September 1989 to facilitate the transition of the existing collection management records to the ANCS system. Park staff enlisted the help of four volunteers “to assist...with this time-consuming project.” Data entry into ANCS continued into the mid-1990s, and, by 1994, nearly 10,000 items had been entered. In 1996, another 2,000 backlogged entries were corrected and entered into ANCS. Since then, park staff have worked to maintain the existing records and keep up with additional new donations, after 1998 using an updated version of ANCS.

In the wake of the 1988 CMP, the park contracted with Magda Jensen to conduct a Collection Condition Survey. This report identified several issues pertaining to conservation and preservation of objects in the collection. The park’s staff continued to address these changes throughout the early 1990s. In the meantime, NPS issued an initial Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections, revised in 1992 as the Checklist for the Preservation, Protection and Documentation of Museum Property. This checklist was then automated in a DOS-based program for electronic submittal in 1996 as the Automated Checklist Program and was incorporated in the 1998 revision of ANCS. This system provided Homestead National Monument and other National Park System units with museum collections a standardized set of guidelines for conservation and preservation. In April 1995, the park contracted with a professional museum conservator to provide on-site training in techniques for basic cleaning and conservation treatments, In the wake of this training, park staff initiated the systematic cleaning of the agricultural implements that were then on display.29

By 1998, however, park staff faced a substantial backlog of conservation items. The park secured funding for three years through the Museum Collections Preservation and Protection Program. This allowed hiring Museum Technician Ted Volkmer, who entered on duty in April 1999. Volkmer took on responsibility for addressing ninety-one deficiencies defined in the Museum Checklist. Within his first year, he completed a draft Integrated Pest Management Plan, developed a security and fire survey, and initiated standardized environmental monitoring of the collection. In 1999, another work item was removed from the Museum Checklist when a new curatorial office and workspace was created within the 1986 collection storage addition. This space included new shelving and storage units.30 The major accomplishment in 2000, meanwhile, involved nitrate photographic negatives. The transparent base of these negatives emits acidic nitrogen oxide gases as it deteriorates, which can be extremely flammable. Volkmer removed more than 220 nitrate negatives from their acidic envelopes, placed them in archival photo sleeves, and had them transported to the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) in Lincoln for secure storage. In addition, the Integrated Pest Management Plan, using non-toxic means, was implemented in the collection storage at the park.31

The major collection-related project in the early 2000s focused on the park’s archival collection. In 2000, the park hired Museum Technician Christy Sweet to begin processing the

29 Homestead National Monument of America, Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1995; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40.
30 Annual Reports for 1998 and 1999; ; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1.
31 Ibid.
park’s growing archives which, at that point, included approximately 24,000 items; she was later hired to assemble research for the Heritage Center exhibits, including the collection of most of the graphics in the new exhibit. In 2005, the park hired seasonal Museum Technician Keely Rennie-Tucker to continue the multi-year project that involved identifying, accessioning, processing, and cataloging these items to NPS standards and creating finding aids for the archival collection. At the same time, the park embarked on an ambitious program conducted largely by volunteers who began scanning and indexing vast numbers of photographs, consisting primarily of park photographs of events together with a limited number from the museum collection. By 2003, this included indexing more than 10,000 images and scanning 5,000. Their task was made larger in 2002 when the park acquired a collection of more than 300 glass-plate negatives depicting homesteaders and Nebraska farm life in the early twentieth century.

One of the most significant items on the Museum Checklist was the location of the collection storage facility. By the 1980s, the Visitor Center was identified as being within a 100-year floodplain due to its proximity to Cub Creek. As will be discussed later in Chapter 12, the park’s General Management Plan was completed in late 1999 and distributed in early 2000. One of the most important features of this plan was the recommendation that a new Heritage Center be built. The park acquired a parcel of land immediately east of the original boundary in 2003, which kicked off several years of intense planning. Among the important components of the new Heritage Center, which was completed in 2007, was a state-of-the-art collection and archival storage facility. Although collection storage still exists in the former Visitor Center, collection management efforts by 2005 were focused primarily on preparing the collection for relocation. This included ensuring that all requirements for collections management established by MWRO and WASO were met, all deficiencies noted on the Automated Checklist were addressed, and that all cataloging on ANCS was brought up to date.

Preparations for relocating Homestead’s museum and archival collection from the Visitor Center to the new Heritage Center began in earnest in the fall of 2006 and was primarily overseen by Museum Technician Keely Rennie-Tucker. A 100% inventory of the museum collection was completed first. Packing objects began in December 2006 and continued into the spring of 2007. Rennie-Tucker directed the work of a dedicated volunteer corps who provided much of the labor for packing. She had the assistance of volunteers, a temporary museum technician, and other curatorial staff from throughout the Midwest Region for the relocation.

The available storage space for the collection in the Heritage Center was vastly enlarged and included open storage within the exhibit space and secure storage on the ground floor of the Heritage Center. The secure storage space is along the south wall of the lower level of the Heritage Center, is climate controlled, and includes a workspace and curatorial office separate from the shelving. Archives and three-dimensional objects are stored in high-density mobile storage units in the enclosed storage space adjacent to the curatorial workspace. Early proposals suggested the inclusion of a window from the open exhibit area into the curatorial. This window allows visitors to view more of the collection and provides for the display of temporary exhibits.

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32 See Chapter 12 for a more complete discussion of this important volunteer project.
33 Chapter 11 includes a detailed discussion of the process of securing the land.
Even during the move, and continuing to the present, the park continued to accept and accession new items into the collection. Homestead received an important donation to the collection during planning for the new Heritage Center. The last person to receive title to land under the Homestead Act was Kenneth Deardorff, whose claim was in Alaska. Deardorff moved to Alaska after returning from service in the Vietnam War and settled on an eighty-acre claim on the Stony River in 1974. He fulfilled the requirements of the Homestead Act in 1979 but did not receive his patent until 1988, by which time the Homestead Act had been repealed; his claim was finally certified in 2001. In late 2006, Deardorff donated a collection of artifacts to the park, including his dog sled, a fishing net, a draw knife, and his original homestead patent. These were incorporated into the new exhibit. Following the opening of the Heritage Center, the park purchased Deardorff’s rifle with the help of Leigh Coffin and the Friends of Homestead. Finally, in 2017, partly with a donation by Beatrice physician C.T. Frerichs to the Friends of Homestead and after years of planning, park staff and volunteer retrieved the 1945 Allis-Chalmers tractor which Deardorff had used to help clear his land in Alaska, staging an expedition which included airlifting the tractor from the property and transporting it by ship and truck to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for restoration. The addition of Deardorff’s artifacts highlighted a noticeable gap in the park’s collections which, given the initial focus on homestead’s early period, defined its collection policy to include artifacts only from 1862 to 1890. The Scope of Collection Statement was updated in 2007 to extend the dates of artifacts which it would accept to include 1862 to 1986, reflecting the complete scope of homesteading.

Museum Technician Keely Rennie-Tucker served as Homestead’s collection manager until May 2008 when she departed for a new position with the MWRO’s Museum Management Program. Museum Curator Jason Jurgena entered on duty in March 2009 to assume responsibility for Homestead National Monument’s museum and archival collection. Aside from special projects and emergencies, collection management work since the opening of the Heritage Center has included preparing objects for the regular temporary exhibits on display at the former Visitor Center (now the Education Center), managing accessions, updating the catalog with submissions to the National Catalog, cleaning and preservation of artifacts, fielding questions about the collection from visitors, staff, and NPS personnel, coordinating the activities of volunteers, and overseeing the preparing of collection management documents.

Several events have called for extraordinary efforts regarding collection management. The new year of 2010 dawned with a crisis when a water line into the facility broke on January 1. The outside water eventually found its way into the building following a building conduit and waterline. Water rushed through the conduit to the projection room, which sat over the curatorial storage room. Water also followed piping from the north wall across the museum, dumping water along the way to the collection room, causing extensive damage. That evening, the Museum Curator and other staff worked through most of the night to remove items from the

34 Email, Keely Rennie-Tucker to Carolyn Wallingford, MWRO et al., June 6, 2007, Files of Homestead NM, H2017; see also Annual Report for 2007, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 51. See the Conclusion for a brief discussion of the final artifact from Ken Deardorff to arrive at the park, his tractor.

35 The Conclusion to this Administrative History provides additional information about the recovery and installation of Kenneth Deardorff’s tractor.

36 The richly-detailed Annual Superintendent’s Reports provide extensive information about collection management activities; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1.
collection storage area to tables in the exhibit room where they could be assessed. Water damage and the threat of mold led staff to remove and replace the subflooring beneath the high-density storage system that contains the tracks for the moving shelving. For the next six weeks, the Curator and a group of volunteers cleaned objects before moving them back to the replaced storage shelves. The Curator also arranged for the transportation of 400 books to BMS CAT, a contractor that specializes in the restoration of water-damaged goods, for freeze-drying and fungicidal treatment.\(^{37}\)

In 2014, Homestead National Monument staff attended an auction in Beatrice and acquired several items associated with the Dempster Mill Manufacturing Company. One of the leading companies in Beatrice from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Dempster manufactured and sold a wide range of equipment and materials used by homesteaders including windmills, water pumps, and fertilizer spreaders and, in recent years, has manufactured recycling trailers. Due to this minor acquisition, staff from the park, including Superintendent Mark Engler, Historian Blake Bell, and Curatorial Intern Amy Neumann, were invited to meet Dempster President Ryan Mitchell at the Dempster office in Beatrice. The company archives remained in the building, and Mitchell, whose wife is an archivist, offered the complete archives to the park. The vast collection was brought to Homestead in part thanks to a grant from The Margaret and Martha Thomas Foundation of Beatrice, which allowed the park to process and store this large, archival collection and the Friends of Homestead to hire Amy Neumann. Neumann had previously worked at the park as an intern and, under the grant, was tasked with directing the project and overseeing the work of a large corps of volunteers and two interns in the work of cleaning, organizing, and rehousing the collection that consisted of company records, engineering drawings, product information, and photographs. Work to prepare the collection included removing more than 100 pounds of staples, putting documents into archival folders, and labeling the folders, and was largely complete by 2016.\(^ {38}\) In addition, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution helped to underwrite digitizing many of the records. This enormous collection will allow Homestead National Monument staff and visiting researchers to tell the story of the daily life of homesteaders even more completely.

\(^{37}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2010; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 54.

\(^{38}\) “Preserving Dempster History at Homestead National Monument,” in Farm Progress, December 14, 2016; available online: https://www.farmprogress.com/story-preserving-dempster-hist-homestead-national-monument-9-150601. See also Chapter 12 for the role played by Friends of Homestead in organizing the Dempster collection.
Chapter 8: Natural Resources Since 1978

Although it is a historical park with a clear mission to interpret the Homestead Act of 1862 and its impact on American history, much of the land within Homestead National Monument’s boundary is undeveloped and managed for its natural resources. In addition, the park contains a segment of prairie that has been the subject of restoration efforts since the late 1930s and has been recognized as one of the best-restored prairie areas in the nation. From the creation of the park in the late 1930s to the 1990s, the prairie was the principal, if not sole, focus of natural resource management at Homestead National Monument. Beginning in the 1970s, though, NPS leaders placed greater emphasis on the scientific study and management of the wide range of natural resources throughout the National Park System. Following the introduction of formal natural resources management planning requirements in the early 1980s, NPS’ attention soon turned to standardizing and coordinating its scientific research programs to provide the data that, in turn, underlies resources management planning at the regional and park levels. Accordingly, Homestead National Monument superintendents and staff began diversifying the range of resources which they studied by the early 2000s, looking beyond the grasses and forbs (non-grassy plants that are parts of the mix of prairie vegetation) that constitute the prairie to include the range of plants and animals that occupy the park. This chapter will chart this shift in the emphasis of natural resources management from an exclusive focus on the prairie to a broader range of features.

Prairie Restoration

Earlier chapters of this book have discussed the centrality of prairie restoration to the early development efforts at Homestead National Monument. Initially seen as a key component of the site’s interpretive plan—restoring the prairie that Daniel Freeman knew rather than reconstructing any of his buildings—it soon became an end in itself. In the years after World War II, the Monument’s prairie restoration efforts continued to draw the attention of soil and plant conservation scientists throughout the Great Plains who offered suggestions, advice, and encouragement. With memories of the Dust Bowl still fresh, Homestead National Monument’s prairie restoration became an important laboratory for restoring the natural health of the Great Plains and avoiding the human and environmental catastrophes of the 1930s. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, as the prairie in the Monument’s central and eastern forties showed promise, NPS staff at the park showed renewed interest in its interpretive potential. In the summer of 1955, Superintendent George Blake first opened the preliminary self-guided prairie trail that crossed Cub Creek from the headquarters area into the central forty. This trail took advantage of the 1948 archeological study by Smithsonian Archeologist J. Joseph Bauxar, which verified the locations of the Daniel Freeman and Agnes Suiter cabins and the Freeman’s brick home, and the prairie now filled with tall growing grasses and forbs. This trail proved popular with public visitors and school groups alike and soon was expanded with new trail segments and more permanent interpretive signage.

Throughout this earlier period, from the late 1930s into the 1950s and early 1960s, park staff had few tools in its arsenal for successful prairie restoration: planting native grass seed, laying in sod harvested from other sections of prairie that had a high concentration of native
grasses and forbs, spraying herbicides, and mowing. The problem at Homestead National Monument, as at other restored prairie areas throughout the Midwest, was not in getting the grasses to grow. Instead, NPS staff confronted the problem of invasive and non-native plants, both grasses and trees, that established themselves in the restored prairie. Although the park’s section of prairie was planted with native grasses, it was surrounded by farms, highway rights of way, and open land where non-native grasses and trees thrived and often pushed into the park’s prairie. The goal of NPS restoration since the early 1930s, however, whether of cultural or natural resources, was historical authenticity. Visitors, according to this goal, should be able to come into a park and experience physical surroundings appropriate to the time and place for which the park is significant. A reproduction of an eighteenth-century house in a mid-nineteenth century site, or non-native grasses and trees in a restored section of prairie were both deemed inappropriate. The decisions whether to recreate a building and how to do it were problems ultimately subject to control by research, funding, and political will. Restoring a section of prairie, however, added the unpredictable variable of nature into the mix.

As described earlier in Chapter 4, NPS planners by the 1960s began turning to a traditional method to help restore the prairie to its virgin condition: fire. Seen to be the enemy of forest health in America since the late nineteenth century, the desire to eradicate fire at all costs spread into NPS by the early twentieth century and became policy. The practice of deliberately setting fires and controlling them carefully, however, was a longstanding one among land managers in the southeast who sought to remove combustible detritus that could lead to more intense and uncontrollable fires and to open habitat for wildlife. Scientific studies through the 1920s and 1930s showed the viability of prescribed, controlled fires in protecting against uncontrolled wildfires and improving habitat. By the 1950s, scientists were also coming to recognize the value of fire to control invasive weeds and plants in prairies. Timing in this process was vital. Invasive grasses tended to rise in the spring before the native grasses and forbs, whose roots remained safely underground until later in the spring; burning the prairie after the invasive grasses had grown but before they flowered and released seeds allowed the later-sprouting native grasses to thrive and become dominant. At the suggestion of Soil Conservation Service scientists in 1969, Homestead National Monument Superintendent John Higgins initiated planning for a prescribed burn which was conducted, with the approval of the Midwest Regional Office, in late April 1970.¹

The prescribed burn took place primarily in the approximately seventy acres that lay to the south of the original alignment of Highway 4 before it was relocated in 1954, in the central and east forties. The results of the initial prescribed burn were considered generally favorable; park staff noted an increased growth of native grasses in the prairie, though not all non-native grasses and trees were eliminated. The park took several years to evaluate the results while restoration planning continued at Homestead National Monument with the renewed input of scientists. Professor Roger Landers conducted a survey of prairie restoration efforts at NPS areas throughout the Great Plains in 1975. The survey provided additional encouragement for the use of controlled fire in prairie restoration and led to the establishment, in 1976, of a series of photograph stations on the prairie to record changes over time. Landers’ study, together with other research, laid the groundwork for the initiation of natural resource planning at Homestead

¹ See Chapter 4 for a more thorough discussion of the development of NPS policy toward fire management and the initial prescribed burn at Homestead National Monument in 1970.
National Monument in the late 1970s. These plans, though focused initially on the prairie, led the way to the scientific management of the park’s natural resources to the present.

The Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1977 described this new emphasis on coordinated planning, inspired by the provisional success of the 1970 controlled burn and the need to evaluate the best methods for conducting controlled burning. This attention to planning was part of an overall renewal of resource management planning throughout NPS, which emerged from a revived emphasis on research within the Service during the early and mid-1960s. A number of scientists within and without NPS had criticized the Service during the Mission 66 era for its lack of planning with regard to impacts on critical natural resources. In addition, natural resource scientists began placing increased emphasis during the mid-20th century on ecosystems, an understanding of how a variety of plant and animal species evolved together and interacted with one another within a particular environment. The changing NPS policy on fire and its potential for beneficial effects on the health of ecosystems was an early example of this changing attitude. By the late 1960s, NPS leadership had fully embraced the need to create research-based natural resource management plans, though their implementation was delayed for a decade. The National Park Service first developed guidelines for resource management plans in 1965, which were revived in 1968 and amended in 1969. Internal reorganizations, false starts, input by regional and park-level staff, and attempts to reconcile the planning and evaluation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) led to a retrenchment of resource planning efforts through the early 1970s.²

The Service finally received Congressional impetus to institutionalize natural resource management planning in the wake of a 1979 report on resource problems in parks prepared by the National Parks and Conservation Association. This report drew attention to issues of physical deterioration in the national parks and ultimately brought Congressional action. At the request of Congress, NPS prepared a State of the Park Report in late 1980 that detailed thousands of threats to aesthetic values and natural and cultural resources. The State of the Parks report contained a requirement that each park must have a Resource Management Plan, to include both natural and cultural resources, in place by the end of 1981. Although compliance with this requirement was uneven and still incomplete by the late 1980s, it put NPS on the track of more careful and research-based planning for the natural and cultural resources it preserved and interpreted.

The park prepared its first Prairie Management Plan (PMP) during the period of experimentation with natural resource planning in the mid-1970s. The PMP contained descriptions of the various means of achieving the goal of restoring the native prairie. The park’s prairie restoration was acknowledged as incomplete after nearly four decades of work, as there was “a significant intrusion of non-native grasses and forbs,” together with “a continued invasion of brush and tree species such as elm, green ash, mulberry, boxelder and honey locust [that] is gradually reducing the prairie vista.” The PMP then provided a discussion of three alternatives to achieve the goal of a restored prairie at Homestead National Monument: conducting controlled burns; mowing, planting, and other mechanical means; and no action aside from occasional spraying for noxious weeds such as thistle. The PMP was followed by the preparation of an

Environmental Assessment (EA) which evaluated the potential effects of the three proposed means. The EA identified the use of managed fires as the most promising method with the fewest drawbacks and proposed a ten-year schedule of controlled burns from 1978 to 1988. This schedule, adapted from the Landers report, was based on a division of the park’s prairie areas, including the section of virgin prairie adjacent to the Freeman School, into zones. Each zone was to be burned at different intervals ranging from every three to every five years based on the particular vegetation and soil conditions in each zone (Figure 38). The EA also included definitions of the conditions that were required for a controlled burn to be conducted and required continued monitoring through the existing photograph stations and other on-site evaluations. Finally, the EA recommended that “The Monument will encourage colleges and universities to initiate and continue studies of the prairie and the effects of the Prairie Management Plan.”

The PMP was the first stage in a broader planning process as NPS began requiring more rigorous research and planning efforts at individual parks. In 1979, the park coordinated with MWRO planning staff to complete an Alternatives Assessment of Natural Resources Management. This document incorporated the alternatives and recommendations for fire management, prairie restoration, and exotic plant and weed control, which led to the recommendation that the park continue to plan and implement a program of controlled burns on

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Figure 38: 1980 map showing prescribed burn units. Source: files of Homestead National Monument.

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3 Environmental Assessment, Prairie Management Plan, Homestead National Monument (c. 1977); Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-A, Catalog No. 7744, Box 1 Folder 1. The full Prairie Management Plan was not located in the course of research for this project.
the prairie portions of the park. Other natural resource issues included beaver management; tick control; rare, threatened, and endangered plants and animals; and erosion on Cub Creek. This document was forthrightly a preliminary document which outlined what park and regional staff saw as their most important natural resource issues together with recommendations for either particular actions to address the issues or additional research and monitoring.4

The park’s first Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) was released the following year, shortly after an update of the park’s Statement for Management (SFM). As with the original 1976 SFM, the first of five management objectives was identified as “To manage the area to reflect, as nearly as practicable and consistent with the Service’s management policies, the conditions existing during the early homesteading period.”5 Based on the Alternatives Assessment, the NRMP provided guidance for a range of natural resources issues, although the focus remained on prairie restoration. The NRMP provided a brief summary of natural resource conservation and restoration efforts at the park since the late 1930s and defined the program of prescribed burning that park staff would implement in order to improve the results of the prairie restoration efforts. As with the initial PMP, the 1980 NRMP proposed a ten-year plan of implementation to begin in 1981.

While the use of prescribed burns to advance prairie restoration remained the focus of the NRMP, it also incorporated a discussion of flooding and erosion on Cub Creek. The NRMP included a discussion of previous efforts to control erosion, which all proved ultimately unsuccessful, including erection of physical barriers such as the planting of willow and cottonwood trees and the use of rip-rap and log cribbing to armor the banks, as well as coordination with neighboring farmers to control run-off. The NRMP proposed a two-year study of the creek’s hydrology to better understand how and why the creek floods, which, hopefully, would lead to a solution for the problem of erosion. In addition, the NRMP provided the first discussion at Homestead National Monument about threatened and endangered species of plants and animals. The plan recommend a two-year study of plants at the park, with a focus on threatened and endangered species, to be conducted by contractors, while a two- or three-year study of threatened and endangered animals should be conducted periodically by Monument staff, who would establish a “scientifically reliable observation program.”6

In keeping with the traditional approach to natural resources management at Homestead National Monument, the two first aspects of the NRMP to be implemented were the program of prescribed burns and a vegetation survey. The park prepared a management plan for prescribed burning in 1982, which was approved in early 1983. In the spring of 1983, Homestead National Monument conducted the first prescribed burns since the initial burn in 1970, with the assistance of personnel from MWRO and Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota. All prairie areas within the park’s boundary were burned between April 20 and April 26, 1983, constituting a total

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4 Assessment of Alternatives: Natural Resources Management, Homestead National Monument of America; approved by Midwest Regional Director on October 10, 1979; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-A, Catalog No. 7745, Box 1 Folder 2.
5 “Statement for Management, Homestead National Monument of America,” update approved by Midwest Regional Director J.L. Dunning on June 13, 1980; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8088, Box 1 Folder 10.
6 “Natural Resources Management Plan, Homestead National Monument,” approved by Regional Director J.L. Dunning, January 9, 1981; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-A, Catalog No. 7745, Box 1 Folder 2.
of 123 acres. Preliminary results appeared positive: nearly all of the thatch which accumulated as grasses died and inhibited new growth was removed by the fire, staff observed new growths of native grasses, and many of the thickets of woody plants were reduced in size. In addition, according to the Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1983, “Several new plant species germinated and were recorded for the first time after the burn.” The only negative effects noted after the prescribed burns in 1983 were an increase of invasive plants that either were unaffected by or thrive on fire, including Smooth Sumac, Rough-leaved Dogwood, and sunflowers. In 1983, the park completed its first Fire Management Plan, which was approved by MWRO in 1984 (Figure 39).

![Figure 39: A prescribed burn at Homestead National Monument. Photograph provided by Homestead National Monument](image)

The park initiated a vegetation survey in 1982, which was completed in December 1984. This study was part of a coordinated series of studies at National Park System units with prairie components throughout the Midwest Region. All studies were conducted through a cooperative agreement with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and were led by Dr. James Stubbendieck, Professor of Range Ecology, who served as the principal investigator. The Homestead National Monument study was prepared by Professor Richard K. Sutton and Ms. Jayne Traeger under Dr. Stubbendieck’s direction. The purposes of the study were to document the existing vegetation in

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7 See Superintendent’s Annual Narratives for 1982 and 1983, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folders 28 and 29. Burn plans from the early 1990s are contained in Federal Records Center, 079-99-0002, Box 10, Y1421.

8 Memorandum, Associate Regional Director, Operations to Superintendents at Effigy Mounds, Fort Larned, Fort Scott, George Washington Carver, Herbert Hoover, Homestead, Indiana Dunes, Pipestone, Saint Croix, Scotts Bluff, and Wilson’s Creek, December 9, 1985; FRC, 079-92-0004, Box 10, N1617.
the park, to develop an herbarium collection, and to provide a prairie management action plan. The report identified the plant species as grouped in three plant communities—upland prairie, lowland prairie, and woodland—and included a useful historical overview of natural resource management at the park since the late 1930s. The report also provided more specific information regarding the goal of restoring the prairie to its appearance in the 1860s by identifying a recommended mix of vegetation species consisting of a blend of grasses and forbs, and made recommendations regarding methods for controlling invasive species and woody plants.9

The completion of the vegetation survey report in late 1984 inaugurated a burst of prairie restoration activities that has continued since the 1980s, with the recommendations being implemented immediately. Even before the final report was released in late 1984, Homestead National Monument staff and volunteers embarked on a two-year program to identify and collect native prairie plants and seeds in the region surrounding Beatrice. The seeds were gathered, labeled, and brought to the park. Seeds were then either stored for future use or were germinated in a greenhouse for eventual planting in the park’s prairie. A western Nebraska farmer, Frank Mattoon, offered to donate substantial sections of virgin prairie sod to the prairie restoration effort. Throughout the 1980s, his donated sod was combined with the results of the seed collection and germination project and planted at targeted locations in the park.

Within six months of completion of the vegetation survey, the park produced a Prairie Management Action Plan (PMAP). Released in June 1985, it revised the park’s prairie restoration goals. In addition to restoring the prairie to what was typical in the 1860s, the park also sought to reestablish the prairie to the point that it would be self-perpetuating by the early twenty-first century. Based on results of the vegetation survey report, the PMAP identified and prioritized fifteen critical areas in the park where prairie restoration efforts should be targeted. The five most vital areas were: the ten acres immediately east of the Cub Creek foot bridge, where the park had attempted, without success, to plant native species in the late 1960s; the remaining lot of virgin prairie adjacent to Freeman School, which was subject to encroachment of invasive plants from neighboring farms; the right of way of the current alignment of Highway 4, where invasive trees had become prominent; the former alignment of Highway 4 before its 1954 relocation, where disturbed soils proved inviting to invasive species; and the Osage Orange hedgerow which Daniel Freeman had planted and which was becoming overgrown with invasive trees and shrubs. The PMAP then divided the park into sixteen ten-acre square parcels, identified specific problems in each, and made a management recommendation to address those problems. Many of the recommendations for specific locations included prescribed burning and selective mechanical thinning, combined with the occasional and limited use of EPA-approved herbicides. The PMAP also included recommendations to supplement natural revegetation with seeding, planting, and laying virgin prairie sod.10

The park continued to manage the prairie restoration efforts in accordance with the PMAP through the 1980s and into the 1990s. This included annual prescribed burns when conditions allowed, mechanical thinning, planting greenhouse-grown native grass seedlings, and

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laying the sod donated by Frank Mattoon. In 1992, meanwhile, Chief Ranger John F. Batzer who had entered on duty at Homestead National Monument in September 1991, prepared an updated Prairie Management Plan. Completed in March 1993, the updated PMAP provided an outline of actions to be undertaken through 2002 and was titled “Into the 21st Century: Homestead National Monument of America Prairie Management Plan 1993-2002.” In contrast to the sixteen 10-acre parcels identified in the 1986 PMAP, the updated version divided the park into five management units within the overall Monument prairie ecosystem: the upland prairie rising above the 1270-foot elevation contour, the lowland prairie below the 1270-foot contour excluding the woodland and Cub Creek environs, the hydric prairie consisting of two small areas east of Cub Creek that have traditionally poor drainage, the Freeman School prairie, and the woodland/riparian area surrounding Cub Creek.

The last area, Cub Creek and the woodlands surrounding it, was a new addition in the approach to prairie management. The updated PMAP was based on an ecosystem approach to understanding the prairie to account for the interaction of various natural and man-made factors that affect it. The riparian and woodland areas were included under this approach “because of the biological interactions that take place along the edge of the prairie and woodlands” Although many of the recommended treatments for the prairie areas remained the same as in the past decade, including prescribed burns, mechanical thinning and pruning, limited application of EPA-approved herbicides, planting native grass seedlings, and sodding, the 1993 PMAP recommended a more vigorous monitoring and research program. This was particularly the case for the woodland section and Cub Creek. Rather than focus on erosion and flood control, however, the PMAP reported that the park had conducted no significant studies of the area’s vegetation and that baseline vegetation data was lacking as a result. The PMAP made additional recommendations for studies pertaining to water quality and hydrology.

By the time the PMAP was completed in early 1993, the park had begun to implement computer-based data analysis. In 1992, the park established a data collection and monitoring program designed for use with the park’s new Geographic Information System (GIS) using Environmental Planning and Programming Language version 7 (EPPL-7). An important component of the PMAP’s recommendations was the need for additional inventory and monitoring of changes to various aspects of the prairie ecosystem, with the resulting data to be entered and stored in a database program. The database, in either Quattro Pro v. 6 or dBase III software, would then be integrated with the park’s GIS software. The use of GIS, according to the PMAP, will allow park staff “to arrange, present and analyze data for management planning.”

GIS is a way of joining maps and geographical information with data sets, using digital means. Through these digital means, in which the various maps and the data are in digital form, GIS allows analysis of vast amounts of data in spatial terms. First developed in Canada in the 1960s, it was further expanded by several key academic centers through the 1970s and 1980s. The Harvard Laboratory for Computer Graphics and Spatial Analysis at Harvard University, and

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the Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI) in California, developed new means and approaches to tying digital data to ever more complex maps. ESRI soon developed GIS for wider governmental and, later, commercial uses. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was among the early users of GIS in the 1970s and, by the late 1980s, NPS had begun to explore its possibilities. The Service created the Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems Center (CRGIS) in 1990, and initially applied the new technology to the American Battlefield Protection Program. Part of the role of CRGIS, in addition to creating inventories of cultural resources, was to promote the use of GIS throughout NPS and other government entities. Although NPS first applied GIS technology to cultural resources, natural resource managers quickly adopted the technology as well.

Homestead National Monument began using the technology in 1992 and continued its use to map and monitor changes in vegetation in the prairie. An early GPS inventory of woody thickets helped staff, by 2001, to identify a strategy for controlling these invasive plants, and a grant to purchase new GIS software and equipment at the same time allowed more accurate tracking of thickets and other invasive species.

**Broadening the Scope of Natural Resource Management**

The park’s adoption of this powerful new technology in the early 1990s and its application to a new approach to studying the prairie were parts of a shift in how NPS managed natural resources. In the summer of 1999, the Service released a major policy statement, “Natural Resource Challenge: The National Park Service’s Action Plan for Preserving Natural Resources.” The Natural Resource Challenge was one offshoot of NPS’ response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), which advocated a new approach to management based on developments in the private sector in the 1970s and 1980s and was focused on measuring performance against clearly identified goals, both long-term and short-term. The Service-wide Strategic Plan resulting from GPRA included an emphasis on NPS’ role in the stewardship of natural resources, which the Natural Resource Challenge was designed to address. The introduction to the document stated that NPS had become a “superb visitor services agency” through the twentieth century, but, in the face of pollution, invasive species, incompatible uses, and more, the protection of the natural resources under the Service’s care “now requires active and informed management to a degree unimaginable in 1916. The lack of information about park plants, animals, ecosystems, and their interrelationships is profound.” To correct this lack of knowledge, the Natural Resource Challenge urged NPS to work collaboratively with other agencies and scientists to monitor natural resources and to share the information widely to protect native species of plants and animals and their habitats and to prevent the spread of non-native plant and animal species in the parks.

The Natural Resource Challenge program, which included increased funding for six years, recognized the importance of research at the local and regional level to address specific

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13 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative Report for 2001; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 46.
challenges to environmental protection. The program provided direct benefits to natural resource management activities at Homestead National Monument. One of the chief strategies to support this approach was the creation of regional networks. This strategy drew upon the existing NPS Inventory and Monitoring Division, created in 1992 to oversee the systematic gathering and analysis of information on plants, animals, and ecosystems throughout the National Park System. In November 1993, the National Biological Service (NBS) was created within the Department of the Interior through the transfer of various scientific functions of NPS along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Minerals and Mining Service, and the U.S. Geological Service, and the NPS Division of Inventory and Monitoring provided the liaison between the NBS and the individual networks. Thirty-two regional networks around the country included approximately 280 parks, with staff and member parks coordinating the studies that allowed NPS to understand natural resources within local and regional contexts. The information and analysis that resulted from these studies allowed NPS managers at regional offices and WASO to make resource management policy at regional and national scales. The regional networks were organized based on geography and on the natural resources that parks have in common. Within these networks, resource management staff from individual parks collaborated to plan, design, and conduct inventories and long-term monitoring projects. The results of these programs were then shared through technical reports and journal publications.

Homestead National Monument is located within the Heartland Region, which extends from central Nebraska east to Ohio and from southern Minnesota south to northern Louisiana. In 1994, the park was invited to take part in the pilot program for the new Division of Inventory and Monitoring as part of what was then called the Prairie Parks Cluster. Homestead National Monument’s Resource Management staff began taking part in studies through the Prairie Parks Cluster in the summer of 1995 when staff from what is now the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center proposed a study of practices designed to control the invasion of exotic plants in the Great Plains. Acting Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management Becky Lancome provided Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center staff with an extensive background and analysis of the efforts taken at the Monument up to that time but explained that the park had relatively little baseline data on the extent and nature of exotic plants at the park. She added that former Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management John Batzer was then preparing an article on efforts to control the spread of Smooth brome grass, the most aggressive of the invasive species at the park; “Other than that, the effects of any treatments and management techniques have been mostly observational as described above and noted in the management actions summary. We have only a part-time resource management staff making it difficult to track our research techniques or results.”

In 1996, a research team visited the park to conduct a vegetation monitoring program through the Prairie Cluster Long Term Environmental Monitoring Program (LTEM), collecting plant samples from the prairie and water samples from Cub Creek. This monitoring program

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15 Becky Lacome to Kristin Freitag, July 13, 1995; Files of Homestead NM, N1617; this letter is part of a longer correspondence between Freitag and Lacome in the spring and summer of 1995.
instituted by the LTEM continues to the present through the Heartland Network operating in the Midwest Region, while other researchers initiated other studies using Homestead National Monument’s prairie. These included ornithologist Dr. Abby Powell with the U.S. Geological Service who conducted a bird survey, and researchers from Kansas State University who conducted a study of diversity in prairie plant and animal communities. At the same time, park staff began collating maps, aerial photographs, and blueprints for entry into the park’s natural resources database. Partnerships such as this soon came to characterize the way Homestead National Monument managed its natural resources through the Heartland Network. Having one of the oldest sections of restored prairie in the nation made it an attractive laboratory for groups and organizations wishing to study various aspects of the prairie and related ecosystems. In 2000, for example, the park engaged in a partnership between the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District and then the Natural Resources Conservation Service to promote the use of buffer strips. These narrow strips of land adjoining other vegetation were designed to inhibit the movement of pesticides, sediment, and nutrients from one area into another, on farmland. In 2002, the Heartland Network contracted with University of Nebraska scientist Daniel Fogell to conduct an amphibian survey, and the LTEM program contracted with University of Nebraska botanist Steven Rolfsmeier to coordinate with LTEM personnel on an inventory of the woodland area at Homestead National Monument, which was completed in 2007.

With the release of the Natural Resource Challenge program in 1999, Congress appropriated approximately $14 million in FY 2000 to implement the proposed plan with its several programs, including monitoring and inventorying, fixing critical problems, and attracting scientists. Additional funding over the next decade eventually brought annual appropriations to more than $70,000. Through the 1990s, the park’s organizational chart provided for natural resource management through the Park Ranger position. In order to handle the increasing responsibilities for natural resource management, the park hired its first Resource Management Specialist when Jesse Bolli entered on duty in September 2002. Bolli was soon active with the Heartland Network and coordinated with MWRO staff in 2003 to develop a deer survey funded by the Heartland Network with assistance from volunteers. While on furlough later in 2003, the Heartland Network funded Bolli to enter all documents relating to natural resource management at Homestead National Monument into a searchable database. In 2005, again while on furlough, he was funded to map the woody plants and thickets in the prairie. The Heartland Network continued its long-term vegetation and monitoring program through the mid-2000s. By 2005, the park and the Heartland Network both placed additional emphasis on Cub Creek and its water quality. This involved a volunteer effort by the Master Ranger Corps, formerly the Volunteer Senior Ranger Corps, together with hydrologists from Buffalo National Scenic Riverway, Arkansas and Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Oklahoma. The park also formed a partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service, which actively supported prairie restoration efforts at Homestead National Monument through the 1950s) to promote conservation throughout the Cub Creek watershed. More recent studies have covered air quality, fish populations in Cub Creek, bird communities, and aquatic invertebrates.

In 2006 and 2007, meanwhile, much of the Resource Management program, as with all of the park staff, was focused on the new Heritage Center, which was completed in 2007. The

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16 Annual Report for 1996; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 41.
Resource Management Specialist developed a plan for the grounds to restore the landscape surrounding the new building. Working with a design from the Landscape Architect for the project, Bolli coordinated the preparation of seeds and plant material and organized their installation. In the wake of the Heritage Center’s construction, erosion became an important problem, and Bolli coordinated with a contractor to fill washouts and install erosion control devices while also arranging for seed mixes for grasses and wildflowers for revegetating the construction area.

Cultural Landscape Report

Despite its status as having the oldest restored section of prairie in the National Park System, and the second oldest restored in the nation, Homestead National Monument did not become the subject of a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) until the late 1990s. In the spring of 1997, when the park was temporarily without a permanent Superintendent, Midwest Region Historical Landscape Architect Sherda Williams contacted the park with news that funding through the Cultural Resources Preservation Program had been programmed for the park to conduct a CLR in FY 1997. In the interregnum, and with the need to move quickly to obligate the funds before the end of the fiscal year, Williams offered to prepare the scope of work and coordinate the request for proposal on behalf of the park. In August 1997, MWRO Contracting staff requested a proposal for the CLR from Quinn Evans Architects of Ann Arbor, Michigan, which held an indefinite quantity contract with MWRO. Superintendent Mark Engler entered on duty during the contracting phase of the project and was present for the initial planning meeting on December 2, 1997. This meeting included a discussion of how to integrate the CLR with the development of a new General Management Plan then being prepared by MWRO and park staff. By this time, discussions were already underway regarding the possibility of a new Heritage Center, which would have to be addressed in the CLR. Superintendent Engler also requested that the Quinn Evans team address the relationship between the need to tell the story of homesteading, with its grid plan, and the presence of a restored section of prairie that was planned to replicate the land as Daniel Freeman saw it before he created his homestead. Engler also requested their support for justifying the money and time needed for the restored prairie in the face of local concerns that the prairie was “a patch of weeds.”

Quinn Evans coordinated with Land and Community Associates of Charlottesville, Virginia (LCA) to conduct the CLR. Staff from LCA, comprising a landscape architect, a cultural landscape specialist and preservation planner, and a historian, conducted research and field visits to the park through 1998 and 1999, preparing an inventory of existing conditions and buildings, identifying potentially historic features and general vegetation types, and developing a historic narrative of the park’s physical evolution. The LCA team prepared a draft CLR in 1999 that included a historic overview, extending from geological and prehistoric eras through the time of Freeman’s homestead into the twentieth century, and the park operation of NPS since 1939. This extensive overview incorporated substantial information regarding land use practices, including agricultural practices during Daniel Freeman’s ownership and between his death in

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17 Email, Sherda Williams to HOME Superintendent, May 19, 1997; Files of Homestead NM, H3019.
18 Meeting Minutes for CLR Pre-design Conference on December 1, 1997, issued on March 26, 1998; Files of Homestead NM, H3019.
1908 and the arrival of NPS in 1939, and the prairie restoration effort. The historic overview also placed a strong emphasis on historic land use patterns including fields, roads, and circulation patterns before the arrival of NPS in 1939 and under NPS management after that date. Of particular interest are the reproductions of historic photographs of several buildings that were present after 1864, built or occupied by Daniel Freeman and his heirs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.\(^\text{19}\)

The CLR also provided a thorough review of the existing site conditions, describing that the park, at the time, closely approximated the land that comprised Daniel Freeman’s original homestead. The existing conditions which the report addressed included vegetation, soils, patterns of landscape organization, land uses and management, buildings, boundaries, circulation systems, and archeological resources. After the inventory of the existing conditions, the report discussed management issues, which were challenging, given the site’s history both before and after NPS began work there. The site, as the report documented, includes neither physical remnants of the farm as Freeman worked it during the homesteading era nor significant aspects of virgin prairie, with the exception of the section of prairie adjacent to the Freeman School. Although the history of the site extends from the pre-homesteading era, when a squatter lived there, through the homesteading era, when Daniel Freeman and his family lived there, few cultural reminders remain: the houses and barns have been removed, only limited archeological evidence is available for the locations of several of these resources, no evidence remains of the tenants who worked on the Freeman’s farm, and the early freight road, the route of which was appropriated by the original Highway 4, has been lost. As the authors of the report explained, this lack of architectural and landscape components constitutes a challenge for the site’s interpretation: “The continuous occupation of the site from squatter to NPS acquisition is inextricably linked to the homestead era history. However, these threads of continuity are not apparent or addressed through interpretation.”\(^\text{20}\)

The CLR discussed the apparent conflict in interpretive strategies caused by the presence of the restored prairie when that prairie covers over the remains of the site’s historic occupations. Although early NPS planners conceived of the restored prairie as an interpretive device that would allow visitors to understand the conditions that existed when Daniel Freeman first arrived, it does not easily allow for an interpretation of Freeman’s life as a homesteader. As the report observed, the presence of the restored prairie “diverts attention from the cultural associations that are the intentional focus of the park’s mission. The prairie restoration has actually created a natural/cultural resource management conflict that is especially difficult to address in the absence of aboveground cultural resources that date from the homestead era.”\(^\text{21}\)

This understanding continued into the discussion of the site’s integrity, its ability to convey its period of historical significance. Although the events which the site represents have

\(^{19}\) Quinn Evans Architects and Land and Community Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report, Homestead National Monument of America*, prepared for NPS Midwest Regional Office, approved by Regional Director David N. Given, July 24, 2000; Files of Homestead NM, D34. The site history can be found from pages 2-1 to 2-86, with the historic photographs on pages 2-98 to 2-105.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 4-2 to 4-3.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 4-5.
great historical significance, the landscape, according to the CLR, no longer represents this historical significance with integrity:

The hallmark of a qualified homestead was a habitable dwelling and agricultural improvements such as pastures and cleared and cultivated lands. The absence of such significant landscape features precludes an evaluation of integrity.

However, the site does possess several mitigating features despite this absence of historic landscape features. In particular, the CLR identified that several of the features that Daniel Freeman would have found attractive as a homesteader and which drew him to this location, remain in place. These include Cub Creek, which provided Freeman with a source of water, and the surrounding woodlands, which were a source of building materials and fuel. Moreover, the original T-shaped configuration of Freeman’s original homestead remained visible, his Osage orange hedge remained intact, and a fragment of the original freight road was still on the site. In addition, the restored prairie is significant in the history of conservation efforts as an intact early prairie restoration that has continued to evolve as it was designed. Finally, the Freeman School retains a high degree of physical integrity and is significant for its educational and social role during the homesteading era and after.

The CLR was prepared concurrently with the park’s new General Management Plan (GMP), and its recommendations and treatment plan were aligned with this overall guidance document. In particular, the CLR included support for the GMP’s preferred alternative to relocate the park’s interpretive functions to a new site outside the original Freeman homestead property. With regard to the historic landscape, the CLR focused on rehabilitation as a treatment goal; restoration not being feasible given the lack of existing landscape elements related to a nineteenth-century homestead and not enough information on Daniel Freeman’s homestead buildings to permit reconstructions. Together with research into the park’s natural resources and communication with stakeholders, many of the CLR’s recommended treatments, pertained as much to interpretation as to physical upgrades. Regarding the restored prairie, the CLR recommended allowing the prairie to continue to evolve rather than attempting to “replicate the 1930s-installation-era appearance.” This included continuing to promote ecological diversity, managing invasive woody and exotic species through prairie management techniques such as annual prescribed burns, and incorporating species inventories and the changing conditions of the prairie into the park’s interpretive programs. In addition to incorporating interpretation into the landscape treatment plan, the CLR also included specific recommendations for interpretation: treating the Freeman family as a representative homesteading family, interpreting the Freeman family’s use of the landscape during their period of ownership, decreasing dependence on visually intrusive wayside exhibits, and including discussions of changing agricultural practices in the site’s overall interpretation. Finally, the CLR recommended rehabilitation of the historic Osage orange hedgerow through selective removal of intrusive plants, specifically eastern red cedar and shrubs, and replenishing the hedgerow itself through propagating, grafting, and replanting.
Osage Orange Hedgerow

As the CLR indicated, the row of Osage orange trees which lines the park’s southern boundary is the only well-defined cultural landscape artifact remaining from Daniel Freeman’s ownership of the property (Figure 40). Freeman planted this row of trees on his original homestead, and it is now included on the park’s List of Classified Structures. The CLR provided evidence that the row may never have been highly maintained even during Freeman’s occupancy:

Since the hedgerow today shows no signs of being woven into an organized hedge, it is likely that maintenance had halted many years ago . . . By the late 1930s parts of the hedge had almost disappeared, particularly in its eastern sections. In other areas, however, it had become overgrown and the hedge plants had reverted to tree-like growth. These characteristics indicate that care of the hedge had been suspended for a number of years.22

Figure 40: A portion of the Osage orange hedgerow with the Palmer-Epard Cabin at the left, 2019. Photograph by the author.

Although the Osage orange hedgerow received little attention during the early decades of NPS’s prairie restoration program, it attracted new attention in the 1980s with the emergence of natural resource management planning. In 1983, park staff conducted initial work on the Osage orange hedgerow, with crews mechanically removing the invasive tree species starting to crowd the original trees.23 The hedgerow was the subject of an initial formal assessment in 1995 by

22 Ibid., 2-47 to 2-48.
23 Homestead National Monument Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1983, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 29. For a more detailed analysis of the results of the 1983
David L. Potter, who assigned identification numbers to every tree, including dead and non-Osage orange trees within the hedgerow. Park staff removed most of these non-contributing components of hedgerow after 2000.24

The hedgerow remained in challenging condition during and after the work on the CLR, however. As one of the first projects that followed upon the CLR’s recommendations, the park contracted for a Hedgerow Management Plan in 2004. Dr. Richard Sutton, a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, prepared the plan, which was based on the treatment recommendations of the CLR. Work on the plan began with an intensive survey and documentation of the hedgerow, gathering data on each of the trees including their size, condition, and, for selected trees, their age based on growth rings. Sutton found that the overall condition of the hedgerow was improved from what Potter had observed a decade before. Part of this difference was due to the improvements that had been made since Potter’s report, but the difference was also due to the difference in methods that Sutton used to determine condition; in particular, he did not count the amount of dead wood on a tree as indicative of poor health. Sutton’s study of the hedgerow also indicated that few, if any, of the existing stems were original to the first planting, which likely was in the 1870s, but, instead, had sprouted from the original stumps. Sutton explained that Osage orange trees were frequently harvested for use as posts for barbed-wire fences and that most, if not all, of the existing stems likely sprouted after such a harvesting, possibly in the 1920s.

Sutton concurred in the recommendations of the CLR of thinning the invasive trees within the hedgerow, removing selected trees, and replacing them through grafting, propagating, and replanting. He noted that most of the invasive trees had already been removed, which eliminated competition for water and sunlight, and his inventory indicated the locations of gaps in the hedgerow that would benefit from replanting. In addition, Sutton urged that attention be paid to the land immediately south of the hedgerow, which was a source of many of the invasive trees, allowed stormwater runoff, and promoted erosion. Any new plantings within the hedgerow, he recommended, would need a buffer strip of open land on each side of the hedgerow to allow them to be established without competition from invasive tree species. An important component of the rehabilitation program for the hedgerow involved seed collection, and Sutton provided recommendations for methods to collect and prepare seeds. He also provided specific guidelines for budding, grafting, propagating, and weaving seedlings into the existing hedgerow.25

Although the new Heritage Center occupied much of the park staff’s attention during 2007 and 2008, work on the Osage orange hedgerow in accordance with Sutton’s recommendations proceeded. During that time, the park followed Sutton’s recommendations for collecting seeds and propagating seedlings, growing them in pots on the park grounds. In 2008, the park’s resource management staff prepared for the restoration work by mowing the brome

prescribed burn, see Memorandum, Park Technician David Johnson to File, August 26, 1983; incorporated in Richard K. Sutton, Dr. James Stubbendieck, and Ms. Jayne Traeger, “Vegetation Survey and Management Recommendations, Homestead National Monument, Final Report, December 1984; Files of Homestead NM.
25 Ibid.
grass that was spreading into the hedgerow, marking the areas where new seedlings should be placed, and identifying exotic trees to be removed. Finally, in September 2009, park staff planted thirty-eight new trees in the hedgerow. The hedgerow continues to be monitored closely, with occasional pruning to maintain the shape of the canopy and ongoing removal of invasive trees.

**Fire and Fire Protection**

In keeping with NPS policy through the 1960s, Homestead National Monument worked to prevent all fires on the grounds. Particularly during the hot summers and periodic droughts, the dense grasses in the restored prairie as early as the late 1940s posed a significant threat of wildfire. This threat was becoming a concern by the early 1950s, and, in 1951, Region II Soil Conservationist Fred Dickinson recommended mowing the entire park to alleviate the fire hazard; Superintendent Schultz agreed with the recommendation, though he lamented “the loss of fertility which is inevitable when 20 to 70 tons of dry nutrient are taken from the fields each year.” This practice of mowing to reduce the fire hazard continued throughout the 1950s. Even by 1959, fire avoidance was the only real strategy for managing potential wildfires, although the park had limited equipment for containing a structural fire, including basic hoses and hand tools.

Particularly with the advent of Mission 66 funding, Homestead National Monument’s firefighting capacity improved during the early 1960s. In 1960, the park acquired a fifty-gallon, slip-on pumping unit that fit into the bed of the pickup truck, allowing staff to confront fires in the prairie. In 1962, as discussed in Chapter 6, the park’s Mission 66 program included the installation of an underground 20,000-gallon water tank behind the Visitor Center that assured sufficient water to confront fires in the new Visitor Center. Following these improvements, however, the park acquired no new substantial equipment or professional firefighting attention until the 1990s. During this time, the park relied primarily on the Beatrice Rural Fire Department (BRFD) for fire protection. As early as 1959, the Region II Office in Omaha recommended to the new Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss that he

fully explore this organization to ascertain the methods by which they operate and the facilities they have to deal with fire. It is believed that a good chance for reciprocal relations exists here that could clearly enhance the fire fighting facilities at the Monument area.

Park staff successfully formed a relationship with the BRFD, and, by the 1960s, the park’s fire policy required that personnel call BRFD immediately upon report of a fire. The BRFD chief

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26 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, June 8, 1951; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 19.
27 Regional Director Howard W. Baker to Superintendent Warren D. Hotchkiss, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2.
28 Howard D. Baker, Regional Director Warren D. Hotchkiss, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2.
would assume overall direction of the fire suppression, while park staff would have responsibility for traffic control and provide necessary assistance.  

The relationship between Homestead National Monument and BRFD was formalized in April 1972, when the two agencies entered into a Cooperative Agreement. The agreement stipulated that, in the case of structural or wild fires within the BRFD, Homestead National Monument would provide water from either Cub Creek or fire hydrants within the park, together with equipment and personnel, with no remuneration, and the BRFD would provide similar support for fires at the park with no remuneration. The Cooperative Agreement was renewed in May 1978 and has remained in place since then. In more recent years, Homestead National Monument staff has cooperated with BRFD and the Beatrice Fire Department on training and funding opportunities. In 2000, the park coordinated with both fire departments to develop a Wildland Firefighting Course. Homestead National Monument hosted the thirty-two-hour course in 2001 with the two fire departments and the Nebraska Fire Marshal’s office, and twenty-three local fire fighters participated. This allowed the participants to receive their Incident Qualification Card, also known as a Red Card, which certifies their ability to respond to wildfires and is accepted by all agencies. As documented in the 2001 Annual Superintendent’s Report, “Our effort pushed the State of Nebraska forward in red carding firefighters, thus making available local firefighters for western fire callout.”

The park has continued to host wildland fire training programs and has also maintained and extended its relationship with BRFD and the Beatrice Fire Department through supporting grant applications. In 2003, the park supported BRFD in a successful application for $20,000 through the Department of the Interior’s Rural Fire Assistance program. This grant enabled BRFD to purchase a new fire engine and to build a single vehicle all-weather cache at the park to house their truck. The grant, as described in the Superintendent’s Annual Report, created a partnership that, to the best of our knowledge, has never been tried before through this grant. The rural fire department owns the new engine, but the engine is housed at the monument [sic], serving as an initial attack engine for [Homestead]. This gives the monument additional protection that it did not have and gives the fire department another centrally located resource for firefighting.

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29 A discussion of the existing fire policy is contained in “Natural Resources Management Plan, Homestead National Monument,” approved by Regional Director J.L. Dunning, January 9, 1981; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-A, Catalog No. 7745, Box 1 Folder 2.

30 In late 1969, Superintendent John Higgins attended a statewide meeting of federal and state agencies designed to create a Rural Fire Defense Plan for Nebraska; it is not known if this work was continued or if it had an effect on the agreement document between BRFD and Homestead National Monument, as no other correspondence was located during research for this Administrative History; see Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, December 4, 1969; Federal Records Center, 79-88-0002, Box 14, Y14.

31 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative for 2001; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 46; see also the report for 2000, in Folder 45. These were not the first staff from Homestead National Monument to be dispatched to fight wildfires. In July 1985, Maintenance Foreman John Seger was part of a sixty-person contingent from MWRO sent to fight fires in California, and Chief Ranger Kelly Collins was dispatched to a U.S. Forest Service base in Duluth, Minnesota, and from there to Boise, Idaho, though her NPS crew was not assigned to a fire; see Press Release, July 12, 1985, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 6.
In addition to cooperating with the local fire departments at an institutional level, several staff members as individuals have also been member of local volunteer fire departments. In 2001, Law Enforcement (LE) Ranger Michael Stansberry first began volunteering with BRFD, and other staff members have served with BRFD and the Dewitt Volunteer Fire Department. The benefits of these relationships are important in a number of ways. As noted in the Annual Superintendent's Report for 2008, the two park staff members then serving with regional volunteer fire departments are “each providing support to their communities while also strengthening the relationship between Homestead National Monument and the Rural Fire Districts, and also gaining valuable experience in structural firefighting.”

Before this significant increase in the professionalization of the park’s firefighting and more formal relationships with the local fire departments, the park placed its principal fire planning emphasis on the prescribed burn program. The park conducted a preliminary burn in 1970, and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the park inaugurated an annual prescribed burn program with a rain-shortened attempt in 1982 and a complete series of six burns in 1983. The park has conducted prescribed burns annually since then, except for occasional rest years. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the park received additional funding from BRFD for equipment and a new storage building for fire equipment. Prescribed burns continued into the 2000s.

In 2015, the Nebraska Intelligent Mobile Unmanned Systems laboratory (NIMBUS), an interdisciplinary team at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), announced that it was developing the technology to use drones, unmanned aerial devices, to ignite and monitor prescribed fires remotely. The system involved the use of small balls the size of ping-pong balls filled with a flammable chemical. Each drone carried a cache of these balls; before being dropped through a chute, each ball was injected with another chemical that caused fire ignition while the ball was in the air, igniting the grasses once it hits the ground. A similar technology had been used to start fires from helicopters, but the use of drones allowed fires to be ignited in terrain that is either more difficult to access or too close to private property for helicopters. The system was designed to be small enough to fit into a firefighter’s backpack. As remote machinery, the drones can be programmed to release the ignited balls only under the proper conditions (Figure 41).

The NIMBUS team conducted indoor tests of the system in 2015, and, in March 2016, they conducted the first test of their unmanned drone technology for prescribed burns at Homestead National Monument. Park staff initiated a partnership among the MWRO Fire and Aviation Program, NPS National Aviation Office and Department of the Interior Office of Aviation Services to collaborate with the NIMBUS team to develop the pilot program. The goal of the pilot was to prepare the system for use in a variety of applications related to firefighting throughout the nation. In preparation for the test, Homestead National Monument staff mowed a fire line that was wider than normal as a precaution and arranged for fifteen NPS staff to be present and monitor the work. The conditions were right on April 22, 2016, and the UNL team and park staff conducted a burn of twenty-six acres of prairie. Park staff ignited a fire at the perimeter of the parcel, while the drone was used to ignite a fire at the interior of the parcel.

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32 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative for 2008; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 52.
33 See clipping from Fire Aviation, October 30, 2015; UNL Press Release, April 22, 2016; Files of Homestead NM
typically the most dangerous location. Firefighters from MWRO, NPS Black Hills Wildland Fire Module, Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota, Bureau of Indian Affairs-Horton Agency, BRFD, and the Fairbury Rural Fire Department joined Homestead National Monument staff for the pilot burn, and Heartland Network staff provided weather updates. Both UNL and NPS staff declared the test a success, and the program garnered extensive local, regional, and national news coverage.

Other agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service, have since conducted similar tests. The NIMBUS team continued to develop prototypes and, in 2017, used the technology to create a start-up company, Drone Amplified, that has continued to develop new software and applications for the system. By inviting the NIMBUS team to conduct its inaugural test on federal lands, Homestead National Monument applied an innovative approach to natural resource conservation, using cutting-edge twenty-first century technology to continue its legacy as one of the nation’s earliest experiments in prairie restoration.
Chapter 9: Interpretation and Research, 1975-2015

Interpretation and Living History

Homestead National Monument has a tradition of quickly adapting new technology to enhance its educational and interpretation programs. Strategies range from the Admatic automatic projector used in the late 1950s for visitor orientation, through an early use of a website and distance learning technology, to the distribution of educational curriculum guides on flash drives. At the same time, the park has also relied on traditional methods of interpretation that have changed little in nearly nine decades of operation. As described in Chapter 5, interpretation at Homestead National Monument from the earliest days of operation in 1940 through the late 1950s consisted of an orientation to the site by the Superintendent or a seasonal park ranger, supplemented, by the mid-1950s, with small changing exhibits and a prepared audio-visual program in the Utility Building. Into the 1960s many of the seasonal rangers were school teachers who worked at the park during summer break. By 1952, a visit to the park also included the opportunity to see the Palmer-Epard Cabin, which was furnished with period pieces, and the late 1950s saw the introduction of a self-guided trail, with wayside signs providing information about the surrounding prairie and the historic sites associated with the Freeman family. When available, seasonal park rangers or the Superintendent provided a guided walk on the prairie trail. The Mission 66 era improvements included construction of the 1962 Visitor Center, with its new audio-visual program focused largely on Daniel Freeman and his operation of the homestead, and the substantially enlarged permanent exhibit, which provided visitors with a broader interpretation of the homesteading era.

Homestead National Monument, together with many units of the National Park System and other historic sites around the nation, embraced living history as an interpretive approach in the early 1970s. The origins of this approach at Homestead National Monument is discussed in Chapter 5. The expansion of the program through the 1970s, led by Superintendent Vince Halvorson, coincided with an improved level of training for interpreters, both at the park and throughout NPS. Seasonal Park Technician (now MWRO Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education) Thomas Richter, who began his career at the Monument in 1973, recalled that interpretive training involved primarily watching training films followed by on-the-job experience. During the 1975 summer season, the park sent Richter to a two-week training course at HFC, where “the idea was to instill a greater understanding and practice of interpretation to the current Park Service standards.” In 1976, still as a seasonal employee while in graduate school, he was placed in charge of training interpreters at the park; “then, the following year, ’77, my last year, they had a different Park Ranger, William Fink, and he, also was inspired to…upgrade the quality of the interpretation, so we did the training together.”

The living history program continued to serve as the primary interpretive medium for the park through the late 1970s, with both seasonal interpreters and volunteers in period dress.

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1 Thomas Richter, oral history interview, May 17, 2019; Files of Homestead NM. In 1977, the park provided training for staff on a variety of topics including interpretation, the management of cooperating associations, in-service law enforcement, historic preservation maintenance, and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation; see Annual Report for 1977, Archives of Homestead Monument, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 23.
working primarily near the Palmer-Epard Cabin behind the rear of the Visitor Center. Butter churning, candle dipping, cooking, spinning, soap making, and working in the cash crop plot served as the principal activities. In addition, the park fully integrated the Freeman School into the interpretive program by the late 1970s, with interpretive staff at the school to provide talks in response to questions from the visitors. Finally, guided tours led by park staff continued, with tours typically starting in the audio-visual room and museum exhibits of the Visitor Center before venturing outside to the farm exhibit display, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and across the Cub Creek footbridge to the prairie. Park interpretive staff then introduced the visitors to the prairie ecosystem and the impacts of breaking the sod, and “connected the historical and natural themes encountered in the tour.” In 1978, the park provided interpretive staff with guidance on all these topics and how to engage visitors so that they could learn and experience as much as they wished.2

In 1979, the park completed a new Interpretive Prospectus which contained a summary of the current interpretive program and recommendations for the future of the program. In addition, the Interpretive Prospectus provided a historical summary of homesteading that led to ruminations on the then-current state of agriculture in the United States. While not citing any historical sources, the historical overview is decidedly pessimistic with regard to the effects of the Homestead Act, arguing that other land distribution systems including railroad grants, the Morrill Land Act, and a tacit acceptance of squatters and speculators meant that only a small fraction of western land went to homesteaders. For immigrants who came to the United States after the Homestead Act and hoped to take advantage of its offer, “the discovery that the prospect of free land was most often a hoax was only the first of many tests of their perseverance. Our debt to these people is the greater, in view of the failure to administer an effective land distribution program.” As described later in this chapter, more recent research, conducted as a result of the massive research program into homestead land records instigated by Homestead National Monument in conjunction with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the National Archives, and private genealogical entities has provided decisive evidence that debunks this pessimistic understanding of the Homestead Act. However, the understanding as conveyed by the 1979 Interpretive Prospectus was fully consistent with accepted historical research at the time.3

The Interpretive Prospectus went on to provide a brief summary of the existing program, noting that the Visitor Center, “one of the best of the Mission ‘66 genre,” provided a valuable introduction to homesteading. “The strength of the exhibits,” it observed, “is in the collection portraying the daily life of the homesteader.” The audio-visual program was then in the process of being created anew by HFC, and, when completed, it would reduce the emphasis on Daniel Freeman and instead concentrate on the Homestead Act, according to the Prospectus. Freeman would instead be interpreted primarily by a new set of wayside exhibits then being prepared for the self-guided prairie tour. The Palmer-Epard Cabin and the Freeman School, both of which

2 “Individual Activity Plans,” [1978], typed guidance for all of the park’s interpretive activities, in Files of Homestead NM, A7043.

3 “Interpretive Prospectus, Homestead National Monument,” approved by Acting Regional Director Charles A. Veitl, April 19, 1979; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.004.002, Catalog No. 7607, Box 1 Folder 1. See Edwards et al., Homesteading the Plains for a more recent and statistically driven interpretation of the Homestead Act and its operations and impacts.
were supported by a living history program to interpret the lives of homesteaders, completed the interpretive program. Looking forward, the Interpretive Plan explained that the new audio-visual program would emphasize “the real impact of the [Homestead] Act in the perspective of the agricultural/industrial relationship, coupled with environmental factors. It is essential that every visitor gain some fundamental understanding of this relationship at the outset.” As described in the Interpretive Prospectus, the new introductory movie would convey the pessimistic understanding of the Homestead Act at the time, that it “was the realization of an idea whose time had passed almost as it arrived. The industrial revolution and the quest for land met on the edge of the great plains with unforeseen consequences for agriculture and for the fundamental character of American life.”

The Interpretive Prospectus argued that the new audio-visual narrative would provide the bulk of the interpretive message at Homestead. The exhibits, meanwhile, would emphasize the lives of homesteaders through objects and artifacts. The document recommended understanding the exhibit in two phases, one dealing with the difficult lives of those who first arrived and broke the sod and the second dealing with the impact of technology on agriculture. As for the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and the Freeman School, the Interpretive Prospectus recommended that they continue largely as they were, though the Palmer-Epard Cabin needed a furnishings plan, and the Freeman School interior should be reorganized so that the information/sales desk constituted less of a barrier, to allow more effective contact with the visitors.⁴

As discussed later in Chapter 12, the park faced declining budgets starting in 1980 which reduced interpretive staff to the bare minimum, while extensive staff turnover through the early 1980s also hindered the park’s ability to maintain continuity of programs. The living history program came to rely increasingly on volunteer efforts during the early 1980s amid these many changes. At the same time, an emphasis on resource management, particularly natural resources and landscape protection, played a larger role in the park’s operations. By 1980, the Park Ranger position had been re-programmed as the Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management, with responsibilities for the interpretive program and for the park’s increasing attention to natural resource management. Chapter 8 describes the park’s efforts throughout the 1980s to create a modern, scientifically driven approach to natural resource management, specifically restoration of the prairie through a vegetation study, a Prairie Management Plan, and the development of a prescribed burn program. Superintendent Vince Halvorson, who had served at Homestead National Monument since 1971 and worked to improve the park’s interpretive program by developing living history demonstrations, left in November 1982 to serve as Superintendent of Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota and was replaced by Superintendent Randy Baynes, who entered on duty in February 1983. Former Seasonal Park Technician Tom Richter recalled that “by that time, the pendulum had shifted, with Randy Baynes much more into a focus on the prairie and managing the prairie.”⁵

Later in the 1980s, the park’s interpretive efforts were oriented toward the development of new trail segments in the prairie and on the increasing array of special events such as Homestead Days, begun in 1979, Prairie Appreciation Week, and Christmas on the Homestead. Living

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⁴ “Interpretive Prospectus,” 1979.
⁵ Thomas Richter, oral history interview, May 17, 2019; Files of Homestead NM. See also Superintendent’s Annual Reports for 1980-1983 in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1.
history demonstrations continued on weekends from May through August, using staff as well as volunteers. In 1987, the park embarked on the preparation of its first General Management Plan (GMP), designed to replace the original 1964 Master Plan. In the wake of the new GMP, the Midwest Regional Office prepared a new interpretation plan for Homestead National Monument. Like the new GMP, the new interpretation plan was created to include the newest addition to the park, Freeman School, and the restoration of the prairie. The prairie restoration, according to the new interpretation plan, was begun more than fifty years before, but “efforts to interpret the role of natural resources in the development of the pioneer lifestyle are only recently beginning.” As directed by the GMP, the new interpretation plan placed emphasis on four new concepts to be incorporated into the park’s interpretation:

- The role of education on the homestead frontier
- The ecology, prehistoric, and historic significance of the prairie and the interpretation of prairie restoration efforts at Homestead National Monument
- The impact of ethnic group settlement on the Great Plains
- The evolution of agriculture on the Great Plains from subsistence farming in the homestead era to modern agricultural technology and agribusiness

Rather than providing an interpretation of homesteading, as proposed in the 1979 Interpretive Prospectus, the 1990 interpretation plan focused on the types of media needed to convey the park’s three essential interpretive themes: the Homestead Act of 1862 and its effect on westward migration, pioneer life on the homestead, and the prairie environment. The plan recommended replacing the 1979 audio-visual program and urged the park to secure original copies of the of the thirty-minute introductory film, which was still on reel film that had to be rewound manually. The plan also recommended revisions to the Visitor Center exhibit through rearranging the organization of the exhibit rather than creating a new one with the exception of creating two new exhibits on the prairie ecosystem and immigration to the Great Plains. For the prairie trail, the interpretation plan recommended installing five new wayside exhibits in addition to the existing wayside exhibits. Topics of these exhibits were to include the historic road that crossed the Freeman homestead, NPS prairie restoration efforts since 1939, the role of fire in the prairie restoration, Daniel Freeman’s Osage orange hedgerow, and Cub Creek and its problems with flooding and erosion.

Beginning under Superintendent Constantine Dillon in the mid-1990s and expanding under Superintendent Mark Engler since 1997, the park’s interpretive program has been reimagined and refreshed. Superintendent Dillon inaugurated a return to the park’s enabling legislation and original purposes by putting an emphasis on creating a museum and archive and focusing on the history of homesteading more than on its environmental aspects. In 1996, Superintendent Dillon also led the development of a Long Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) for the park in coordination with Interpretive Planner Tom Richter and other Omaha staff, Pipestone National Monument Superintendent Palma Wilson, and Beatrice citizens including Laureen Riedesel, Director of the Beatrice Public Library and a founding member of the Friends of

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6 “A Plan for the Interpretation of Homestead National Monument of America, Nebraska,” prepared by Division of Interpretive Planning, Harpers Ferry Center, approved by Acting Regional Director William W. Schenk, May 11, 1990; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.004.002, Catalog No. 7608, Box 1 Folder 2.

7 Ibid.
Homestead, which was created in 1994. The LRIP manifested Dillon’s vision, which involved going back to the origins of the park to understand how to fundamentally re-shape its interpretation program. The document quoted the 1936 enabling legislation at length to argue that the park’s focus needed to be, on a grand scale, interpreting homesteading and its impact. Under Dillon’s administration, park documents consistently referred to the full title of the park: Homestead National Monument of America; the final phrase, “of America,” was crucial to him. From his study of documents associated with the park’s founding, he recalled, “it was pretty clear, from Congressional testimony, they intended the park to be, quite literally, a monument to America.” Noting the concerns over Communism in America in the 1930s, he reflected that one of the theories, as to why the United States didn’t go through some of the upheavals other countries did at the turn of the twentieth century, during industrialization, is because we had all this land, and people could own land in the United States. Middle class, ordinary people could own land. So, it was a different atmosphere than Europe. So, it was, literally, a monument to America. 

Dillon’s review of the park’s original documents clearly informed the LRIP, admitting that the vision for the park as a museum and study center designed to serve as a memorial to pioneers and the Homestead Act was never fully realized. The potential to do so remained, however. As Dillon observed, “Homestead National Monument of America is still the only site in the country designated specifically to interpret the Homestead Act.”

In keeping with Dillon’s intent to return to the park’s roots, the LRIP redefined the park’s primary interpretive goals:

- Engage visitors in activities, demonstrations, and exhibits which incorporate the 160-acre Freeman claim, to enable them to understand the story of homesteading in America.
- Expose visitors to the entire scope and diversity of homesteading throughout the nation, from its nineteenth-century origins to its continuing influences today.
- Provide visitors with an inclusive view of the Homestead Act including its effect upon American Indians, European immigrants, African-Americans, women, and non-citizens, as well as its effect on the land.

The 1997 LRIP began with a candid and detailed assessment of the existing interpretive facilities, including the Visitor Center exhibit, the outdoor agricultural implements exhibit, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, the prairie trail, Freeman School, special events, and the park’s initial website. As described earlier in this chapter, the park’s new education program, using funds from the Parks as Classrooms program, emerged during this period, and the LRIP incorporated educational programming which provides curriculum guides that enable teachers to take more responsibility for content during students’ visits to the park. The LRIP strongly encouraged developing additional curriculum guides and other educational programs for all grade levels, providing educational internship opportunities for college students, and developing computer

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8 Dillon, oral history interview.
networks that allow teachers and other parks to access Homestead National Monument of America’s curriculum guides.

Under Superintendent Engler, the park continued to expand its interpretive focus to include the national story of homesteading. This involves presenting information about the impacts of providing free land to actual settlers in thirty states and about the role of the Homestead Act in many aspects of American history including industry, agriculture, immigration, and the expansion of civil rights to women and African Americans. These themes infused the creation of exhibits in the Heritage Center, as described in Chapter 9, and, with the assistance of research by successive park historians, has continued to expand since then.

In 2015, the park produced a Foundation Document which outlines the park’s purpose, its fundamental resources and values, its significance, and the interpretive themes. Building on this Foundation Document, in 2016, the park developed a new Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP). Released in 2017, the LRIP presented interpretive strategies that built on the themes, the fundamental resources and values, as described in the Foundation Document. The LRIP opens with a summary of the renewed vision for the park:

Over the past eight years, National Park Service (NPS) staff at Homestead National Monument of America have fulfilled the site’s purpose by facilitating connections between the site’s physical resources, our nation’s character and development, and universal concepts relevant to every visitor and audience.11

The LRIP then elaborates on this general theme by referencing the special mandates identified in the Foundation Document, including the development and operation of a museum on the site, telling the homesteading story in a national context, laying out the land in a suitable manner, and creating a Homestead Heritage Highway on a portion of Highway 4.

The LRIP identified several key interpretive themes at Homestead National Monument:

- legislation and the landscape, which incorporates the distribution of public land and the settlers’ interaction with the surrounding natural resources;
- progress, which includes the development of communities, transportation networks, and schools, and increasing prosperity;
- peoples affected, paying attention both to the benefits of homesteading gained by immigrants, women, African Americans, and others who struggled for survival, and to the losses incurred by American Indians of traditional lands;
- American character, which examines the role of homesteading in helping people from various backgrounds to realize the American Dream in which all people have the opportunity to be prosperous and successful through hard work.

In order to achieve these themes, the LRIP laid out several strategies that build upon the park’s existing interpretive programs. These include continuing to build innovation into the park’s culture of interpretation to find new ways to reach additional audiences, providing additional

10 The Foundation Document is discussed in Chapter 12.
opportunities for local and distant audiences to become more engaged with the homestead story, fostering dialog and relevancy, affording visitors the opportunity to engage the story on multiple levels, and highlighting current scholarship that allows for the presentation of different points of view. Finally, the LRIP included a series of recommendations for further expanding the park’s interpretive programs by developing new tours and ranger-led experiences, finding ways to increase the value (and begin to recoup the costs) of the park’s genealogical research facilities, developing approaches that allow more visitors to see the interior of the Freeman School, creating new digital approaches to delivering content including virtual reality and a portal for digital services, and improving and expanding on the park’s social media presence. The LRIP also includes recommendations for developing the Homestead Heritage Highway, which was a component of the GMP, and for creating a Homestead Institute which would provide immersive visitor experiences related to homesteading and the natural environment.

Education

Interpretation is at the core of Homestead National Monument’s legislated mission, and the park initially relied on either passive interpretation or on impromptu talks with visitors. Passive interpretation used, first, temporary displays in the Utility Building and, later, permanent designed exhibits in the Visitor Center. Local teachers began bringing their students to the park in the mid- and late 1950s, first to see the Palmer-Epard Cabin and then for the new self-guided prairie trail, opened in 1956. The 1957 annual report for interpretation, for example, noted that “The self guiding trails and conducted tours are in demand by organized groups. Schools, elementary and high, place priority on historical values of social science to be obtained at the Monument.” At the same time, the park acquired an automatic projector that staff could use for off-site programs. Educational programs at Homestead into the 1960s and 1970s consisted primarily of visits by school groups who viewed both the exhibits and the restored prairie.

In the early decades of the park’s history, education was indistinguishable from interpretation, with visiting school groups receiving largely the same program as other organized groups and individuals. The emergence of living history programs at the park in the early 1970s added a new level of public engagement and new opportunities by participation by school groups, but the offerings to school groups differed little from everyday programs for individual visitors. In 1971, however, the park partnered with the State’s Educational Service Unit (ESU) No. 5 to conduct an Environmental Study Area teacher’s workshop in Beatrice, which included a visit to the park’s restored prairie, to help teachers incorporate the park’s environmental program in their lessons.12 In 1973, the park coordinated with Regional Environmental Specialist Andy Kardos to host and conduct a three-day Environmental Education workshop with high school students from Omaha, Nebraska, while Homestead staff developed a new interpretive trail in the prairie to encourage other environmental education groups to visit the park.13 From the 1970s into the early 1990s, park rangers provided special programs for visiting school groups at two times in the year: in the fall in coordination with Prairie Appreciation Days, and in May, before the school year ended, when new seasonal rangers provided guided walks and visits to the

12 “Teachers Register for Workshop,” Beatrice Daily Sun, October 21, 2917, page 7.
13 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 19. See also “Homestead Site Weekend Campus,” Beatrice Daily Sun May 12, 1973, page 1.
Freeman School. These were popular programs, which teachers frequently requested year after year. Other than these special programs, however, the park’s educational offerings were congruent with the general means of interpretation at the park, including exhibits and the audio-visual program in the Visitor Center, the display of farm equipment, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and the expanding series of trails through the prairie with interpretive signage.14

Finally, in the early 1990s, the park began to develop specific educational programs and materials. In 1992, the National Park Foundation established the Parks as Classrooms program. The goal of the Parks as Classrooms (PAC) program was to encourage teachers to use National Park System units as a part of their school curriculum. Individual units were encouraged to develop specific curriculum guides which teachers could adopt for their programs. Homestead National Monument secured $10,000 in special funding in 1993 to develop a curriculum through the PAC program and contracted with Jason Sutter, a teacher in Beatrice, to write, design, and lay out the curriculum guide. The park used the PAC funding also to purchase notebooks, a computer, publications and media, and materials for use by teachers and students. This initial curriculum guide was based on, and was an expansion of, the Prairie Appreciation Days school programs.15

The park’s new education planning broke new ground in 1996. With a second round of special funding in 1994, the park completed the curriculum guide, “Homesteading: The Free Land Idea,” in July 1996. The curriculum was aimed at students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades and resulted in a large boost in student visitations. In 1996, also, Park Ranger Lorna Lange and Chief of Operations Beverly Albrecht attended a teacher’s networking meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska. This resulted in a rise in awareness of the park’s programs among Nebraska’s teachers when the director of the state’s Social Science Education program began discussing the curriculum at workshops throughout the state. Park Ranger Lange also attended workshops to learn how to organize PAC programs. Finally, the park funded transportation for nearly six hundred at-risk youth from public schools in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, to visit the park.16

In 1996 and 1997, the park also held a series of teacher workshops at the Visitor Center to introduce the new curriculum guide. Park staff continued to expand the number of teacher workshops through 1998 and 1999, as “The curriculum-related workshops are becoming noteworthy through the state of Nebraska and into Kansas.” This outreach on the part of

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14 “Long Range Interpretation Plan, Homestead National Monument of America,” 1997; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.004.002, Catalog No. 7609, Box 1 Folder 5. See also the “Annual Statement for Interpretation and Visitor Services, Homestead National Monument,” approved by Superintendent Randall Baynes, March 6, 1986, Files of Homestead NM, K2621. This document points to such public programs as Homestead Days and Prairie Appreciation as key components of the park’s interpretation program, while noting that “Increased involvement with local communities and schools is a high priority.” Annual interpretation statements into the 1990s contained the same language.
16 Undated description of early educational program developments, with PAC budgets, c. March 1997; Files of Homestead National Monument, K18. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report, FY 1996, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 41; Staff Meeting Minutes, July 11, 1994, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 10; NPS Parks as Classrooms Grant Application, August 9, 1994, Files of Homestead NM, K18.
Homestead staff also led to a substantial increase in the number of students who attended curriculum-related educational programs, from 3,300 in FY1998 to 4,300 in FY1999.17

**Distance Learning**

The park’s education program made significant advancements throughout the 2000s. A major innovation for the educational program was inaugurated when a connection was made between Homestead National Monument and the Nebraska Educational Service Unit (ESU) program. The Nebraska Legislature created the ESU program in 1965 as a series of regions across the state that would serve as cooperative programs to make educational services available to school districts that might not otherwise be able to afford them; ESU No. 5 covers the southeastern portion of the state, including Beatrice. In studying the disparities between school districts, each of the ESU regions sought to explore ways of creating equal educational opportunities for all schools. The Nebraska Legislature in 1997 provided funding to the ESU program to develop “core services that included instructional technology, staff development, instructional materials, and technology infrastructure.” Briefly, the ESU program was tasked with giving rural schools access to specialized instruction by means of technology, now termed “distance learning.” In assigning this task to the ESU program, the Nebraska legislature appropriated $9.7 million in FY1998-99 and $3 million the following year to develop curricula and technology infrastructure.18

Don Ferneding, who started working with the ESU program as a computer data processing specialist in 1977, paid a visit to the park in the mid-1990s (Figure 42). By that time, the ESU program had begun installing distance learning systems in schools throughout the state. The outlay was substantial. As Ferneding recalled,

> We could teach to four simultaneous school districts, and they all could see each other and hear each other. We had four TVs in the front of the room for the students. We had four identical TVs in the back of the room, so that the teacher could see. Every student was [fitted with a microphone], and we had all of those. . .synchronized together, and then we built the network.

The ESU distance learning program initially focused on foreign languages, allowing students in rural schools to learn from teachers in urban schools.19 The purpose of this program was to provide to rural schools educational opportunities for their students that rural school systems could not afford to provide themselves.

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17 Quotation and visitation figures in Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1999; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 44. See also Press Release announcing a new round of teacher workshops in 1997, May 8, 1997; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 6.

18 “Nebraska Educational Service Units (ESUs): A Study of Mission, Services, and Organizational Structure, Executive Summary,” prepared by ESU Regionalization/Restructuring Task Force, December 2003; available online: https://www.aesa.us/Archives/research_archives/Nebraska_Educational_Service_Units_Study_of_Mission_Services_and_Organizational_Structure_Executive%20Summary_2003.pdf

19 Don Ferneding, oral history interview, July 19, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
The close association between ESU No. 5 and Homestead National Monument began in the mid- and late 1990s through multiple contacts. Ferneding traveled to Beatrice in the mid-1990s while he was part of ESU’s foreign language program and, while there, visited the park. During his visit, he talked to Administrative Clerk Susan Cook, who told him about the growing educational program at Homestead National Monument. Ferneding recognized the opportunity that National Park System units offered for a diverse range of educational content in which urban and rural school districts could provide educational opportunities for one another: “And she was telling me about all these other educational programs. And I’m suddenly going, ‘Okay! So, that’s something we, as a rural school district, could offer the urban schools!’”20 In the spring of 1998, Superintendent Engler attended a Kiwanis Club meeting, learned about advancements in distance learning being pioneered by ESU-5, and conveyed his interest in the technology. Ferneding then began coordinating with Superintendent Engler and negotiated an arrangement that would allow the ESU program to use Homestead National Monument as the beta test site for connecting National Park System units into a nationwide distance learning program. He worked with ESU to secure grant funding to allow the program to expand the distance learning programs into twenty-five parks, initially.

Homestead National Monument incorporated the development of a distance learning program into its overall education offerings, creating innovative opportunities for students through 1999 and the early 2000s. The park used base Operations of the National Park Service (ONPS) funding in late 1999 and early 2000 to have a website developed that incorporated educational materials for teachers, students, and the general public, and ESU donated assistance to the park for a teacher workshop. The workshop participants used a video camera to produce virtual tours of the Palmer-Epard Cabin, Freeman School, and the Visitor Center, which were
then incorporated into the park’s new website. At the same time, the park collaborated with ESU to broadcast performances during the park’s annual Storytelling Festival.

Homestead National Monument and ESU staff continued to develop the pilot distance learning program through 1999 and 2000. Preparations included creating five curriculum-based programs and identifying participating schools and colleges which, by early 2000, included ninety-nine K-12 schools and six colleges. As described in an application for NPS funding, the program would allow park rangers using portable video cameras to “communicate with students via monitors at each site; creating visual and verbal connetiveness [sic] to the students. Programs would include minicourses highlighting career options within the National Park Service, specialized courses on prairie and stream biology/ecology, and programs integrating rarely seen museum collections in storage.” The programs would be recorded, which would allow use in other off-site programs such as senior centers, friends groups, and civic organizations. It was important to Superintendent Engler and to Ferneding that the distance learning offerings be curriculum-based and met specific learning outcomes established by the Nebraska Educational Standards and the Kansas Curriculum Standards for Science and Social Studies. The park collaborated with the State of Nebraska Director of Social Science Education John LeFeber to ensure this outcome. The relationship with ESU, which had already established the distance learning technology in classrooms throughout the state, allowed Homestead National Monument to fit its educational programs into an existing system.

During the development phase of the distance learning program, from 1999 to 2002, ESU staff worked with park staff to test the equipment and approaches. As Ferneding recalled, “we used Homestead as our testing ground. . . . what worked educationally, what didn’t work educationally, to the equipment that worked, the equipment that didn’t work.” The initial tests, however, were done using analog signals which proved expensive for ESU to maintain. In 2001, therefore, the ESU No. 5 secured funding to install a fiber-optic network on the park grounds. The park arranged for a review by the Nebraska SHPO to allow the fiber optic cables to be buried, and the lines were laid in the fall of 2001. ESU No. 5, through the STAR Schools, contributed approximately $500,000 in technology and infrastructure at Homestead National Monument. This included bringing fiber optic cables from Beatrice, installing outside connections to allow the equipment to be portable and for the actual equipment, including monitor, computer, and cart. In later years, green screen technology was adopted.

National Park Service Director Robert Stanton signaled his support for the relationship between NPS and ESU No. 5 in early 2000 when he traveled to the park and interacted with students from the ESU office in Beatrice. In 2001, the park entered into an Agreement with the

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21 Memorandum, Acting Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America to Regional Chief of Education and Visitor Services, March 7, 2000; Files of Homestead NM, A98.
22 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1999; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 44.
23 PMIS Project Detail Sheet, Partner in Long Distance Learning, Homestead National Monument of America, August 8, 2000; Files of National Park Service. See also Ferneding, oral history interview, July 19, 2019, who discussed the value of Superintendent Engler insisting on the use of state curriculum standards.
24 Don Ferneding, oral history interview, July 19, 2019; see also Staff Meeting Minutes, July 5, 2001, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 17; and Joe Dixon, Dark Fiber Solutions to Chief Park Ranger Denise Germann, September 27, 2001, Files of Homestead NM, K18.
Nebraska ESU No. 5 to continue developing the distance learning program and the necessary curricula, and, by 2002, the park hired its first Education Specialist. Amy Garrett entered on duty in the spring of 2002 as Park Ranger (Interpretation) and was assigned to the teacher’s workshops (Figure 43). Finally, in May 2003, the park first used the distance learning technology, secured through a grant submitted by the ESU No. 5, for the annual prescribed burn of the prairie. The distance learning technology allowed students in two Nebraska high schools to interact with Resource Management Specialist Jesse Bolli in real time “as he discussed fire ecology, the tools of wildland firefighting, and the beneficial effects of fire on the tallgrass prairie.” Garrett went on to summarize the process:

During the burn, students were afforded panoramic views of the prairie via the distance-learning cart, which is equipped with a computer and cameras. The cart is connected to a power source and fiber optics. The power and fiber-optic connections are hidden under four artificial boulders located around the visitor center. For the last couple of years park and public educators have used this distance-learning program to explore various uses of the equipment to better serve students and to support required educational standards.

In addition to the distance learning connection, the equipment was used to provide a live stream video through the internet, allowing many others to view the prescribed burn even though they could not interact with the staff.25

For her work on the distance learning pilot program at Homestead National Monument, Amy Garrett received the Freeman Tilden Award, the Service’s highest award for an individual NPS interpreter. The park has continued its relationship with the ESU program, which has expanded distance learning programs to units throughout the National Park System during the 2000s. As the program expanded, Homestead National Monument served as one of the principal training facilities for distance learning staff from other parks. By the mid-2000s, it was again leading the way in developing a wireless network, separate from the park’s official NPS network, which the ESU program could use to deliver distance learning content through the internet. In early 2004, the park partnered with Southeast Nebraska Distance Learning Consortium and K-Nection Start School Administrators, and received funds through a K-Nection Federal Educational Grant, to obtain the wireless technology that would pair with the existing fiber-optic network installed in 2001. This allowed interpreters to bring the distance learning experience further into the prairie because it eliminated the need to first bury electrical wires in the prairie. The funding also allowed the park to create a laptop computer version of the technology which could be shipped to schools that did not have the necessary technology.26 At the same time, Superintendent Engler communicated with Superintendents of other parks who hoped to develop distance learning programs, encouraging them to coordinate their program with state educational standards that were, in turn, aligned with federal standards promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education.27

With the opening of the new Heritage Center in 2007, the park received an increase in its base ONPS budget which allowed increases in permanent and seasonal park rangers. This increased the range of interpretive programs possible, and the park developed a Kids in Parks program series as a result. The Kids in Parks series consisted of eight programs developed in 2008 oriented toward children and focused on the exploration of natural resources at the park The park also partnered with YMCAs in Beatrice and Lincoln, Nebraska, to provide activities for children enrolled in summer camps at Homestead National Monument and at nearby State Park sites. In 2009, the Kids in Parks program expanded from the partnerships with local YMCAs to include the Gage County 4-H program and Native American, African American, Asian and Hispanic Cultural Centers in Lincoln, Nebraska.28

Completion of the Heritage Center in 2007 also allowed conversion of the 1962 Visitor Center into an Education Center. The original Mission 66 exhibits were removed from the building and the space converted for use as a multi-purpose room, and the auditorium which previously showed the park film was converted into a distance learning facility. In late 2008, the park received a grant from the National Park Foundation to purchase two portable science labs and two microscopes for the building. This equipment, which the park received in the summer of

26 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America to WASO Chief of Interpretation, February 5, 2004; Files of Homestead MN, K18.
27 Ferneding, oral history interview, July 19, 2019.
28 Superintendent’s Annual Narratives for 2008 and 2009; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folders 52 and 53.
2009, allowed interpretive staff to provide additional science education to students and the general public and to help interpret the park’s natural resources.\(^{29}\)

In addition to the distance learning program, Homestead continued to develop curriculum-based educational programs. In 2010, Homestead National Monument initiated the development of a new curriculum for K-12 students. Led by Education Coordinator Tina Miller, the park coordinated with Ellen Janssen and Craig Rafert, area teachers who were selected for the new Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program, while ten other teachers from several nearby school districts collaborated on individual units. The new curriculum units covered a range of topics, including the Homestead Act and Abraham Lincoln, frontier education, American Indians, and the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The curriculum guides were completed in the spring of 2011 and were made available to teachers digitally on flash drives.\(^{30}\)

**Freeman School**

Chapter 2 recounts the legislative process by which Freeman School, located approximately one-quarter mile west of the park headquarters area, became part of Homestead National Monument in 1970 (Figure 44). National Park Service staff at the park and regional levels, however, had long recognized the interpretive value of the school, which was built in 1872 and remained in operation as a school through 1967. As the park’s interpretation program became more robust in the Mission 66 era of the late 1950s, with the addition of a park Historian and with the planning for the new Visitor Center, Freeman School became a more frequent topic of discussion. Although Superintendent Clarence Schultz had first requested in the late 1940s a study of the school and its potential to contribute to interpretation of the park, the issue lay dormant for more than a decade.\(^{31}\) In 1958, however, a Region Two Management Review Team visited Homestead National Monument to assess its operations and to make recommendations. Second on the list of twelve recommendations was to “attempt the preservation of the Freeman School.” The Management Review team admitted that it did not know how to achieve this goal but pledged that “the Regional Office will take the responsibility of suggesting a procedure, which probably should include cooperation with the State and County authorities and the Nebraska State Historical Association.”\(^{32}\)

A follow-up review in 1960 noted that the Region Two Office had not yet taken any steps, but Acting Regional Director M.H. Harvey shortly wrote a memorandum about the school to Superintendent Hotchkiss. As a result of extensive discussion within the Region Two Office,

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\(^{29}\) Mark Engler to Ivan Levin, National Park Foundation, September 1, 2009; Files of Homestead NM, F3019. The letter report includes photographs of the portable laboratories in use, both in the Education Center and on the grounds.

\(^{30}\) Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2010, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 54; see also Homestead National Monument of America Newsletters for June 2010 and April 2011, Files of Homestead NM.

\(^{31}\) Thomas R. Walsh, Draft Historical Report on Freeman School, attached to Memorandum, Walsh (as Acting Superintendent) to Regional Director, April 1, 1965; FRC 079-88-0001 Box 10 H30. Walsh also noted that the park’s Museum Prospectus, dated June 1949 to February 1951, “mentions the possibility of including the schoolhouse in the interpretive program of the Monument.”

\(^{32}\) Memorandum, Region Two Management Team to Regional Director, August 7, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 1.
Harvey explained, “it has been generally agreed that the Service should not attempt to expand its boundaries to acquire this property. It is believed that the basic integrity of the Monument boundaries encompassing the original homestead should be respected.” Instead, Harvey urged Superintendent Hotchkiss to discuss the preservation of the building with representatives of the local school district, Gage County, or the State of Nebraska. While Hotchkiss should avoid giving any impression that the federal government was contemplating acquiring the property, “it would always be our intention to point out the structure to area visitors, and we would cooperate whole-heartedly with any agency concerned with its preservation.”

Superintendent Hotchkiss held meetings with representatives of the local school district, who were enthusiastic to hear about NPS’ interest in preserving the building. They explained, however, that they planned to continue to operate the building as a school for the foreseeable future. The matter lay there until after the new Visitor Center was opened and the park settled into its new interpretive program. When Midwest Region professionals began discussions about Freeman School in 1964, initial focus was on possible relocation of the building to park grounds. A flurry of activity in the summer of 1964 surrounded preparation of a new Master Plan for the park. Regional Museums Coordinator Newell Joyner visited the park in August 1964, primarily to review the collections practices in the new Visitor Center. While there, he investigated the

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33 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, June 13, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 2.
34 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, June 27, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 2.
Freeman Schoolhouse at the request of Regional Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services Alberts. Joyner believed that the Freeman Schoolhouse would be an invaluable addition to the park’s interpretive program but that a historic structures report would be required as well as a feasibility study for relocating the building. He also believed that the Master Plan would need to include the proposed addition. His working assumption, apparently on direction from the Midwest Regional Office, was that the building would be relocated to the park, a position which Superintendent Hennesay supported. In September 1964, Hennesay observed that some were suggesting that the building remain in its present location even if acquired by NPS. “I am personally opposed to this proposal,” he argued, “because of the distance between the Monument and the schoolhouse. It is not suitably situated for proper protection and interpretation.”

On the assumption that the building would be moved to the grounds, the question naturally arose as to exactly where it should be located. In June 1964, Superintendent Hennesay briefed the Regional Director on the status of the school and suggested that Hennesay contact the Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society, who had previously expressed support for preserving the schoolhouse. Superintendent Hennesay recommended that the park coordinate with the State of Nebraska to place the school on the State Triangle adjacent to the North Forty and administer the building jointly with the Nebraska Historical Society. With the involvement of the Historical Society, he suggested, the State might be more willing to work out an arrangement for the State Triangle. Alternatively, he proposed, the Homestead Historical Association (HHA), the park’s friends group which had been organized in 1961, could lease or purchase the State Triangle, and the park and the Historical Society could jointly administer the school. In either event, he concluded,

We feel that the triangle is the most suitable location for the school for two reasons. First, it would be located near the self-guiding trail, and it would be very accessible for visitor use. Secondly, and more importantly, the triangle would be kept out of the hands of other persons who might consider building some type of structure.

Before such issues as location could be determined, though, the Midwest Regional Office urged the development of research into the Freeman School, its history, and its prospective role in the interpretation of Homestead National Monument. By early 1965, this research was the top priority for park Historian Thomas Walsh. Walsh’s research led to the development of a feasibility study for the school which grappled with the unique situation that the building is neither on federal land nor proposed for addition to the park’s boundary. Instead, Regional Historian Merrill Mattes led the development of a planning report based on Walsh’s historical material and asked regional staff, including a landscape architect, a restoration specialist, and solicitor, to develop recommendations for how to handle the school. Relocating the school to the grounds intact, these recommendations concluded, would result in “a rickety building with the

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35 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, September 15, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 2. See also Memorandum, Museums Coordinator to Regional Director, August 6, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 7.

36 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, June 16, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 2.
old cracks and worn mortar, etc., and probably a few new cracks,” while disassembling it before relocation “would result in a sturdy structure but with loss of historical integrity and flavor.” On legal grounds, NPS could acquire the building and relocate it to the park despite a restrictive covenant in the 1871 deed, but acquiring the building and leaving it in place was not possible without an act of Congress to expand the park’s boundary.

Regional Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services David D. Thompson, Jr. consistently held to the position that relocating Freeman School to park grounds was the best option. In the summer of 1966, park Historian Leonard Brown prepared a draft Interpretive Prospectus for Freeman School in which he envisioned a visitor experience that involved taking a self-guided trail to the school in its present location and furnished with school desks and period-appropriate books and writing slates. Thompson disagreed, arguing that the school, combined with the Palmer-Epard Cabin and farm machinery “would be creating an ‘outdoor museum’ environment which would be an excellent interpretive medium.” The school did not have great significance on its own, he argued, but was more important as representative of a type; “Therefore,” he concluded, “moving it to the area in proximity to the present Visitor Center would more closely identify it with other interpretive aspects of the program.”

Superintendent John Rohn, however, announced his opposition to this strategy in the spring of 1967, stating that “We strongly recommend leaving the building at its present location. If it is of any importance—all local interest centers on keeping the building in its original location.” By that time, there was no further discussion of moving it to the State Triangle, and its location on Visitor Center grounds meant that it would be hidden by the trees and not as visible as in its original location. Moreover, Rohn observed, “it would be an excellent site for the development of picnic facilities, which are not presently offered at Homestead.” Water, toilet facilities, parking, and a walking trail would need to be arranged, but Rohn did not see these challenges as insurmountable.

While the interpretive issues and possible relocation of the school were being debated in 1966 and early 1967, the Tri-County School District had decided to close the Freeman School at the end of the school year in June 1967, after ninety-six years of operation. Park Historian Clifford Soubier, acting as the Executive Secretary of HHA, initially wrote to the Tri-County School District in February 1967, recommending that the School District offer the building to NPS. The School District Board and HHA held a joint meeting on February 7, 1967, announcing that the school would be closed and that the School District would convey the building to HHA for eventual conveyance to NPS.

As detailed in Chapter 2, Senator Carl Curtis initiated the legislation to add the Freeman School to Homestead National Monument in 1967 a process which continued through 1968 and

37 Memorandum, Regional Chief, Interpretation & Visitor Services to Superintendent, Homestead, August 17, 1966; see also Leonard E. Brown, “Interpretive Prospectus for Freeman School, Homestead National Monument,” August 1966. Both documents located in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 2
38 Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Regional Director, Midwest Region, April 6, 1967; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 7.
39 L. Clifford Soubier, Executive Secretary to Alfred Harms and Members of the Tri-County School Board, February 6, 1967; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 7. See also “Preservation of Old Freeman School as National Monument Seems Assured,” Beatrice Daily Sun, February 8, 1967, page 1.
The HHA received the deed to the school in June 1967. While Senator Curtis and Representative Robert Denney (R-NE) laid the groundwork for legislation, NPS officials continued their determinations on the best approach for treatment, and, by late 1967, NPS had formally determined that their preferred approach was to keep the school on its 1.2-acre lot and that scenic easements would be the best way to maintain the open vista between the Visitor Center and the school. With NPS fully supporting the proposal to accept the donation of the school from HHA and expand the park’s boundary to include the original school lot by late 1967, the legislation made its way through Congress, and President Richard N. Nixon signed P.L. 91-411 on September 25, 1970. In the spring of 1971, HHA executed a deed conveying the school and its 1.2-acre parcel to the federal government.\(^\text{40}\)

The park took no actions at the school until the fall of 1971, when staff began regular monthly inspections. In the spring of 1972, park staff led a group of volunteers to clean the building and grounds in anticipation of opening the school for visitors on a part-time basis that summer. During this period, however, the park took no steps toward preserving the building. By July 1972, park staff reported that the building had deteriorated to the point that it was a hazard and further visits were cancelled. At that point, park staff provided photographs to Midwest Region Historical Architect Vance Kaminski and requested assistance regarding stabilization of the building.

In January 1973, Engineer Renzo Riddo at the Denver Service Center (DSC) began work on a Historic Structures Report for the school. Participants in a meeting at the school in February 1973, including Riddo, Superintendent Halvorson, Mr. Coryell from DSC, and Historical Architect Kaminski acknowledged the need for emergency repairs. The roof had deteriorated, allowing rain to enter the building, while poor drainage was causing damage to the foundation, and a corner of the building had collapsed. Superintendent Halvorson reprogrammed $7,500 from his budget for the repair work and requested urgent approval from MWRO to conduct it. Heavy rains later in March and throughout April delayed the start of work. These rain events were capped off by a storm in early May that caused even further damage, with more bricks falling out of the northwest corner of the building and a new crack in the northeast corner. Riddo, assisted by Superintendent Halvorson and other staff, “fashioned emergency shoring and covering for the school.”

In consultation with DSC and MWRO staff, Riddo urged that the park contract with a local firm, C. & J. Construction Company, rather than wait for the formal bidding process. Riddo feared that further delays “could result in total loss of the school by collapse caused from weakened corners and from future heavy rains that are common in this area at this time of the year.” He was successful, and Riddo led the stabilization work in May 1972. This included installing a new roof, replacing the original foundation with concrete, and applying new plaster to the interior walls. In addition, since the existing concrete floor had to be removed in order to replace the foundation, the team installed a new wood floor\(^\text{41}\)

\(^{40}\) The deed was executed on April 20, 1971; see copy in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 11.

\(^{41}\) A packet of documents contains information pertaining to the initial work at Freeman School including a completion report of the emergency stabilization work by Superintendent Halvorson, a joint request from Riddo and Halvorson for an emergency contract with C. & J. Construction, and a newspaper clipping showing Riddo in the
With the emergency stabilization work and partial restoration completed in May 1973, the park announced the public opening of the school to visitors the following month. The school first opened to the public on Sunday, June 10, and was open from Friday through Sunday throughout the summer season. As described in Chapter 5, the interpretive program at Homestead National Monument was in a period of transition in the early 1970s, with the growing influence of environmental education and the new living history program. The initial public programming at Freeman School in the summer of 1973 involved having a costumed interpreter serving as a school teacher who “conducted the three R’s with visitor participation.” As suggested in the early interpretive planning, the school was furnished with early desks, slates, inkwells, books, and paper.\(^{42}\)

By the spring of 1973, a Historic Structures Report (HSR), a Furnishings Study, and a Historic Furnishings Plan (HFP) were under way. Engineer Riddo prepared the HSR together with Historian Leonard Brown. Riddo completed a draft of the HSR in April 1973 before the emergency stabilization work was conducted and made use of Historian Leonard Brown’s 1966 draft Interpretive Prospectus for the historical section. The final HSR, released in August 1973, included information on the emergency stabilization repairs in May 1973. The HSR also detailed many other problems with the building including deteriorating mortar in the brick walls, rotting wooden cornices and window frames, a deteriorating brick chimney, and a partially failed foundation, and it included recommendations for additional restoration efforts.\(^{43}\)

In early April 1973, meanwhile, Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) contracted with Heather Huyck to complete a Historic Furnishings Plan (HFP) for the school, which was to provide details on the appropriate artifacts for the Freeman School. At the same time, the Denver Service Center contracted with Enid T. Thompson to prepare a Furnishings Study, which was to be a broad overview of period furnishings for schools. Thompson’s Furnishings Study was completed in July 1973 and included an extensive historical overview of the school which drew upon research in the records of several different school boards in the region, the School District 25 Minute Book and Treasurer’s Reports, Leonard Brown’s earlier historical report, and eight oral history interviews with former teachers and students.\(^{44}\) Thompson’s report provided information about the overall historic development and use of the school and its contents, and Huyck’s HFP was designed to provide specific guidance on furnishing it. By September 1973, a draft HFP was available for review, which continued into the following summer. The HFP suggested a wide range of furnishings, including specifically recommended books and slate blackboards, and was

\(^{42}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for Calendar Year 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 19. See also “Freeman School Open to the Public,” *Beatrice Daily Sun*, June 6, 1973, page 1.

\(^{43}\) Leonard E. Brown and Renzo Riddo, “Historic Structure Report.” (draft report), March 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-A.002.002, Catalog No. 7606, Box 2 Folder 8. The final HSR was not located during the current research.

\(^{44}\) Enid T. Thompson, “Freeman School Furnishings Study,” July 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.002, Catalog No. 7604, Box 1 Folder 9.
approved in the fall of 1974. In 1978, Regional Curator John Hunter provided further input and guidance for the school’s furnishings.

Both the HFP and the plans for full restoration of Freeman School raised the question of the time period that would be interpreted. The HSR initially targeted the 1870s because the school was built in 1871. The initial draft of the HFP likewise used the period of 1870-1880 for a target period of interpretation. In the spring of 1974, Arthur Duerschner, an architect in Lincoln, Nebraska, prepared the Phase I restoration plan, including a narrative report and drawings, using the same 1870 to 1880 period. Upon further research, however, MWRO staff, in the fall of 1974, realized that “we had insufficient evidence to take the structure back that far—and in fact back to any period earlier than the 1902 photographs.” This required a revision to the restoration plan and to the HFP, which was finalized with a period of interpretation extending from 1900 to 1910. This change should pose no significant challenges in the school’s interpretation, MWRO assured Superintendent Halvorson, as “available evidence indicates that the structure was essentially the same in 1902 as three decades earlier, the primary difference lying in the tie rods added during the 1890s (which cannot be removed for structural and policy reasons).

Despite this confusion about the period of restoration, Acting Associate Regional Director Jack Strain initiated consultation per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 with the Nebraska State Historical Society, which functions as the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), in July 1974 regarding the proposed restoration. In early August, the SHPO concurred in the NPS recommendation that the work would have no adverse effects. With this concurrence in hand, restoration work commenced on August 19, 1974, even before the period of interpretation was determined. C. & J. Construction Company was hired to conduct the restoration work, The plan of restoration called for the two inner wythes of brick to be removed and replaced with reinforced concrete designed to bond with the inside face of the exterior bricks and stabilize the exterior walls. Two wythes of bricks with a second installation of reinforced concrete between them, were then installed on the interior walls and covered with plaster. (Figure 45) Although the restoration took longer than originally scheduled, it was completed in early 1976. Work on furnishing the school began in 1975 following suggestions in the HFC prepared by Heather Huyck. The Regional Curator and HFC supported the park by locating and acquiring artifacts which Huyck had identified, and furnishing was largely complete.

45 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director, Midwest Region to Manager, Denver Service Center, August 9, 1974; Memorandum, Acting Manager, Harpers Ferry Center to Regional Director, Midwest Region, November 19, 1974; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 14. As with the HSR, neither a draft nor a final HFP was located during the current research.
46 Memorandum, Staff Curator, Midwest Region to Historian, Homestead National Monument, May 4, 1978; FRC, 79-89-0007 Box 1 H30.
47 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director, Midwest Region to Superintendent, Homestead NM, September 26, 1974; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 14. In a letter to Arthur Duerschner on May 29, 1974, Regional Director Leonard Volz assured that “The period for restoration should be circa 1870-1880;” Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 14.
48 See record of correspondence between NPS, SHPO, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in July-August 1974 in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 1 Folder 14.
50 See memorandum for file in record of Freeman School restoration, February 24, 1976; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.005.004.002.001, Catalog No. 8097, Box 2 Folder 1.
by early 1977. Follow-up restoration and maintenance, including correcting leaks around the
front door and windows and refinishing the wood floors, took place in the summer of 1977.
Finally, in July 1978, Freeman School re-opened to the public, with park staff providing living
history demonstrations.

![Figure 45: Diagram showing brick restoration work at Freeman School, 1974. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun](image)

The park continued to use Freeman School as a part of its overall interpretive program.
Parking remained a challenge; the park did not acquire the adjoining tract for use as a parking lot
until 1991. When the school opened to the public in 1978, visitors parked in the southeastern
corner of the lot, immediately adjacent to the intersection. The Nebraska Department of Roads
(NDR) conducted a survey of the SW 89th Road in the spring of 1979 in anticipation of paving
the road that year and objected that the parking entrance was too close to the intersection and
constituted a safety hazard. The park and MWRO then coordinated with NDR to construct an
entrance to a visitor parking lot at the north end of the school property, which NDR provided at
no cost as part of the paving project, while MWRO consulted with the SHPO.

This space, however, which had been used as parking when the building still functioned as a school, was
identified as a section of virgin prairie, and the park intended to allow it to re-vegetate. After the
lot to the north of the school was acquired through condemnation in 1991, the park began
planning in 1994 for a parking area with access again from SW 89th Road. The parking lot was
constructed in 1995.

By the early 1980s, Freeman School was experiencing drainage issues resulting in water
ponding against the foundation and causing deterioration. In preparation for construction of a
new drainage system, the park coordinated with the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC),
which contracted with the University of Nebraska to conduct initial archeological testing of the

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51 Robert Tecklenburg, “Homestead National Monument of America: An Administrative History,” approved by
52 See series of correspondence among Superintendent Halvorson, MWRO staff, and NDR staff in the spring of
1979 in FRC, 079-89-0006 Box 9 D30.
53 Instruction for staff, July 11, 1995; Files of Homestead NM, D5217.
proposed new drainage system area in 1984 and 1985. The archeologists faced several challenges. Most importantly, the soil surrounding the school had been extensively disturbed during multiple eras of use, with layers of soil mixed over the years. Because of this, the archeologists were not able to use artifacts to date the different layers. With the lack of defined dates in the archeological record, the study relied primarily on historical research. The archeological evidence indicated specific actions, but the historical record was required in order to provide the dates for when those actions occurred. In addition, the archeologists discovered a lack of archeological research into one-room school houses, which left them with no baseline data from which to interpret excavations at Freeman School. While the 1984-1985 study revealed little new information about the history and uses of the Freeman School, it was an important first step in the excavation of one room school house sites.

In 2003, the park again arranged for a substantial renovation of Freeman School. Park Maintenance Worker Gary Armstrong coordinated with Midwest Region Historical Architect Mark Chavez to oversee the project which required removal of the entire floor. This allowed the floor joists to be repaired and replaced as needed; the floor was then refitted to the building (Figure 46). The drainage work completed in 1985 was also updated to ensure that water was carried away from the foundation. The project was completed successfully in 2003, and Armstrong received an award for his work.

![Figure 46: 2003 photograph of Freeman School floor restoration. Source: Archives of Homestead National Monument](image)

54 Superintendent Baynes requested expedited funding for the project, to include the archeological survey, from MWRO, see Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, Midwest Region, March 11, 1985; FRC, 079-92-0004 Box 7 H3015.
56 Superintendent’s Annual Narrative for 2003; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 48.
Park Ranger Alexis Winder was tasked in 2009 with incorporating Freeman School into the park’s growing education program. Winder conducted an extensive search for reproduction artifacts, based on the original HFC prepared by Heather Huyck, that could be used to assemble loan boxes for use in school educational programs. Under this program, teachers could conduct classes in the school according to the methods used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, using the materials provided in the boxes. Beginning in the 2000s, meanwhile, park staff conducted a graffiti inventory. Photographs of the school’s interior are taken every two to three years and placed in binders; this allows staff to understand the degree to which visitors may be adding new graffiti to the walls.

Expanding the Vision of Homesteading

The park suffered a loss in May 1993 when Superintendent Randy Baynes died unexpectedly after suffering a stroke at Homestead National Monument. He was replaced in September 1993 by Constantine Dillon, who had most recently served as Chief of Interpretation at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in California. Dillon had extensive experience in interpretation in the NPS Western Region and was urged to apply for the Superintendent position at Homestead National Monument by MWRO Director Don Castleberry. Shortly after entering on duty, Dillon immersed himself in the history of the park and its legislated mission, which provided context to evaluate the park’s interpretive program. As a result of this period of evaluation, he recalled,

I realized that the park staff was spending a lot of time and effort on the prairie restoration to the detriment of the other themes. . . .I was concerned that we were interpreting prairie for the value of prairie and as an ecological message. When, in reality, homesteaders hated the prairie. The prairie restoration at Homestead is really an exhibit to interpret the history of homesteading. . . .we want to continue the prairie restoration, spend effort on it, but we wanted to change the emphasis away from visitors having to just appreciate prairie for prairie’s sake—to appreciate prairie for how it related to homesteading, and the settlement of the West, and the change in land and land management attitudes in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.57

As early as 1995, Dillon was working with his staff to re-examine the park’s interpretation program.58 As he noted in the Annual Report for 1995, “it has become clear that the monument is in need of a major reassessment of its purpose and subsequent execution of its legislative intent. Many of the directives specifically described in the enabling legislation have been inadequately fulfilled.” As a result, and in response to budget cuts, he began working toward “re-directing resource management and interpretation programs towards the park’s basic mission.”59 This involved creating a new organizational plan for the park that included an Operations Division headed by a Park Ranger. Park staff within this Operations Division then examined the park’s

57 Constantine Dillon, oral history interview, June 12, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
58 See the discussion of the 1997 Long-Range Interpretive Plan earlier in this chapter.
59 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1995; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40.
interpretive programs and their relationship to the enabling legislation: “Programs that were primarily recreational in nature were weeded out, as were programs that did not directly relate to the park’s interpretation themes,” while new educational activities were designed to require more participation of the teachers and less of “the limited staff of park rangers.”

Among Dillon’s concerns were the orientation film and exhibits in the Visitor Center. Together, he felt, these interpretive media failed to convey the whole story of homesteading and, in addition, were unfair to the history of American Indians. This was an outdated approach, he argued, and “we needed a . . .broader scope of diverse interpretation to encompass the native people as well. And so, to do that, you really need to start all over.” Dillon also was concerned that the history provided by the existing exhibit and audio-visual program were inadequately focused on people: “at Homestead, we wanted to focus on the people, and homesteading, and the concepts, and labors rather than the machinery themselves. The machinery is interesting, it’s part of the story because its’ part of the backbreaking work of how they used it.” Among his first moves was to create a new audio-visual program, “The Free Land,” which debuted in the Visitor Center in April 1996.

Dillon realized early that the existing Visitor Center building was inadequate for the interpretive goals of the park. He saw the need for a new building. This, he also realized, would require a new General Management Plan. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the LRIP was one step in the direction of a new GMP, because it laid out the rationale for new facilities in the revived interpretive program:

In order to interpret the Homestead Act, the National Park Service needs to construct facilities that will allow the visitor to understand the park story. . . the lack of any visitor or interpretation development beyond the prairie restoration and the now 30-year-old visitor center have hampered the park’s ability to tell the homestead story.”

Among the specific proposals for upgrading the park’s interpretation program were several that would require significant public comment and, therefore, must be addressed in the new GMP. These included such proposals as relocating the Cub Creek foot bridge further south within the woods, building an outdoor exhibit of structures, outbuildings, and livestock enclosures on the restored prairie to illustrate homesteader life, creating a one-acre demonstration farm, establishing a group of living history cabins in the woods for use by youth groups, and building a new facility for a “Homestead Institute of Pioneer Skills.”

The LRIP also included recommended themes for interpretation in the restored prairie. These emphasized the relationship between the homesteaders and the prairie and identified park needs in terms of museum collections, educational kits, library items, and videos. Finally, the LRIP proposed an extensive historical research program building on the foundation laid by Russell A. Gibbs’ research in the early 1940s, the two administrative histories of the park, and

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61 Dillon, oral history interview.
62 Dillon, oral history interview.
the draft historical handbooks of the early 1960s. “The park sorely needs,” the LRIP argued, “a professional, full-time Historian on staff to pursue identified research, to assist with text and to critique interpretive materials and exhibits.” The most important research areas, as identified in the LRIP, were an updated history of the Homestead Act and its operations, a chronological history of the development of agriculture and agricultural equipment associated with the homesteading era, the historic role of immigration in the implementation of the Homestead Act, the impact of the Homestead Act on indigenous cultures, the environmental consequences of the Homestead Act, and oral history interviews with park neighbors or area residents.64

Constantine Dillon took a new assignment as Superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore in New York in April 1997, just as the LRIP was released. It fell to his successor, Superintendent Mark Engler, to implement the many changes the LIRP recommended. Engler, who had been serving as Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (now Gateway Arch National Park) in Missouri at the time of his appointment, was a native of Beatrice and had served for three years as a seasonal ranger at Homestead National Monument in the late 1970s.65 Engler clearly shared his predecessor’s passion to expand the story of homesteading as it is interpreted at the park. As he recalled,

We’ve enlarged the story. We’ve enlarged it from the standpoint that we look at homesteading, really, in the true national and the international context, and we work to make the story relevant to what’s going on in society today. But, when we look at homesteading here today, we look at it from the standpoint of immigration; we look at from the standpoint of how it relates to native people. We also look at it from an industrial standpoint, what these early farmers, homesteaders, were doing to push the industrial development of our nation and improve technologies. . . .A better plow. We also talk about it from the standpoint of agriculture, this law being at the backbone of our nation’s great agricultural might.66

Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Thomas Richter recalled the continuity between Superintendents Dillon and Engler, elucidating the significance of “the vision that Costa [Constantine] Dillon had—to have this more expansive, homesteading throughout the country focus. Which, then Mark Engler picked up on in a really big way when he arrived.”67

During 1998, his first full year as Superintendent, Engler and park staff developed an aggressive series of new public programs that helped visitors understand the broader aspects of the homesteading story. This new series of programs was to not only enrich the interpretation of the homestead story but put the park in front of citizens throughout Nebraska and northeast Kansas. These new programs included a storytelling festival focused on stories related to homesteading and settlement, a historic farming and antique implement event, and historic

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64 Ibid., page 47.
66 Mark Engler, oral history interview, July 12, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
67 Thomas Richter, oral history interview.
farming demonstrations, together with a renewal of the park’s annual Homestead Days. As described earlier in this chapter, the park’s educational offerings continued to expand through the late 1990s as well, with a wider acceptance of the park’s curriculum guides and the early phases of the distance learning program. Through the early 2000s, more programs were added to the annual schedule. In 2000, the park hired Todd Arrington as the first permanent staff Historian since Park Ranger (Historian) Roger Pearson departed in 1976. In addition to his research duties, described later in this chapter, Arrington gave public talks on a variety of historical topics primarily related to homesteading or the homesteading era.

Homestead National Monument Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management Susan Cook, who entered on duty in April 1991 as an Administrative Clerk, recalled the change in interpretation during the late 1990s as the staff prepared the new GMP. The changes in education programs and how park staff interacted with visitors happened quickly and made a significant difference:

We started changing our program. . . .we created programs that related to the pioneers, how the pioneers used the prairie. And. . .we even used that old museum [Visitor Center] to help tell some of these stories. We created any of the education programs we could. . . .And we really started zeroing in on learning our story, everyone learning the story, learning all the parts and pieces. And everyone sharing with each other what those parts are. And our historians really helped along the line, too, when they’d be doing research on something and then teach us. And then we, in turn, take that to the visitor immediately.

The park’s interpretive program has continued to evolve, though it continues to revolve around personal contact with interpretive rangers, programs, and exhibits in the Heritage Center and the Education Center, and on self-guided tours of the prairie and the Palmer-Epard Cabin. After a nearly thirty-year hiatus, the park returned to providing living history demonstrations in the summer of 2010 in part as a response to comments from visitors. The program, which ran every day from early June to Labor Day in September, featured a different skill each day, such as butter churning, candle dipping, spinning, and clothes washing. Each day, visitors could also see an interpreter working in the garden, while another interpreter was stationed as a teacher at Freeman School. Also in 2010, the park introduced its Web Ranger program, an extension of the popular Junior Ranger program which provided children with guided activities as a way to explore the park. Park Ranger Jessica Fleming developed the Web Ranger program, which extended this concept to learning activities on the internet. The Web Ranger program was phased out in 2019 because it relied on Adobe Flash, a computer software program that allowed viewing of multimedia components on internet browsers but which is, unfortunately, no longer supported by most browsers. A replacement for the popular Web Ranger program has not yet been identified as of 2020.

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68 Chapter 11 provides a more comprehensive discussion of the development of programs and special events at Homestead National Monument.
69 Susan Cook, oral history interview, May 13, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
70 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2010, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection II.B.2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 54; “News from HOME” newsletter, July 2010, Files of Homestead NM.
Heritage Center Exhibit and Film

The proposed new Heritage Center was the park’s principal focus for interpretive planning beginning in 2004. Working through HFC, the park, in 2003, contracted with Nash Brookes Associates (NBA) in Frederick, Maryland, to design the exhibit for the new building. The exhibit, designed by David Lenk with NBA, was to be the tangible manifestation of the renewed approach to the park’s interpretation. The overall goal of the exhibit was to convey the national scope of homesteading in America across thirty states from Florida to Alaska instead of the strictly local or regional scope centered on Daniel Freeman’s homestead claim in Beatrice. Simultaneously, the park’s exhibit team sought to maintain a focus on homesteading that was national in scope. The new approach to interpretation at the park was summarized in the 1999 GMP, which rooted the approach in the enabling legislation to interpret the impact of the Homestead Act on the West both ecologically and culturally:

This redirection of interpretive emphasis will promote knowledge of the epic proportions of the Homestead Act. The existing homestead and the Freeman story will be used as reference points to interpret the national experience that resulted from implementation of the Act. The Monument will use expanded interpretive media, such as exhibits, interactive media, and waysides, to interrelate the story of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem with the historical human perspective of “taming” this natural resource. The Monument will go on to redefine the Palmer-Epard Cabin’s role in the interpretive story as an exhibit of a genuine homestead structure and as an example of the use of natural resources in a regional context.71

Led by David Lenk to discuss the size issue, NBA began working with park staff in September 2003 to design the exhibits for the new Heritage Center, which was being designed concurrently. The park also worked with Dr. Elliot West, a prominent historian of the American West and a professor at the University of Arkansas, Nancy Stimson, NPS interpretive specialist and an American Indian, and Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Thomas Richter.72 Following a Values Analysis meeting for the Heritage Center in March 2004, NBA developed a schematic plan for the exhibit in June 2004. Entrance to the building would be on the second floor, which would contain all park services including offices, educational book store, theater, and restrooms, and provide a sweeping view of the prairie to the west. The exhibits would begin on the staircase down to the first level where they would occupy the entire space except for collections management and storage areas. To meet the interpretive guidelines in the new GMP, NBA structured the exhibit around seven principal themes: legislating progress and westward expansion, unleashing an agricultural revolution, opportunity and displacement, promise and reality, homestead life and the community, success and failure, and the enduring legacy. The general approach to the exhibits that constitute the seven themes was to use first-person accounts as much as possible, integrated with historic images and artifacts.73

71 Homestead National Monument of America General Management Plan, approved by MWRO Director William Schenck, December 23, 1999; Files of Homestead NM.
72 Engler, oral history interview; see also Thomas Richter, oral history interview.
In 2004, while the exhibits remained in planning stages, park staff prepared a presentation to the NPS Development Advisory Board (DAB) to secure approval for the design of the building and exhibits. During the hearing, Superintendent Engler took questions and explained the development of interpretive themes focused on homesteading in a national context relative to immigration, American Indians, agriculture, industry, and more. The Service’s Associate Director for Cultural Resources was a part of the hearing; Superintendent Engler recalled that, during the hearing, “she made the comment that this was what the park should have been doing long ago, talking about homesteading from a national perspective.” The DAB approved the plans, allowing planning to move forward.

Early mock-up versions of the exhibit were presented in Lincoln, Nebraska, and in Point Reyes National Seashore in California in 2005 to allow potential visitors to view them and provide feedback. Nash Brookes Associates contracted with Dawn Huntwork to evaluate the responses at these showings. In April 2005, Huntwork reported that visitors found the story to be interesting and relevant and that they had high expectations for the museum experience. In particular, Huntwork concluded that the park and NBA should “continue to keep the firsthand experience of a homesteader in mind as they work to design interactive and memorable experiences for museum visitors.”

With the approval of the DAB for the construction and with exhibit plans being finalized, ground was broken in the spring of 2006. The Heritage Center was completed in time for the public opening on May 20, 2007. There were exhibits in place for the opening, but as the Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2007 observed, although they were only approximately sixty percent complete, “the exhibits opened without visitors recognizing the uncompleted work.” The final components were installed by late 2007. As completed, the exhibits are accessed by way of a broad staircase along the building’s west wall that descends from the main, second floor to the first, suffused with light from the window walls at the building’s northwest corner. The exhibits occupy nearly the entire ground floor except for the collection management areas in the southwest corner. The exhibit area in the western portion of the space opens to the second story roof, while the eastern two-thirds of the lower level is beneath the main floor. This arrangement allows ambient light to filter in from the northwest wall but also allows most of the exhibits to be illuminated by controlled artificial lights. Exhibits are arranged along the walls, and a series of low pedestals are deployed throughout the space to create two wide, but defined, curved passageways. Low, freestanding panels in front of each themed exhibit section provide introductory text occasionally supplemented by enclosed cases with artifacts or interactive computer screens, while the walls or vertical panels behind contain period photographs pertaining to the theme (Figures 47-48).

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74 Engler, oral history interview.  
75 See Chapter 11 for a more complete discussion of the planning and construction of the Heritage Center.  
76 Dawn Huntwork, “Displacement, Success and Failure, and Confronting Reality: A Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Homestead National Monument of America,” April 2005; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.007.004.002, Catalog No. 8423, Box 2 Folder 6. See also Superintendent’s Annual Narrative for 2005; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 50.  
77 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2007; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 51.
Figure 47: Heritage Center interior showing upper and lower levels, 2018. Photograph by the author

Figure 48: Heritage Center interior, exhibits on lower level, 2018. Photograph by the author
Two other interpretive features were installed at the same time as the Heritage Center exhibits, both of which were completed in 2008. The first was a gift from the Toro Giving Program and Exmark Manufacturing which donated funds to the Friends of Homestead to purchase a series of sixteen wayside exhibits. These wayside exhibits are located on the grounds of the Heritage Center to identify the Palmer-Epad Cabin and other historic items on outdoor display and at strategic points along the prairie trail. The wayside exhibits were designed by the MWRO Interpretive Media Specialist Roberta Wendel in collaboration with Homestead Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management Meredith Baughman (Figure 49).

The second interpretive component is the introductory film shown in the orientation theater on the second floor of the Heritage Center. Land of Dreams: Homesteading America is a twenty-minute film providing a national context for homesteading. The film, created by HFC in 1996, replaced the earlier audio-visual and film introductions the park had used in the Visitor Center since the 1950s. The film, produced by HFC staff member Chuck Dunkerly, was funded by contributions from Nebraska Public Power District for $125,000, First National Bank of Omaha for $25,000, and Pinnacle Bank for $25,000. Rather than a form of interpretation itself, the film allows viewers to gain an impressionistic sense of homesteading from a wide perspective with both historical and modern imagery. The film blends aerial videography of areas where homesteading has taken place with historical imagery and incorporates a range of American Indian perspectives. The film is structured primarily around portions of many interviews that park staff conducted in preparation for the video and includes interviews with park staff members Todd Arrington and Gerald Baker. In planning for its production, Chief of
Interpretation and Resource Management  

Susan Cook argued that the law continued to be in force into the 1980s,

so we know we have living homesteaders. So, why don’t we care about them? We should be finding them and interviewing them while they’re still alive, while we have the chance.”

Tasked with identifying and contacting interview subjects, Cook enlisted the support of radio personality Paul Harvey who announced the invitation to take part nationwide on his program. Cook also solicited help from museums and historical societies in Alaska who likewise helped her to find people whose families had homesteaded.78

The film had not been included in the original budget for the Heritage Center, leaving Superintendent Engler to solicit funds for it. He turned to Friends of Homestead member William (B.) Scully, who was successful in raising the money for the film, including production costs and Cook’s travel to Alaska to interview living homesteaders. The film was not ready in time for the Heritage Center opening in May 2007. Instead, the park secured funds from the Hevelone Foundation, a Beatrice-based charitable organization, to provide a premier on April 5, 2008 at the Hevelone Center for Performing Arts in the Beatrice High School. It was shown first to a group of 900 local middle and high school students, “followed by a special evening premier…complete with tuxedoed greeters, red carpets and spotlights.” It was part of a weekend-long celebration at the park with storytellers and other performers.79 The film is currently shown daily at the Heritage Center as an orientation film and is available to a wide audience on the YouTube website.

Research: Land Records Project

Historical research has been a key component of Homestead National Monument’s operations since the inception of planning in 1939. The initial development of the park was led by Regional Historian Edwin Hummel, who insisted on thorough research before contemplating reconstruction of any buildings on the site. The first superintendent and the caretakers during WWII continued to conduct research into the history of homesteading generally and the Freeman family particularly. In the late 1950s, the Mission 66 program allowed Homestead National Monument to hire its first permanent Historian, Donald Warman. As described in Chapter 5, the park retained a staff Historian through the 1960s and into the early 1970s; Roger Pearson served at the park as a Park Ranger (Historian) through 1976, when he was replaced by Park Ranger William Fink. By the mid-1970s, both budget constraints and a changing approach to park operations led to elimination of that position in favor of Park Ranger and resource management specialists, a situation that lasted until the turn of the century.

A renewed interest in having a permanent staff Historian was a part of the revitalization of the park’s interpretation program starting in the mid-1990s. Both Superintendents Dillon and Engler recognized the need for a sustained historical research program to provide a foundation

78 Cook, oral history interview.  
79 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2008; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 52. See also Engler, oral history interview.
for the park’s new interpretation program, but budget constraints in the late 1990s would not fund this position. In 1999, though, Superintendent Engler was tasked with serving as Acting Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery II: 200 Years to the Future project, an interagency traveling classroom. Through this assignment, the park received funds for two temporary promotions and one temporary position, which Engler filled by hiring Benjamin (Todd) Arrington as park Historian. With an increase in the park’s base ONPS budget in 2000, however, Arrington’s position was converted to permanent status in 2001.80

From the outset, Arrington took on a steady stream of activities that included attending and giving papers at scholarly conferences, speaking to civic groups, participating in planning for historic commemorations, developing an oral history program for living homesteaders, maintaining the park’s research files, fielding research requests from visitors and the general public, and serving as historical expert in public meetings and planning programs for the new Heritage Center. Arrington was also active in symposia conducted in association with the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery Expedition Bicentennial and initiated research into various aspects of homesteading, particularly the exodus of African-Americans from the South during the Reconstruction era following the Civil War. While at Homestead, Arrington also pursued his Ph.D. in History from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, writing a dissertation on the early Republican Party, westward expansion, and homesteading. In April 2009, Arrington accepted the position of Chief of Interpretation and Education at James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Ohio and was replaced on a temporary basis by Museum Curator Jason Jurgena. Blake Bell entered on duty as the permanent Historian on February 15, 2010. While continuing to advance the park activities, Historian Bell focused his research efforts on the relationships between immigration and homesteading. Bell remained on staff until 2015, when he was replaced by Daniel P. Ott, PhD, who served from September 2015 to May 2016. Robert Murcell was then hired as Park Historian in February 2017. He remained until February 2019, when he was replaced by Jonathan Fairchild.

All the Historians at Homestead helped the park fulfill its legislated mission of interpreting the role of homesteading in the nation’s westward expansion. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the park’s historical research program, however, was the Land Records Project. With this project, Homestead National Monument took the lead in a collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the National Archives, and private genealogical companies to digitize and make publicly available the original land claims filed by homesteaders themselves. The effort was augmented by extensive use of databases like Fold3, Ancestry, and FamilySearch. These documents were curated primarily by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and stored in the NARA facility in Washington, District of Columbia. While publicly accessible in NARA, these records, totaling approximately 30,000,000, have rarely been used because of the huge volume, the dearth of indexing, and the time necessary to sift through so many individual pieces of paper. The value of making these records more easily accessible to the public through indexing and digital means is extraordinary, as they allow for a more complete understanding of the process of homesteading, its true scope, and its role in the private settlement of public lands under the Homestead Act. It promotes more complete understanding of the process of homesteading, its true scope, and its role in the private settlement

80 Superintendent’s Annual Reports for 1999, 2000, and 2001; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1. See also Engler, oral history interview.
of public lands under the Homestead Act. The records also open vast new areas for genealogical research. The first book to make use of the initial set of available records, *Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History*, was written by UNL professor Richard Edwards and two graduate students. Edwards, who was Superintendent Engler’s principal contact at the university, successfully made the argument that, in the absence of the original homesteaders’ records, previous studies of homesteading have formed a generally negative assessment that is largely without foundation. The book highlights the ability of a statistical analysis of this new, still limited, range of records to fundamentally change understanding of homesteading and its role in western settlement. Scholars in the future, according to the authors, “should use the new data sources, digitized records, and powerful new analytic tools that are increasingly becoming available to fashion new understandings that better illuminate our homesteading past.”81

The genesis of this modern and pathbreaking research program lies in the original 1936 legislation that established Homestead National Monument. Among the responsibilities of the Secretary of Interior for the new national monument was “to erect suitable buildings to be used as a museum in which shall be preserved literature applying to such settlement” of the West. This duty was one of the aspects to which Superintendent Constantine Dillon pointed when he explained that the original purpose of the park remained unfulfilled. The 1997 LRIP noted that approximately “30% of visitors come to the park specifically seeking information related to their family history and homesteading,” but that the park was unable to help the vast majority of them in the absence of useful research materials. In response, the LRIP proposed a “Homestead Information Center” at the park where scholars and the general public could find information. As defined in the LRIP, the plan was to maintain copies of all patents granted under the Homestead Act, in electronic data format and accessible at terminals in the Visitor Center and through the internet.82

Following the 1997 LRIP, the new General Management Plan proposed the creation of an electronic database of homestead land entry case files. The park received funds in 2000 to begin planning the project, and, on May 21, 2000, Dr. John Matzko, Professor of Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, arrived to begin work as the park’s temporary Historian. His task in this role was to lead the planning efforts toward developing the project. The next month, Matzko, with park Historian Todd Arrington, Superintendent Mark Engler, Regional Chief of History and National Register Programs Don Stevens, and Friends of Homestead (FOH) member and Beatrice Public Library Director Laureen Riedesel, made an initial trip to Washington, D.C., to begin investigating the land record holdings of NARA and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The team met first at the BLM-Eastern States Office in Springfield, Virginia. This office had already begun scanning land patents from the General Land Office (GLO) for the states east of the Mississippi River and entering specific information about them into a database which allowed for indexing. By that time, in June 2000, BLM had scanned and indexed approximately 2.3 million images of original GLO documents, all of which were available to the public on BLM’s website. One of the crucial pieces of information contained with each document was the legal description of the land, which is required to order land-entry case files in NARA.83

81 Edwards et al., 23.
82 LRIP, 1997, pages 33-34.
83 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2000, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 45; Trip Report Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Files, June 26, 2000; Files of
The most important set of documents for the Land Records project is the land-entry case file. These are the records that document the transfer of public lands from the U.S. Government to private ownership. They provide an immensely valuable range of information. The FOH Newsletter in early 2001 provided a useful description of these records:

Land-entry case files are records that were amassed by the General Land Office and were intended to insure that those who claimed a portion of the public domain met the legal requirements to take the title. Homestead case files describe improvements made to the property, including houses constructed, wells dug, crops planted, trees cleared, and fences built. Some case files include records of military service and evidence of naturalization. Some refer to other family members who lived on the land. If the claimant died and a wife or heirs completed the homesteading process, a date of death is given and relationships are explained.

Despite their remarkable historical value, according to the Friends of Homestead newsletter in early 2001, “there is no general name index to these records, they have not been reformatted in microform or digital form, and they exist only on deteriorating acidic paper.”

The team then visited NARA facilities: first, the original Archives I building in the District of Columbia and, then, the Archives II facility in College Park, Maryland. The original Archives I building contained the land patents for the states west of the Mississippi River and all surviving land-entry case files. Superintendent Engler reported that after seeing the paper files in Archives I, “which are obviously suffering the consequences of time and acid-based paper,” the team members visited Archives II in College Park and presented their plans to reformat the land-entry case files as digital images for wider public use. The NARA staff, Superintendent Engler continued, “responded by noting the nearly unworkable magnitude of such a project and the limited use such records receive at the Archives,” and suggested that, during the next few years, when Archives I was to be closed for renovation and when no microfilming could take place, the Homestead National Monument team focus first on creating a name index for the Western states.

The official trip report for this initial visit to Washington, D.C. gave a positive assessment, arguing that the team members now had a better understanding of how and where federal land records were being held. Later recollections, however, suggested more resistance on the part of NARA. Laureen Riedesel, for example, who, as the Director of the Beatrice Public Library, regularly fielded questions from patrons pertaining to genealogical research into homesteading ancestors, recalled that NARA staff repeatedly put up roadblocks during the initial meeting, referencing the magnitude and expense of the project. In addition, NARA staff had admitted that they did have some indexing materials for the land records but were not willing to share it outside of the National Archives: according to Riedesel, “the whole focus of the meeting was, ‘We’re keeping everything here. We’re retaining everything. Nothing is going out. No

Homestead NM, H2213. See also web page on Land Entry Case Files and Related Records on website of National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/land/land-records.
84 Message from Home, Volume 1, No. 2, March 2001; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.IVD.
85 Trip Report Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Files, June 26, 2000; Files of Homestead NM, H2213.
copies will be made. Everything is just right here. This is it.”

Likewise, Richard Edwards, who managed UNL’s portion of the project but who was not at the initial meeting, observed that

NARA had had very conflicted views about this digitizing option. When we started, they were really quite opposed to the idea of digitizing or making these records available. . . . They believed and acted as though these were their documents and, if we wanted to come see them, they had a perfectly fine reading room, and we could do it that way.

Although NARA has since become a valuable partner in the project and has made the paper records available for microfilming and digitizing, “they were still. . . . very concerned about the quality, the care of, and conservation of these records.”

Two months after the initial visit to NARA facilities, Superintendent Engler, Regional Senior Historian Stevens, and Professor Matzko met with the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) in Salt Lake City, Utah. The purpose of this trip was to explore the possibility of partnerships between Homestead National Monument and LDS. This established a relationship between the park and LDS, yielded possible methods for digitally reformatting the land-entry case files, and led to a partnership between the park and the Federation of Genealogical Societies and FamilySearch.

Professor Richard Edwards, in his recollections of the project, described the distinctions in the use of land-entry case files between history and social science scholars on the one hand and genealogists on the other hand. Scholars, he explained, are interested in databases with many thousands of entries to gauge broad trends, while genealogists typically want to follow the records of a single family; “that’s always been a little bit of tension within our consortium,” he said. It was clear from the beginning, however, that including a genealogical component in the project would be vital to attract a wide range of potential users of the data and to identify sources of funding for the project. In June 2001, the Monument organized a public symposium on land records and genealogy, held at Southeast Community College in Beatrice. The Monument had already begun working with historical scholars to develop the program, and FOH President Laureen Riedesel, from her position as a librarian, encouraged genealogists to take part in the program. Writing in the FOH newsletter announcing the summer 2001 symposium, she described the proposed Land Records project and suggested that

Genealogists need to let their relatives and colleagues across the country know about this unique opportunity. There are people in all 50 states who have ancestors who homesteaded. Many of these families are unable to access the Homestead records because they do not have enough information about the land; they only know the names of their relatives. This is truly an opportunity for

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86 Laureen Riedesel, oral history interview, May 15, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
87 Richard Edwards, oral history interview, July 19, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
88 Trip Report Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead to Files, August 23, 2000; Files of Homestead NM, H2213.
genealogists everywhere to support the increased availability of Homestead records.\footnote{Message from HOME, Volume 1, No. 1, January 2001, page 1; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.IVD.}

Also in 2001, Homestead National Monument first approached the University of Nebraska-Lincoln about participating in the project. Richard Edwards was Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the time. As he recalled, Superintendent Engler came to me, saying he had this big idea, and would the University help him in trying to make it happen. At that point, I didn’t know anything about Homestead National Monument. I didn’t know that much about homesteading, but it seemed to me the kind of thing that a land-grant university should be doing. It had both cultural and historical aspects to it, but it also had economic development aspect. . . .So, it just seemed to me like this was the kind of thing that we should be doing. And I recognized the magnitude of his big idea.\footnote{Edwards, oral history interview.}

In August 2001, Nebraska Lieutenant Governor David Maurostad wrote to UNL Chancellor Harvey Perlman. Citing the recent publicity surrounding the announcement that LDS was partnering with Statue of Liberty National Monument in New York/New Jersey to make immigration records available to the public, Lieutenant Governor Maurostad encourage UNL to continue the partnership with Homestead National Monument. As Edwards explained, the role played by UNL Librarian and Archivist (now Director of UNL Center for Digital Research in the Humanities) Kay Walter and himself was to raise funds and to ensure that records generated would be useful to scholars, “trying to provide a framework for the metadata so that social scientists and historians and other scholar could get access to the records.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In 2002 park staff, primarily Superintendent Engler and Historian Arrington, coordinated with UNL to develop a pilot project. In August, the park contacted NARA to suggest a project that would allow the microfilming of land-entry case files for Custer County in central Nebraska. As NARA Assistant Archivist Michael Kurtz explained, Custer County included lands overseen by four different land offices in the late nineteenth century: Broken Bow, Grand Island, Lincoln, and North Platte. The records associated with the Broken Bow Land Office held approximately 60,000 documents, and each of the other three land office records held from 125,000 to 340,000 documents; NARA, therefore, recommended that the pilot project include only the Custer County records from the Broken Bow Land Office as a way to clarify the microfilming process and test indexing possibilities. The park received $20,000 through the NPS Challenge Cost Share Program, which the University of Nebraska Foundation matched. In accordance with the recommendation from NARA, the park and UNL agreed to begin with microfilming the Broken Bow Land Office records for Custer County, Nebraska, for the pilot program. In a meeting between UNL, Engler, and Arrington in June 2003, it was agreed that, rather than digitizing the records, the pilot program would involve only microfilming because of costs and “because of the difficulties of preserving documents in electronic format.” Moreover, while all agreed that the
documents would be indexed, the specific information that would be included in the index was left for future deliberations.\textsuperscript{92}

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and NARA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in 2004 that allowed the work to proceed, and the pilot program was announced publicly in Broken Bow on May 24, 2004. The work of microfilming approximately 65,000 documents was conducted by contractors hired by the National Archives Trust Fund and was completed by late 2006. In early 2007, a combination of volunteers and UNL staff began indexing this initial set of documents, an effort which continued into 2008.

In 2007, while the pilot program was in progress, the park and UNL began new discussions with NARA regarding digitizing land-entry records. In addition to the ability to make homesteading records available through the internet, this decision was driven by cost estimates provided by NARA to continue microfilming records for Custer County, Nebraska. The costs estimated in early 2007 were significantly higher than the cost for the initial round, partly because microfilm technology was being phased out, making the 35mm microfilm stock more rare and, therefore, more expensive.\textsuperscript{93} The new Heritage Center opened in May 2007, and hosted a major symposium organized by Historian Todd Arrington in collaboration with the Center for Great Plains Studies at UNL. The symposium, \textit{Homesteading Reconsidered}, drew approximately 125 scholars, NPS personnel, and interested members of the public. In the wake of this symposium, the park continued discussions with genealogical organizations and companies, seeking support for a NPS Challenge Cost Share grant and direct funding to help the park move forward with digitizing homestead records. David Rencher of FamilySearch suggested forming a consortium of organizations and agencies that coalesced by the late summer of 2008. The consortium consisted of Homestead National Monument, UNL, NARA, the Federation of Genealogical Societies (which manages the Stern NARA Gift Fund), the Genealogical Society of Utah (which, in 2008, became FamilySearch, a non-profit company, and which provided nearly $27,000 to purchase the digital cameras needed for the project), and Footnote.com (operated by \textit{iArchives}), which would index the images and provide hosting for them online.\textsuperscript{94}

In September 2008, NPS, UNL, FamilySearch, and \textit{iArchives} entered into a four-part Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding digitizing and making accessible the homestead land-entry case records from the Nebraska City/Lincoln Land Office, estimated to include approximately 300,000 documents. Under the terms of the MOU, \textit{iArchives} allowed NPS to establish computer stations at Homestead National Monument that allowed visitors to access Footnote.com, where the digitized content would be housed. According to the scope of work defined in the MOU, FamilySearch would create the digital images, and \textit{iArchives} would produce a searchable digital database of the images that FamilySearch created. Each party to the MOU would bear its own costs. FamilySearch retained title to the digitized content, while \textit{iArchives} retained title to the database.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92} These documents are kept in the park’s curatorial office for research purposes.

\textsuperscript{93} Cynthia G. Fox, NARA to Sue Bruns, Acting Superintendent, Homestead, January 5, 2007; Files of Homestead NM, H2213.


\textsuperscript{95} A copy of the signed MOU, executed on September 28, 2008, is in Files of Homestead NM, H2213.
Work on the digitizing project began in April 2009, when FamilySearch trained Don and Marilyn Vickers, volunteers who conducted the initial phase of digitizing. The Vickers arrived at NARA in Washington, D.C. in May 2009, and continued work into 2010. Richard Edwards recalled what he heard of the Vickers’ efforts at NARA:

every day, [they] would go to the National Archives, and they would sit there all day—one would sit there all day in front of a camera on a table and click the scanning machine. The other one would be folding and unfolding the documents to keep the machine going. And, in fact, people at the archives said that they never took a lunch; that one of them would go off to lunch, but the other one would keep going so the machine, the scanner, could keep going the full eight hours that they were in the Archives.

By January 2010, the FamilySearch volunteers had scanned more than 126,000 documents, and iArchives had indexed more than 6,000 documents. All parties, including NARA, agreed that it was a positive program and should be continued past the pilot phase. Despite having concerns about maintaining NARA’s standards for accuracy and archival preservation, NARA concluded in March 2010 that “The nature of this project now sets the standard for other digitization partnership projects involving tri-folded records in the NARA holdings nationwide.”

The second pilot project, which included the land-entry case records for the Lincoln/Nebraska City Land Office, was completed later in 2010. FamilySearch was acquired by Ancestry.com in October 2010; but many of the staff remained the same. The partnership continued on to digitizing the land-entry case files from the Omaha, Nebraska Land Office, which started in late 2010 and was completed in the summer of 2011 when attention shifted to the Alliance, Nebraska Land Office. The digitization process has continued, with all Nebraska land-entry case files through 1908 (when the recording process was changed) scanned and indexes finished first. The progress has been uneven, however. As Edwards observed, “sometimes it starts and stops because we don’t have money, or we don’t have a volunteer, or volunteers who are doing a mission to do this.” More recently, he noted, the progress came to a halt when a researcher for one of the genealogical companies, and “who apparently was being paid by the number of files that were digitized, actually either destroyed or threw out some of the [original paper] files.” This caused a scandal with NARA and put a temporary halt to the process.

Despite these occasional setbacks, the land records project has allowed thousands of visitors to the park to access their family information and has made possible exciting new historical research. By the time that *Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History*, the first scholarly book to take advantage of the new cache of records, was published in 2017, the records

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96 Homestead Digitization Project Pilot Evaluation, Prepared by NARA March 12, 2010; Files of Homestead NM, H22.
97 Edwards, oral history interview.
98 Homestead Digitization Project Pilot Evaluation, Prepared by NARA March 12, 2010; Files of Homestead NM, H22.
99 Edwards, oral history interview.
for Nebraska and several other states had been fully digitized and indexed. As the authors noted in the conclusion to their pathbreaking book,

We believe our work points to a new, deeper, and historically more accurate understanding of the role homesteading played in the history of the American West. We will have succeeded if our work causes other scholars to return to the topic, reexamine old finding and new results, dig deeper into the newly available data, adapt our methodologies, and extend this learning to new and unexpected insights, whether those results ultimately agree with or upend our conclusions.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{100} Edwards et al., *Homesteading the Plains*, 203.
Chapter 10: Visitation and Promotion

Homestead National Monument struggled to attract visitors during its first several years. Being located several miles west of a small city in southern Nebraska did not work in its favor, and several other factors in the early years worked against drawing many visitors to it. Although the park was established by law in 1936, NPS acquired the 160-acre Freeman homestead from Daniel Freeman’s heirs only in late 1938. As a result, the Region II Office did not begin development of the site until 1939, a process which required extensive land clearing activities followed by the planting of grasses and trees. Through the early 1940s, the lot was essentially one among several abandoned farms with open fields rising from a wooded creek. By the time that grasses on the restored prairie were beginning to take hold and NPS hired a Superintendent for the site, the country was gearing up for World War II. The Superintendent himself enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 and returned to his post only in early 1946 after two temporary Superintendents had managed the property in his stead. Finally, while a site of undeniable historical significance, it lacked any buildings or other distinctive features that would attract visitors. The park’s first building was a garage with office space completed in 1941, and though it eventually served as a makeshift museum and visitor center, it did not serve as a substantial draw for visitors.

Data on visitation for the early years of Homestead National Monument is limited. A summary prepared in 1984, however, shows that slightly more than 1,000 people visited the park in both 1941 and 1942, but there are no visitation figures for 1943 through 1945. Strict limits on gasoline for personal use curbed the ability of families to travel, and even the Region II Office placed limits on gasoline usage by the acting superintendents at the site. Acting Superintendent Russell Gibbs, for example, presented three slide lectures to groups in Beatrice, with a total of 146 in attendance, but he reported that “It was necessary to decline invitations to show them in two neighboring towns because of limited gasoline supply.”

Almost the entire NPS was on hold during WWII, and expectations for visitation were low, particularly at a new site. In the years after the war, however, Superintendent Schultz worked to steadily increase visitation to the park. In an address to the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce in early 1948, Schultz informed his audience that “Granting of funds for national monuments are based on the number of visitations.” Attracting some 2,000 visitors in 1947 was a positive step, he told the business leaders in attendance, but “this number should be increased many times to assure getting money for improvements.” In speaking to the local Chamber of Commerce, Schultz continued a tradition set by Acting Superintendent Gibbs of appealing to the community for support. As described in Chapter 2, local civic leaders in Beatrice had played an active and vital role in securing Homestead National Monument for the city in the 1930s, and the community has continued to support the park in many ways ever since. In 1943, Gibbs reported that the Beatrice branch of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, a civic organization for young

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1 Custodian’s Report for April 1943; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 2.
men, were sponsoring a “Homestead Window” program, encouraging local businesses to display homestead items in their windows to foster interest in the park.³

When Superintendent Schultz spoke to the Chamber of Commerce in early 1948, he was there to solicit their assistance. Reminiscent of the urban boosterism of the early twentieth century, Schultz explained that Homestead National Monument would never be what the civic leaders of the 1930s had envisioned without more visitors. Increasing visitation, he continued, would need effort on the part of the community to promote the park. In particular, he asked them to support the park by getting behind the move to have more highway signs pointing to the Homestead National Monument. His current NPS budget did not allow placement of signs on the nearby highway, but, he noted, “adding directional signs at strategic points would greatly increase the number who annually visit.”⁴ He did, however, secure funding for informational signs at the park. In February 1948, the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation agreed to place one directional sign and two informational signs on Highway 4. It was a good start but inadequate from Schultz’ perspective. Fortunately, in the summer of 1948, the Chamber of Commerce had begun having highway signs made, which, Schultz predicted, “will afford greater convenience for the public traveling to Homestead.” In 1949, the results of this collaborative signage project were manifested: the State installed two official signs on Highway 4 immediately west of Beatrice and one-half mile from the park, and the Chamber of Commerce installed signs on “all the principal highways leading to Beatrice.” The park, meanwhile, installed thirteen informational signs at the park which were produced in 1948. “It is believed,” Schultz concluded in a report in late 1949, “that the installation of signs has materially stimulated visitation to the Monument.”⁵

Schultz returned to the community’s civic leaders again in 1953, asking them to do more to promote visitation to the park. He prefaced his comments to a luncheon meeting by describing the value of the park to the community and explained that, again, his budget did not allow for the kinds of promotional work he thought was necessary. He suggested that, “An association to promote and publicize the First Homestead should be formed.” Fortunately, the local Elizabeth Montague Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), which had been active in promoting the site as a national park in the 1920s and had placed a monument to the Freemans at the site, continued their supportive relationship. The DAR coordinated with the State of Nebraska to have three signs pointing to Homestead National Monument installed in downtown Beatrice in 1955.⁶ (Figure 50)

³ Custodian’s Report for April, 1943; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 2.
⁵ “Material for Use in Preparing the Director’s 1949 Annual Report to the Secretary,” Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 1; Superintendent’s Monthly Narrative for May 1948, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 6; Memorandum, Regional Director Howard W. Baker to The Director, April 28, 1948, Archives of Homestead NM, 100-VII-D-1, Catalog No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 9; Memorandum for the Director, February 3, 1948, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 6.
The 1951 opening of the Palmer-Epard Cabin, combined with the placement of highway signs from 1953 to 1955, substantially increased visitation throughout the 1950s. From 3,408 in 1950, the number of visitors more than doubled to 8,058 in 1951. The number more than doubled again to 18,773 by 1954 as more Americans began taking to the highways and visiting national parks. Beginning in the late 1950s, the park began developing additional interpretive opportunities including the self-guiding trail, which appealed to both the general public and to school groups, and the Admatic slide projector, which provided basic information about the park. With these innovations, together with the creation of regularly changing exhibits in the Utility Building, the park regularly accommodated between 18,000 and 20,000 visitors per year into the early 1960s.

The park gained considerable publicity in the local *Beatrice Daily Sun* from the proposed improvements under the Mission 66 program. The Superintendent and, after 1958, the park Historian, regularly gave talks to civic groups throughout the region about the work expected to take place at Homestead National Monument, including the new Visitor Center and its exhibits, a footbridge over Cub Creek, and new wayside exhibits on the self-guided prairie trail. At the
same time, the original state Route 3, which extended east and west through downtown Beatrice, was designated as Federal Highway 136, which increased the number of travelers in Beatrice between Missouri and Colorado. This, combined with new highway signs, brought the park to the attention of even more tourists in automobiles. The opening of the Visitor Center in 1962, which coincided with the centennial anniversary of the signing of the Homestead Act, created a spike in visitation as more than 40,000 people came to the park that year. While this was an artificial boost in 1962 due to the special events, the new facilities allowed the park to handle increasing numbers of visitors through the 1960s, from 27,000 in 1962 to a high of nearly 45,000 in 1968.

In the wake of the Visitor Center opening in 1962, staff at Homestead National Monument became even more attuned to the need to promote the park. The local media, consisting of the Beatrice Daily Sun and the area radio stations, actively provided outlets for information about the park. In 1964, for example, radio station KWBE of Beatrice aired thirty-second and sixty-second spots produced by park staff free of charge during the weekends and a live three-minute report by park staff on Saturday mornings, a feature that continued for several years. The park also began issuing more press releases in the mid-1960s, which visitors to the park confirmed they had heard or seen, and annual reports regularly reported on the extensive coverage provided to the park.

A sign survey in 1973 led to the placement of new directional signs on the nearby highways in 1974. Other than these, however, annual reports and other documents from the park indicated a declining interest in engaging in public relations and promotional activities during the 1970s. Even the addition of Freeman School to the park in 1970 and its opening for interpretation in 1973 provided no substantial boost in visitation. Visitation figures from the 1970s into the early 1980s show no growth but, instead, a general pattern of decline from more than 22,000 in 1971 to nearly 19,000 in 1982. A review of articles from the Beatrice Daily Sun throughout the 1970s reveals few mentions of Homestead National Monument, and the Superintendent’s Annual Reports identify few attempts to promote the park or develop new programs beyond the living history demonstrations during the summers. Several issues seem to be fundamental to this decrease in activity at the park, including the waning effectiveness of the Homestead Historical Association by the early 1970s, the inward turn of the park staff’s attention toward prairie restoration and living history programs, the impact of the nationwide energy crisis which caused higher gasoline prices and reduced family travel, and the lack of any new features at the park such as the Visitor Center in 1962 and the Freeman School in 1970. In addition, a column in the Beatrice Daily Sun in early 1971 by Russ Grimes, who had recently served as Chairman of the Homestead Historical Association, indicted the community’s lack of promotion of its tourist resources: “The Homestead National Monument has been ready for business for a number of years, even though it appears that we have been trying to keep the whole thing a deep dark secret.”

Superintendent Vincent Halvorson, who served at the park throughout nearly all of the 1970s, was an able and energetic young leader, overseeing the restoration of Freeman School, developing an active living history program, and sponsoring training among the staff while coordinating the park’s early natural resources management program. With the lack of support from the community and the Homestead Historical Association, however, Halvorson was

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unable to keep the profile of the park at the level that it had reached in the 1960s in the public’s mind.

Visitation to the park remained low through the early 1980s. Preparing his final Annual Report in early 1982, Superintendent Halvorson observed that

The park continues to enjoy a good relationship with the surrounding communities; however, more familiarization with our program and activities most certainly would result in more visitation. We cannot identify any particular group nor vocal individuals that are particularly concerned about our resources. We suspect that as we begin our prairie burn program, interest will increase in our methods, procedures and results.\(^8\)

Visitation figures remained low through the early 1980s but rose quickly in the late 1980s with the development of new special events, described later in this chapter, some of which were shared with the local community. While none reached the level of 1968, when nearly 45,000 people visited Homestead National Monument, visitation steadily increased through the late 1980s and early 1990s, reaching nearly 43,000 in 1992. The park’s visitation then remained stable through much of the 1990s, with the exception of a drop to only 29,000 in 1997, but saw a dramatic increase beginning in 1999 with the development of new interpretive offerings and public programs, a new education program that worked to bring increased numbers of teachers and students to the park, and a vigorous internet presence, coupled with a renewed emphasis on outreach to the community. In addition, the public planning process of the General Management Plan in the late 1990s and the anticipation of a new Heritage Center drove increased visitation through the early 2000s, finally surpassing the 1968 high in 2001 with nearly 48,000 visitors. A new era then began in 2007 with the completion of the Heritage Center and the attendant publicity, as visitation figures since have regularly topped 70,000.\(^9\)

**Programs and Special Events**

With only a Superintendent on staff through the early 1950s, joined by a seasonal ranger in 1952, a Clerk-Typist in 1953, and a Historian in 1958, the park organized few special events through its first two decades. The park took part in historical events sponsored by the community, including a Homesteader’s Parade in 1952 and wide-ranging celebrations in 1957 commemorating the centennial anniversary of the City of Beatrice. In 1960, Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss was appointed chairman of a subcommittee of the Nebraska Civil War Centennial Commission, charged with planning a centennial celebration of the Homestead Act. As the park’s Mission 66 improvements developed, the Homestead Centennial was planned to coincide with the Visitor Center opening in June 1962. The local committee in charge of organizing the event intensified its activities in 1961, and, in March 1962, the City of Beatrice urged all citizens to show their support for the celebration from then until the event, with women

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\(^8\) Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1981; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 27.

\(^9\) Annual Superintendent’s Reports, which are available for nearly every year from 1972 to 2008, provide total visitation figures and frequently discuss the reasons for an increase or decrease in attendance.
wearing either the Centennial Belle badge or period costumes, while men were urged to “refrain from shaving from now until the end of our glorious Celebration Week, June 10 through June 27.” The chairman of the local planning committee said, “We are anxious to have the city take on the look of 100 years ago and urge that everyone cooperate.”

The events took place over a full week, June 10-16, 1962. The highlight of the first day was the dedication of the Visitor Center at Homestead National Monument, at which the principal speaker was Undersecretary of the Interior James K. Carr. Nebraska Governor Frank B. Morrison and other dignitaries also addressed the crowd. For the rest of the week, the community hosted parades, carnival rides at the fairgrounds, and meetings and displays by community organizations. On Saturday, June 16, the final event of the program was the burial of a time capsule at the new Visitor Center.

In April 1961, in association with planning for the Homestead Centennial celebration, the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce announced plans to request the issuance of a special Homestead National Monument commemorative stamp by the U.S. Post Office. An earlier attempt to have a commemorative stamp was made in 1939, when the Beatrice postmaster put in a request to Postmaster General James Farley to mark the development of Homestead National Monument. Although this earlier request was denied, the renewed attempt in 1961 gained greater traction in April, when Secretary of the Interior Steward Udall made the request to Postmaster General J. Edward Day, followed by the same request in June 1961, by the Nebraska Congressional delegation. Finally, in early 1962, Postmaster General Day agreed to the Homestead Act commemorative stamp and released the design for the new four-cent stamp in April 1962. Charles Chickering of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing designed the stamp, which showed a man with a shovel outside a sod house with a woman in the door (Figure 51). Postmaster General Day traveled to Beatrice for a celebration at Chautauqua Park commemorating the first-day issue of the stamp on May 20, 1962, the one-hundredth anniversary of the Homestead Act. Homestead National Monument organized a postal substation at the park where more than 10,000 stamps were sold on May 20.

The close relationship between Beatrice and Homestead National Monument continued in the mid-1960s. In June 1964, the Beatrice Kiwanis Club joined with the Homestead Historical Association to sponsor a Homesteaders Day event. The Wednesday event started with a picnic lunch at the park followed by games such as horseshoes and a sack race. Members of the community provided a spinning demonstration in the Visitor Center, while the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission provided a demonstration of a team of oxen. The picnic was part of the inaugural Homestead Days celebration in Beatrice. This week-long event, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce in an effort to continue to promote Homestead National

13 Press Release, June 10, 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1964, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Box 1, Folder 14.
Monument and attract tourists to the area, featured square dancing, musical performances, a rodeo, a parade, and a beard-judging contest.\textsuperscript{14} Homestead Days became an annual celebration in Beatrice throughout the 1970s, growing to include car races, tennis matches, and other such events.

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\caption{1962 four-cent commemorative postage stamp}
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The park began to develop its own public programs in the early 1960s. In November 1963, Superintendent Vernon Hennesay announced an inaugural winter film series at the park using the audio-visual space in the Visitor Center. Hennesay promoted the thirty-minute films, which were shown on Sundays from December 1 through March 8, 1964, as “educational in nature dealing with the historical and scientific wonders of our great land.” Topics for this initial year of films included “Sunset at Appomattox” about the surrender of General Robert E. Lee, “Dawn of Plains History,” “Sod House Frontier” about the lives of early homesteaders, and “Life and Times of Teddy Roosevelt.” Each Sunday afternoon featured multiple showings of the films, which were then made available to area schools during the following week and shown by NPS uniformed staff.\textsuperscript{15} Superintendent Hennesay judged the program a success: “after becoming known around the community, [the program] was a tremendous success, attracting Sunday

\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{Beatrice Daily Sun} provided extensive coverage of the events; see in particular February 25, 1964, page 1; and June 12, 2964, page 1. See also Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1.

\textsuperscript{15} News Release, November 29, 1963 and December 13, 1963; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1.
afternoon crowds which would otherwise not have visited the area.” In 1965, after the second successful season of the winter film series, Superintendent Hennesay reported that the showing of films to schools and other groups during the week “was received so well by the local schools that it placed an exceptionally heavy workload on the staff, especially during the winter months when the staff is already to minimum.” The film series became an annual event for the next several years, bringing 3,300 visitors to the park on Sunday afternoons in the winter of 1966-1967.

The original winter film series was discontinued later in the 1960s but was revived in the fall of 1971 when a series of environmental films was shown in November. A series of films focused on the centennial of national parks was shown in the winter of 1972. Subsequent years occasionally featured film series at the park, most notably from 1988 to 1991, when films depicting topics pertaining to various units of the National Park System were shown, and individual films were occasionally shown as special events. In 2011, the park reinstituted a winter film series, again focused on National Park System units in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the park. Film offerings in 2012 included Hollywood movies that used homesteading as a theme.

The Homestead Historical Association (HHA) was formed in 1961 as the official Cooperating Association of Homestead National Monument. One of the principal tasks of the HHA was to operate an educational bookstore to benefit the park, and it served more generally as a community support organization on behalf of Homestead National Monument by promoting visitation and conducting programs in association with the park. In December 1963, the HHA coordinated with Superintendent Hennesay to hold a Christmas tree trimming event in the Visitor Center. This became an annual event and a community staple through the 1960s (Figure 52). In 1965, for example, the event resulted in “a well-decorated native juniper Christmas tree in the lobby, along with some 150 cocoa and Kool-Ade imbibers singing Christmas carols with gusto.” The program was discontinued by Superintendent Halvorson in the 1970s, and was revived in the 1990s; in 1995, it was transformed into “Winter on the Homestead” in an effort to be more inclusive. “Winter on the Homestead” featured a range of wintertime activities from the homestead era. In 1998, it was recast again as the Winter Festival of Prairie Cultures and extended for the month of December with exhibits about the ways that the various cultures and ethnic groups affected by the Homestead Act celebrated winter holidays. The Festival retains a similar format each year and is open throughout the month of December. Variations from one

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16 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1964; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 14.
17 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1965; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 15.
18 See “News from HOME” newsletters for January 2011 and December 2011; Files of Homestead NM.
19 See Chapter 12 for a discussion of the origins and operations of the HHA.
20 See “Old-fashioned Fun Decorating the Tree,” Beatrice Daily Sun, December 9, 1966, page 1, which noted that Superintendent Hennesay “inaugurated this program three years ago.” See also 1964 Annual Report, Homestead Historical Association; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102 I-A, Catalog No. HOME 7191, Box 2 Folder 4.
21 1965 Annual Report, Homestead Historical Association; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102 I-A, Catalog No. HOME 7191, Box 2 Folder 4.
year to the next include special exhibits and events that are held on the first three Sundays in the month.22

The park initiated perhaps its signature event in 1979, when seasonal Technician (who later became Superintendent) Mark Engler organized the park’s own version of Homestead Days. Initially a separate program from the similarly-named event in Beatrice, this was a five-day event in the summer featuring folk dancing, square dancing, living history activities, and evening walks. More than 1,000 people attended the inaugural event, and, by the next year it, was the park’s main event. Again organized by Engler, it was reduced to two days in 1980 because of reduced staff and funding but featured a bluegrass band playing music from the homestead era and craft demonstrations. Despite the shortened duration, it still attracted more than 800 visitors to the park. The event returned to its seven-day format in 1981, again organized by Engler. The event featured nearly forty volunteers who demonstrated various crafts, and

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22 See Annual Superintendent’s Reports for 1995, 1999; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folders 40 and 44.
traditional music was again prominent. The event received statewide publicity in newspapers and radio, and, though attendance was reported to be strong, no figures were available for this report.

Engler left the park after the 1981 season, but other seasonal staff continued to coordinate the event through the early 1980s. In 1984, the park, for the first time, coordinated its annual Homestead Days event with the City of Beatrice and the Chamber of Commerce, resulting in a total of more than 17,500 people attending events at the park and in venues throughout the city. The program has continued annually since 1979, with a theme for the event selected each year. Attendance at the park remained steady at approximately 3,000; in 2005, however, seven cast members from the television show *Little House on the Prairie* took part, driving attendance to more than 7,000. Over the past four decades, Homestead Days has become the park’s signature annual event. (Figure 53).

As an annual event, Homestead Days set the pattern for several other programs that have emerged since the early 1980s to become staples on the park’s calendar. In September 1983, for example, Homestead National Monument first took part in the Beatrice community’s celebration of Prairie Appreciation Week. The event was developed primarily for students to create an awareness of prairie resources, and nearly 600 people took part in the initial event. It coincided neatly with the park’s emphasis at the time on the conservation of prairie resources and the restoration of Homestead’s prairie and, by the mid- and late 1980s, included events designed to heighten environmental awareness. It was expanded in 1990 to a full month of activities to
accommodate the demand from schools but was scaled back to two days in 1993 and was not continued after that. The reason for the reduced participation was not specified at the time, but Prairie Appreciation Week in 1993 took place several months after the untimely death of Superintendent Baynes and before Superintendent Constantine Dillon entered on duty. In 2002, however, the park again began participating in Prairie Appreciation Week, the initial event included hosting members of Raptor Recovery of Nebraska, who released two red tail hawks onto the prairie.\(^\text{23}\) The park has participated in Prairie Appreciation Week nearly every year since, and featured different programs or events. In 2009, for example, the park hosted a photograph contest in association with Prairie Appreciation Week, and in 2013 park staff led community members in a program of harvesting prairie seeds for future use in maintenance and restoration projects.

Two new events were inaugurated for students in 1986. The first was Hooky Days, a program conducted the last few days before the start of school in August that survived only two years. The second event, Public Lands//Take Pride in America, was longer-lasting. This program involved films, exhibits, and a clean-up day work project.\(^\text{24}\) By the next year, the program had been adopted by local Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops as part of the broader “Keep America Beautiful” program and involved litter clean-up, prairie restoration, and park beautification projects. Although this program was phased out by the early 1990s, it was replaced in 1994 by the March for Parks event. This was a national program sponsored by the National Parks and Conservation Association designed to build support for and encourage the use of national parks. Initially sponsored by the Gage County Planned Approach to Community Health, a community health organization, the march raised funds for paving the parking lot at Freeman School. By 1998, the event, retitled “Homestead Prairie Walk: A March for Parks Event,” was sponsored by the Friends of Homestead which arranged with American Tool Companies Inc. Dewitt Operations to donate one dollar for everyone marching at the park on April 25. This event continued until at least 2007.

Other annual events also had their start in the late 1990s. In 1997, Friends of Homestead President Laureen Riedesel was tasked with expanding an existing Halloween program. The park included the new Howling Halloween program in the overall Halloween events. Based on her research of homesteaders’ Halloween customs, she worked with the park to create Halloween stories to tell the participants.\(^\text{25}\) The next year, the park debuted three programs: Heartland Storytelling Festival, Horsepower and More, and summer campfire programs. During the first year of the Heartland Storytelling Festival, five regionally and nationally recognized storytellers came to Homestead National Monument in May, where they told stories related to homesteading and conducted storytelling workshops. In 1999, this program was oriented toward school children, and portions of the event were used in the park’s initial distance education program, reaching more than 1,400 people over the course of twenty-seven sessions. Horsepower and More was held over two days in June and featured demonstrations of historic farming tools and machinery including horse-drawn haying, corn shelling, and meal grinding machines. The

\(^{23}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2002; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Cat No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 47.
\(^{24}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1986; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2 Cat No 7584 Box 1 Folder 32.
\(^{25}\) Laureen Riedesel, oral history interview.
Storytelling Festival continued for approximately fifteen years, but Horsepower and More programs ended after only three years. The campfire programs, which are common throughout the National Park System, have continued with park rangers telling stories about the prairie and homesteading to visitors in the summer evenings.

In 1999, the park debuted the Monumental Fiddling Championship, a partnership between Homestead National Monument, the Coffin Family Foundation, Friends of Homestead, and the Homestead Days Committee of the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce. The event is a one-day event with competition categories for beginning and advanced players and has recur annually over the Memorial Day weekend with associated events, exhibits, and workshops. It is now known as the Tallgrass Prairie Fiddle Festival and Acoustic Band Contest.

The next year, Homestead National Monument debuted another major event, the Nebraska Literacy Festival. An earlier statewide writer’s event oriented toward college students lost its intended host site in 1999. In response, the Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors at the Bennet Martin Public Library in Lincoln requested permission to sponsor the event in 2000. During negotiations for the event, Beatrice Public Library Director and Friends of Homestead President Laureen Riedesel, a member of the Heritage Room Board, secured a commitment for one event to be held in Beatrice, which was to be based in Lincoln (Figure 54). Her goal was to find ways to inspire high school students to learn more about Homestead National Monument. As a result of her participation, Nebraska State Poet William Kloefkorn conducted a writing workshop for students at the park on the Friday of the Literacy Festival, September 15. She recalled of that initial one-day event
the format he used was so good that we used it for a number of years. . .he had the kids do some writing exercises. We made sure that they could eat right there. . .they had an extended lunch hour so they could write during that time period and then to come back and share what they wrote in the afternoon. 26

Approximately 100 high school students attend the event, which was judged a success by the park and the Beatrice Public Library. The program was repeated the next year, with Kloefkorn returning to the park to work with approximately ninety students who traveled from as far away as O’Neill, Nebraska, a nearly four-hour drive from Beatrice, to take part. The event has occurred annually since, with the exception of four years when staff turnover within the Nebraska Literacy Festival did not allow for planning, and now the Prairie Visions Writing Festival is operated as a collaboration between Homestead National Monument and the Nebraska Writing Project, which is affiliated with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln English Department, with many writers and educators taking part (Figure 55). 27

In more recent years, Homestead National Monument has coordinated with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to host naturalization ceremonies. These ceremonies are the final component of the process of becoming a United States citizen and involve taking the Oath of Allegiance in the presence of either a judge or a USCIS official. The park first hosted a naturalization ceremony in 2010, which featured an address by U.S. District Judge Richard Kopf with additional speakers and musical events provided by the park. The park has frequently hosted naturalization ceremonies since 2010, seeing them as a way to emphasize the continuing relevance of the Homestead Act, which had a profound impact on the nation’s development by providing opportunities for thousands of immigrants.

Figure 55: Students taking part in Nebraska Literacy Festival at Homestead National Monument, 2014. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument

26 Laureen Riedesel, oral history interview.
27 A discussion of the 2016 event, for example, can be found at https://www.unl.edu/newp/prairie-visions-writing-festival-0.
Visibility of Homestead National Monument: Technology and Events

All these regular programs, from the Christmas tree trimmings of the early 1960s through the Prairie Visions Writing Festival, have helped to raise the visibility of Homestead National Monument within Beatrice and the surrounding region. Because visitation figures are important for funding and staff allotments, recent Superintendents have sought to expand the story of homesteading from a local focus on Daniel Freeman toward a broader understanding of its role in American society. Increased visitation, in this sense, means an increase in the number of people who have an opportunity to learn more about how the Homestead Act and the people who put the act into practice by settling on the land shaped so much of modern American life. For park managers and staff, traditionally this has meant either attracting people to the park or securing placement of stories in local and regional media. Newspapers and radio stations in Beatrice, Lincoln, and beyond have long been willing to provide coverage for activities at the park.

Within the past twenty years, however, efforts to broaden the appeal of Homestead National Monument has been profoundly augmented by several factors. One that has impacted the promotion of nearly everything around the world is the internet. The park was first connected to the internet in 1995, after being one of the first in the Midwest Region to use and test the LANtastic network in 1994. In early 1999, the Monument took advantage of this experience to host an Internet Learning Day for the public. The park began developing its first website at the same time, in early 1999, led by MWRO and with input from high school student Will Mullins, who was working at the park under the School-to-Work (now Pathways Internship) program. The website was operational in September 2000 and included historical information about the Homestead Act, a list of current activities and events, and future management plans. The site also allowed visitors to view short movie clips from the park and gave them an opportunity to order merchandise from the parks’ Cooperating Association, Eastern National. Superintendent Engler noted the power of the internet in early 2005, following a reference to the Homestead Act by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address:

what happened, after he mentioned that . . . everybody was going to the Web, and they’re all . . . searching ‘Homestead Act.’ What do they find when they’re looking for the Homestead Act? They’re finding Homestead National Monument. And I can remember that there was a lot of interest, shortly after that about homesteading and added interest in Homestead National Monument. 28

In addition to its official NPS website, the park maintains an active presence on various social media platforms, establishing a Twitter account in September 2009, a Facebook account in October 2009, and an Instagram account in March 2014. With these, the park has the opportunity not just to distribute photographs and information to followers, but also to engage with them and solicit participation. As an example, the United States Mint inaugurated the “America the Beautiful Quarters” program in 2010, regularly releasing quarter-dollars that depict a National Park System unit for each state. In 2015, the Mint released the Nebraska quarter featuring Homestead National Monument, with an image of the Palmer-Epard Cabin flanked by stalks of wheat with a water pump in the center. (Figure 56) The park hosted an official release party on February 10, 2015 at Beatrice High School with Nebraska Lieutenant Governor Mike Foley and

28 Engler, oral history interview.
City of Beatrice Mayor Stan Wirth in addition to U.S. Mint Associate Director of Manufacturing David Croft in attendance. In the years following the release, Homestead National Monument continues to post photographs of people showing their Homestead quarters at National Park System units and other parks throughout the nation. In addition, the park encourages social media posts from the park itself. The prairie trail includes several wayside signs indicating “selfie spots” to facilitate visitors taking and posting pictures of themselves with the prairie in the background (Figure 57).
More locally, the park has been profoundly impacted by the creation of the Friends of Homestead. In 1994, Superintendent Dillon brought together a group of citizens in Beatrice who were interested in supporting the park and encouraged them to revive the charter of the Homestead Historical Association.29 This was an earlier friends group for the park established in the early 1960s but ceased operations in the early 1970s when it transferred its responsibility for the park’s educational bookstore to Eastern National Park and Monument Association. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 12, the new Friends organization was created in 1994 under the earlier group’s charter but then was incorporated as a separate non-profit entity in 2001. From the beginning, the Friends of Homestead organization was active in supporting the park by raising funds and helping to organize programs, providing volunteers for a wide range of activities, and lobbying elected officials for park projects, including the Heritage Center through the early 2000s and the proposal to change the park’s name from Homestead National Monument to Homestead National Historical Park, which began in the mid-2000s and at the time of the writing of this Administrative History (2020) has passed the House of Representatives.

The park’s promotional efforts, in particular, have received significant help from one of the Friends of Homestead members, William (B.) Scully (Figure 58). Scully had first visited the park with his daughter in the 1980s, and recalled thinking “My god, this is the most boring place I think I’ve ever seen in my life!’ . . .It wasn’t up to date, and I really felt that . . .if you were targeting various different groups, you would have to do something different than what you had there.” A decade later, in the mid-1990s, Scully was approached to join the Friends of Homestead by Laureen Riedesel. Scully, a successful businessman and promoter, was involved in developing a website in the community in which the park had agreed to participate. This project brought him into contact with Superintendent Mark Engler shortly after Engler entered on duty in 1997.

Figure 58: Friends of Homestead member William B. Scully, Jr., 2019. Photograph by Deborah Harvey

29 Chapter 12 presents details on the origins of the Friends of Homestead.
At the time that the park was beginning to develop the GMP, the two found that they shared an understanding for expanding the vision regarding the park. Scully recognized the possibilities of expanding the park’s audience, given the scale of homesteading that included immigrants from thirty countries, going to thirty states where homesteading lands were available, over a period that stretched from the 1860s to the 1980s. Scully, in part at the request of Beatrice Mayor Paul Korslund, became deeply involved in the preparation of the GMP, helping to craft the approach to expanding the vision of homesteading as presented at the park. Scully both led and took part in the lobbying efforts of Friends of Homestead for the Heritage Center, making several trips to Washington, DC and meeting with staff from Senator Chuck Hegel’s and Representative Doug Bereuter’s offices. He also met frequently with the Governor of Nebraska and local business and political leaders. Scully took the lead on a media approach to building support, recognizing the need to appeal to a variety of constituencies and interest groups. During one of his trips to Washington, DC in the late 1990s he took with him the publishers of two Nebraska newspapers. As Scully recalled, the planning of the Heritage Center made it easier to compartmentalize the various attractions:

the boring Homestead National Monument was turned into an education center. . . That’s for those PhDs and people that want to learn about stuff. . . People that want to, ‘Gee whiz! What happened here!’—was the Heritage Center. That was more whiz-bang. And then we had the pickle on the plate, which was . . . the one-room schoolhouse. That was definitely part of the whole homestead. . . So you had those three pieces.

In his recollections, B. Scully also expounded on the need to bring all facets of the homesteading story to a wider public through the internet and to make more of the park’s educational resources available online. In this connection, a third important component of the park’s promotional program since the 1990s has been its development of a distance learning program in collaboration with the State of Nebraska Educational Service Units (ESU) which provides the platform. As discussed in detail in Chapter 9, the park collaborated with the ESU beginning in 1998 to develop distance learning programs that allowed students throughout the state to learn about the resources at Homestead National Monument. In development for several years, the park served as the test site for distance learning throughout NPS, and the program had its debut in the early 2000s. Its debut used an analog format, but ESU and the park soon developed the capacity to deliver distance educational content on the internet. In addition to serving as an invaluable educational platform, allowing students from many different backgrounds and socio-economic levels to learn about a range of topics, this has brought Homestead National Monument to the attention of school students throughout the nation.

30 Information about B. Scully’s involvement in the Heritage Center planning in particular comes from the recollections of Superintendent Mark Engler, provided in comments on the initial draft of this document: Ron Cockrell to Candice Somerville, May 13, 2020. Engler also recalled that Beatrice Mayor Paul Korslund “asked Scully to bird dog the GMP project to completion.”
31 William Scully, oral history interview, May 13, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
The park adopted another approach to promoting awareness of the park and of the importance of homesteading to American history generally. In September 2000, the park inaugurated its Homestead Legacies project, funded with a grant from the Gage County Foundation. This ambitious project involves identifying notable Americans, both living and dead, who were either homesteaders themselves or descendants of homesteaders and creating a banner using their likenesses for display. The process entails genealogical research to verify the ancestral relation between the subject of the banner and a homesteader, followed by contact with the person to secure permission to use his or her name and photograph on a banner. The banners, which are displayed on the outside of the Education Center (the former Visitor Center), feature such historical notables as author Willa Cather, scientist George Washington Carver, lawman Virgil Earp, farmer and entrepreneur Walter Knott, professional football player and coach Steve Owen, aviator Charles Lindbergh, and homesteader and author Rachael Bella Calof. More contemporary honorees include novelist Ivan Doig, former Secretary of the Interior Thomas Kleppe, singers Jewell Kirchner and Amy Heidemann, and comedian Whoopi Goldberg. (Figure 59) The banners primarily have an interpretive purpose, to allow visitors to the Education Center to gain an understanding of the contemporary significance of the Homestead Act of 1862, but they have also offered opportunities for increased visibility for the park. In October 2013, for example, Amy Heidemann, then part of the pop music duo Karmin and recently on the cover of the magazine *Rolling Stone*, made an appearance at the Education Center to unveil her banner.

![Visitor Center showing Homestead Legacy banners, 2019. Photograph by the author.](image)

The park also continued its traditional relationship with the Nebraska state highways to promote an awareness of Homestead National Monument and to direct visitors to it. In 1999, members of the Friends of Homestead and Superintendent Engler met with the Nebraska Department of Roads, the City of Beatrice, the City of Lincoln, and the county supervisors for Lancaster and Gage Counties to gain support for the proposal to have U.S. Highway 77 named the Homestead Expressway. This highway extends directly south from Lincoln to its intersection
with Highway 136 in Beatrice. It was an exercise in community relations that Superintendent Engler saw as a test case for the coming drive to build support for the Heritage Center. The effort was a success; the Nebraska Department of Roads, with approval by Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns, formally approved naming of the road in 1999. The park hosted a formal dedication ceremony on April 26, 2000, with public comments from Governor Johanns, Congressional Representative Doug Bereuter, and several city and county elected officials.\[^{32}\]

In more recent years the park organized several major events that brought increased national visibility to the site. With addition of the Heritage Center, which opened in the spring of 2007, Homestead National Monument has the interior and exterior space to accommodate larger crowds than in the past. In 2011, for example, park staff began planning for the 150\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Homestead Act in 2012. The anniversary year kicked off in January with a renewed winter film series, focused on Hollywood’s depictions of homesteading over the years. The year’s major event, however, was the temporary exhibit in the Heritage Center that included the original 1862 Homestead Act. The park made special arrangements with NARA, which delivered all four pages of the Act to Homestead, the first time that all pages had been shown at the same time. This major exhibit, installed in the lower level of the Heritage Center, opened on April 25, 2012 in a program that featured United States House of Representatives Historian Matthew Wasniewski, NARA-Kansas City Archives Director Lori Cox-Paul, and NARA Senior Archivist Greg Bradsher. In addition to the program of speakers, Homestead National Monument also hosted a United States Citizenship and Naturalization Ceremony that afternoon, when more than fifty new citizens were sworn in, and a speech given by District Director of U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services Nelson Perez.

Shipping the Homestead Act to Homestead National Monument was an enormous undertaking. Prior to shipping, NARA conservation staff prepared the Act’s individual pages by encasing them in polyester and Tyvek before packing them in a secure wooden box for shipment. The box arrived on April 24 as the lone package in an unmarked semi-truck accompanied by armed guards. It was brought to the secure archival storage in the lower level of the Heritage Center before NARA staff installed the exhibit (Figure 60). Law Enforcement Rangers from other parks served on temporary duty 24/7 to provide security for the exhibit during its thirty-four-day exhibition through May 28, 2012.

In addition to the Homestead Act exhibit, the park’s 150\(^{th}\) Anniversary celebration included a Chautauqua event titled “Free Land? 1862 and the Shaping of Modern America,” given the short title of Free Land Chautauqua, which the park co-sponsored with the Nebraska Humanities Council with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, the State of Nebraska, Friends of Homestead, and Homestead National Monument. This week-long program featured a range of speakers and discussion sessions that treated with the Homestead Act, the Morrill Act, the Pacific Railway Act, and other topics related to westward expansion and frontier settlement. The events were held in the

\[^{32}\] Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1999; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 44. See also Press Release, Homestead Expressway Dedication Ceremony, April 20, 2000; Files of Homestead NM, D30. The understanding that the effort to have Highway 77 named the Homestead Expressway was a test case for the building support for the new Heritage Center was presented to the author in an email from Superintendent Engler, March 4, 2000.
evenings under a tent on the grounds near the Heritage Center. In addition to the speakers and discussions, the evening events featured local entertainers and first-person interpretation performances of historical figures. During the days, the Beatrice Public Library held workshops for adults and youth. The 150th anniversary celebration, including the Homestead Act exhibit and the Free Land Chautauqua, received extensive publicity both regionally and locally, and attracted approximately 38,000 visitors.

![Figure 60: Original Homestead Act of 1862 in wooden crate being delivered to Heritage Center collections storage while an armed park ranger watches over the historic document, 2012. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument](image)

The park hosted an even more ambitious program in 2017. A solar eclipse was expected to affect much of the continental United States on August 21, 2017. Beatrice was identified as being near the centerline of the path of total eclipse, and, several years before the event, Homestead National Monument staff began planning for a major event at the park, focusing on the eclipse. The park was identified as an official National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) viewing station, which brought an additional level of publicity, and park staff developed a three-day schedule to conclude on Monday, August 21 with the eclipse. The program featured talks pertaining to the eclipse and the solar system every hour from 10 am to 7 pm at the Education Center on both Saturday and Sunday, additional events at the Heritage Center, together with hands-on activities for children and adults. As an official NASA viewing station, NASA scientists were stationed at a tent on the Heritage Center grounds and gave numerous presentations on planetary research, astronaut training, and other topics. Other attendees included Bill Nye (“the Science Guy”), television personality and CEO of The Planetary Society, and Dr.

33 “Preparing to Kick Off the ‘Free Land’ Chautauqua,” *Beatrice Daily Sun*, May 9, 2012, in clippings file at Homestead NM.
Amy Mainzer with the PBS children’s television show, “Ready Jet Go.” The event also featured a range of exhibits and digital displays which were housed on the Heritage Center grounds. The total solar eclipse itself lasted for two minutes and thirty-four seconds, beginning at 1:02 pm on Monday, August 21, and was prefaced by additional talks and reminders of safety precautions by Mainzer and Nye. The multi-day event concluded at 4 pm that day (Figure 61). The City of Beatrice, Friends of Homestead, and many other groups provided enormous amounts of support to the Monument for accommodations, remote parking and shuttle service, and assistance with coordinating the daily activities.

To support Homestead during this event, the Midwest Regional Office sent half of a Special Events Team to the park to help manage the event, together with six interpreters, maintenance workers, a concessions specialist, and a Public Relations Specialist from the Washington Office, Jeff Olson, while several hundred volunteers joined the staff. Additional crowd control was provided by local law enforcement including the Gage County Sheriff’s Office, the Seward County Sheriff’s Mounted Posse, and the Nebraska State Patrol which provided a bomb sniffing dog and a helicopter. Starting Friday, August 18, the park went into a 24-hour operation status. This continued through Monday, August 21, 6 p.m.

Leading up to Totality, the park was averaging a phone call every twelve seconds, with callers from throughout the United States asking questions regarding the availability of camping facilities, telescope viewing locations, and other related inquiries. At one point on the weekend leading up to Totality, the NPS Public Health Officer at Homestead was concerned that the
park’s septic systems could collapse due to overuse. With fifty portable toilets brought on-site, that did not happen, and the 23,000 people on-site greeted Totality with a roar as the national news media watched.

By 10 a.m., visitors traveling to Homestead were told they would need to divert to other viewing areas as all fourteen buses running routes to the park had become overwhelmed with eclipse enthusiasts. For three days, a bus transportation system, funded by Beatrice and the Friends of Homestead, was put in place between Beatrice and the park. Earlier in the day, at approximately 9 a.m., the Nebraska State Patrol alerted local law enforcement that heavy traffic was moving into the area. Traffic was backed up on Interstate 80 at the Beatrice Exit near Lincoln for over one mile.

Regional and national news media were on site: ABC’s Good Morning America, CBS’s This Morning, NASA Television, and many of the nation’s major newspapers, including the New York Times. Radio Stations KWBE Beatrice and KFAB Omaha carried the events at Homestead live. Regional media outlets from Orlando, Florida, and Wichita, Kansas, joined Omaha and Lincoln network affiliates. NASA not only had scientists on the ground at Homestead, but NASA TV broadcast to viewers around the globe from Homestead and had planes overhead racing the darkness as it swept across the nation. NASA provided a “Jumbotron,” an enormous display screen, that allowed all to see and participate in interpretive programs.34

These major events, the 150th anniversary of the Homestead Act in 2012 and the solar eclipse in 2017, were successes that drew an enormous number of visitors to the park. The park’s annual attendance has surpassed 100,000 only twice: in 2012, approximately 103,000 visited the park, while 2017 saw nearly 124,000 visitors, of which nearly 21,000 were present for the solar eclipse event. Moreover, the publicity surrounding each of the events greatly raised the public’s awareness of the park. Superintendent Engler recognized the risk of taking on such a monumental challenge as the solar eclipse event, particularly in terms of managing the crowds and potential damage to the resources. In the face of such risks, however, he recommended that “I think it’s important to see many of these things as opportunities.”35

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34 The preceding information about the logistics of the eclipse event were provided to the author by Superintendent Mark Engler.
35 Engler, oral history interview.
Chapter 11: Heritage Center, Infrastructure, and Landscape Since 1995

The idea of a building that would become the Heritage Center first emerged in the mid-1990s as part of the attempt to re-engage with the original intent of Congress for Homestead National Monument. Superintendent Constantine Dillon entered on duty at the park in September 1993 following the unexpected death of Superintendent Randall Baynes in May 1993 at age 47. Dillon immediately began a review of the park’s founding documents to understand its original purpose and mission. By early 1994, he began working with park staff to re-orient the park back toward a focus on homesteading which, he argued, needed to be viewed more broadly in its historic context. He recognized several issues that needed to be addressed to accomplish the original mission of the park. The exhibit in the Visitor Center, for example, was the original from when the building was built in 1962 and was in dire need of updating; “to do that,” he recalled, “you really needed to start all over, and that building wasn’t going to be able to handle it.” At the same time, his review of the park’s legislation led him to emphasize the requirement to preserve literature related to the Homestead Act and homesteading generally. As he recalled, “I did really sit around and think, ‘What does that mean?’ And I think that Congress meant we’re supposed to preserve homestead records and things of that sort.” This awareness contained the germ of the Land Records research project discussed in Chapter 10, but he also “realized we needed a new General Management Plan to lay all this out, or to acquire extra land, or to build a new building, or things of this sort.”

The proposed creation of a new GMP for Homestead National Monument was driven not only by the need for more and better space for archival and curatorial storage and interpretation but also by events in Congress in the mid-1990s. In an era of shifting approaches to the management of federal agencies and attempts to reduce the size of the federal government, the National Park System came under increasing Congressional scrutiny. Among the concerns of limited-government reformers were the procedures and criteria for adding new units to the National Park System and the maintenance of smaller units. In 1994, Representative Joel Hefley (R-CO) introduced the National Park System Reform Act of 1994 (H.R. 4476). This bill called on the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to develop a list of units where NPS management could be modified or terminated. It also established a National Park System Review Commission to make and report the determinations on individual parks and barred the initiation of studies of potential new units unless directed by Congress. The bill passed the House unanimously in October 1994 but was stalled in a Senate committee. In early January 1995, Representative Hefley reintroduced the bill in the House as H.R. 260, the National Park System Reform Act of 1995. The new bill again passed through House committees and was brought to the House floor for a vote on a suspension of the rules, a procedure normally reserved for non-controversial bills.

The House passed the 1994 version of the bill unanimously, but the 1995 bill faced an extensive public backlash. Major newspapers throughout the nation picked up the story of the bill, claiming that it was a “park-closure” bill. Proponents of the bill sought to reassure Congress and the public that it was not designed to close parks but rather to put on a firmer footing the

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1 Constantine Dillon, oral history interview, June 12, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
management of NPS and to make the decisions about which units to add and which to keep more transparent. Opponents saw it otherwise. All the major national environmental organizations issued statements of opposition, while newspapers throughout the country argued against it in editorials in July and August 1995. Opponents of the bill in the House of Representatives, led by Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM) and others, forced a debate on the floor on September 18, 1995; the next day, the bill was defeated in the House by a vote of 231 to 180.

With this national attention on the potential for widespread park closures, local communities with both small and large units of the National Park System were justifiably concerned. Although Superintendent Engler had not yet entered on duty when the bill was being discussed, he understood, “when this news broke, that citizens within Beatrice. . .were concerned. They were not happy, so they approached their elected officials—and, at that time, the congressman representing this district was Congressman Doug Bereuter.”

![Figure 62: Representative Douglas Bereuter, 2019. Photograph by Deborah Harvey](image)

Congressman Doug Bereuter (R-NE) was an active supporter of the park. Particularly in light of the potential threat to smaller parks, Bereuter agreed with Superintendent Dillon regarding the need for a new General Management Plan (GMP), even though the park’s existing GMP was less than a decade old (Figure 62). Superintendent Dillon wrote to Rep. Bereuter in April 1996 about a new GMP for the park, defining the content and purposes of GMPs generally and describing the need at Homestead. Dillon reviewed the park’s enabling legislation and cited correspondence from Senator George Norris and Representative Henry Luckey in 1935 as to the

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2 Mark Engler, oral history interview, July 12, 2019.
intent and purposes of Homestead National Monument of America. He observed that “much remains to be done to achieve the intent described by Congress.” A GMP, he concluded, “will address our need to do a better job of fulfilling this Congressional intent.” The next day, Bereuter appeared before the House Appropriation Subcommittee on Interior. In his appearance, he submitted a request that “the National Park Service prepare a General Management Plan to help ensure the Homestead is able to reach its full potential as a place where Americans can now effectively appreciate the Homestead Act and its effect upon the nation.” Superintendent Dillon transferred from Homestead National Monument to Fire Island National Seashore in April 1997. Before he departed, however, he oversaw the completion of a new Long-Range Interpretation Plan (LRIP). As discussed in Chapter 9, the 1997 LRIP sought the creation of a new building to house research and archival material pertaining to homesteading and to serve as a “Homestead Information Center.”

In addition to these programming needs, the existing Visitor Center housed not just exhibits and office space but collections storage as well. The building is located within the floodplain of Cub Creek, however, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, Cub Creek is a highly flashy stream that floods frequently. According to flood zone maps produced by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), the Visitor Center lies within a 100-year floodplain, which marks it as a high-risk zone. The NPS Museum Collections Management Checklist identifies the location of a curatorial facility within a 100-year floodplain as a deficiency that must be addressed. The location of the Visitor Center within such a flood-prone area was, therefore, not just unsafe but also insufficient in terms of NPS policy.

Superintendent Mark Engler replaced Superintendent Dillon in July 1997 and oversaw development of the new GMP. This process involved extensive public comment in an effort to create the broadest base of support possible for the park’s new direction. Local and regional news outlets followed developments closely and voiced strong support, and citizens and organization submitted letters of support. To address the need for a new type of visitor center facility and experience at the park, GMP Team Leader John H. Sowl of the Midwest Regional Office originated the name “Homestead Heritage Center,” which would be an entirely new structure built to meet the project interpretation and research needs of the park. The GMP was approved in late 1999 and included a provision for the new facility. As defined in the GMP, it would “need to be sited in a location that can integrate both the human elements of living within this vast region together with its rich natural resource legacy.” Sowl suggested that the building should be called the “Homestead Heritage Center,” rather than a visitor center, for the reason that

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3 Constantine J. Dillon to Alan Feyerherm and Congressman Douglas Bereuter, April 16, 1996; files of Homestead National Monument, D18.
4 Douglas Bereuter, oral history interview, June 14, 2019; Files of Homestead NM. See “Statement of Congressman Doug Bereuter to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior,” April 17, 1996
5 According to the Long Range Interpretation Plan: Homestead National Monument of America (1997), 33-34, the new Homestead Information Center would “contain copies of all patents granted under the Homestead Act and a data base of all applicants by name, state, and year. In addition, the center would accept donations of original material such as diaries, letters, music, artwork, newspaper accounts, journals, land records, legal papers, and other ‘literature’ relevant to the Homestead story.”
6 This process is detailed in Chapter 12.
7 General Management Plan for Homestead National Monument of America, approved by Midwest Region Director William Schenck, December 23, 1999; Files of Homestead NM.
the new designation would more accurately describe the broader function of the building as a place that would integrate the history, artifacts, and human experience of homesteading while transcending that period to showcase its enduring influence on the nation’s present and future heritage. As an added feature, Sowl suggested that the length of adjacent Highway 4 from the City of Beatrice west to Plymouth could be renamed the “Homestead Heritage Highway.” This section of highway could have occasional educational wayside exhibits to inform the public of the homesteading heritage of the area and to highlight several of the remaining original homestead properties that still exist along the route.

Superintendent Engler recalled that the decision to call the building a Heritage Center, rather than a traditional Visitor Center, was debated during the GMP process. The GMP team had to carefully consider the possibility that the public could perceive that the call for construction of a new “Homestead Heritage Center” within the park would give the appearance that the existing Visitor Center building would be torn down. This would be seen as a waste of a perfectly usable structure and existing public investment on site. However, the existing Visitor Center, along with its artifacts and function, remained threatened by its location within the 100-year floodplain of the adjacent Cub Creek. The decision again related to the need to convey the full scope of “America’s epic homestead story.” This story, Engler recalled,

is really told through different interpretive tools. . . . not only is it with museum exhibits and museum where we’re telling the story, but it’s also in the research that we had envisioned at the Heritage Center to provide [to] visitors. . . . it was not a Visitor Center. It was much more than that. It was where we were to engage in a much deeper and thoughtful process, a story which needs more than a Visitor Center.8

The vision for the new Heritage Center as expressed in the GMP included having it sited where visitors could experience “the feeling of the prairie’s wide-open spaces.”9 In order for this to happen, the park would need a different location than the existing Visitor Center, which was set on the park’s lowest land, separated from the prairie by the trees that surrounded Cub Creek. At the time, however, the restored prairie extended all the way up the slope to the parks’ eastern boundary, leaving no room for a new building. During the planning for the GMP in the late 1990s, Superintendent Engler approached the Ensz family, who owned the land that bordered the park to the south, on the opposite side of the Osage orange hedgerow, about acquiring their land for the new Heritage Center. They rebuffed the suggestion, anticipating the possibility of developing the land instead.10 The GMP team also discussed the possibility of other locations for the new Heritage Center, including the small triangle of land within the park boundary at the northeastern edge, separated from the rest of the park by the new alignment of Highway 4 and referred to as the “State Triangle.”

In an exercise to assist the GMP Team in visualizing the possible Homestead Heritage Center design concept, Sowl asked the team and Superintendent Engler to accompany him to the

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8 Mark Engler, oral history interview, July 12, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
10 The Ensz family later agreed to sell the land to the Friends of Homestead with the intent that it would be added to the Homestead National Monument boundary in the future.
top of the park’s eastern boundary, near the location of the present-day Heritage Center building, and to look west-northwest. Sowl then asked the assembled team to place their hands on either side of their eyes like blinders as they looked across the landscape. The results of that action effectively removed almost all of the modern human developments and intrusions from the existing landscape and left only the park’s reconstructed prairie and creek-side woodland to view; in effect, rolling back time to the period of the first homestead on site. Sowl then explained that a building carefully designed to offer such a view could achieve the same result. That building could be the new Homestead Heritage Center.

This land immediately to the east of the original boundary of Homestead National Monument was owned by the Graff family. The Graffs first purchased land south of what is now Homestead National Monument in 1860, before the Homestead Act of 1862. In the early twentieth century, a member of the Graff family purchased a quarter-section of land immediately east of the Freeman homestead from the Freeman heirs, where Tim Graff lived with his family at the end of the century. By the 1990s, the parcel covered approximately sixteen acres, including the Graff’s house, which overlooked the park’s restored prairie. The Graffs had attended early meetings held by NPS staff with area residents regarding the GMP and the proposed Heritage Center. As Tim Graff recalled, he and his wife were approached by park staff about the possibility of leasing land for parking if the new Heritage Center were built at the eastern edge of the park’s boundary at the time: “So, my wife and I thought it over, and said, ‘What would happen if we could negotiate a way to just sell you this...acreage of ours...if we could be able to move our house off of that property.’”

Superintendent Engler recalled that the Graffs made the suggestion while he was inspecting the park’s eastern boundary line:

Tim Graff saw us out there, and we started our conversation. . . .And Tim basically said, ‘Well, you really should be looking over here on this side of the fence.’ . . . .The side that wasn’t ours. And he said that ‘This is really the best place.’ . . .I remember being totally surprised. And basically, they said that it was their responsibility as a neighbor to this park to help tell our nation’s epic homestead story, and that anything like that [the new Heritage Center] should be built on their property—on their property because they had the best location. And they did have the best site.

Chapter 2 details the legislative process by which this sixteen-acre parcel was added to the Homestead National Monument boundary under P.L. 107-332, which President George W. Bush signed on December 16, 2002. In an unusual turn to the normal process, however, the park received the funds to purchase the property and begin planning for the new Heritage Center before Congress authorized the boundary expansion. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Rep. Bereuter was an active supporter of the park and arranged for a visit in April 2002 with Congressman Ralph Regula (R-OH), Chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. In anticipation of the visit, the Friends of Homestead arranged for a large group of supporters to be at the park, together with Nebraska Lieutenant Dave Maurstad. A local farmer, Glen Brinkman, brought a historic steam tractor to the site.

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11 Tim and Bob Graff, oral history interview, May 14, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
12 Engler, oral history interview.
The two members of Congress included the visit to Homestead as part of an extended tour of several sites in Rep. Bereuter’s district. The party, including MWRO staff and the two Congressmen, arrived at the Beatrice airport late in the afternoon. Superintendent Engler recalled that, on the drive to the park, he was warned that it had not been a good day for the Congressmen. As they passed Freeman School, however, Regula, a native of Ohio, noted that he had attended a one-room school as a child. As Engler recalled, when they arrived at the Visitor Center, there were

sixty to eighty supporters here at the Monument. . . . the group got here, and we had gone over to the prairie side of the [Cub Creek foot] bridge, where the steam tractor was puffing smoke. And Glen [Brinkman], the operator of the steam tractor. . . . was keeping the boilers hot by throwing in wood, and so it was blowing, bellowing out steam and smoke. Mr. Regula and Mr. Bereuter walked up to the back of the tractor, and Glen Brinkman stuck out his hand and said, ‘I’m Glen Brinkman, and I’m a farmer.’ And Ralph Regula stuck out his hand, and he said, ‘I’m Ralph Regula, and I’m a farmer,’ they climbed up on that tractor, and things changed on a dime.\textsuperscript{13}

According to a newspaper report of the meeting at the park, Rep. Regula told Rep. Bereuter “‘You’ve got to get me out of here, Doug . . . . If I had the [National] Park Service checkbook, I’d be writing one right now.’”\textsuperscript{14} Regula was also deeply impressed by the show of support as organized by Friends of Homestead. As a sign of appreciation for making the effort to visit the park and learn about the importance of the new developments there, Nebraska Lieutenant Governor Dave Maurstad presented Rep. Regula with an “Admiralship in the Great Nebraska Navy,” an honorary title for people who make a contribution to the state’s well-being. Rep. Bereuter had hoped to secure $2.5 million in funding for the purchase of land and design of the new Heritage Center, but feared that federal budget cuts meant that fewer projects would be funded for FY 2001.\textsuperscript{15} However, Rep. Bereuter, with the support of Rep. Regula, was able to secure $400,000 that could be used to purchase the Graff’s property.

As described in Chapter 2, Rep. Bereuter introduced legislation to expand the boundary of Homestead National Monument in January 3, 2001. The House of Representatives took no action on the bill until December 2001 when the House Committee on Resources reported favorably, and the full House of Representatives voted to approve the bill on December 11, 2001. The bill was then introduced in the Senate, and, in September 2002, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported the bill favorably without amendments. The bill passed the Senate by Unanimous Consent on November 20, 2002 when it was forwarded to the president who signed it into law on December 16, 2002. The law passed included a provision from negotiations between NPS and the Graff Family; according to the legislation, the Secretary of the Interior had only five years from the law’s passage to complete the purchase of the Graff’s property. The arrangement with the Graff family also included a provision for NPS to relocate their existing house on the property to a new lot which they purchased approximately one-half mile to the east

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} “Bereuter, Colleague Tour Sites,” Omaha World-Herald, April 29, 2000; Clippings File, Homestead NM
\textsuperscript{15} “Homestead Backers Try to Sway Congressman for Financial Support,” Beatrice Daily Sun, April 29, 2000; Clippings File, Homestead NM.
on Highway 4. Under the guidance of Regional Real Estate Specialist Fred Suarez, MWRO moved quickly on the agreement to purchase the Graff’s property and relocate their house. The sale closed in early December 2003, and the park took possession in August 2004.16

In April 2002, Rep. Bereuter secured an appropriation of $300,000 for FY 2003 to complete pre-design work. The initial discussion of the building, in the GMP and subsequently, anticipated a building of 28,000 square feet that would cost approximately $18.5 million. During 2002, members of Friends of Homestead initiated discussions with the Omaha architecture firm Leo A. Daly to develop concepts for the new building, and B. Scully provided the funds for an architectural model of the building as proposed by the firm. This model would allow the Friends of Homestead to begin developing support for the new building. In late 2002, however, a report accompanying the FY 2003 appropriations act limited the Heritage Center budget to $4.5 million. A scoping meeting with the Denver Service Center (DSC), which managed the project for MWRO, was held in late March 2003 to discuss ways of scaling back the project.17 As a result, the size of the building was reduced, first, to approximately 18,000 square feet and later to the current 10,600 square feet.18

The park worked with planners from DSC to solicit proposals from architecture firms and expressed a preference to work with a Nebraska-based architect. Park and DSC staff initially consulted with seven firms from throughout the country to provide a vision for what the Heritage Center could be. During the planning process with DSC, park staff identified four firms, two from firms in Nebraska, one firm in Salt Lake City, Utah, and one firm in Baltimore, Maryland, as finalists. Representatives from the four firms were then invited to submit written responses to the Request for Proposal. Despite having a preference for a Nebraska-based firm, park staff were unimpressed by the responses from the two Nebraska firms. As Superintendent Engler recalled, “we felt like they didn’t really put much energy into our Request for Proposals.”19 Park and DSC staff nonetheless invited representatives from all four firms to take part in oral interviews. The results of the oral interviews, Engler recalled, were the same as with the written responses, and the two Nebraska firms “just did not seem interested.” Both the park and DSC staff, however, were impressed with the firm of Grieves, Worrall, Wright and O’Hatnick, Inc. (GWWO) of Baltimore, Maryland. Superintendent Engler recalled asking if any of the representatives from GWWO were descendants of homesteaders, to which they responded in the negative: “they told me, later on, they thought, when I asked that question, they lost the bid.”20 Their plans and vision, however, best matched those of the park, and in the summer of 2003 GWWO was selected to design the Heritage Center. At the same time, Nash Brooks Associates was selected to develop the exhibits (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of the process of planning and developing the Heritage Center exhibits).

16 Staff Meeting Minutes for December 4, 2003; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.III.D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 19. See also Engler, oral history interview for an emphasis on the role played by Fred Suarez in seeing the process completed so quickly.
17 Briefing document, Update on Construction of Heritage Center, Homestead National Monument of America, April 2003; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.007.004.002, Catalog No. 8423, Box 1 Folder 6.
18 Engler, oral history interview.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
The two firms coordinated their designs from the beginning “to create an integrated design in which the exhibits, building and site share a symbiotic relationship in order to tell the story of the Homestead Act of America [sic.]” Superintendent Engler was particularly insistent on this close integration of exhibit and building design. A meeting in December 2003 with representatives from GWWO, Nash Brooks, MWRO, the park, and Friends of Homestead served as the first opportunity for GWWO to present their designs for the building. The architects arrived at the December 2003 meeting with two design concepts. Both were designed to highlight the surrounding landscape. One, as Superintendent Engler recalled, was “a building that resembled rows of corn.” For the design concept for the second approach, Engler recalled, “they brought in a piece of carpet, and they had pulled the carpet apart.” With one corner of the carpet lifted, the designers showed the upward sweep of the roof that would rise above the prairie: “so they came in with this carpet and the explanation of that, and from our discussions that lasted over several days, we decided to go with that.”

The participants in this meeting also reviewed various combinations of layout configurations for the Heritage Center. They selected two versions that would be presented at a Value Analysis meeting in March 2004.

This basic design concept, which featured an upward sweep of the roof, looking west over the restored prairie below, formed the basis of the Value Analysis meeting in March 2004. However, the team considered alternatives for one-story and two-story options that incorporated this concept. The resulting report indicated the two-story option was the preferred alternative. Important components of the general layout included a lower-level collections storage and curatorial work area, a view to the prairie from the upper level, an outdoor plaza area, and a central lobby and balcony area with access to an audio-visual room. Other considerations including managing the natural light that came from the proposed glass curtain walls into the exhibit area and incorporating environmentally friendly concepts in materials and in the use of a geo-thermal heat pump mechanical system. The Value Analysis meeting also considered the site plan, which was based on the idea that the Heritage Center should feature a view of the prairie, while an access road should serve as a visual and temporal buffer from the modern Highway 4.

Drawings of the Heritage Center that were prepared in April 2004 based on the Value Analysis incorporated an important design component that reflected the integration of exhibit and building design. The renewed emphasis on historical interpretation at the park since the mid-1990s included understanding homesteading in a national context in addition to understanding its local implications. Alan Reid, the principal designer for GWWO, raised the possibility of a long, sloping wall along the sidewalk from the parking lot to the Heritage Center entrance. This “living wall” would include depictions of all thirty states where homesteading took place, providing visitors with a gradual awareness of the national scope of homesteading before encountering the exhibits.

Although the park staff was pleased with the design of the building, its unconventional shape posed a concern for some at DSC and MWRO. Regional Director Ernest (Ernie) Quintana, who entered on duty in July 2003, approached Superintendent Engler about these concerns. As

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21 Engler, oral history interview. See also Meeting notes for December 8, 2003; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.007.004.002, Catalog No. 8423, Box 1 Folder 6.
22 “Homestead Heritage Center Value Analysis Draft Report,” prepared by Kirk Associates, LLC, March 11, 2004; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.007.004.002, Catalog No. 8423, Box 1 Folder 8.
Engler recalled, “my response was that homesteading is all about the future. Homesteading is about people in pursuit of their dream, and this building really captures that, and this building. replicates the spirit of the Homestead Act.” At Regional Director Quintana’s request, Engler, in turn, presented the design at public meetings and to local and state political leaders including Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns. Engler received widespread public enthusiasm for the design, which prompted MWRO to give its full support. As described in the Final Schematic Design Analysis in May 2004, the building

is at once simple and engaging. Distinct from the surrounding farm buildings, it is clearly a destination. . . .Like the story of the homesteaders, the architecture is simple and powerful. The building literally emerges from the earth. . . .The curved roof form, in particular, suggests imagery associated with working the land."

In June 2004, Superintendent Engler presented the final designs to the NPS Design Advisory Board (DAB) in Omaha, which approved the Heritage Center. 

Securing approval for the design was a vital step, but concerns over funding the building remained. The dramatic reduction in funds for the Heritage Center, from over $18 million to $4.5 million, was a blow that led not just to reducing the scale of the building but to defunding important features of the building and exhibits. In the spring of 2005, the park received word that funding for the Heritage Center could be further reduced or even eliminated by the Department of the Interior (DOI). In response, Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) led the Nebraska Congressional delegation to keep funding in the DOI’s budget. Senator Hagel and Senator Ben Nelson (R-NE), together with Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), in particular, corresponded with NPS Director Fran Mainella to secure construction funds in the FY 2005 and 2006 budgets, which was approved by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush in August 2005.

The Friends of Homestead and local governments made their support for the park and the new Heritage Center clear. As Superintendent Engler recalled, “all through this [funding] process, there were efforts to try to find support from the private sector, non-federal funds to help move. . . .this project forward. . . .in all, I want to say ten percent of the Heritage Center project was provided by local government and by private funding.” Gage County, for example, agreed to pave the portion of Township Road 75 from Highway 4 south to the new Heritage Center drive at no cost, and Norris Public Power agreed to bury the electric lines at the site for little or no cost. The Friends of Homestead, meanwhile, conducted a substantial fund-raising campaign in support of the Heritage Center, in part using a list of donors which Senator Hagel provided.

23 Engler, oral history interview.
25 Comments from the DAB meeting as recalled by Superintendent Engler in his oral history interview are discussed in Chapter 9 regarding the exhibits. See also Staff Meeting Minutes for June 10, 2004; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.II.D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 2 Folder 1.
26 Engler, oral history interview.
27 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2005; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 50.
28 Engler, oral history interview.
Friends of Homestead donations for the Heritage Center were crucial for two components in particular. First, the budget did not include any funds for a new introductory film. In response to this need, Friends of Homestead members B. Scully and Ross Bauman approached several large firms that included Pinnacle Bank, First National Bank of Beatrice, and Nebraska Public Power District for help. Their efforts resulted in donations totaling approximately $185,000. The park transferred these funds to HFC, where the film was being produced, to help offset the cost of the film, approximately $300,000. Likewise, the project budget did not include funds to pave the parking lot. The park received an anonymous check for $50,000, which was applied to the cost of the parking lot, but the bulk of the cost was covered by the Peter Kiewitt Foundation, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska. The Peter Kiewitt Foundation agreed to contribute another $125,000 toward paving the lot, but it would only release the funds after the work was completed. The contractor paving the lot required the funds in advance of the work. In order to cover the up-front costs, Friends of Homestead member B. Scully and his father, prominent businessman William Scully, Sr., agreed to loan the funds in an arrangement with MWRO Comptroller Marty Sutherland. The loan would be repaid when the Kiewitt Foundation released its portion of the funds at the end of the paving project. Gage County provided an in-kind donation of highway crew laborers who worked under the direction of NPS. As Engler recalled, “So, there was tons of involvement, tons of community support, which was coordinated through the Friends [of Homestead], and B. Scully, and others who were heavily, heavily involved with project.”

Architectural design and exhibit planning efforts continued throughout 2005, and the park held a groundbreaking ceremony on April 21, 2006. Glen Brinkman, the farmer whose steam tractor had so impressed Senator Ralph Regula six years earlier, returned with Gary Higgins to drive the team of horses that pulled the plow to break ground. Superintendent Mark Engler welcomed the dignitaries in attendance, comprised of elected officials from the City of Beatrice and Gage County, members of the Nebraska Congressional delegation, Regional Director Ernie Quintana, and Friends of Homestead President Laureen Riedesel. A descendant of homesteaders, Laura Maricle, was the featured speaker. With the groundbreaking out of the way, construction on the building began in June 2006 (Figure 63).

NPS Director Fran Mainella signaled her support for the project by visiting Homestead National Monument during the annual Homestead Days event in June 2006, which coincided with the start of construction, exclaiming that “We tell the stories of America, and what a story we tell here. Right here at Homestead you have a story no one else can tell.” Once work was under way, it proceeded quickly, with the concrete foundation largely in place by October 2006 (Figure 64). By the end of 2006, the exterior walls were in place, the glass curtain walls were being installed, and the roof, with its distinctive upward sweep at the northwest corner, already visible (Figure 65). With the roof in place, the construction crews could complete the interior, including the main floor balcony overlooking the lower exhibit area (Figure 66). An important component of the building, though hidden from public view, was the collections storage area on the ground floor beneath the main floor office space, which also served as a tornado shelter; this area, with subfloor racks for movable storage cases, was completed by February 2006 to allow the relocation of collections (Figure 67).

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29 Ibid.
Figure 63: 2006 photo of Heritage Center site prior to excavation. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument

Figure 64: Heritage Center foundation under construction in July 2006. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument
Figure 65: Heritage Center roof under construction in January 2007. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument

Figure 66: Interior of the Heritage Center under construction in February 2007. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument
The building was completed in time for the Grand Opening celebration on Sunday, May 20, 2007, the 145th anniversary of the Homestead Act of 1862 (Figure 68). The ceremony was rich in symbolism and featured the singing of the National Anthem by Atz Kilcher, the son of Alaska homesteaders and the father of popular singer Jewel Kilcher. An American Indian blessing was given by Marvin Diamond of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma, and Laura Maricle again provided comments (Figure 69). Other speakers included the Mayor of Beatrice, the Chairman of the Gage County Board of Supervisors, Nebraska Governor Dave Heinemann, Representative Jeff Fortenberry, Regional Director Ernie Quintana, and Nebraska state senators (Figure 70). Dr. Elliott West, Professor of History at the University of Arkansas and a prominent historian of the American West, gave the Keynote Address. Although he did not have a formal role in the ceremony, Kenneth Deardorff, the last person to prove his claim under the Homestead Act in Alaska, attended and drew applause from the crowd (Figure 71).
Figure 68: Heritage Center looking east from restored prairie, 2019. Photograph by the author

Figure 69: Marvin Diamond giving American Indian blessing at opening of Heritage Center, 2007. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument
Figure 70: Superintendent Mark Engler (L) and Regional Director Ernie Quintana at Heritage Center Opening, May 2007. Photo provided by Homestead National Monument

Figure 71: Last Homesteader Kenneth Deardorff at Heritage Center Opening, May 2007. Photograph provided by Homestead National Monument
In addition to the formal ceremony, the park planned other events at the Heritage Center and at the former Visitor Center that continued throughout the day. The theme of the events was Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, and included portrayals of Presidents Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, and a chance to meet the living homesteaders who had been invited to attend. A Quilt Exposition sponsored by the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was at the former Visitor Center, along with activities for children led by Phyllis Stone, great-granddaughter of Peace Chief of the Lakotas Iron Shell. The park and ESU established a distance learning connection which allowed Astronaut Clayton Anderson in Florida to talk about his coming tour of duty on the International Space Station “and the future frontier-space.” The Scully family provided a commemorative poster to be given away, while the Gage County Foundation gave out commemorative coins.

With the completion of the Heritage Center, the park’s attention turned to the former Visitor Center. In 2008, the park received funding to renovate the 1962 building for use as an Education Center. This work included converting the former exhibit space for use as a multi-purpose room for traveling exhibits, larger presentations, and school groups. The former curatorial space was renovated in 1986, and continues to accommodate collection items including archival documents, complete with what Superintendent Engler identified as “a super duper exhaust fan for venting the space.” The public and administration spaces were repainted and new carpets were installed, and the bathrooms received new tile for the first time since the building opened. At the Heritage Center, meanwhile, the park was able to hold over base funds to start work on the tensile structure that was originally planned to cover the patio on the building’s south side. This work was completed in 2009 and provides a covered space from which visitors can look over the restored prairie. In 2009, also, the park began work on the process of dismantling the Palmer-Epard Cabin at its 1962 location behind the Education Center. The building was then relocated to its current location near the Heritage Center. Other than a major water leak on January 1, 2011, as discussed in Chapter 7 in regard to its impact on the building’s collections storage area, the Heritage Center has continued to serve in its original function and remains an iconic presence at the park with its upturned roof facing west visible from the restored prairie.

Maintenance

The new visitor contact buildings at Homestead National Monument, the Visitor Center in 1962 and the Heritage Center in 2007, put additional burdens on the park’s maintenance and facilities management staff and infrastructure. The 1962 Visitor Center was part of the park’s Mission 66 program, which also included allowance for additional staff. As described in Chapter 12, under Mission 66, the park was able to hire Donald Warman as the park’s first permanent Historian in 1958, while Evelyn Carlson, who served as the part-time Clerk-Typist, was

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31 Hevelone Grant Final Report, July 6, 2007; Files of Homestead NM, F3019.
32 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2008; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 53.
33 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2008 and 2009, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1; see also Staff Meeting Minutes for February 10, 2009, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.II.D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 2 Folder 6.
34 See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the Palmer-Epard Cabin and its several relocations.
transferred to a permanent position in May 1959, and in July 1960 she was appointed to the full-time Clerk Stenographer position, reporting to the Superintendent. Through the early 1960s, the park relied on a seasonal Caretaker and a seasonal Laborer throughout the summer season to take care of the buildings and grounds, and the permanent staff cared for the facilities for the rest of the year. Finally, in November 1962, the park hired Raymond Norman as the first full-time permanent Custodian.

Norman remained as the only full-time Custodian/Maintenance Worker throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until Ralph Kerl was hired. In addition to general maintenance of the buildings and groundskeeping, Norman was actively involved in the various restoration efforts at Freeman School and the Palmer-Epard Cabin. Beginning in the late 1970s, in the wake of the national energy crisis, the park began placing more emphasis on energy conservation. In 1979, the first year of concerted energy-saving efforts, the park reduced its consumption substantially by installing or improving insulation in the Utility Building and in Freeman School and by reducing lighting and color-coding switches to make it easier to turn off unneeded lights. The biggest reduction in energy consumption, however, came from installation of a new water-to-air heat pump unit for heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC). This new unit replaced the earlier hydronic boiler system and cut costs, provided a free supply of hot water, reduced dependency on oil, and gave the Visitor Center a higher relative humidity, which was good for the collections. In 1980, the park experimented with a small passive solar heating device, which Park Technician Ray Brende modified from plans in Mother Earth News and which garnered local news coverage.

Raymond Norman retired in early 1981 and was replaced as Maintenance Supervisor in July by a former park ranger, Donald A. LaDeuax who transferred from Coulee Dam National Recreation Area. In 1981, the park created the permanent Maintenance Worker position to assist the Maintenance Supervisor, which was filled in 1982 by John Seger, who was promoted to Maintenance Foreman/Supervisor in 1988. Under their guidance, the park continued to work on energy conservation, which included installing a wood-burning stove in the Visitor Center in 1981. Major updates to the facilities included adding collections storage space to the Visitor Center in 1986, replacing the entire septic system and drain field in 1986, resurfacing prairie trails and improving drainage in the late 1980s and early 1990s, rehabilitating and remodeling the farm implement shed at the Visitor Center in 1991, and replacing the Visitor Center roof in 1992. In 1996, a tornado struck the park, causing extensive damage to trees which required intensive clean-up activities, in which park staff was assisted by an outpouring of community support. Water violations and the opportunity to create a water district led to a complete rehabilitation of the water system for the Visitor Center and housing in 2000.

The park created a new staff organization in the mid-1990s which placed the maintenance workers under a new Operations Division. Although the Operations Division proved

35 Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY 1961; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box I Folder 11.
36 Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY 1963; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box I Folder 13.
37 This was not the first tornado to strike Homestead National Monument. A tornado on May 30, 1978 damaged the Visitor Center’s roof.
unsuccessful and was reorganized by Superintendent Engler, John Seger remained on staff through this transition, his title changing from Maintenance Foreman, to Maintenance Supervisor, to Maintenance Worker under the new organizational structure. In 2000, the park instituted the Facility Manager position, which was filled in March 2001 when Lynn Chelewski entered on duty. John Seger remained on duty as Maintenance Worker during and after construction of the Heritage Center in 2007. Chewelski remained Facility Manager until 2003 until replaced by Facility Manager Laura Streseman. In 2006, Rob Ruskamp was hired to serve as Facility Manager, remaining in that position until 2018. Travis Allen entered on duty as Maintenance Worker in September 2007 and was promoted to Facility Manager following Ruskamp’s departure.

In 2004, the park reinstated conservation efforts, seeking new ways to conserve resources and reduce impacts to the environment. The park implemented a vigorous recycling program with receptacles in the Visitor Center, the new Heritage Center in 2007, and along the exteriors of the buildings. In 2008, the park instituted a composting program that used primarily yard waste, and an engineering firm was contracted to advise the park on increasing energy efficiencies.

**Landscape Protection and Land Use**

The expansion of the park’s boundary to allow purchase of the former Graff property raised other questions related to lands surrounding the park. Efforts to protect the surrounding viewshed through the early 1980s were discussed in Chapter 6. In early 1988, however, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), a private, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the mission of NPS, released the final report of a multi-year assessment of NPS’s operations. The report, *Investing in Park Futures: The National Park System, A Blueprint for Tomorrow*, includes a series of wide-ranging recommendations for funding, the management of natural and cultural resources, land uses and protection, and administrative structures. One component of the project was a Boundary Study to determine the adequacy of the existing boundaries of all units of the National Park System. The NPCA study recommended boundary adjustments for nearly 200 units, including Homestead National Monument. In July 1988, NPCA Vice President for Conservation Destry Jarvis wrote to the park with its recommended boundary. In its evaluation, NPCA drew upon the park’s own 1982 Boundary Evaluation Report, citing several of its sections. The boundary expansion recommended by NPCA was breathtaking in its scope, encompassing approximately 4,400 acres. Much of the proposed expansion lay south of the existing boundary, extending from the meanders of Cub Creek in the west to the meanders of Bottle Creek in the east.38 (Figure 72)
Such a vast expansion of the park’s boundary clearly lay outside the realm of the politically feasible, and the suggestion never appeared in any other documents. However, from the perspective of protecting the prairie restoration gains that had already been made and the historic viewsheds from the prairie, additional buffer lands immediately surrounding the park would definitely be most helpful. In the wake of the condemnation proceedings of the early 1990s, however, when the park acquired the parcel immediately surrounding Freeman Schoolhouse from an unwilling seller, neither funds nor political will existed to explore any expansion opportunities. The purchase of the Graff property for the Heritage Center Site in 2003 was the first attempt since the Freeman School parking lot purchase and was from a very willing seller who had the park’s best interests in mind. This addition of land, however, although of immense importance to the park in terms of its interpretive and collections management programs, did little to protect the park’s broader viewshed.

The second set of developments allowed the park to protect its boundaries. As a non-profit friends group affiliated with Homestead National Monument, the Friends of Homestead was able to raise funds and hold property for the benefit of the park. From the beginning, this was an active and supportive organization, and it has provided immense benefits to the park since its creation. In May 2004, the park learned of the death of Opal Shum, the long-time owner of the West Court Dairy Queen in Beatrice (Figure 73). Ms. Shum, who had employed Superintendent Mark Engler when he was young, had discussed the disposition of her estate with attorney Duane Smith, who was also involved in the founding of the Friends of Homestead as
counsel to the new group. Ms. Shum was well-disposed toward the park and sought ways of providing assistance. “During one of our discussions,” Mr. Smith recalled, “I noted that additional land for the park could really help them achieve their mission. . . . I advise that, if there was additional land to the south of the existing park boundary, which is separated by a grove of hedge trees. . . . that you would be shielded from that view of highway traffic and the housing development [Pioneer Acres].” As a result, Ms. Shum specified in her will that $124,000 be given to the Friends of Homestead to support purchase of land adjacent to the park that could help provide a visual buffer.

The property to the south of the Homestead National Monument was owned by the Ensz family, who operated a farm on the land. In 1963, the then-owners of the property, the Estate of John Weibe, had contacted the Midwest Regional Office to inquire whether NPS might want to acquire the land, but NPS had no interest at the time.40 Park staff met with the Ensz family in 1998 while preparing the GMP, inquiring whether they might have an interest in donating their land. By that time, NPS was aware of the potential expansion of the park’s boundary to include the new Heritage Center. Because the boundary expansion would require Congressional authorization, it made sense to include any other possible new lands at the same time. At that time, the Ensz family declined to sell since they were contemplating the possibility of selling their land for future development.41 In early 2005, however, in response to Ms. Shum’s bequest, Superintendent Engler and representatives of the Friends of Homestead met again with members

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39 Duane Smith, oral history interview, May 15, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
41 Mark Engler, informal telephone interview with the author, June 12, 2000.
of the Ensz family, who then expressed their interest in selling their farm land that abutted the park. Given the cost of the land, however, which the Ensz family valued at $2,500 per acre, the family announced that they were willing to split off parcels of forty, eighty, or 140 acres to allow for easier purchases as funds were available. The Friends of Homestead agreed to purchase an initial forty acres using the Opal Shum bequest and to pursue funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for additional purchases. The initial purchase was closed on July 31, 2005. Homestead Law Enforcement Ranger Michael Stansberry assisted the Friends of Homestead in preparing a grant request to the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET). In May 2006, the NET announced that it would provide $250,000 to allow the purchase of more of the Ensz’ land. In November 2006, using this grant, the Friends of Homestead closed on 100 acres of the Ensz property bordering Homestead National Monument to the south, while the Ensz’ retained twenty acres (Figure 74). This purchase protected the viewshed generally, helped the park to prevent hunters from gaining access to the park, and allowed better maintenance of the Osage orange hedgerow because the Friends of Homestead property abutted a portion of the hedgerow. The property remains in the hands of the Friends of Homestead while the park awaits passage of legislation to again expand the boundary. Volunteers for Friends of Homestead have worked to maintain the land since by providing limited weed control and planting native grasses.

Figure 74: Land purchased by Friends of Homestead with funds from Shum bequest and Nebraska Environmental Trust, looking north toward Heritage Center, 2018. Photograph by the author.

42 Meeting minutes for the Friends of Homestead provide details regarding the Opal Shum bequest and the Nebraska Environmental Trust grant which allowed for the purchase of the Ensz property; they can be found in Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-II B, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 10. See also Superintendent’s Annual Narratives for 2004, 2005 and 2006; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1. An announcement of the Nebraska Environmental Trust grant was made in a staff meeting on May 11, 2006; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 0001.II.D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 2 Folder 3.

43 Duane Smith, oral history interview.
Since 2006, when the Friends of Homestead acquired 140 acres of the Ensz’ property adjoining the park’s southern boundary, Homestead National Monument staff have identified several other adjoining parcels to include in a boundary expansion. All of the proposed additions of land were prompted in part by the willingness of the landowners to sell or donate their properties. The first parcel to be identified was a 160-acre lot, owned by Graff family who also conveyed a portion of their property to the park for the new Heritage Center. This parcel lies immediately east of the Friends of Homestead Lot and also adjoins the park’s southern boundary. These two abutting parcels, totaling 300 acres, was the subject of boundary expansion legislation introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) in 2007, 2009 and 2011; all three bills died in the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. In 2014 the park completed a Boundary Adjustment Study and Environmental Analysis (EA) which included these two parcels together with two others: a forty-acre lot lying at the park’s northwestern border immediately west of the Education Center, and the twenty-acre parcel which the Ensz’ had reserved in their sale to the Friends of Homestead (Figure 75). Of the forty acres which lay to the west of the Education Center, however, the park owns an easement of nearly six acres along its northern edge bordering on Highway 4, leaving 34.07 acres to be acquired.44

Figure 75: Proposed boundary additions. Source: Boundary Adjustment Study EA, 2014

44 Boundary Adjustment Study: General Management Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment (Homestead National Monument of America, October 2014).
According to the EA, the attempt to expand the park’s boundary was driven primarily by the need to protect resources in the adjoining historic zone of the park, and secondarily to accommodate future visitor uses. The timing of the proposed action was driven in part by the Ensz’ desire to sell and Opal Shum’s death, but also by the need to protect the Osage orange hedgerow and the bur oak forest which surrounds Cub Creek, both of which lie at the park’s southern boundary, and to provide for future needs for infrastructure such as sewer lines and service facilities. The EA included a recommendation that three of the four parcels be included within the park’s expanded boundary. The fourth property, consisting of twenty acres then owned by the Ensz family, was excluded because it did not meet the requirements of being related to park purposes and was not needed either to enhance opportunities for public enjoyment or for operational or management purposes. Despite this recommendation, however, the issue of expanding the park’s boundary has lay dormant since the 2014 EA, and the Nebraska Congressional delegation has not introduced any legislation to expand the park’s boundary since 2011.

The protection of land on the park’s southern boundary through the Friends of Homestead purchase, even though it is not yet within the park boundary, helped ensure the park remains free from direct encroachments. A more pervasive threat to the visual integrity of Homestead National Monument, however, lies in the development of wind power towers. The wide-open prairie with steady winds provides valuable opportunities for the generation of clean electricity with wind turbines, and wind tower farms have been proposed within one mile of the park’s boundaries on all sides since 2013. As a result, Superintendent Engler held extensive meetings with developers, local government officials, community organizations, and news media to convey “the value that Homestead plays and that we provide a sense of time and place, and, representing a sense of time and place, the story is depending on our landscapes, the viewsheds that are around us.” Superintendent Engler recalled further that the vast expansion of the park’s southern boundary proposed by the National Parks Conservation Association in the 1980s was “where this wind farm could be that was eighteen miles long and six miles wide. . . .where they [NPCA] were looking at establishing view sheds. . . .What they projected. . .is now happening!”

Homestead’s work to minimize the adverse effects of wind farms was a team effort. Washington Office External Renewable Energy Specialist Sarah Quinn has been involved, coaching the superintendent and assisting him in meetings with local leaders, environmental groups, and wind developers. Quinn brought to Homestead Mark Meyer, Washington Office Visual Resource Specialist, and Robert Sullivan who is with the Environmental Science Division at the Argonne National Laboratory, to place a value on the park’s scenic vistas. Joining this group to help evaluate the park’s viewshed were Dr. Richard Sutton from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and park staff including Jesse Bolli. This work followed a two-day workshop with staff from NPS sites and others from across the state, including Chimney Rock, who were interested in maintaining their viewsheds.

Engler appeared before Gage, Jefferson, and Lancaster County Commissioners and Planning and Zoning Groups and others to the importance of Homestead’s viewshed. Another important ally in this effort was Pat Pope, President and CEO of Nebraska Public Power District

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45 Mark Engler, oral history interview.
(NPPD). Pope had invited Engler and Regional Director Mike Reynolds to appear before the Southeast Power Board, sharing with leaders from Public Utility Groups the potential impact wind development would have on Homestead. Beyond NPPD, Engler and Midwest Regional Office staff met with Lincoln Public Power District and Omaha Public Power District officials to inform them of the importance viewshed has to Homestead. As potential wind farm development was on Homestead’s doorstep from all directions, the news media followed Homestead’s concerns. The *Lincoln Journal Star* published an editorial in support of the park. Lynn McLure, NPCA President, issued a letter to local papers in support of Homestead’s efforts. During the winter of 2020, the park is again working to educate wind developers and local officials of the importance viewsheds have for Homestead.

The park nearly opened the door to a wind farm precedent, however, in the wake of the Heritage Center opening. In 2009, before the threat of wind farms was realized, Superintendent Engler initiated discussions to install a small wind turbine at the park to generate a relatively small amount of power, 100 to 200 kilowatts. Site planning from the late 1990s, including the GMP (1999) and the Cultural Landscape Report (2000), emphasized reliance on economically sustainable materials and practices. The new orientation of the park’s interpretive program also emphasized awareness of the forward-looking nature of homesteading, and the willingness of homesteaders to adopt new technologies. The installation of a single wind turbine on the park’s grounds was proposed in line with these new directions for the park. Both Regional and WASO officials, however, including the Director of NPS, urged that the proposed wind turbine be scuttled “because we would not want to invite all these windfarms to impact Homestead.” To date, as Superintendent Engler noted, “the wonderful viewshed and the wonderful landscaping around us has not been interrupted” by wind farms.\(^{46}\)

\[^{46}\text{Ibid.}\]
Chapter 12: Management

Staff

Homestead National Monument received its first permanent staff when Clarence H. Schultz entered on duty as Superintendent on October 4, 1940 (Figure 76). Schultz had a background in history and had served as the Junior Historical Technician at Statue of Liberty Historical Park in New York and transferred to Homestead National Monument from a post at Fort McHenry National Monument in Maryland.¹ Schultz took over the direction of the park from Regional Historian Edwin A. Hummel, who had initiated the park’s development in 1939, and continued to develop the park through research and conservation efforts. During this first tour of duty, Schultz managed the early prairie restoration program and oversaw construction of the park’s first building, the Utility Building, in 1941. Schultz was called to military service in World War II and served in the U.S. Army until his return to Homestead National Monument in the winter of 1946. While he was on military furlough, Russell A. Gibbs was appointed Acting Superintendent in November 1942, serving until late September 1944. Gibbs’ activities were severely constrained by a lack of funds, materials, and general support, but he successfully completed a substantial historical research project, producing many chapters of a proposed historical guide for the park. After Gibbs left the park in the late summer of 1944, the Region II Office in Omaha appointed Elmer Hevelone to serve as Acting Custodian for the park. Hevelone was a prominent businessman in Beatrice who had been active in the creation of the park in the 1930s. Hevelone agreed to serve with little pay until Superintendent Schultz returned to duty on February 1, 1946.

¹ https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol4-3k.htm
During his second tour of duty, Superintendent Schultz managed overall development of the park, including continuing efforts to restore the section of prairie in the central and east forties. Schultz led the expansion of staff at the park, starting in 1952 with administrative staff. Nellie Renning served as a temporary Clerk-Typist for two months in the spring of 1952. In June 1953, Schultz hired Evelyn Carlson as a temporary Clerk-Typist. Carlson advanced steadily during her years of service at the park, promoted to the permanent Clerk-Stenographer position in July 1960, then being named Administrative Assistant in March 1963. She remained the Administrative Assistant until she retired from the National Park Service in January 1981. Schultz also hired the first seasonal interpreter in the summer of 1952, James Kinne. Schultz oversaw the work of seasonal workers while also serving as the principal interpreter in addition to his other duties. Schultz typically hired school teachers as seasonal guides, some of them returning for several summers in a row.

In 1953, Schultz also took part in the negotiations that resulted in the removal of Highway 4 from the center of the park to its current alignment and coordinated with the Region II Office to issue the first Special Use Permit to the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation in 1953. Finally, Schultz was responsible for the identification of the Palmer-Epard Cabin as suitable for interpretation at the park, coordinated its removal to Homestead National Monument in 1950, and took part in its restoration. Schultz transferred to George Washington Carver National Monument in Missouri in May 1954 as that park’s Superintendent.

Figure 77: Superintendent George Blake (L) with Regional Historian Ray Mattison (R), 1954. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun
Two Acting Superintendents, Ray H. Mattison and Fred Dickenson, oversaw the operations of Homestead National Monument from May 1954 until September 1954, when George C. Blake entered on duty as Superintendent. Blake had a background as a park ranger, having served at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico and then at Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky before transferring to Homestead National Monument (Figure 77). Blake’s tour of duty was short; in April 1956, he transferred to Moores Creek National Military Park in North Carolina. During his brief tenure, Blake oversaw the initial development of the park’s Mission 66 plan and spurred the development of a self-guiding trail through prairie. Blake was replaced by Ralph K. Shaver, who entered on duty on April 8, 1956 (Figure 78). Prior to arriving at Homestead, Shaver served as the District Ranger at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. While serving as Homestead National Monument Superintendent, Shaver oversaw planning for the park’s Mission 66 development and hired the park’s first historian, Donald G. Warman (Figure 79). Warman served two years in the U.S. Army before returning to graduate school, receiving his Master of Arts degree in History in 1957. Warman’s work focused on two areas: managing the park’s interpretive program and leading the process of cataloging of the park’s collections for the first time. Shaver took part in and helped to guide this first collection management program, while he also led the installation of the park’s first audio-visual display in the Utility Building.

Figure 78: Superintendent Ralph Shaver (center) with Superintendent George Blake (right) and Regional Administrative Officer Neal Castro, 1956. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun
Shaver remained at Homestead until February 1959, when he was appointed District Ranger at Glacier National Park in Montana. Historian Donald Warman briefly served as Acting Superintendent until late April 1959, when Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss entered on duty (Figure 80). Hotchkiss began working with NPS in 1948, when he entered on duty as a Ranger at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Prior to arriving at Homestead National Monument, Superintendent Hotchkiss served as Personnel Officer and then as Management Assistant at Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. Hotchkiss served at a pivotal time in the history of Homestead National Monument, overseeing the execution of the park’s Mission 66 development that included construction of the Visitor Center with its new exhibit, construction of the Cub Creek foot bridge, expansion of the self-guided trail through the prairie, and new interpretive wayside signs throughout the park. Superintendent Hotchkiss left Homestead National Monument in May 1963, to serve as Superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park in North Dakota.

Historian Donald Warman remained on staff through completion of the museum cataloging process and initial planning for the new exhibit in the Visitor Center Museum. He also prepared a draft of the park’s Historical Handbook. He departed in August 1961, however, after accepting a teaching position at Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, where he remained until he retired in 2003. His position remained vacant until July 1962, when Superintendent Hotchkiss hired Cecil Halliday as Historian (Figure 81). Formerly a high school principal and history teacher in South Dakota, Halliday remained on staff for less than a year, departing in February 1963 to accept a teaching position in the Special Education Department of the Beatrice Public
Schools. Superintendent Hotchkiss then hired Thomas Walsh to serve as park Historian in early March 1963. Walsh, who had a Masters Degree in History from the University of Nebraska, continued to oversee the park’s research and interpretive program and made an initial attempt at revising Historian Warman’s initial Historical Handbook.

Following Superintendent Hotchkiss’ departure in May 1963, Historian Walsh served as Acting Superintendent until Superintendent Vernon Hennesay entered on duty in September 1963 (Figure 82). Hennesay had most recently served as Management Assistant at Oregon Caves National Monument in Oregon, having previously served as Supervisory Park Ranger at Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado and at Sequoia National Park in California. Hennesay’s tenure was brief: he left in July 1965 to serve as Supervisory Park Ranger at Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri, a new park created in 1964. While at Homestead National Monument, Hennesay oversaw construction of the second employee’s residence, inaugurated the park’s Winter Film Series, and led the initial feasibility planning efforts for Freeman School. Hennesay also hired the park’s first full-time permanent Maintenance Worker, Raymond (Gene) Norman. Norman remained on staff for nearly two decades, retiring at the same time as Administrative Assistant Evelyn Carlson in January 1981.

Superintendent John F. Rohn, Jr. entered on duty as Superintendent in August 1965, replacing Hennesay (Figure 83). Superintendent Rohn began his career as a school teacher and
Figure 81: Historian Cecil Halliday, 1962. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun

Figure 82: Superintendent Vernon Hennesay, 1965. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun
first worked with NPS in 1948 as a seasonal park ranger at Everglades National Park in Florida. After serving as a ranger at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming and Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota, Rohn served as a recreation planner at the Region Two Office in Omaha, followed by an appointment as Management Assistant at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. Prior to arriving at Homestead National Monument, Rohn was serving as Assistant Chief of Branch of Publications and Public Inquiries at the NPS Washington Office. Rohn also served a relatively short term at Homestead National Monument, leaving in June 1968 for health reasons. During his time, however, he finalized feasibility planning for acquisition of Freeman School.

In September 1966, during Superintendent Rohn’s tenure, Historian Thomas Walsh left Homestead National Monument to take a teaching position. In his place, Rohn hired Leonard A. Brown, who arrived at the Monument after completing a training course at the Horace M. Albright National Park Service Training Center in Arizona. Brown remained at Homestead only three months, transferring to the NPS Washington office in December 1966. He was replaced immediately by L. Clifford Soubier, who also came to the park from the Horace M. Albright National Park Service Training Center. Soubier, under Superintendent Rohn’s direction, helped the park move toward greater environmental awareness at Homestead National Monument, bringing concepts of the natural prairie ecosystem into the park’s interpretive program and setting the stage for the park’s living history program. Soubier left the park in November 1969, first taking the position of Historian at what is now Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Monument before beginning a career as an interpretive planner, first at the Denver Service Center and then at the Harpers Ferry Center.

Superintendent Rohn left Homestead National Monument in June 1968, and his successor, John F. Higgins, did not enter on duty until late April 1969. During this interim, Homestead National Monument had the distinction of having one of the first women superintendents in NPS history when Administrative Assistant Evelyn Carlson served as Acting Superintendent; in 1968, only two women had been appointed superintendents of National Park System units, with a third having served as an Acting Superintendent (Figure 84). The principal focus during this time was the addition of Freeman School to the park, legislation for which was then working its way through Congress, together with advances in the park’s interpretive planning. Carlson also managed the park during a damaging flood. John Higgins entered on duty as Superintendent on April 23, 1969, having served in various western parks for nearly two decades. He came to Homestead National Monument from Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, where he served as Management Assistant. In the news accounts of his arrival, the local newspaper consistently pointed out that Administrative Assistant Carlson had served as Acting Superintendent for nearly a year. Superintendent Higgins presented Administrative Assistant Carlson with a Special Achievement Award for her work as Acting Superintendent; according to the Beatrice Daily Sun, “The additional responsibility of the acting assignment coupled with the flood emergency created an unusually heavy workload and Mrs. Carlson donated an untold number of hours of overtime to provide a continuation of normal service to the Monument visitor.”

Figure 84: Administrative Officer Evelyn Carlson and Superintendent John Higgins, 1969. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun

3 The first two female NPS Superintendents were Gertrude Cooper at Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, New York (appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940) and Wilhelmina Harris at Adams National Historic Site, Massachusetts, who was appointed at the recommendation of the Adams family in 1950 and served until 1970. In addition, Margaret Patterson served as Acting Superintendent at Andrew Johnson National Historic Site, Tennessee in late 1942 and early 1943, then serving as Custodian in the spring of 1943. See Polly Welts Kaufman, National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996; paperback edition, 1998), 149

4 “Special Achievement Award,” photograph caption in Beatrice Daily Sun, August 8, 1969, page 11.
Superintendent Higgins remained at the site until 1971, when he accepted the position of Superintendent at Platte National Park in Oklahoma, now a component of Chickasaw National Recreation Area. During his tenure, Congress added the Freeman School property to Homestead National Monument, and Higgins coordinated early efforts to secure scenic easements between the Visitor Center and Freeman School. Higgins was also instrumental in the park’s first prescribed burn in 1970. In addition, Superintendent Higgins hired Fahy Whitaker as Historian to replace Historian Soubier, who departed the park in November 1969 (Figure 85). Whitaker was a native of California, trained at the Horace M. Albright National Park Service Training Center in Arizona before being assigned to work at Independence National Historical Park in Pennsylvania. In choosing to work at Homestead National Monument, she became one of the few women park Historians in NPS at the time. Whitaker remained Homestead National Monument Historian for a year, transferring in December 1970 to Moores Creek National Military Park in North Carolina, where she also worked as Historian. Whitaker later went on to have a long career as a Superintendent, serving at William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Ohio, Nez Perce National Park in Idaho, and Edison National Historic Site in New Jersey.

![Figure 85: Historian Fahy Whitaker, 1969. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun](image)

To replace Historian Whitaker, Superintendent Higgins hired Roger L. Pearson, who entered on duty December 16, 1970. Pearson, who arrived at Homestead National Monument after serving for three years as Historian at Grand Portage National Monument in Minnesota, remained at the park until August 1976, helping to oversee implementation of the living history

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5 Unfortunately, no Superintendent’s Annual Reports for the years 1968 to 1971 could be located during the current research.
After Superintendent Higgins left the park in 1971, he was replaced by Vincent Halvorson (Figure 86). Halvorson joined NPS in 1967 after graduation from the University of North Dakota with a Bachelor’s degree in social sciences. He worked as a historian-trainee at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in Georgia and Tennessee and then as Assistant Historian at Fort Sumter National Monument in South Carolina. Despite his age, only 26 years old when he was named Superintendent at Homestead National Monument, Halvorson proved himself a capable leader who guided the park through a revolution in its interpretation program which he accompanied with a vigorous training program for staff, including installation of living history programming first introduced for the Nation’s bicentennial. During his tenure, the park developed a living history program which incorporated awareness of environmental history and the integration of natural and cultural history. Halvorson also oversaw the development and diversification of park staff, shifting its orientation to include increased attention to natural resource management. Halvorson led development of the park’s first natural resource planning program, including support for prairie management studies by Roger O. Landers, Jr. which recommended regular controlled burns as an effective tool for prairie restoration. In 1977, Halvorson oversaw creation of the park’s first Prairie Management Plan, followed, in 1979, by a broader Natural Resources Management Plan. These plans laid the groundwork for the park’s long-standing prescribed burn program, which began in 1983. In addition, Halvorson oversaw extensive work at the Freeman School and major restoration work with the Palmer-Epard Cabin.
Park staff began to expand under Superintendent Halvorson. When he entered on duty in 1971, there were four full-time positions at Homestead National Monument: Superintendent, Historian, Administrative Assistant, and Maintenance Worker, which were supplemented by seasonal maintenance and interpretive staff. After Historian Roger Pearson left the park in 1976, he was replaced quickly by William O. Fink, Park Ranger, with responsibility for natural resources and interpretation. A year later, in 1977, Halvorson hired Ramon (Ray) Brende to serve as Park Technician on a subject-to-furlough basis assisting Fink. Superintendent Halvorson in 1977 began referring to the Interpretation and Resource Management (I&RM) program at the park, indicating his inclination to incorporate the park’s natural and cultural resources. In 1978, Halvorson hired Ralph L. Kerl as a full-time Maintenance Worker and assistant to Maintenance Worker Raymond Norman.

The park faced rapid and significant turnover of staff in the early 1980s. Ranger William Fink departed on September 20, 1980, transferring to Friendship Hill National Historic Site in Pennsylvania to serve as Ranger-in-Charge. Park Technician Ray Brende was temporarily promoted to serve as acting head of the I&RM division; he was named the permanent Chief of I&RM in January 1981. Because of budget restrictions, Brende’s Park Technician position remained unfilled through late 1980 and early 1981. According to the 1981 Superintendent’s Annual Report, most of the Park Technician duties “were placed in the capable hands of a long time seasonal Park Technician, GS-4 Mark Engler.”

In addition, Administrative Assistant Evelyn Carlson and Maintenance Supervisor Gene Norman both retired, effective in January 1981. In response, Superintendent Halvorson hired Patricia A. Mitchell as Administrative Technician, who entered on duty on March 23, 1981. Mitchell had previously served at Wupatki National Monument in Arizona and the Midwest Archeological Center in Lincoln. On July 28, 1981, Donald A. LaDeaux entered on duty as the new Maintenance Supervisor. LaDeaux came to Homestead National Monument after serving as Park Ranger at Coulee Dam (now Lake Roosevelt) National Recreation Area in Washington. Finally, Halvorson hired Park Technician Dianne Bigge, who entered on duty on September 20, 1981. Bigge, who had previously worked at Independence National Historical Park in Pennsylvania, had primary responsibility for the park’s interpretive program.

Changes in park staff continued into the early 1980s. Superintendent Halvorson left Homestead National Monument in November 1982, becoming Superintendent of Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota. According to the Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1982, “Vince left a well organized, well maintained park with a capable, highly motivated staff which speaks well for his 12 years of leadership.”

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6 The Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1977 is the first time that this organizational approach is mentioned; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 23.
7 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1981; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 27.
8 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1982; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 28.
on duty. Baynes had been Assistant Chief Ranger at Shenandoah National Park in Virginia before transferring to Homestead National Monument. Two months after he arrived at the park, Superintendent Baynes hired Virginia Beard to serve as Park Technician, replacing Dianne Bigge. Beard had previously served at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan and William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Ohio and entered on duty at Homestead National Monument April 17, 1983. 

In August 1983, Superintendent Baynes hired John Seger as Maintenance Worker. Seger, who arrived from Dinosaur National Monument in Utah, remained at the site for more than two decades.

Superintendent Baynes maintained the staff organization that brought natural resources, cultural resources, and interpretation within a Division of Interpretation and Resource Management, consisting of a Chief of I&RM, who had primarily a natural resource focus, and a Park Technician, who oversaw interpretation and cultural resource activities. Patricia Mitchell remained as Administrative Assistant, while the Maintenance Division had a Foreman and a Maintenance Worker. These six permanent, full-time positions were supplemented by seasonal staff including park technicians, for both interpretation and resource management, seasonal laborers, and a seasonal clerk-typist.

During Superintendent Baynes’ term, he oversaw the growing natural resource component of the park’s management, including annual prescribed burns of the restored prairie. In addition, he led development of the park’s first General Management Plan, the first comprehensive management plan for the park since the early 1960s. In April 1985, Chief of I&RM Ray Brende accepted a transfer to Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Louisiana, and was replaced by Richard Williams, who transferred from Cape Lookout National Seashore in North Carolina and entered on duty in July 1985. At the same time, Maintenance Foreman Donald LaDeaux accepted a position as WRRO Exhibits Specialist and was replaced by Kevin McMurry, who entered on duty in August 1985.

Superintendent Baynes continued the management organization developed by Superintendent Halvorson in the 1970s through 1986. In 1987, however, he added two new positions: a part-time Clerk-Typist (Martha Scheiding, who entered on duty June 1987) and a subject-to-furlough Park Ranger (Resource Management), which was filled by Gary Sullivan, who had worked as a seasonal technician for several years. The Park Technician position, meanwhile, was recreated as a Park Ranger (Interpretation) position, held successively by Kelley Collins, Shirley Hoh, Gwendolyn Parrett, Rebecca Dahle, and Laura Appler from the mid-1980s into the early 1990s. Chief Ranger Richard Williams left Homestead National Monument in August 1991, accepting a transfer and promotion to the National Trails Office in Wisconsin. He was replaced by John Batzer, a forester by training, who had recently served at Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico; he entered on duty in September 1991. Within the Administrative Staff, meanwhile, Administrative Clerk Martha Scheding took a promotion and transfer to Curecanti National Recreation Area in Colorado in December 1990. She was replaced

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9 Press Release, April 21, 1983; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 6.

10 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1983; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 29.
in April 1991 by Administrative Clerk (who later became Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management) Susan Cook.

In 1986, Superintendent Baynes was tasked with responding to the most serious threat faced by the park in its history. In 1984, the Department of the Interior’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an investigation of the Midwest Regional Office and several parks, including Homestead National Monument. The report of this investigation, issued in draft form in 1985, found numerous problem areas in the financial operations at the regional level, together with operational and procedural problems in the parks. For Homestead National Monument, the report questioned the need for the growth in number of employees from 1975 to 1985, given a corresponding lack in new developments. The report took particular issue with the need for two maintenance staff and claimed that the park’s museum collection was too large and was not managed properly. Superintendent Baynes provided a strong defense of the park and its management. With regard to staffing levels, he pointed out that many of the employees noted by the OIG inspector were either seasonal employees or were Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) students. In addition, he explained that the park had additional requirements for natural and cultural resource management that were not present in 1975, the base year used by the OIG inspector. As Baynes replied to the Regional Director after reviewing a draft of the report in 1985,

> While we could easily have hired fewer people using the same amount of FTE [full-time equivalent, a measure of the total number of paid hours allotted to a park within an annual budget] (hired fewer people, worked them longer) our needs are primarily in the summer time. The OIG should have spoken to overall FTE allocation rather than numbers of employees. Total FTE’s available have not changed all that much since 1975, but the way they are used has.\(^\text{11}\)

The portion of the OIG report that garnered the most public attention, however, was a recommendation that NPS consider entering into cooperating agreements or other arrangements to have non-federal organizations operate smaller units of the National Park System. The purpose of such an arrangement would be to reduce federal expenditures at parks with low visitation and/or small acreages. The OIG report identified four units in the Midwest Region as examples: Harry S Truman National Historic Site in Missouri; Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in Iowa; Grand Portage National Monument in Minnesota; and Homestead National Monument. In the course of their investigations, OIG contacted the Nebraska State Historical Society, which operated Chimney Rock National Historic Site in a cooperative agreement with NPS through Scotts Bluff National Monument in Nebraska, and the State Game and Parks Commission, which operated Rock Creek Station State Historical Park. Both agencies operated historic sites of similar scale as Homestead National Monument, and both apparently told the OIG inspectors that management of Homestead National Monument was a possibility for them.

In April 1986, however, Superintendent Baynes and the Superintendent of Scotts Bluff National Monument met with Nebraska State Historical Society Executive Director James Hanson to discuss the possibility of a contractual arrangement under which the Historical Society

\(^{11}\) Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument to Regional Director, Midwest Region, May 8, 1985; Files of Homestead NM, F4217.
would manage Homestead National Monument. Hanson was unequivocal in his response that the Historical Society had no interest in taking on responsibility for the management of Homestead National Monument, as the Historical Society was “extended as far as it can presently go in managing branch museums.”

As former Deputy Midwest Regional Director David Given recalled, “Homestead is instructive in that the people who were proposing this had no clue as to how the state park system worked. . . . It didn’t make any sense at all. The state had no interest.”

At the same time, the suggested alternative management arrangements of Homestead National Monument and the other park generated public and Congressional outrage because it was popularly identified as a threat that the parks would be closed. As Given recalled, “the uproar over the list. . . . from Congress and by supporters of National Parks was immediate and large. . . . and it never went anywhere.”

In May 1986, Rep. Bereuter, who served on the House subcommittee which oversaw NPS, issued a statement that he had been assured by NPS and Department of the Interior officials that neither had plans to transfer management of Homestead National Monument out of the National Park System. The following month a group of Congressmen headed by Bruce Vento (D-MN), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation, sent a strongly-worded letter to Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel, referencing “a proposal by the Department of the Interior to divest itself of several units of the National Park Service.” In the letter, the Congressmen took issue with the proposal, which went against the will of Congress in creating the four units of the National Park System, arguing that “its very consideration constitutes an abuse of the Inspector General’s authority, as it denies the importance bestowed on these historic sites when Congress authorized them.” As all four parks were in the Midwest Region, the proposal to transfer their administration to non-federal agencies, the Congressmen argued, reflects “the idea that western trade and settlement and the presidency as an institution are all of such minor significance to our nation’s history that they need not be part of our National Park System.”

Later that summer, in August 1986, Midwest Regional Director Charles Odegaard summarized the responses from non-federal organizations that were mentioned in relation to all four of the targeted units in a memorandum to the Department of the Interior’s Inspector General. None of the non-federal organizations mentioned in the OIG report expressed any interest in taking responsibility for the parks, thus making the issue moot. However, Regional Director Odegaard noted that each of the four parks either had undergone or was about to take part in operations evaluations that would allow the region to address the specific issues identified at each park.

With that, the possible removal of Homestead National Monument from the National Park System was put to rest.

Superintendent Baynes, in addition to his duties at Homestead National Monument and responding to the OIG report, was frequently called to consult on management issues throughout the Midwest Region. In particular, he led the feasibility study team that recommended the addition of Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Kansas to the National Park

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12 Meeting report in Memorandum, Superintendent, Scotts Bluff and Agate Fossil Beds to Regional Director, Midwest Region, April 25, 1986; Files of Homestead NM, F4217.
13 David Given, oral history interview, June 27, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
14 Ibid.
15 Bruce Vento et al. to The Honorable Donald Paul Hodel, June 6, 1986; Files of Homestead NM, F4217.
16 Memorandum, Regional Director, Midwest Region to Inspector General, Department of the Interior, August 1, 1986; Files of Homestead NM, F4217.
System in early 1993. He was also involved in planning the 150th Anniversary of the Oregon Trail, the Chimney Rock National Historic Site visitor center, and others. Sadly, Superintendent Baynes suffered a stroke while at Homestead National Monument and died at Bryan Memorial Hospital in Lincoln on May 19, 1993. Former Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management Susan Cook, who was on staff at the time of Baynes’ death, recalled that Chief Park Ranger John Batzer served as Acting Superintendent “for a while, because they were trying to let us heal before they brought somebody else into this.”

His position was finally filled in September 1993, when Superintendent Constantine Dillon entered on duty (Figure 87). Dillon, who had a dual career in film as the creator and writer of the popular *Killer Tomatoes* series of movies, came to Homestead National Monument from Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in California where he served as Chief of Interpretation. In his fourteen years with NPS, Dillon had developed a strong reputation for interpretation. He recalled that Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry had heard of him and thought that the Superintendent position at Homestead National Monument would be a good fit:

He’d heard of me, both because, I guess, my interpretation and because of my movie career. He was a fan of my movies. And I saw him at a conference after that and gave him a tee shirt from one of my movies, so, I used to joke with people I’m the only Superintendent who bribed his way to a Superintendent job with a *Killer Tomato* tee shirt.
Chapter 9 recounts the fundamental shift in interpretive priorities which Superintendent Dillon led during his service at Homestead National Monument. His approach, which placed a far greater focus on the need to interpret the broad history of homesteading and its role in Western settlement, was based on his study of documents from the park’s founding in the 1930s. In addition to instilling a new vision for the park and its interpretive strategy, Superintendent Dillon took advantage of changes in the approach to management throughout the federal government in the 1990s to reorganize the ranger positions as they had evolved from Superintendent Halvorson and Superintendent Baynes’ terms. In March 1993, President William Clinton instituted the National Performance Review, which was a government-wide study of management with the goal of “reinventing government” so that it would be more efficient and responsive. Drawing in part from management practices that had been evolving in the private sector for more than a decade, leaders of the National Performance Review emphasized identification of core missions for each agency and management practices that would be needed to achieve specific goals related to those missions. The implications of this program were wide-ranging and dramatic, leading to a reorientation of many federal programs and how they worked with employees and with those who used government services. The National Performance Review program was later manifested in the Government Performance Results Act (GRPA) of 1993.

Superintendent Dillon’s arrival at Homestead National Monument coincided with this revolution in federal management practices, and his reorientation of the park’s mission, which he cast as returning the park to its roots, gained force from these broader changes in the federal government. In place of separate divisions for Park Rangers and Maintenance, Superintendent Dillon created a single Operations Division in October 1995. This change, he explained, “resulted in an increased supervisor/employee ratio as called for in the National Performance Review.” Within the Operations Division, Dillon established the positions of Resource Management Specialist and Historian, though both positions remained unfunded and unfilled during his tenure. In line with new NPS guidelines, Superintendent Dillon also changed the position of Administrative Manager to a higher-grade Administrative Officer. Betty Boyko, who had entered on duty as Administrative Technician in November 1993, was promoted to the new position of Administrative Manager while the Administrative Clerk position held by Susan Cook was re-described as Secretary. Supervisory Park Ranger John Batzer, meanwhile, left the park in April 1995, taking a position at Capulin Volcano National Monument in New Mexico. In his place, Superintendent Dillon hired Beverly Albrecht to serve as Supervisory Ranger and later as Chief of Operations. Albrecht, who entered on duty in July 1995, had previously served at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in Indiana and Colonial National Historical Park in Virginia, and came to Homestead National Monument from William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Ohio.

During his term, Superintendent Dillon instituted several major changes and programs, including overseeing a Long-Range Interpretation Plan and laying the groundwork for a new General Management Plan and a Cultural Landscape Plan. He saw the need for a new building, outside the 100-year floodplain where the Visitor Center was located, to house new exhibits and

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20 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1995; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40.
a collection of papers and records related to homesteading. Superintendent Dillon was also active in reestablishing close connections with the City of Beatrice, developing activities in coordination with the Beatrice Public Library, the Gage County Museum, and the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce. He was instrumental establishing an education program at Homestead National Monument, securing funding through the NPS Parks as Classroom program to begin developing curricula which teachers could use for visits to the park. Moreover, Dillon spurred the re-establishment of a friends group for the park. The original friends group lapsed in 1973 when the Homestead Historical Association yielded its responsibilities for the educational bookstore to Eastern National Park and Monument Association, now the park’s Cooperating Association. As described later in this chapter, the Friends of Homestead was organized as a friends group in 1994, and gained an independent charter in 2002.

Superintendent Dillon departed Homestead National Monument in April 1997, after less than four years in the position, to serve as Superintendent at Fire Island National Seashore in New York. He was succeeded by Superintendent Mark Engler, who entered on duty on September 14, 1997 (Figure 88). Superintendent Engler, a native of Beatrice who began his NPS career in 1977 as a seasonal laborer at Homestead National Monument for one year before being hired as a park technician. Prior to returning to Homestead National Monument in 1997, Engler served as Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in Missouri for seven years. He came to the park when the programs and planning processes Superintendent Dillon put in motion were on the verge of being implemented. His first task was to coordinate preparation of the park’s second General Management Plan in a decade. He was active in soliciting input from the local community, including vigorous involvement by the Friends of Homestead, and generated widespread support for the results of the GMP, which included construction of a new Heritage Center on land lying east of the existing park boundary.

Figure 88: Superintendent Mark Engler, 2019. Photography by the author
Superintendent Engler’s second goal was to examine the park’s staff organization to determine if the Operations Division which Superintendent Dillon had instituted remained viable. The staff organization remained in place through 2001, but, when Chief of Operations Albrecht departed the park in 2001, Engler eliminated the position and hired Denise Germann as the park’s Supervisory Ranger. Since then the park has featured an organization chart that includes three principal divisions: Administration, Interpretation/Resource Management, and Facility Management (Figures 89 and 90). Germann had worked for more than a decade with NPS and the U.S. Forest Service, primarily as a public affairs specialist. Germann left Homestead National Monument in 2004, and was not replaced until September 2005, when Superintendent Engler hired Merrith Baughman to serve as Supervisory Park Ranger. Baughman began her NPS career at Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota and was serving as Supervisory Park Ranger at Jewel Cave National Monument in South Dakota when she was hired by Engler. In the interim before Baughman entered on duty, the park’s ranger functions were divided between Park Ranger (Law Enforcement) Michael Stansberry, who entered on duty in June 2000, and Park Ranger (Interpretation) Amy Garrett, who entered on duty in 2002. As the Ranger most directly involved with the park’s interpretative program, Park Ranger Garrett was primarily responsible for the park’s education program, particularly for coordination with the State of Nebraska Educational Service unit for delivery of distance learning content. In 2003, Garrett was awarded the national Freeman Tilden Award for interpretation. She remained on staff until the summer of 2006, when she departed to serve as the Education Specialist at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site in Arkansas. Stansberry, meanwhile, remained on staff until 2008 when he left to serve as Deputy Chief Ranger at Yosemite National Park in California. Baughman remained on staff until 2013, when she departed to serve as Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan.
Baughmann was succeeded by Andrea Bornemeier, who transferred to Homestead from Pipe Spring National Monument, Arizona in May 2014. She remained in this position until 2016. In 2016, Superintendent Engler promoted long-time employee Susan Cook to the position of Chief Ranger (Figure 91). Cook entered on duty at Homestead National Monument in 1991 as an Administrative Clerk, and had been promoted to the position of Administrative Manager on a temporary basis in 1999. She was promoted to the position of Visitor Use Assistant in 2000, where she served until 2007 while also serving as the Volunteer Coordinator. In 2007, she was appointed as Park Ranger (Interpretation). In July 2019, Cook accepted a position as Chief of Interpretation at Niobrara National Scenic River, Nebraska. The park went without a Supervisory Park Ranger until February 2020 when Amy Genke transferred to Homestead from Natchez Trace Parkway, Mississippi.

While at his previous post at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Engler was part of the team assembled to start planning for the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. With Engler’s transfer to Homestead National Monument, Regional Director Schenk asked him, in addition to leading Homestead, to also serve as superintendent for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial effort. As part of the agreement, Homestead received funding to elevate Betty Boyko to Deputy Superintendent because, as Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Program, Engler was often on travel meeting with tribal leaders and officials with state and federal government agencies.
Funding directed to Homestead under Engler’s agreement to superintend the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Program was also to provide for the hiring of an additional clerk. Sue Bruns, therefore, was first hired under an emergency hire authority. Sue Bruns entered on duty in 1999 as Administrative Clerk (Temporary) and was made permanent staff in 2000. By 2002, Bruns was serving as the park’s Administrative Officer, a position that she held for nearly two decades before retiring in December 2019. During her tenure at Homestead National Monument, Bruns was also called upon to serve as Acting Administrative Officer at Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska, as Acting Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Kansas, and to lead the administrative functions of Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas. Among her accomplishments, Bruns developed a method to track the documentation of safety training at the park. In 2014, during her tenure as Acting Superintendent when Superintendent Engler was serving as Acting Deputy Regional Director, Bruns was alerted that NPS Director Jon Jarvis would visit the park. The purpose of his visit, only the third time that an NPS Director visited Homestead National Monument, was to present the park with the Andrew Clark Hecht Memorial Public Safety Award.

In 2002, through the National Resource Challenge Initiative, Superintendent Engler hired Jesse Bolli to serve as the park’s first Resource Management Specialist. Bolli was serving at Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida before entering on duty at Homestead National Monument. Bolli took on responsibility for management of the park’s natural resources, including overseeing contractors for the preparation of studies and managing the park’s prescribed burns and
vegetation management. He also managed the development of educational programs related to natural resources. The Resource Management position is funded through the Natural Resource Challenge and is a subject-to-furlough position.

When he arrived at the park in 1993, Superintendent Dillon clearly saw that Homestead National Monument needed to regain its interpretive focus on the history of homesteading and its fundamental role in the history of Western settlement. He also sought to expand the scope of the study of homesteading, turning it away from a narrow focus on the pioneers of the late nineteenth century and toward its role in immigration, its connection to agricultural and industrial progress, and its impact on American Indians. Homestead National Monument, in Superintendent Dillon’s vision, should be a center for historical research on homesteading, broadly conceived. Superintendent Engler inherited and shared this vision and has worked to implement it. One of the key factors in this reorientation of the park has been having a park Historian for the first time since the mid-1970s. When he entered on duty as Superintendent in 1997, Engler had no budget documents in place to hire a historian. With funds made available to the park through the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, Superintendent Engler hired Benjamin (Todd) Arrington as an intern in September 1999. In 2000, Arrington’s position was made permanent. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 9, the park hired Dr. John Matzgo, Professor of History at Bob Jones University in South Carolina, to lead the planning efforts for the land records project. Dr. Matzgo took the lead in coordinating the park’s participation in the Land Records project, discussed in Chapter 9, assisted with the Heritage Center exhibits, and coordinated several symposia pertaining to research on homesteading topics. Historian Arrington, meanwhile, worked with Matzgo on these projects. In his research on behalf of the park, he focused on the role of African Americans in the history of homesteading, including the settlement of Nicodemus, Kansas. Arrington remained on staff until April 2009, and was replaced in February 2010 by Blake Bell, who remained on staff until 2015. Bell was succeeded as Historian first by Daniel Ott, who served from September 2015 until May 2016. Robert Murcell then served as Historian from February 2017 until February 2019. The current Historian, Jonathan Fairchild, entered on duty in February 2019.

Superintendent Engler placed a strong emphasis on collections management and development of an archival collection. Much of this work has been conducted by Museum Technicians on term positions using Collection Management Program funds, though the park had a permanent Curator for several years. In April 1999, Engler hired Museum Technician Ted Volkmer as a term employee to assist with backlog items on the park’s museum checklist. The next year, Volkmer was promoted to a permanent Park Ranger (Interpretation) position, and Museum Technician Linda Hulvershorn entered on duty as a term employee. In 2001, Superintendent Engler supplemented the work of Hulvershorn with an Archivist and a second Museum Technician for short-term projects with the collection management staff. Museum Technician Christy Sweet then served as a term employee from 2002 to 2003. No funds were available for the position in 2004, but, in 2005, Museum Technician Keely Rennie-Tucker entered on duty with funds provided by the NPS Cultural Resources Preservation Program (CRPP). Rennie-Tucker remained on staff through 2008 as a term employee, providing invaluable service throughout 2007 in preparing the park’s collection for relocation from the Visitor Center to the new Heritage Center. This work included moving, unpacking, and installing
objects in the new facility’s storage room and in the new exhibits. In 2008, Rennie-Tucker transferred to MWRO to serve as a staff Curator in the Midwest Region Museum Program.

The park received increases in its base funding in 2007 and 2008, reflecting the increased scope of activities associated with the new Heritage Center. In 2009, Superintendent Engler hired Jason Jurgena to serve as the park’s first Curator. Curator Jurgena oversaw management of the park’s collections, including its growing archival collection, and, in 2012, was instrumental in cooperating with NARA to prepare the park to receive on temporary loan all four pages of the original Homestead Act as signed by President Lincoln. The document was displayed as part of the park’s celebration of the sesquicentennial of the Homestead Act of 1862. Jurgena remained on staff until 2013, when automatic budget cuts resulting from the federal government’s budget sequestration forced Superintendent Engler to eliminate the position. The budget has not yet fully recovered, and Engler hired only seasonal Museum Technicians from 2016 to 2018 to manage the park’s archival and artifact collection. In 2019, he created a subject-to-furlough, part-time Museum Technician position, which was filled by Amy Neumann who first began working at the park as an intern in 2014.

Friends Groups, Cooperating Associations, and Community Relations

Homestead National Monument has benefited immensely from long-standing relationships with friends groups and a Cooperating Association. Private citizens and organizations have supported national parks through donations of time and money since the early twentieth century, helping to staff and fund educational and interpretive programs that parks were not able to fund through their government budgets. By the 1930s, nonprofit companies began providing support to parks by operating educational bookstores and sharing the proceeds with the parks to fund special programs. These companies operate their businesses as cooperating associations, a relationship established in 1946 under P.L. 79-633, the National Park Service Functions Act. This law allowed cooperating associations to operate facilities on NPS property but required that items for sale be directly related to the interpretation of the park and directed the means by which proceeds would be shared.

Homestead National Monument’s first friends organization also served as the park’s cooperating association. In early 1960, with Mission 66 planning in full swing, Superintendent Hotchkiss began planning with community leaders regarding a community-wide celebration of the Homestead Act’s centennial anniversary. As part of this increased community interaction, the Superintendent and Historian Warman also began coordinating with the Regional Chief of Interpretation regarding the formation of a cooperating association for the park. Superintendent Hotchkiss and Historian Warman worked with local supporters of the park through the winter and spring of 1960 to form the Homestead Historical Association, “which will permit the wider circulation of information concerning homesteaders and homesteading, and will further interest in American history, particularly the history of the American West.”

21 Press Release “Busy 98th Anniversary Slated for Homestead National Monument,” May 17, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1. See also Memorandum, Regional Chief of Interpretation, Region Two to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, February 29, 1960; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 2 Folder 8.
Association (HHA) was formally organized in 1961. According to the HHA’s constitution, the organization’s purpose was to “assist in the historical, educational, interpretive and scientific activities of the National Park Service, especially at Homestead National Monument.” In particular, the HHA would support the park through helping to educate the public about homesteading, publishing literature pertaining to homesteading, assisting in the collection and preservation of library materials and artifacts for the park, acquiring non-federal lands on behalf of NPS, and providing financial assistance for programs and other activities at Homestead National Monument. Under the constitution and by-laws, the park’s Historian was to serve as the group’s executive secretary. Dues were set at one dollar per year for individuals, with higher dues for life memberships and institutional sponsors.22

The first meeting of the new group was held on June 29, 1961.23 The evening meeting, held on the park grounds near the Palmer-Epard Cabin “to the music of buzzing mosquitoes,” formally established the organization by ratifying the constitution and by-laws and electing officers. Claude Dell, a farmer and cattle dealer, was chosen as Chairman; Percy Lemon as Treasurer, and Robert Graff, who lived next door to the park, was selected as a member of the board. The group started with thirty-four members.24 Superintendent Hotchkiss coordinated with the Region II Office in Omaha to identify items for HHA to sell, such as slides, booklets, and postcards. These were sold at a counter placed in the temporary museum in the Utility Building. The group’s membership grew quickly, totaling nearly 130 by May 1962, and, on April 1, 1963, it was incorporated by the State of Nebraska.25

In addition to operating the sales counter at the park, HHA sought to increase local and regional awareness of Homestead National Monument and homesteading in general. In 1964, the organization sponsored an essay contest for thirteen counties in Nebraska, receiving nearly 500 entries from students who used homesteading as their topic. In the summer of 1964, the group held a picnic at the park during Beatrice’s Annual Homesteader Week, featuring, according to the organization’s Annual Report, “the famed Nebraskaland oxen and covered wagon” which proved to be “a great drawing card.” Later that year, HHA inaugurated its first annual Christmas tree trimming event at the Visitor Center. Although the park did not hold any winter events through most of the 1970s, the original Christmas tree trimming was revived later and is now organized as the Winter Festival of Prairie Cultures, a month-long celebration of the winter traditions of a variety of ethnic groups that took advantage of the Homestead Act.26 In 1965, HHA coordinated with the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce to build a log cabin float, which it

22 The Constitution and By-Laws, undated, can be found in Archives, Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 2 Folder 8. See also Memorandum, Superintendent to Regional Director, January 4, 1961; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 2 Folder 8.
23 Press Release, undated c. June 1961; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 1.
25 Superintendent’s Annual Report for FY 1963; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 13. See also Monthly Narrative for August 1961, Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1, Folder 19; and Memoranda between, Regional Chief of Interpretation and Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, July 3, 1961 and July 10, 1961; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 2 Folder 8.
planned to use in local parades to advertise the park. The group also began installing roadside directional signs to the park.

The organization remained active through the mid-1960s, continuing to build support in Beatrice and the surrounding region through its annual essay contest, the log cabin float, the Christmas tree trimming, and other events in the community, together with raising funds to construct and install directional signs. In 1967, HHA began work on its most ambitious project, to help secure Freeman School for Homestead National Monument. As discussed earlier in Chapter 9, Homestead National Monument and Midwest Regional Office staff had long been aware of Freeman School and its potential interpretive value. The Tri-County School Board announced that it would close the school at the end of the 1966-1967 school year, and, in early 1967, park staff began meeting with the school board to discuss ways to incorporate the school into the park’s interpretive program. One proposal, to acquire the building from the school board and relocate it to park grounds, was discussed for several months before being eliminated from consideration in the summer of 1967. Instead, the park and the school board decided the best option was for NPS to acquire the school and its 1.2-acre parcel. Because this required a change to the park’s boundary, however, Congress would have to pass a law approving the boundary expansion. This process could take years, a delay that the school board could not accommodate. In June 1967, therefore, HHA took title to the school and grounds for the token sum of one dollar and the understanding that the organization would hold the property until Congress passed a law approving the boundary expansion. The Homestead Historical Association conveyed the property to NPS in April 1971, again for the token sum of one dollar.

The role of HHA in securing Freeman School for Homestead National Monument was pivotal; the school remains a vital component of the park’s interpretive program. Despite this active role in supporting the park, however, membership in the organization began to sag by the mid-1960s, with fewer than 100 members by the end of 1966 and only seventy-four members in 1967. By 1970, HHA’s Annual Report noted that “Membership continues to dwindle and lose interest,” and concluded by observing that “Due to the apathetic membership, plans for the coming year are indefinite.” While receipts at the organization’s sales counter in the park Visitor Center remained steady at approximately $1,400 per year, profits on these sales were consumed largely by the required annual financial audit. According to HHA Chairman W.R. Clifford, “The Association is in a difficult financial situation.” Membership continued to decline through the early 1970s. In early 1972, Regional Cooperating Associations Coordinator Francis Elmore provided comments on the HHA’s annual financial report to Superintendent Halvorson, saying, “I am pained to see that membership continues to dwindle and lose interest.” Elmore recommended that Halvorson contemplate joining another existing cooperating association such as Jefferson National Park Association or what is now the Oregon Trail.

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28 Homestead Historical Association Annual Report for 1970; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 1 Folder 1.
29 W.R. Clifford to Director, Midwest Region, February 8, 1971; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 1 Folder 1.
Museum Association, which served as the cooperating association for Scotts Bluff and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, also in Nebraska.\(^\text{30}\)

Superintendent Halvorson, with the support of MWRO, initiated communication with Jefferson National Park Association and with Eastern National Park and Monument Association (ENPMA). The latter was founded in 1947 by a group of NPS Park Rangers who met at Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania. Their goal was “to serve as a shared-resource retail and educational network” for national parks. The group of Rangers formed a non-profit company associated first with Abraham Lincoln National Historical Park in Kentucky.\(^\text{31}\) On February 25, 1973, HHA Board held a special meeting with its remaining members; the assembled members “voted to amalgamate with Eastern National Park and Monument Association,” and set the final day of HHA operations for July 14, 1973. Eastern National Park and Monument Association began operations at Homestead National Monument the next day, July 15, 1973. Homestead Historical Association sold its remaining inventory, consisting of postcards, books, pins, and living history craft supplies, to ENPMA for $1,241, which the new organization held as a credit in a special fund earmarked for the Superintendent to be used at his discretion. According to Superintendent Halvorson in the park’s Annual Report for 1973, “This organizational change will make more money available for Homestead’s interpretive program. Apathy of membership of the old association was a prime reason for the change.”\(^\text{32}\) Park Historian Roger Pearson, who served as the final Executive Secretary of HHA ex officio, added that “hardships encountered in the operations of a small association” was another part of the decision.\(^\text{33}\)

Eastern National Parks and Monument Association’s first full year at Homestead National Monument was 1974, and their assistance with the park’s interpretive program was felt immediately. Sales showed an increase of more than thirty-five percent in 1975, the result of offering a wider range of sales items and “the living history demonstrations generating interest in the visitors to seek more knowledge about the pioneers [sic] way of life.”\(^\text{34}\) The park has continued to work with ENPMA, now known simply as Eastern National, since 1973. Proceeds from sales are put toward a range of interpretive programs and publications. Although Eastern National stocked the sales counter, Homestead National Monument staff conducted sales. This situation was identified as a conflict in the OIG report of 1986. Superintendent Baynes, in his response to the report, identified the miniscule fraction of staff time devoted to operating the Eastern National sales counter, saying also that the sales exchanges offered additional opportunities for visitor contact and informal interpretation. Park staff continued to conduct sales at the Visitor Center until 1998, when increased visitation at the park led to higher sales, and

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\(^\text{30}\) Memorandum, Cooperating Associations Coordinator to Superintendent, Homestead, February 15, 1972; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 1 Folder 1.


\(^\text{32}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 19. See also

\(^\text{33}\) Roger D. Pearson to NPS Director Ronald E. Walker, August 22, 1973; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102-I-A, Catalog No. 7191, Box 1 Folder 1.

\(^\text{34}\) Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1975; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 21. In the Annual Report for 1974, the first year of Eastern National’s Activity, Superintendent Halvorson noted that “Without their assistance, both financially and professionally, our various interpretive programs would not have been as successful as they were.”

292
Eastern National created a new seasonal sales clerk position at the park.\textsuperscript{35} This arrangement has continued to the present. Markedly increased visitation following opening of the Heritage Center in 2007 has led to consistently increasing sales.

The park’s association with Eastern National as a cooperating association has brought enormous benefits to the interpretive program. The greater reach of Eastern National, a national organization, allows it to stock the sales counter at Homestead National Monument with a far wider range of goods for sale than the Homestead Historical Association, as a small, member-drive organization, could afford. What Eastern National initially lacked, however, was the close ties to the local community that HHA provided. Superintendent Dillon recalled that, by the early 1990s,

the city of Beatrice had kind of forgotten the park. It wasn’t getting many visitors….they didn’t see the park as an asset. Hardly anybody visited there, and it was not a benefit to the city as far as they were concerned….So, that was part of my effort, as well: to get the community to embrace the park again.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite Superintendent Dillon’s assessment, under Superintendent Baynes, visitation had been increasing gradually during the late 1980s and 1990s, and the park continued existing events and inaugurated new events which invited participation from the local community, including Homestead Days, Prairie Appreciation Week, Hooky Days, Christmas on the Homestead, and the film series. Superintendent Dillon, however, placed a new emphasis on involving local community groups such as the Gage County Historical Society and Museum, the Beatrice Public Library, and the Beatrice Chamber of Commerce. Under his direction, the park installed a Travelers’ Information Station at the Gage County Museum that alerted visitors to activities at the Museum and at Homestead National Monument. In 1996, a crisis in the form of a tornado which touched down at the park and at the nearby Pioneer Acres subdivision, where Superintendent Dillon lived, provided additional opportunities for community engagement. Dillon and park staff coordinated a vast clean-up effort that included students from the national AmeriCorps volunteer program, the Midwest Archeological Center and MWRO, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and other residents in Beatrice to help to clean up the park and Pioneer Acres. Superintendent Dillon recalled that he received additional assistance from five employees of a local firm who had been temporarily displaced by tornado-related damage and who “worked in the park for four weeks through a cooperative agreement with the Job Service of Nebraska.” As Superintendent Dillon recalled also, “Because of the vagrancies [sic – vagaries] of the way the electrical system worked, the park still had power, but the houses across the street, where I lived, the Pioneer Acres, didn’t. So I just left the bathrooms open and the lights on for neighbors to use.” For its efforts in responding to the tornado, the park received a NPS Unit Award for Excellence of Service, and Representative Douglas Bereuter came to Beatrice to personally thank Dillon and the park for their work.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{35} Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1998; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 43. According to the Annual Report for 2000, this position was filled by Alnora Naubendiek.

\textsuperscript{36} Dillon, oral history interview.

\textsuperscript{37} Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1996; Archives of Homestead NM, 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 41. See also Dillon, oral history interview.
A part of Superintendent Dillon’s community outreach efforts was to spur the creation of a new friends group. He had identified several people in Beatrice, including Mayor Paul Korslund, Beatrice Public Library Director Laureen Riedesel, several neighbors, and others who had expressed an interest in the park. Several of these people joined Dillon for a meeting at which he explained what friends groups are and how they can support units of the National Park System: “Friends groups can do things that federal government cannot. They can advocate for legislation, which the park cannot do, they can raise money. . . .They accept donations that the park can’t accept.”

The new Friends of Homestead was initially organized in 1994, but there were legal complications. The charter of the original HHA had never been revoked, and the organization remained an incorporated legal entity with people who had purchased lifetime memberships still living. In order to take advantage of the existing legal entity, however, the new group operated as a Doing Business As (DBA) organization using the existing charter. The legal complications arose when the new organization found that HHA retained title to one acre of land near the Pioneer Acres subdivision. Awareness of this property ownership, dating back to the 1960s, prompted questions from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which requested financial records for the period between 1973, when the organization amalgamated with Eastern National, and 1994, when the new organization revived the original charter. Upon the advice of legal counsel, the new organization was incorporated as a separate legal entity, Friends of Homestead. Because lifetime members of HHA remained in the Beatrice area and participated in Friends of Homestead, including park neighbor Robert Graff, the revived HHA continued to meet for one year, eventually conveying its assets to the Friends of Homestead before it was disbanded. In 2001, the HHA charter was formally revoked and Friends of Homestead (FOH) was established as its own non-profit corporation. By-laws were adopted by the FOH Board of Directors on May 30, 2001. Finally, in 2005, FOH sold the original Homestead Acre which it had received from HHA.

Friends of Homestead has remained very active in supporting Homestead National Monument in many ways since it was first created in 1994. Its initial efforts included securing $1,800 in donations from the Beatrice Rotary Club and an $8,000 grant from the National Park Foundation to finance the creation of a new audio-visual orientation program in the Visitor Center in 1994. Later in the 1990s, Friends of Homestead assumed coordination of the annual March for Parks event. Individual members provided further support by taking part in local, state, and regional tourism committees and lobbying Congress on behalf of Homestead National Monument. In 2000, Friends of Homestead President Laureen Riedesel, also the Director of the Beatrice Public Library, participated in initial planning meetings with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to develop support for the park’s pathbreaking Land Records project. She and others also met with Members of Congress to urge the passage of legislation to

38 Dillon, oral history interview.
39 Laureen Riedesel, oral history interview, April 1, 2019 and May 15, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
40 “By-Laws of Friends of Homestead National Monument of America,” signed by five members of the Board of Directors including Laureen Riedesel, President, May 31, 2001; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102- IIA, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 2.
41 Meeting Minutes, Friends of Homestead National Monument of America, May 16, 2005; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102- IIB, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 19. In her oral history interview, former Friends of Homestead President Laureen Riedesel provides additional details regarding the disposition of the Homestead Acre.
extend the park’s boundary for the new Heritage Center and also the appropriation of funds to build the Heritage Center. As discussed earlier in Chapter 11, in 2004, Friends of Homestead also accepted the donation of funds from the bequest of Beatrice resident Opal Shum, who left money in her estate to purchase lands to help enhance the park’s viewshed. Friends of Homestead used a portion of these funds in 2005 to purchase an initial forty acres from Charles and Betty Ensz. The Friends of Homestead then received a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust that allowed them to purchase additional land along the park border from the Ensz family. Friends of Homestead retains title to this land, holding it on behalf of the park until Congress approves an extension of the park’s boundary.

Friends of Homestead has also raised funds to pay for programs and activities that fall outside the park’s budget. As discussed earlier in Chapter 11, the park’s budget for the Heritage Center was cut substantially from the original Congressional request and did not include funds for either the parking lot or the film. Friends of Homestead secured a $30,000 loan commitment from First National Bank of Beatrice, in which the bank loaned the money to FOH to help fund the film and then made an annual contribution to Friends of Homestead to cover the cost of the principal and interest payment over the course of seven years.42 For the parking lot, Friends of Homestead received one anonymous donation totaling $50,000, and the Peter Kiewit Foundation agreed to provide much of the remaining costs, but only after the work was completed; Friends of Homestead member B. Scully then asked his father, William Scully, Sr., to loan $125,000 to the park to cover the necessary up-front costs until the Foundation released the funds at the end of the parking lot project.43

This combination of raising funds to support park activities and acting as the park’s representatives and advocates has continued since Friends of Homestead was created. It has also taken on special projects aimed at assisting the park’s research and collections management programs. In 2002, for example, Friends of Homestead entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the park to begin developing an oral history research project with living homesteaders, with FOH responsible for recruiting oral history interview subjects and raising funds for travel.44 In 2014, the park received a massive collection of records from the Beatrice-based Dempster Mill Manufacturing Company. Although an extraordinarily valuable archival collection, the cost of processing it exceeded the budget Superintendent Engler had available. Friends of Homestead received a grant of $139,30 from the Margaret and Martha Thomas Foundation which allowed them to hire former park intern Amy Neumann for a two-year contract to process the archive, create a finding aid for the collection, and oversee the work of a large group of volunteers recruited to assist her. This contract, which extended from December 2014 to January 2017, was renewed for the summer of 2019, from April to August, to begin the process of digitizing large portions of the Dempster collections and to provide other collections management services to the park.

42 Meeting Minutes, Friends of Homestead National Monument of America, July 17, 2006 with attached letter explaining the loan commitment from John C. Rypma, President and CEO of First National Bank of Beatrice, July 17, 2006; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 02-II-B, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 10.
43 See Chapter 11; see also Meeting Minutes, Friends of Homestead National Monument of America, September 18, 2006; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 02-II-B, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 10.
44 Cooperative Agreement Between The United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Friends of Homestead National Monument of America, executed September 19, 2002; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 102- IIA, Catalog No. 8875, Box 1 Folder 1.
More recently, Friends of Homestead led lobbying efforts to change the name of the park from Homestead National Monument of America to Homestead National Historical Park. It has been a longstanding effort, commencing shortly after the Heritage Center was completed in 2007. Because NPS staff is not allowed to directly lobby Congress, Friends of Homestead used research provided by park staff to lobby members of Congress themselves. In 2009, park staff conducted a survey of visitors that included a question about the name of the park. As Superintendent Engler recalled, “eighty-nine percent of first-time visitors found [the name] confusing. People are always asking us, ‘Where’s the monument?’” With multiple buildings and a significant natural resource, the restored prairie that has achieved historical significance of its own, the park now meets the criteria for designation as a National Historical Park. As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, Representative Adrian Smith (R-NE) introduced legislation to change the name of the park to Homestead National Historical Park in February 2019. After the House passed the bill on voice vote in November 2019 it moved to the Senate, where the Subcommittee on National Parks of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources reported it favorably in March 2020.

Volunteers

In addition to its role in raising funds and advocating on behalf of Homestead National Monument, Friends of Homestead also helps to coordinate other volunteer efforts at the park. Homestead National Monument has benefited from the work of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers since the early 1960s when HHA was formed. In 1964, as discussed earlier in this chapter, HHA sponsored and promoted a Christmas tree trimming event at the park, which became an annual event. In 1965, the group built a float used in parades throughout the region to promote the park. In 1970, with authorization from Congress under P.L. 91-357, NPS created the Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) program to facilitate voluntary donations of time to individual units of the National Park System. Homestead National Monument first hosted a VIP group in the summer of 1971. Twenty-nine women, many of them members of a senior citizens group in Beatrice, began gathering at the park in late June to demonstrate quilting to visitors at the Visitor Center on Fridays and Saturdays during the summer (Figure 92). Superintendent Halvorson, who oversaw the work of the volunteer quilters, reported that they had donated more than 250 hours of time in less than two months. The volunteer quilt demonstrations were later integrated into the park’s new living history program, which began in the summer of 1972; by the fall of 1972, the quilters had donated more than 4,000 hours and had completed ten quilts. In 1974, according to the Superintendent’s Annual Report, in addition to the quilters, “An additional VIP, a spinner (a male at that!) came on board during November. The rest of the VIPs are ladies and Senior Citizens from Beatrice, Nebraska.”

45 Engler, oral history interview. See also Riedesel, oral history interview.
46 Riedesel, in her oral history interview, commented that the Friends of Homestead is the umbrella organization for all volunteer efforts; park staff noted that the Friends of Homestead is the umbrella organization only for the Senior Rangers program, which is described later in this section.
49 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1974; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 20.
The advent of the annual Homestead Days event in 1978 led to new opportunities for volunteer craft demonstrations as the park sought to provide additional activities for visitors. In 1983, for example, volunteers demonstrating traditional crafts donated more than 280 hours during Homestead Days. By the mid-1980s, as parks through the nation were experiencing budget shortfalls, Homestead National Monument began actively soliciting volunteer assistance for craft demonstrations as well as for other park needs. A 1986 press release asking for volunteer help through the park’s VIP program reported that local residents and groups had donated more than 2,000 hours in 1985, and current needs for volunteers included work on collections management, natural resource monitoring, maintenance, and administrative help. In 1987, the park began hosting an annual VIP recognition dinner on the Visitor Center patio, and, in 1995, volunteers participated in natural resource surveys and began cataloging books and documents in the park’s library. In 1996, the park’s VIP program documented donation of nearly 3,600 hours by 180 volunteers.

The park took a new step in the fall of 2001, when it became one of eight parks in the nation to host an inaugural Volunteer Senior Ranger Corps project. United Parcel Service (UPS)

Figure 92: Volunteer quilters at Homestead National Monument, 1971. Source: Beatrice Daily Sun

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51 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1988; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 34; Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1005; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40; Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1996; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 41.
provided funding for a partnership among NPS, the National Park Foundation, and Environmental Association for Senior Involvement (EASI) to create the program. Homestead National Monument’s selection as one of the eight pilot parks was facilitated by a committee of members of Friends of Homestead and the Tallgrass Prairie Club, which became an EASI partner. Beatrice native Gerald “Jerry” Davidson, who built a successful volunteer program at the Beatrice Community Hospital in 2000, provided vital leadership to this new program. Davidson was a member of the Friends of Homestead and used his extensive volunteer and fund-raising skills to work with the Senior Rangers program. He recruited volunteers for the new program and mentored park staff on how best to build and manage the program. As a result of his skills, EASI invited Davidson to write a booklet, *Volunteering for the Public Good*. He was joined by park staff when he gave a presentation at a national conference dealing with partnerships.

The program was designed to be intergenerational, bringing seniors and youth together in volunteer efforts. As one of the first eight parks to take part in the Senior Ranger Corps project, the park received a $15,000 grant to digitize the park’s collection of historic and current photographs. Developed and led by the park’s volunteer coordinator, Susan Cook (later Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management), the project entailed removing the photographs from non-archival folders and envelopes, scanning them, indexing the electronic files, and then placing the photographs in new archival envelopes. The funding also allowed the park to purchase scanning and indexing equipment. The City of Beatrice provided office space for the program in the Beatrice City Auditorium. The Senior Ranger program grew quickly and, by 2002, had approximately 150 people working on a variety of projects at the park including coordinating with the Beatrice Junior High School eighth grade Physical Science class to conduct monthly water quality testing at Cub Creek and conducting living homesteader oral history interviews, in addition to the ongoing photograph digitization project. The Senior Ranger Program continued to expand throughout the 2000s, forming its own Corps Council that coordinates activities with the park’s volunteer coordinator. In 2005, the program changed its name to the Master Ranger Corps, which continues to communicate with park staff on a regular basis to coordinate needs and to incorporate training.

In the mid-1990s, the park also began working with the Student Conservation Association (SCA). The SCA was created in 1957 as the National Student Movement, based on the New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corp. It provided student volunteers the opportunity to conduct projects at National Park System units throughout the country. The SCA volunteers at Homestead National Monument have documented the etchings on the walls of Freeman School, assisted with educational programs, helped to manage the photograph documentation stations on the restored prairie, worked on removal of invasive species, and conducted other resource management projects. In addition to SCA volunteers, local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have volunteered many hours in the process of completing the requirements for badges.

The volunteer program at Homestead National Monument has continued to expand, with 544 volunteers donating more than 11,000 hours of time in 2008, including the Senior Park

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52 Susan Cook, oral history interview, May 13, 2009; Files of Homestead NM.
53 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2002; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 47.
Rangers, SCA volunteers, scouts, and students from Beatrice High School. Volunteers have become key to the park’s growing schedule of annual special events, staffing booths, designing promotional materials, providing tours to adult and school groups, and demonstrating traditional music and crafts. The park’s volunteers have coordinated with staff to provide guidance to and mentor volunteer programs at other parks and to give talks at conferences throughout the nation. In 2005, the park received the national George B. Hartzog Jr. Award for Outstanding Park Program. Superintendent Engler and then-Volunteer Coordinator Susan Cook accompanied volunteers Tom and Eileen Shirk to Washington, DC to accept the award. In 2010, when the park re-instituted a living history demonstration program, volunteers worked with Park Rangers to provide demonstrations; according to the Annual Report for 2010, the 647 volunteers who donated more than 15,000 hours of time constituted “the equivalent of 7.3 additional employees for [Homestead].”54 After Susan Cook was appointed as the park’s Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services in 2016, staff members Charlotte Graveline and Amber Kirkendall took on the duties of Volunteer Coordinator. In 2015 and 2016, volunteers again provided assistance to the park’s collections management program by helping to prepare a large collection of documents which the Dempster Mill Manufacturing Company donated to Homestead National Monument for archival storage (Figure 93).

54 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 2010; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 54.
Budgets

Like all federal agencies and programs, the budget for Homestead National Monument has waxed and waned in step with national political and financial trends. Individual presidential administrations have directed more or less funds to NPS, with the resulting impacts on staff levels and the availability of programs and services. Unfortunately, information on annual budgets for Homestead National Monument during its first five decades of operation is sparse. The impact of national political priorities was clear, however, in the immediate post-WWII years, when NPS budgets remained stagnant even as the number of people visiting the parks began climbing steadily at the end of gasoline rationing and rising prosperity. In late 1950, WASO issued a directive that, in addition to a $200,000 reduction in the Service’s Buildings and Utilities Program, the Bureau of the Budget requested $500,000 be cut and transferred to the Roads and Trails construction program. As a result, the Region II Office in Omaha instructed Superintendent Schultz not to plan for any new construction through 1952 and 1953, and buildings after that were placed lower on the region’s priority list.\(^55\)

Annual Superintendent’s Reports for the first several decades of the park’s existence did not include budgets or any administrative information aside from staff levels. In a summary of the park provided to newly-arriving Superintendent Warren Hotchkiss in 1959, however, the park’s base budget, identified as Management of the Park, stood at $16,920, with an additional $3,410 for special projects including soil and moisture conservation (prairie restoration activities), roads and trails maintenance, buildings and utilities maintenance, and forest pest control.\(^56\) This was while the park was in the midst of the Mission 66 program. It reflected the addition of a full-time permanent Historian to complement the full-time Superintendent and the park’s Clerk-Typist position, which remained part-time. By FY 1963, however, the park’s budget had expanded to allow the Clerk-Typist position to be made full-time permanent and hire a full-time permanent Maintenance Worker. This minimal staff was supplemented by a seasonal park guide, seasonal laborer, and occasional seasonal administrative help.

The staff at Homestead National Monument grew slowly through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, but research for this Administrative History located no budget information for those years. In 1990, however, the Annual Superintendent’s Report began recording the park’s budgets. The base discretionary budget for NPS is identified as Operation of the National Park System (ONPS), which includes such items as staff salaries and benefits, visitor services including interpretive and educational programs, natural and cultural resource stewardship, facility maintenance and operations, and park protection. Beyond these basic budget items, NPS provides funds for specific items such as the Cultural Resource Protection Program, cyclic maintenance funds, and other funds to provide for specific natural and cultural projects. In 1990, the park’s base ONPS appropriation totaled $279,000, with an additional $15,000 in fee enhancement funds, $6,000 in cyclic maintenance funds, and $6,000 for prairie restoration.

\(^{55}\) Memorandum, Regional Director to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, December 5, 1950; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Catalog No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 13. See also Memorandum, Acting Director to Regional Directors of Regions One, Two, Three, Four, and the Superintendent, National Capital Parks, November 22, 1950; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-D-1, Catalog No. 8074, Box 1 Folder 13.

\(^{56}\) Regional Director Howard D. Baker to Warren D. Hotchkiss, Superintendent, April 24, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 2. The 1959 base budget of $16,920 translates to approximately $151,000 in 2020.
through the Regional Science Program. The following years were particularly challenging ones for the park. Homestead National Monument’s base ONPS budget grew slowly, from $352,100 in 1993 to $378,100 in 1995. In a staff meeting in November 1992, Superintendent Baynes outlined the park’s difficult position in the coming year, when the park was projected to receive only an additional $5,300 in base funding:

This increase will not even come close to covering our costs associated with the 3.7 percent pay raise, increased benefits costs for FERS [Federal Employees Retirement System] employees, and the government’s share of increased health benefit costs. Considering that last year six of our eight permanent positions were lapsed from one to twelve pay periods, at one time or another last year, our forecast for this year is bleak. Preliminary steps taken to balance the FY 1993 budget include cutting all ‘shoulder season’ (March, April, September) seasonal employees except those needed for special events; eliminating the YCC [Youth Conservation Corps] program; and reducing programmed funds for capital expenditures.57

By early 1993, the dire situation was alleviated only slightly by the arrival of $81,000 in economic stimulus funding for specific projects, but the underlying budget difficulties remained: increased costs for staff that outpaced increases in the base ONPS budgets. Superintendent Dillon inherited the park’s budget difficulties in September 1993. In the Annual Report for 1995, his second full year at the park, Dillon detailed that

The park’s biggest concern is the loss of purchasing power as more and more of the budget is consumed by the rising cost of permanent personnel. In FY92 the monument spent approximately 76% of its budget on the eight permanent positions. In FY96, these same eight positions will consume 92% of the budget. . . As a result, the monument has been forced to reduce seasonal employment including YCC. The loss of staff has reduced visitor services and resource management activities.58

The budget limitations continued into 1996, when a shortage of funds and the inability to hire a sufficient number of seasonal employees, forced the park to close at 5 pm in the summer rather than the usual 6 pm.59 Instead of a base budget increase, though, the park received $180,000 in funding for special projects including improving the Freeman School parking lot, repairs to the implement shed exhibits, a new alarm system, and emergency response to the 1996 tornado; in accordance with federal government regulations, this funding could be applied only to the specific project and could not be used to supplement the park’s base funding.60

57 Minutes of Staff Meeting, November 18, 1992; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 5.
58 Annual Superintendent’s Report for 1995; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 40.
59 Press Release, May 21, 1996; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-1, Catalog No. 7579, Box 1 Folder 6.
60 Minutes of Staff Meeting, July 15, 1996; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-D, Catalog No. 8085, Box 1 Folder 12.
The park continued to see only limited increases to its base ONPS budget through the late 1990s, during Superintendent Engler’s first several years. Finally, in FY2000, with the completion of the park’s GMP that included recommendations for a new Heritage Center and expanded programming, the park received an increase in its base ONPS budget. By 2002, with planning under way for the new Heritage Center and approval for new staff, including a Historian and a Resource Management Specialist, the park’s base ONPS budget was $698,585. Under Superintendent Engler, the park has also been successful in securing additional funding from NPS and other sources, including cyclic maintenance, cultural resources, and the Challenge Cost Share program, and Friends of Homestead continues to provide donations for specific programs and events. Even with these increases, however, the park’s rapidly expanding programming and visitation, combined with rising costs for staff salaries and benefits, continues to put pressures on the budget. By late 2003, the park faced a shortfall of up to $130,000 by FY 2006 without an increase in base funding. Superintendent Engler’s proposed strategy was to avoid filling the Chief Ranger position, which was vacated in December 2003, extend furloughs for two employees, reduce staff training, and rely on existing staff to coordinate the planning for and transition to the Heritage Center while continuing to depend on Friends of Homestead and volunteers to fund and staff interpretive and educational programs.\(^{61}\)

The park received an increase to its base ONPS budget in 2005, to $759,224 from $695,914 in 2004, and Superintendent Engler was able to hire Merrith Baughman to serve as Chief Ranger in September 2005. In FY 2007, with the completion of the Heritage Center, the park received another increase, adding $200,000 which brought its base ONPS budget to $991,972, and its FTE allocation increased from 11.76 in 2005 to 16.05 in 2007.\(^{62}\) The park received another substantial increase in FY 2008 to accommodate the additional costs associated with the Heritage Center, with year-end funding raising the park’s base ONPS budget to $1,276,740; in FY 2009 it was raised again to $1,461,053, and included a staff Curator position.

This represented a high point for the park, however, as the park’s budget has remained stagnant or decreased since 2009. In 2013, automatic budget cuts resulting from the federal government’s budget sequestration forced Superintendent Engler to eliminate the park’s Curator position and reduce or eliminate programs and hours. The budget has not fully recovered since; as Superintendent Engler noted, the budget “has not kept up. And we’ve actually reversed.” While the park has remained successful at securing federal and non-federal funding for special projects, the base ONPS budget remains a challenge, forcing staff positions such as the Curator to remain unfilled.

Management Planning

Superintendent Schultz led the development of the park through much of its first fifteen years and, although he received frequent advice and recommendations from the regional office regarding the management of the site, there is no record of a formal management review.

\(^{61}\) Memorandum, Superintendent, Homestead National Monument of America to Regional Director, Midwest Region, November 26, 2003; Files of Homestead NM, F3015.

\(^{62}\) Annual Superintendent’s Report for 2007; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 51.
Regional officials occasionally wrote to Superintendent Schultz, and to the two Acting Superintendents on procedural issues and matters of general park direction and policy. Often, this communication was in the form of forwarding directives from NPS headquarters in Washington. At other times, the Regional Director relayed advice from staff regarding either interpretation or conservation work. In March 1947, for example, Acting Regional Director Howard W. Baker wrote to Superintendent Schultz, informing him that

We are of the opinion that the gulley and silt control phase of soil and moisture conservation work at Homestead can readily be handled under your supervision. Action taken with regard to the purchase of grass seed was explained to you in a separate memorandum, also dated March 27. Recommended wage rates applicable to Homestead National Monument are currently being processed.63

Likewise, in 1948, the Region II Office supported Schultz in his search for an authentic homestead-era cabin which could be relocated to the park. Regional and WASO Historians were actively involved in the project, understanding that the cabin would fit into the park’s interpretive program, which was still being developed:

Although the interpretive plan for Homestead in its final form has not yet been approved, the investigation of authentic homestead structures is an approved project on your research program. Mr. Guy D. Edwards, Chief Recreation Planner, has expressed concurrence in the plan and accordingly we are in a position to pay your per diem with MRB [Missouri River Basin] funds for the purpose of investigating homestead structures within reservoir areas. . . . You understand, of course, that your museum prospectus has priority over all other matters and the above project must not be allowed in any way to interfere with the completion of the revised prospectus.64

Beyond this regular correspondence, the park received its first formal management review in February 1958 while Warren Hotchkiss was serving as Superintendent. Hotchkiss traveled to Omaha for the review, armed with statistical data, organization charts, information about the status of the park’s Mission 66 planning, information about equipment at the park, and interpretive topics that needed discussion. After meeting at the Region II Office, the reviewers traveled to Beatrice to see the park in person. In its report on the meeting, prepared later in the summer of 1958, the management review team made a number of wide-ranging recommendations for review by the Regional Director. These recommendations were to be implemented by the Region II Office and the park. They included resource management and protection items such as preparing a vegetative cover management plan to aid in the restoration of the prairie to its status after the first year of farming by Daniel Freeman, identifying ways to aid in the preservation of Freeman School, working with engineers to plan the removal of the abandoned portion of Highway 4 in the restored prairie, and surveying the park’s boundaries and installing a fence where required. The management review team also strongly suggested the creation of a “live” exhibit as part of the park’s interpretive program that would recreate a typical

63 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to Custodian, Homestead National Monument, March 31, 1947; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VI-C, Catalog No. 6965, Box 1 Folder 16.
64 Memorandum, Acting Regional Director to Custodian, Homestead National Monument; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-V-E-1, Catalog No. 7642, Box 1 Folder 25.
homestead-era farm that would have a house, barn, outbuildings, farm machinery, and animals. Finally, the management team noted that “It seems desirable to take whatever steps are necessary to avoid any possibility of development in the small triangle of land. . .which is in the interior of a curve of the State road crossing the Monument.”

The 1958 management review took place concurrently with the preparation of a museum prospectus for Mission 66. One of the management team recommendations was that the Regional Office continue to prepare a Master Plan Development Outline while the park was preparing its Mission 66 museum and interpretive prospectuses and merge them later. In 1959, therefore, the Region Two Office released its Management Plan Development Outline (MPDO) for the park which clearly drew from the management team’s recommendations the year before. The MPDO proposed substantial changes to the park’s interpretive program and to its entire surroundings. The MPDO started from the core objectives as identified in the park’s enabling legislation: telling the homestead story and erecting suitable buildings to be used as a museum to contain agricultural implements and literature that help tell the story of homesteading’s role in the county’s westward expansion. Several specific developments were identified as essential to these objectives, including recreating a homestead-era farm with a house, barn, and outbuildings, all furnished as appropriate for a homesteading farm of the late 1860s, together with farm animals and machinery; the continued restoration of the prairie to its condition shortly after the Freemans arrived; restoring the abandoned section of Highway 4 to its condition as an early freight road; building a new museum building; and prohibiting picnicking from the grounds as “extraneous to the monument story.”

The 1959 MPDO contained recommendations for two other substantial physical changes. First, the recently rerouted Highway 4 should be realigned again, this time to the north and east of the park’s boundary. This realignment would allow NPS to restore the old freight road that passed through Freeman’s homestead and “form a part of the exhibit of Homestead National Monument.” Second, the park should construct a new headquarters compound to contain a museum/administration building, a custodian’s residence, and service buildings. This complex of buildings should be located on a seven-acre parcel of land lying immediately south of the current boundary, sheltered from the park by the wooded area surrounding Cub Creek. With the proposed relocation of Highway 4, the MPDO expected that NPS would need to build a spur road to provide access to the new museum and administration complex.

As fascinating as these proposals were, the park’s Mission 66 planning took precedence, and the MPDO was put on the shelf. Instead, the park in late 1959 and in 1960, began work on a Master Plan “in the new format.” The park’s “Master Plan for the Preservation and Use of Homestead National Monument: Mission 66 Edition” was finalized and approved in late July.

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65 Memorandum, Region Two Management Review Team to Regional Director, August 7, 1958, attached to Memorandum, Regional Director to Superintendent, Homestead National Monument, August 15, 1958; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8075, Box 1 Folder 1.

66 “Homestead National Monument of America Development Outline,” 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-VII-C, Catalog No. 7001, Map Cabinet Drawer 2, Folder 15. The MPDO recommended a seven-acre parcel in the NW corner of NE¼ of the NW¼ of Section 26, “bounded on the north and the west by the Monument boundary and on the south and east by the meander of Cub Creek.”

67 Memorandum, Superintendent to The Director, November 12, 1959; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-1, Catalog No. 9584, Box 1.
In setting out the objectives of the park, the new Master Plan incorporated a concept expressed in the earlier MPDO: Homestead National Monument occupies what was recognized as the nation’s first homestead claim, but the land “is devoid of striking physical, historical or cultural features which would by their own intrinsic impact give the area great interest.” It was not the scene of any great event, and thus

the appeal to visitors will depend upon effective management and development of the area in helping them to understand what the Homestead act meant to the Nation as a major tool of settlement and growth, and of governmental land policy.

The park, the Master Plan concluded, was “a symbolic or memorial type of area set aside to commemorate a major socio-economic chapter in the history of the United States.” At the park, NPS could “reveal the impact of the homestead frontier on American character and democratic spirit.”

The 1960 Master Plan was a comprehensive management planning document that outlined the park’s existing staff, facilities, natural resources, and interpretive program. With Mission 66 planning in full swing, the Master Plan also outlined the developments that would soon be implemented. The document consisted of several sections covering visitor use, staff organization, operations, design analysis of existing and proposed visitor and maintenance facilities, and recommended strategies for protection of the park’s natural and cultural resources from fire, insects, and erosion. Within the discussion of the park’s objectives and policies, the Master Plan contained a series of recommendations for general administration. At the head of this list of recommendations was “a vigorous program of research by Service personnel into all aspects of homesteading,” followed by the creation of a Visitor Center that would fulfill the enabling legislation’s requirement by having a museum and a library. The three southern forties were to be maintained in their natural state “oriented to the period of the 1860s,” and the abandoned segment of Highway 4 was to be restored to prairie. The Master Plan softened the earlier MPDO recommendation by recommending an evaluation of recreating a living farm and suggesting that the park “Possibly acquire and place carefully selected authentic and typical homestead structures on the Monument grounds in the vicinity of the headquarters area.” At the same time, the park should continue to acquire “appropriate historical objects, literature and data concerning homesteading and assure proper preservation of such materials.” The park also should establish a cooperating association while working with local and regional conservation agencies, civic and community groups, and state agencies and exploring the possibility of zoning to “prevent non-agricultural uses of adjacent lands.” In what had become a common refrain, the park should prohibit camping “and discourage picnicking.”

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69 Ibid., 7-8. A small picnic area was installed at the east end of the Visitor Center parking lot in 1983; according to the 1984 Statement for Management, “It receives moderate use and presents no management problems.” Former seasonal technician and current MWRO Regional Chief of Interpretation Thomas Richter recalled in his oral history interview for this project that” one of my jobs was to bust up any picnics. And I had an escape, though, that, if the picnic was already starting, then I simply went up and asked them never to do it again. So, I always waited so that. . . I wasn’t running people out.” In informal conversation with the author of this Administrative History, Superintendent Engler was given the same unfortunate assignment as a seasonal technician in the late 1970s.
The Master Plan recommended the addition of a permanent Caretaker and Administrative Aid to the park’s staff, supplementing the existing three permanent staff positions of Superintendent, Park Historian, and Clerk-Stenographer. Seasonal staff should be increased from a Caretaker, Laborer, and Seasonal Ranger Historian to include a Seasonal Ranger General. In addition to the park’s existing interpretive facilities, which included the exhibit space in the Utility Building, the audio-visual equipment, the self-guiding trail, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and a study collection of pioneer artifacts, the Master Plan recommended a Visitor Center with a new exhibit and orientation materials, a shed for agricultural machinery, and a historical handbook. The new Visitor Center, was to be located near the Utility Building and the Superintendent’s residence in the north forty rather than in a separate tract to the south as recommended in the MPDO, and a new residence for the Historian should be built in the same area.

The 1960 Master Plan remained in effect throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and periodic Statements for Management starting in 1977 summarized the park’s management goals. By the early 1980s, the park began recommending an updated Master Plan that would take into account the addition of Freeman School to the park’s boundary and provide updated guidance on collections management, updating the park’s historical and archeological sites, and accounting for the park’s scenic easements. The park completed an expanded Statement for Management in 1984 that more clearly outlined the need for updated management guidance. The 1984 Statement for Management pointed to the inadequate storage conditions of the park’s museum collection, noting that those artifacts not on display in the Visitor Center “are stored in the visitor center lunchroom, the attic of the maintenance building and at an unprotected wooded site near the prairie,” and that the park also needed curatorial assistance to catalog a backlog of artifacts. Other needs in 1984 included an updated interpretive prospectus, a museum exhibit plan, and a historic furnishings report for the Palmer-Epard Cabin.

The release of the OIG draft report in 1985 and its completion in 1986 gave further impetus to the need for reexamination of the park’s management. The park underwent an Operations Evaluation as a part of the response to the OIG report in April 1986, while at the same time beginning to prepare a task directive to update the 1964 Master Plan. The new document would be a General Management Plan (GMP), a new type of management document created by the 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act (P.L. 95-625), which required a GMP for each unit of the National Park System. According to the Annual Report for 1987, the earlier Master Plan “did not address the Freeman School addition, prairie restoration, a full range of interpretive themes, or provide much conceptual guidance for the management and operation of the Monument.”

The GMP process began in April 1987 with a scoping meeting for the GMP planning team and park staff; non-federal input was provided by several state agencies. The park

70 These subsequent management documents refer to a Master Plan that was approved in October 1964; this update to the 1960 Master Plan was not located during the present research.
71 See Statement for Management, Homestead National Monument of America, approved by Midwest Regional Director, May 24, 1982; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8089, Box 1 Folder 11.
72 Statement for Management, Homestead National Monument of America, approved by Acting Regional Director, April 16, 1984; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-III-A, Catalog No. 8090, Box 1 Folder 13.
73 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1986; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 32.
completed a draft of the new GMP in late 1987 and completed revisions through 1988; it was finally approved in late December 1988. As anticipated in initial discussions, the GMP updated the earlier Master Plan primarily with new information about Freeman School and the park’s new prairie restoration program that, by then, included prescribed burns. It also suggested new interpretive themes. The park’s interpretive program at the time focused on the exhibits in the Visitor Center, the prairie trails, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and Freeman School, and new annual events, according to the GMP, “provide more intimate and personal interactions with visitors.” The GMP went on to observe that the exhibits were generally acceptable, but several new themes should be introduced, including the tallgrass prairie, its ecology, its uses by American Indians, and how the prairie influenced the homesteaders; the effects of immigration and ethnic groups on the settlement of the West; and the revolution in agriculture from subsistence farm to modern agribusiness. For Freeman School, the GMP proposed a mix of self-guided tours and living history programs, as well as other tours for scheduled groups.

The 1988 GMP also addressed land use issues. For the State Triangle, the GMP recommended continuing to consult with the Nebraska Department of Roads in the hopes that the park could acquire the land. At Freeman School, the GMP noted that parking was inadequate and proposed the acquisition in fee of the adjoining lot to address this need. Perhaps the biggest concern for the park regarding land use, however, were the periodic floods of Cub Creek that threatened the Visitor Center and the Palmer-Epard Cabin. The GMP recommended that the park continue to work with hydrological studies of the drainage to find ways of alleviating the threats of floods. The entire development area, the GMP explained, lies within a 100-year floodplain, but the GMP team saw few viable options:

relocation of facilities out of the floodplain was considered, but ruled out as impractical. A development site with sufficient acreage outside the prairie and cultural areas does not exist within the park. Costs to move and to rebuild structures would be prohibitively high.74

With the addition of curatorial space in 1986, moreover, the GMP observed that “Administrative, storage, and mechanical space adequately serve Homestead’s current staffing levels. No plans exist for facility expansions.”75

The new GMP was approved in late 1988, and the park began taking steps to implement its provisions from 1989 into the early 1990s. One of the major steps was to acquire the one-acre parcel adjacent to Freeman School, completed through condemnation in September 1992. Unfortunately, Superintendent Baynes died in the spring of 1993 before he could see the recommendations fully implemented. The Annual Report for 1993 stated that “Land acquisition and public access concerns for the Freeman School addition; prairie restoration projects; and interpretive planning remain high priorities.”76 Superintendent Baynes’ successor, however,

75 Ibid., page 15.
76 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1993; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 39.
envisioned the park and its direction in a fundamentally different way than the direction provided in the 1988 GMP.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Superintendent Dillon recognized the need to maintain the park’s prairie restoration program, but he was convinced that the park had lost its focus on the original intent of the park, which was to tell the story of homesteading and its impact on the settlement of the West. At the same time, he felt that the park was not doing enough to build up and maintain a collection of homesteading-related documents and artifacts. His vision of a reoriented interpretive program, with new and more expanded exhibits together with a substantially enlarged and modernized collections space which allowed visitors to conduct research on homesteaders, would require vastly more space than the existing Visitor Center. It likely would also require adding new areas to the existing boundaries of the park. All these interpretive changes indicated the need for a new GMP less than a decade after completion of the previous one.

In April 1996, Superintendent Dillon responded to the staff of Rep. Doug Bereuter, whose Congressional district included Homestead National Monument and who was an active supporter of the park. Dillon provided information to Rep. Bereuter regarding a GMP. Later that month, Rep. Bereuter appeared before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, asking, as he recalled, to “request the National Park Service prepare a General Management Plan to help ensure the Homestead is able to reach its full potential as a place where Americans can now effectively appreciate the Homestead Act and its effect upon the nation.” As a result of Rep. Bereuter’s advocacy, Congress directed NPS to prepare a GMP in FY 1996. Superintendent Dillon transferred away from Homestead National Monument before work began. His replacement, Superintendent Engler, began meeting with the GMP team in August 1997 before formally entering on duty at Homestead National Monument in September 1997. Work to develop the new GMP began in October 1997.

Unlike the 1988 GMP, planning for the new GMP in the late 1990s involved extensive contact with the local and regional community and received a corresponding level of coverage in the local Beatrice and Lincoln newspapers. The GMP planning committee held community meetings in Beatrice as well as in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, and communities in Kansas, and Superintendent Engler made personal visits to community organization leaders and elected officials to gain their support: “I did it on all different levels, meaning people that could help with the volunteer program, people that could help us with the type of public program that we thought would be important to have.” Superintendent Engler also paid particular attention to gaining the support of the park’s direct neighbors. This approach to generating support, he recalled,

was the catalyst from the standpoint of the community involvement, community engagement. And everything we did with reference to moving this park forward,

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77 Doug Bereuter, oral history interview, June 14, 2019; Files of Homestead NM.
78 Superintendent’s Annual Report for 1997; Archives of Homestead NM, Collection 100-II-B-2, Catalog No. 7584, Box 1 Folder 42.
we felt like it was important to engage the community—and the community being Beatrice, Lincoln, and the larger area.”

In a report on a public meeting in April 1998, for example, the Beatrice Daily Sun quoted Superintendent Engler on the vital role played by the community: “‘If we work together in partnership, we can tell the whole story. We need to work in partnership to move the Homestead National Monument into the next century.’” As a bridge between the community and the park, Friends of Homestead took an active role in the GMP process, helping to organize events and fostering connections with local organizations. While Park Planner John Sowl of the MWRO wrote and organized the document, Friends of Homestead volunteer B. Scully assisted by providing a thorough review of the draft GMP.

Working throughout 1998, the park released a Draft GMP in May 1999. At the outset, the Draft GMP outlined the need for this new document barely a decade after the existing GMP, claiming that the existing facilities were no longer sufficient to allow park staff to fully carry out the park’s legislated functions and mandates:

For example, exhibits on the Homestead Act and homesteading are outdated; storage space for museum and archival collections is severely limited; and there is no facility solely devoted to researchers to access the homestead collections and archives. . . . In addition, the present facilities lack adequate flexibility to address unforeseen future needs relative to the commemoration and interpretation of the Homestead Act and the mission of the Monument. As a result, most Monument facilities are now inadequate for visitors and employees.

In addition, the existing Visitor Center, located in a 100-year floodplain, represented a constant threat of flooding which could damage or destroy the Visitor Center and its museum collections. The GMP reported that the Nebraska Department of Roads was planning to redesign and improve Highway 4 where it passed through the park in order to bring it into compliance with current highway safety and design standards and noted that increased traffic on Highway 4 had the potential to negatively impact the park. Finally, according to the Draft GMP, “present interpretation and exhibits on the Homestead story are outdated and suffer from a basic disconnection between the telling of the national homestead story and the management of the principle [sic] cultural resources of the Monument.”

The GMP identified ten specific planning issues that needed to be addressed, including relocating facilities outside the 100-year floodplain, reorienting the park’s emphasis on natural resource protection to include increased interpretation of the park’s historical significance with regard to the Homestead Act, managing potential increases in traffic on Highway 4 through the park, improving inadequate and inaccurate interpretive media, correcting the lack of a collection

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79 Engler, oral history interview.
81 William Scully, oral history interview; Files of Homestead NM.
83 Ibid., page 10.
of literature about the Homestead Act, and expanding the park’s boundaries. To assess the impacts of the proposed changes, the GMP planning team identified three management alternatives, one of which had two options. The first alternative was No-Action, which is always a default alternative in planning documents of this kind. This alternative, Alternative A, recommended the continuation of existing levels and patterns of management with no changes. Alternative B discussed retaining the basic existing pattern of management but with adjustments, including construction of a 6,000-square foot addition to the existing Visitor Center, two stories tall, to allow sensitive museum collections to be raised above the flood threat. Alternative C envisioned substantial changes to the park’s management and functions to relocate the park’s key interpretive and collections management functions outside the 100-year floodplain; one option explored building a new facility outside the existing boundary, and a second option placed the new facility within the existing boundary.

The Draft GMP identified Alternative C, with a new facility outside the existing boundary, as the preferred option. Under this option, the park would construct a new Homestead Heritage Center that would be located to the east of the existing boundary on land to be acquired for the park from a willing seller. The focal point of the new Homestead Heritage Center would be the Palmer-Epard Cabin, which would be relocated to the interior of the new facility. The new Homestead Heritage Center would also feature state-of-the-art exhibits that interpreted the experiences of homesteaders, the national and international impacts of the Homestead Act, and its impacts on American Indians, immigrants, literature, industry, and agriculture. It would also incorporate a research facility to serve as a repository for items related to the park and to homesteading generally. The preferred alternative encouraged the voluntary designation of Highway 4 as the Heritage Parkway to connect the new Heritage Center, the original Visitor Center, Freeman School, and the surrounding communities and landscapes. This concept presumed that Highway 4 would be re-routed away from the park’s boundaries, with the existing alignment becoming an access road for the park and for residents who live along it. The preferred alternative, respecting the historical and scientific value of the restored prairie, advocated continuing its current management practices while incorporating the prairie into the park’s primarily historical interpretation adjusting the park’s overall interpretation to reflect the legislated mission.

Once the Draft GMP was released, the park held additional public meetings in Beatrice and Lincoln in May 1999 to solicit input on the document. Homestead National Monument also held an open house at the park in late June 1999 for the same purpose. In addition, more than 200 copies of the GMP were distributed to agencies, organizations, and individuals, with other copies available at the Beatrice Public Library and at the park. The groundwork Engler and the GMP team had prepared during their extensive community outreach were richly repaid with editorial support for the proposals. In June 1999, for example, Gage County Tourism Director Christine Stroud wrote a guest editorial urging residents to contact elected officials at all levels, from the City of Beatrice to members of Congress, supporting the preferred option.84 Over Labor Day weekend in 1999, the Beatrice Daily Sun ran an editorial supporting the proposed changes. The opinion of the editorial was that the existing resources, including the Visitor Center, restored prairie, Palmer-Epard Cabin, and Freeman School were “only the tip of the tall grass that grows here. The Homestead Act is undeniably one of the most important pieces of legislation in

America’s past, and the drama of the pioneer story deserves to be brought to life and to be shared with the color and emotion of the seasons on the prairie.” The proposals included in the GMP, including the new Heritage Center and what would become the Land Records project deserved local participation according to the Beatrice Daily Sun:

Our support through letters and telephone calls is needed to let national park and federal officials know that the dollars would be well-spent on this national park. As the prairie grass grows tall and strong, so must we now stand tall as advocates for the future of the monument and the story it has to tell.”

By the end of the sixty-day public comment period, the park had received fifteen written comments, several of which were substantive and which were addressed. The Final GMP and Abbreviated Environmental Impact Statement was then released to the public in early November 1999; no comments were received during the mandatory thirty-day review period. The document was pronounced final on December 20, 1999. Initially planned to guide the park for a period of ten to fifteen years, the GMP has served the park well for two decades. While not all recommended actions have been fulfilled, notably the relocation of Highway 4 outside park boundaries, the park completed the Heritage Center, which has allowed for a new and more complete interpretation of homesteading in its broader context to the visiting public, and the ongoing Land Records project has allowed scholars to profoundly reshape understanding of homesteading, its operations, and impacts on a host of topics including American Indians, immigration, African-Americans, industrialization, and agriculture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under the current management, Homestead National Monument is finally able to fulfill its legislated mandate to be “an appropriate monument to retain for posterity a proper memorial emblematical of the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed in the settlement, cultivation, and civilization of the great West.”

General Management Plans created during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s were designed to provide specific management recommendations. As a result, they were accompanied by an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement in which the potential impacts of these recommendations were evaluated. In more recent years, parks have developed Foundation Documents; rather than provide management recommendations, they outline the core mission of the park, and identify its most important resources and values and the potential threats to those resources and values. In this sense, a Foundation Document serves as the underlying guidance for all future management and planning decisions.

Homestead National Monument of America released its Foundation Document in August 2015.86 The document first provides a statement of the park’s significance, which focuses on historical issues: the park encompasses the 160-acre homestead claim, one of the first to be filed under the Homestead Act of 1862; the Homestead Act had a profound impact on many facets of American history; the Freeman School was one of the longest continually operating one-room schoolhouses in Nebraska, from 1872 to 1969; and the park is “the world’s primary repository of objects associated with homesteading.” The park also has great environmental significance: it contains the second-oldest tallgrass prairie restoration in the nation, and the Freeman School site

86 Foundation Document: Homestead National Monument of America, Nebraska 9August 2015).
contains one acre of tallgrass prairie that has never been plowed. The park’s significance is then manifested in its fundamental resources and values, those aspects of the park that “warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.” The Foundation Document identifies eight fundamental resources and values:

- The original 160-acre homestead claim with its related landscape features;
- The Freeman School and grounds
- Museum collections
- Lowland bur oak forest
- Grain Grower’s Highway remains
- Archeological sites related to habitation
- The Palmer-Epard Cabin
- Sense of Time and Place

For each of these aspects of the park, the Foundation Document identifies the current conditions, threats and opportunities, and any data or planning needs. In assessing the park’s planning and data needs, the Foundation Document identified ten issues in particular:

- Highway 4, including impacts from heavy truck and automobile traffic, and the ongoing desire to relocate Highway 4 and develop the Homestead Heritage Parkway as prescribed in the GMP
- Land use and resource concerns including impacts from surrounding agricultural and industrial uses, the potential for future development, and the depletion of the groundwater aquifer
- Recreational activities, including concerns over hunting on adjacent properties, the need for more recreational opportunities for visitors, and the status of the farm pond at the Heritage Center, which the NPS owns only in part
- Invasive plant species in the prairie and forest
- The need for an administrative history
- Technological needs to keep up with current communication trends
- Volunteers, in particular providing new opportunities for those who wish to take part
- A vision for future growth of the park’s interpretive program
- The park’s name, which confuses the vast majority of first-time visitors

The Foundation Document provided the basis for the park’s Long-Range Interpretation Plan, which was completed in 2017. All park planning documents for the foreseeable future will draw upon this concise statement of what is significant and distinctive about Homestead National Monument of America.
Conclusion

On November 20, 2017, Homestead National Monument revealed its newest exhibit in a public ceremony at the Heritage Center: a tractor. The 1945 Allis-Chalmers Model C tractor had been brought from where it lay partially encased in mud in an Alaska forest to Nebraska, where it was stabilized, partially restored, and brought to the park for display. The arrival of this tractor brought to a close the story of homesteading as presented at Homestead National Monument, but it continued to open and enlarge that story to future generations and broader horizons. The tractor had belonged to Kenneth Deardorff, who, in 1988, received the last title to land in the public domain under the Homestead Act of 1862. A relic of disputes over how the new nation’s seemingly limitless land would benefit America’s citizens, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, it remained the law of the land until 1976. At that time President Gerald Ford signed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act which put an end to homesteading throughout the lower forty-eight states. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, however, contained special provisions for Alaska, where claims could be filed through 1986, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. Homestead National Monument of America, established by Congress on the homestead where Daniel Freeman filed a claim within moments of the Homestead Act taking effect on January 1, 1863, now had one of the most important artifacts from the nation’s last homesteader. The circle was closed, with the first and the last homesteaders interpreted in the same place and at the same time.

The arrival of Kenneth Deardorff’s tractor from Alaska, however, also illustrates the more expansive understanding of the Homestead Act which the park seeks to convey. This new understanding helps park staff address a conflict in the park’s interpretation from its earliest years of development before World War II. Though located on the original homestead of Daniel Freeman and acquired from his heirs, the new park retained none of Freeman’s homestead buildings. This situation created a need for decisions on the part of staff at the Region II Office (now MWRO) in Omaha and the new Superintendent, who arrived in 1940: how and what should NPS interpret at Homestead National Monument? With nothing remaining from Daniel Freeman’s occupancy except the original T-shaped boundary of the property, the Osage orange hedgerow, the graves of Freeman and his wife, and yet-to-be-discovered archeological deposits, and with unease among many historians within and without NPS about how much to celebrate Daniel Freeman, early NPS personnel developed an interpretive program around the land itself. While deciding how to create this program, NPS embarked on an ambitious plan to restore the prairie, which had been destroyed by more than seventy years of active farming, to its condition when Freeman first arrived in the 1860s. This was the first attempt by NPS to restore a section of prairie and only the second in the nation.

The 1962 completion of the Visitor Center, part of the Service-wide Mission 66 program, first allowed the park to create an interpretation of the history of homesteading through a series of exhibits. These exhibits provided background on the nation’s various attempts to distribute land to settlers before the Homestead Act before turning the visitor’s attention to the lives of the homesteaders themselves. The exhibits were supplemented a decade later by the development of an active living history program which allowed visitors to gain a more visceral sense of the lives of the early pioneers on the Great Plains and continued into the 1980s. By then, however, the concern for environmental issues that arose in the late 1960s had transformed into a
predominating concern for the ongoing restoration of the section of prairie, using the latest science-based environmental programs available to maintain the prairie in a condition that replicated that which Freeman might have known. In the process, however, the initial confusion over the park’s interpretive focus remained unsolved.

The arrival of Kenneth Deardorff’s tractor from Alaska in 2017 serves as an example of the solution to the problem that had been developing for nearly twenty-five years. Superintendents and staff at Homestead National Monument from the mid-1990s have focused on a more expansive understanding of homesteading and its role in American society. This new emphasis has emphasized a wide range of legacies of the Homestead Act of 1862, not least that people were still claiming land under the Homestead Act at the dawn of the personal computer age. Rather than just a thing of the past, with hardy pioneers cooking over an open fire and churning butter by hand, the Homestead Act remains one of the most vital parts of American history, showcasing both the strengths and the weaknesses of America’s rapid expansion fueled by free land. In recent decades, the park has brought to light the nation’s living homesteaders, such as Kenneth Deardorff, introduced tens of thousands of people to the spirit of contemporary exploration and development which the Homestead Act symbolized, and made millions of historical records pertaining to homesteading accessible to the public, encouraging more effective genealogical research and new avenues in scholarly historical research and interpretation. The new Heritage Center, completed in 2007, accomplishes many of the goals of the new approach to interpreting homesteading at the park. The Heritage Center includes a more comprehensive exhibit which presents the full sweep of the epic story of homesteading, an orientation film which allows visitors to understand the expansion of settlement from the perspectives of American Indians as well as living homesteaders, and dedicated curatorial space which allows for the collection and preservation of both literature and artifacts pertaining to homesteading and its legacies. Moreover, the site of the Heritage Center, facing west on a high point of land overlooking the restored prairie, allows visitors to experience in a more direct way the connection between the history of homesteading on the Great Plains and the landscape encountered by the early homesteaders.

The arrival of Kenneth Deardorff’s tractor, moreover, symbolized the new approach to community engagement and partnerships which has characterized Homestead National Monument in recent decades. The park is deeply woven into the fabric of Beatrice, located on the original homestead of Daniel Freeman, who was celebrated during his lifetime as the nation’s first homesteader. The community’s leaders and citizens were deeply invested in the creation of the park in the 1930s and continue to have a close relation with the park’s Superintendents and staff. Beginning with Superintendent Costa Dillon in 1993, however, and continued by Superintendent Mark Engler since 1997, the park has sought ways to become more actively engaged with the local community, drawing support from it and providing vibrant and active programming and innovative opportunities for volunteer engagement. The reestablishment of a friends group, Friends of Homestead, has, once again, brought community leaders together in support of the park at a level not seen since the creation of the park.

The park secured Kenneth Deardorff’s tractor from Alaska through the kind of partnerships which these new relationships engendered. The park has had a long-standing relationship with Kenneth Deardorff, inviting him to the grand opening of the Heritage Center in
2007 and accepting several of his homesteading items into the park’s museum collection. This relationship allowed for the identification of the tractor and an understanding of its historical significance. Park resources, however, were not sufficient to retrieve the tractor from the woods on Deardorff’s original claim, transport it to Nebraska, restore it, and bring it to the park. Instead, Superintendent Engler and Friends of Homestead President Diane Vicars created a large collaborative effort that started with the donation of approximately $70,000 to Friends of Homestead from Dr. C.T. Frerichs, a Beatrice physician, in memory of his wife. This fund allowed NPS staff and volunteers to travel to Alaska in June 2016 to retrieve the tractor, which had sunk more than one foot into the forest floor. The tractor was then airlifted by helicopter to a port where it was put on a ship and then on truck for delivery to the Larsen Tractor Test and Power Museum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. While there, retired NPS Conservator Al Levitan led a team that included faculty and students associated with the University’s Tractor Restoration Club. The goal of the restoration was not to bring it back to its original 1945 condition but to its condition when Deardorff used it in the late 1970s. Once complete, it was again placed on a truck and delivered to the Heritage Center.

The project was the result of collaboration not just among agencies and organizations but among generations as well. Dr. Frerichs, then ninety-four years old, donated the funds for the project in memory of his wife, Julia, inspired by her interest in the park but also by a photo of his wife sitting on his family’s Allis-Chalmers tractor in 1950 before they were married. Once in Lincoln, the restoration was carried out largely by students, who expressed amazement at the type of equipment Deardorff had available to work his homestead claim. The project to bring this tractor, belonging to the nation’s last homesteader, to the National Monument that commemorates the nation’s first homesteader, thus brought together more than three generations of people who looked both backward and forward in time. It represents the ongoing relevance of the Homestead Act of 1862, which continues to inspire the coming generations to understand more about the origins and impacts of American expansion and settlement, in the Great Plains and beyond.
Note on Sources

The research for this Administrative History of Homestead National Monument of America was based on five sets of research materials. First, as described in Chapter 7, park staff has created an extensive and well-organized archival collection which is now housed in the lower level of the Heritage Center. This archival collection contains early park documents including weekly, monthly, and annual reports, minutes of staff meetings, correspondence, early planning documents, records of the park’s first friends organization, and other miscellaneous information pertaining to the park’s management. Documents from this archival collection are noted in the footnotes as being in Archives of Homestead NM. The park’s administrative office, located in what is now the Education Center (built as the Visitor Center in 1962), contains another set of records. While many of the records in these administrative files contain information about more recent aspects of the park’s management, including educational programs, firefighting, collections, contemporary planning documents and research reports, and staff, they also contain substantial historical information about buildings. Documents from the administrative files are noted in the footnotes as being in Files, Homestead NM.

In addition to records held at the park, the Federal Records Center in Lenexa, Kansas contains a substantial collection of records pertaining to Homestead National Monument. These records derive from the central files of the regional office in Omaha, identified at different times as Region II, Region Two, and Midwest Regional Office. The majority of these records date from the 1960s through the early 1990 and provide a great deal of information about the park’s conservation work during that period and about the acquisition and restoration of the Freeman School. While these records occasionally duplicate documents located either in the archival or administrative files of the park, many provided new information about or insights into the park’s management.

Homestead National Monument emerged from the enthusiasm of the nearby City of Beatrice, where citizens led the efforts to have Congress establish the park, helped to staff the park during World War II, donated the basis for the park’s museum collection, and continued to support the park generally since its creation in 1936. As a result of this close connection between Homestead National Monument and the City of Beatrice, the local newspaper, the Beatrice Daily Sun, regularly published articles and editorials pertaining to the park. These newspaper pieces provided extremely useful information about the park’s programs and particularly about the park’s staff, noting their arrival, departure, background, and photographs.

Finally, the park benefitted immensely from oral history interviews. Outside The Box staff conducted interviews with twelve persons during the summer of 2019, including current and former park and regional office staff, community members, and others who had information about one or more of the park’s programs or eras of development. These interviews were all conducted in-person and were recorded digitally, with the original digital recordings and transcripts provided to the park. This Administrative History would not have been possible without the generosity of these twelve individuals, particularly with regard to programs, events, and other developments that occurred during the past twenty-five years.
All other sources of information are identified in the following bibliography.


Lowitt, “Shelterbelt in Nebraska.” *Nebraska History* 57 (1976): 405-422.


“More Than 80 Years Helping People Help the Land: A Brief History of NRCS.” USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (available online at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021392).


**Reports, Studies, and Planning Documents**


Homestead National Monument of America: Long-Range Interpretive Plan (February 2017).


## Appendix I: Staff List

### Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Entered on Duty</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clarence H. Schultz</td>
<td>October 4, 1940</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February 1, 1946</td>
<td>May 30, 1954</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russell A Gibbs (Acting)</td>
<td>November 17, 1942</td>
<td>September 30, 1944</td>
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<td>Elmer L. Hevelone (Acting)</td>
<td>August 1, 1944</td>
<td>January 30, 1946</td>
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<td>Fred Dickenson (Acting)</td>
<td>Summer 1954</td>
<td>August 1954</td>
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<td>George C. Blake</td>
<td>September 15, 1954</td>
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<td>Ralph K. Shaver</td>
<td>April 8, 1956</td>
<td>February 12, 1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren D. Hotchkiss</td>
<td>April 26, 1959</td>
<td>May 11, 1963</td>
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<td>Vernon E. Hennesay</td>
<td>September 18, 1963</td>
<td>July 12, 1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>John F. Rohn, Jr.</td>
<td>August 3, 1965</td>
<td>June 1968</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evelyn Carlson (Acting)</td>
<td>June 1968</td>
<td>April 22, 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Higgins</td>
<td>April 23, 1969</td>
<td>January 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent J. Halvorson</td>
<td>March 7, 1971</td>
<td>November 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall Baynes</td>
<td>February 1983</td>
<td>May 1993 (died in office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine Dillon</td>
<td>September 17, 1993</td>
<td>April 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Engler</td>
<td>September 14, 1997</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Boyko (Deputy)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>June 2001</td>
</tr>
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### Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Entered on Duty</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nellie M. Renning</td>
<td>Clerk-Typist (seasonal)</td>
<td>April 24, 1952</td>
<td>June 11, 1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Carlson</td>
<td>Clerk-Typist (temp)</td>
<td>June 4, 1953</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clerk-Typist (career</td>
<td>April 24, 1956</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conditional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clerk-Stenographer (Permanent)</td>
<td>July 24, 1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>March 11, 1963</td>
<td>January 11, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Entered on Duty</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Scheiding</td>
<td>Clerk-Typist/Administrative Clerk</td>
<td>June 1987</td>
<td>December 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Cook</td>
<td>Administrative Clerk</td>
<td>April 8, 1991</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Underwood</td>
<td>Administrative Visitor Use Assistant</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Boyko</td>
<td>Administrative Officer</td>
<td>November 1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen Janzen</td>
<td>Administrative Clerk</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Bruns</td>
<td>Administrative Clerk</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy Steelman</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant Officer</td>
<td>September 18, 2016</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative Officer</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Present</td>
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**Rangers**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ramon G. Brende</td>
<td>Park Technician (STF)</td>
<td>December 18, 1977</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dianne Bigge</td>
<td>Park Technician</td>
<td>September 20, 1981</td>
<td>November 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Beard</td>
<td>Park Technician</td>
<td>April 1983</td>
<td>April 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelley Collins</td>
<td>Park Technician</td>
<td>August 1984</td>
<td>October 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Williams</td>
<td>Chief Ranger</td>
<td>July 1985</td>
<td>August 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley Hoh</td>
<td>Ranger</td>
<td>January 1988</td>
<td>June 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwendolyn Parrett</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Interpretation)</td>
<td>September 11, 1990</td>
<td>May 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Entered on Duty</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Batzer</td>
<td>Chief Ranger</td>
<td>September 22, 1991</td>
<td>April 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Appler</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Interpretation) (Law Enforcement)</td>
<td>October 1992</td>
<td>January 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly Albrecht</td>
<td>Supervisory Park Ranger</td>
<td>July 1995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles E. Wells</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
<td>October 1995</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Temple</td>
<td>Park Ranger</td>
<td>March 1, 1998</td>
<td>January 30, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Stansberry</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Law Enforcement)</td>
<td>June 22, 2000</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy Garrett</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Interpretation)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denise Germann</td>
<td>Supervisory Ranger (Interpretation)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>December 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesse Bolli</td>
<td>Resource Management Specialist</td>
<td>September 8, 2002</td>
<td>Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merrith Baughman</td>
<td>Chief Ranger</td>
<td>September 18, 2005</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Troxol</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Law Enforcement)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Korgie (Fleming)</td>
<td>Park Guide</td>
<td>May 19, 2008 (seasonal)</td>
<td>June 22, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Capps-Henke</td>
<td>Park Ranger (Law Enforcement)</td>
<td>July 2010</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Bornemeier</td>
<td>Chief Ranger</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Cook</td>
<td>Chief Ranger</td>
<td>November 2016</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte McDaniel</td>
<td>Park Ranger/Volunteer Coordinator</td>
<td>May 27, 2018</td>
<td>October 12, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Graveline</td>
<td>Education Specialist</td>
<td>November 11, 2018</td>
<td>May 23, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Genke</td>
<td>Supervisory Park Ranger</td>
<td>February 16, 2020</td>
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**Historian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecil Halliday</td>
<td>July 22, 1962</td>
<td>February 16, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas R. Walsh</td>
<td>March 13, 1963</td>
<td>September 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard Brown</td>
<td>September 25, 1966</td>
<td>December 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Entered on Duty</td>
<td>Departed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Clifford Soubier</td>
<td>December 15, 1966</td>
<td>November 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahy C. Whitaker</td>
<td>December 1969</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger D. Pearson</td>
<td>December 16, 1970</td>
<td>August 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Todd Arrington</td>
<td>September 4, 1999</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake Bell</td>
<td>February 15, 2010</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel P. Ott</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Murcell</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>February 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Fairchild</td>
<td>February 2019</td>
<td>Present</td>
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**Maintenance/Facility Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Norman</td>
<td>Custodian/Maintenance Worker</td>
<td>November 16, 1963</td>
<td>January 10, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald A. LaDeaux</td>
<td>Maintenance Supervisor</td>
<td>July 28, 1981</td>
<td>May 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Seger</td>
<td>Maintenance Worker</td>
<td>August 1983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance Foreman</td>
<td>June 1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance Worker</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Post-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin McMurry</td>
<td>Maintenance Foreman</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>June 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Chelewski</td>
<td>Facility Manager</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Streseman</td>
<td>Facility Manager</td>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Ruskamp</td>
<td>Facility Manager</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Post-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis Allen</td>
<td>Facility Manager</td>
<td>September 9, 2007</td>
<td>May 11, 2009 (Emergency Appointment) May 23, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 24, 2009 (Emergency Appointment) Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Karges</td>
<td>Maintenance Worker</td>
<td>February 3, 2019</td>
<td>May 23, 2020</td>
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**Collections Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Departed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted Volkmer</td>
<td>Museum Technician (Term)</td>
<td>April 1999</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Hulvershorn</td>
<td>Museum Technician (Term)</td>
<td>June 2000</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy Sweet</td>
<td>Museum Technician (Term)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Jurgena</td>
<td>Curator</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>2012?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Neumann</td>
<td>Collections Intern</td>
<td>February 2014</td>
<td>October 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Archivist</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>January 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(contractor to Friends of Homestead)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Museum Technician</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>Present</td>
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</table>
Appendix II: Legislation
1184    74TH CONGRESS. SESS. II. CHS. 157, 159. MARCH 19, 20, 1936.

[CHAPTER 157.]    AN ACT

To establish The Homestead National Monument of America in Gage County, Nebraska.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized and directed to acquire, on behalf of the United States, by gift, purchase, or condemnation, the south half of the northwest quarter, the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter, and the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter section 26, township 4 north, range 5 east, of the sixth principal meridian, Gage County, Nebraska, the same being the first homestead entered upon under the General Homestead Act of May 20, 1862, by Daniel Freeman, and that when so acquired, the said area be designated "The Homestead National Monument of America."

Sec. 2. That there is authorized to be appropriated a sum not to exceed $24,000, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for the purpose of acquiring said tract.

Sec. 3. It shall be the duty of the Secretary of the Interior to lay out said land in a suitable and enduring manner so that the same may be maintained as an appropriate monument to retain for posterity a proper memorial emblematical of the hardships and the pioneer life through which the early settlers passed in the settlement, cultivation, and civilization of the great West. It shall be his duty to erect suitable buildings to be used as a museum in which shall be preserved literature applying to such settlement and agricultural implements used in bringing the western plains to its present high state of civilization, and to use the said tract of land for such other objects and purposes as in his judgment may perpetuate the history of the country mainly developed by the homestead law.

Sec. 4. For the purpose of carrying out the suggestions and recommendations of the Secretary of the Interior, the necessary annual appropriations therefor are hereby authorized.

Approved, March 19, 1936.
Public Law 91-411

AN ACT

Providing for the addition of the Freeman School to the Homestead National Monument of America in the State of Nebraska, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, in order to further the interpretation and commemoration of the pioneer life of early settlers of the West, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to acquire by donation or purchase with donated or appropriated funds the following described lands and interests therein, on which is situated the old school building known as Freeman School:

Beginning at the southeast corner of the southeast quarter of section 22, township 4 north, range 5 east, sixth principal meridian, Gage County, Nebraska, thence running north on the east line of the said quarter section 297 feet, thence west 214.5 feet, thence south 297 feet, thence east 214.5 feet to the point of beginning.

The Secretary is further authorized, in order to protect the setting of the Freeman School, preserve an adequate visual relationship with the existing Homestead National Monument of America, and provide access to the school from the national monument, to acquire by any of the above methods such lands and interests therein, as he deems necessary within the areas in certain sections of township 4 north, range 5 east, sixth principal meridian, Gage County, Nebraska, which are described as follows:

Section 22, beginning at a point 297 feet north of the southeast corner of the southeast quarter on the east line of the said quarter section, thence north along the east line of the said quarter section 103 feet, thence west 300 feet, thence south 400 feet to the south line of said quarter section, thence east along the south line of said quarter section 85.5 feet to the boundary of the Freeman School property, thence north along the boundary of the school property 297 feet, thence east along the boundary of the school property 214.5 feet to the point of beginning;

Section 23, the south 300 feet of the southwest quarter thereof;

Section 26, the north 500 feet of the northwest quarter northwest quarter thereof;

Section 27, beginning at the northeast corner of the northeast quarter, thence south along the east line of the said quarter section 300 feet, thence west 300 feet, thence north 300 feet to the north line of said quarter section, thence east along the north line of said quarter section 300 feet to the point of beginning; all containing about 31 acres.

Sec. 2. The property acquired pursuant to this Act shall be administered by the Secretary of the Interior as part of the Homestead National Monument of America, in accordance with the Act of March 19, 1936 (49 Stat. 1154), and the Act of August 25, 1914 (39 Stat. 585), as amended and supplemented (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.).

Sec. 3. For the purposes of this Act, there are authorized to be appropriated not more than $50,000, of which not more than $45,000 (April 1970 prices), plus or minus such amounts, if any, as may be justified by reasons of ordinary fluctuations in construction costs as indicated by engineering cost indices applicable to the types of construction involved herein shall be appropriated for the rehabilitation and development of the Freeman School.

Approved September 25, 1970.
An Act

To provide for additional lands to be included within the boundaries of the Homestead National Monument of America in the State of Nebraska, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress <<NOTE: Homestead National Monument of America Additions Act. 16 USC 490a note.>> assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Homestead National Monument of America Additions Act".

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) Map.--The term "map" means the map entitled "Proposed Boundary Adjustment, Homestead National Monument of America, Gage County, Nebraska", numbered 368/80036 and dated March 2000.

(2) Monument.--The term "Monument" means the Homestead National Monument of America, Nebraska.

(3) Secretary.--The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior.

SEC. 3. ADDITIONS TO HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT OF AMERICA.

(a) In General.--The Secretary may acquire, by donation or by purchase with appropriated or donated funds, from willing sellers only, the privately-owned property described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (b). The Secretary may acquire, by donation only, the State-owned property described in paragraphs (3) and (4) of subsection (b).

(b) Parcels.--The parcels referred to in subsection (a) are the following:

(1) Graff property.--The parcel consisting of approximately 15.98 acres of privately-owned land, as depicted on the map.

(2) Pioneer acres green.--The parcel consisting of approximately 3 acres of privately-owned land, as depicted on the map.

(3) Segment of state highway 4.--The parcel consisting of approximately 3.6 acres of State-owned land including Nebraska
State Highway 4, as depicted on the map.

(4) State triangle.--The parcel consisting of approximately 8.3 acres of state-owned land, as depicted on the map.

(c) Boundary Adjustment.--Upon acquisition of a parcel described in subsection (b), the Secretary shall modify the boundary of the Monument to include the parcel. Any parcel included within

[[Page 116 STAT. 2872]]

the boundary shall be administered by the Secretary as part of the Monument.

(d) Deadline for Acquisition of Certain Property.--If the property described in subsection (b)(1) is not acquired by the Secretary from a willing seller within 5 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall no longer be authorized to acquire such property pursuant to this Act and such property shall not become part of the Monument pursuant to this Act.

(e) Availability of Map.--The map shall be on file in the appropriate offices of the National Park Service.

(f) Authorization of Appropriations.--There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act $400,000.

SEC. 4. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.

The Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Nebraska, Gage County, local units of government, private groups, and individuals for operation, maintenance, interpretation, recreation, and other purposes related to the proposed Homestead Heritage Highway to be located in the general vicinity of the Monument.

Approved December 16, 2002.
Index

Admatic Slide Machine, see Audio-visual technology

Albrecht, Beverly, 190, 283, 285, 324

Allen, Travis, 261, 325

Archives, 7, 8, 63, 150, 152, 159-161, 162, 186, 244, 46, 288, 289, 295, 298, 299, 309, 316

Armstrong, Velma, 104

Archeology, 84-85, 150


Audio-visual technology, 82, 97-99, 101, 103-07, 114, 183-85, 190, 206, 212, 224, 251, 270, 294, 305

Batzer, John, 170, 172, 279, 282, 283, 324

Baughman, Merrith, 212, 285-86, 302, 324

Baynes, Randall, 142, 185, 205, 232, 244, 278-80, 281-82, 283, 292, 293, 300, 307, 322


Beatrice Rural Fire Department, 80, 179-182

Bell, Blake, 162, 214, 288, 325


Blake, George, 96, 100, 115-16, 144, 163, 269, 270, 322

Bolli, Jesse, 173-174, 194, 266, 287-88, 324

Bornemeier, Andrea, 286, 324

Boyko, Betty, 283, 286, 322
Brende, Ramon G., 260, 278, 279, 323

Brown, Leonard, 87-89, 130, 131, 199, 201, 274, 324

Bruns, Sue, 287, 323

Budget (Homestead National Monument), 47, 60, 64, 69, 71, 93, 101, 122, 123-124, 126, 130, 149, 185, 195, 200, 205, 213-14, 223, 250, 252, 253, 278, 280, 288-89, 295, 296-97, 299-302

Cammerer, Arno, 37, 38, 90, 91

Carlson, Evelyn, 101, 102, 154, 259-60, 269, 272, 275, 278, 322

Chelewski, Lynn, 261, 325

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), 6, 34-35, 50-51, 53, 63-64


Cominco Products, Inc., see Fertilizer Plants

Cook Susan, 192, 208, 212-213, 279-80, 282, 283, 286, 287, 298, 299, 323

Cub Creek, 4, 6, 27, 28, 29, 45, 52, 54, 58-60, 69-74, 81, 96, 110-111, 126, 135, 143, 160, 163, 167, 170, 172-73, 176, 180, 186, 246-47, 261, 266, 298, 304, 307 see also Footbridge

Dahle, Rebecca, 279, 324

Deardorff, Kenneth, 1, 161, 256, 258, 313-315

Dempster Mill Manufacturing Company, 162, 295, 299

Dickensen, Fred, 270, 322

Dillon, Constantine, 146-147, 149, 186-187, 205-07, 213, 215, 232, 237, 244, 245-46, 282-85, 288, 293, 301, 307, 308, 314, 322

Distance Learning, see Education

Education, 7, 45, 76, 82, 88, 90-91, 111, 183, 187, 189-196, 201, 205, 206, 208, 226, 228, 232, 238, 247, 259, 284, 285, 287-88, 298, 300, 302

Education Center, 8, 66, 70, 125, 149, 161, 208, 239, 241, 259, 316 see also Visitor Center
Educational Service Unit, see Education

Edwards, Richard, 215, 217-18, 220


Ensz Family, 247, 263-266, 294-95

Erosion, see Cub Creek


Fairchild, Jonathan, 214, 288, 325

Ferneding, Don, 191-193

Fertilizer Plants, 137-138, 142-143, 148

Film Series, 228-29, 240, 272, 293

Fink, William O., 183, 213, 278, 323

Footbridge (Cub Creek), 6, 101, 106, 111, 116, 117, 118-21, 135, 184, 224

Freeman, Daniel, 2-8 passim, 27-28, 29-30, 32, 52, 54, 61-63, 68, 75, 82-84, 87, 90, 92, 103, 106-07, 111-12, 114, 152, 163, 169, 174-77, 184, 186, 209, 213, 222, 235, 303, 304, 313

Freeman School, 5, 6, 42-44, 81, 108, 157, 176, 184-85, 186, 187, 189-90, 192, 208, 225, 232, 260, 272, 274, 275-77, 291, 298, 301, 303, 306-07, 310, 311, 316; Furnishings Report and Plan, 201-202, 205; restoration of, 196-205; and scenic asements, 138-43; virgin prairie at, 166, 169, 170, 175


Garrett, Amy, 194-95, 285, 324


Genke, Amy, 286, 324
Germann, Denise, 285, 324

Gibbs, Russell, 61, 62-63, 69, 83, 89, 93, 111, 206, 222, 258, 322

Graff Family, 45, 46, 248-50, 261, 262, 265, 290, 294

Halliday, Cecil, 86, 117, 271, 273, 324


Hennesay, Vernon E., 75, 106, 108, 117, 155, 198, 228, 229, 272-73, 322

Heritage Center, 5, 6, 7, 44-46, 80, 104, 133, 147, 148, 150, 160-61, 173-74, 178, 188, 195, 208, 209-13, 214, 219, 226, 237, 238, 240-42, 244-59, 261-63 passim, 267, 284, 288-89, 292, 294, 295, 301-02, 310-11, 313-315

Hevelone, Elmer L., 41, 42, 63, 83, 213, 268, 322

Higgins, John, 79, 80, 164, 230, 275-76, 322


Hoh, Shirley, 279, 323

Homestead Act, 1-2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 17, 18, 21, 22-23, 26-33 passim, 35-36, 40, 61-62, 82-83, 86-87, 89-90, 103, 106-08, 111, 122, 124, 156-57, 161, 163, 184-88, 196, 206-07, 209, 214-215, 225-27 passim, 229, 234, 235, 239, 244, 246, 251, 252, 256, 289, 290, 305, 308-11, 313-15 passim; original on exhibit at Homestead National Monument of America, 240-41, 243, 289

Homestead Days, 113, 185, 208, 230, 231, 253, 293, 296; in downtown Beatrice, 227-28

Homestead Expressway, 239-40

Homestead Heritage Parkway, 45-46, 188, 189, 246-47, 312

Homestead Historical Association, 43, 88, 113, 137 140, 198, 225, 227, 229, 237, 284, 289-91, 292-93

Hotchkiss, Warren D., 89, 90, 102, 103-05 passim, 117, 119-20, 123, 145, 154-55, 179, 196-97, 226, 271-72, 289-90, 300, 303, 322

Hummel, Edward, 49, 51-52, 54-61, 64, 68, 82-83, 90, 92, 114, 213, 268

Janzen, Doreen, 323

Jurgena, Jason, 161, 214, 289, 325

Kinney, Julia Beatrice 25, 150

Korgie, Jessica, 324

Lacome, Rebecca; see Rebecca Dahle

LaDeaux, Donald A., 278, 279, 325

Land Records Project, 86, 184, 213-21, 244, 246n, 288, 294, 310, 311

Landers, Roger Q., 76-77, 80-81, 164, 166, 277

Lewis, Ralph, 103

Living History, see Interpretation

Luckey, Henry C., 37-38, 40, 41, 245

Maintenance (facilities), 6, 60, 94, 101, 114, 133, 134-36, 242, 259-61, 272, 278-79, 297, 300, 305

Mattes, Merrill, 42, 62-63, 86, 93-94, 96, 102, 106, 126, 198

Mattison, Ray H., 8, 29, 40, 86-88, 89-90, 107, 109, 269-70, 322

Matzko, John, 215, 217, 288


Mitchell, Patricia A., 278, 279, 322
Murcell, Robert, 214, 288, 325
National Archives (Washington, DC), 184, 214, 216, 219-20, 294
Natural Resources Conservation Service, see Soil Conservation Service
Neumann, Amy, 162, 289, 295, 299, 326
Norman, Raymond, 79, 101, 135, 260, 272, 278, 325
Norris, George, 35-41, 151, 245
Novotny, Emil L., 35, 37, 41
Office of the Inspector General, 157, 280-81
Osage Orange Hedgerow, 169, 176-79, 186, 212, 247, 264, 266, 313
Ott, Daniel P., 214, 288, 325
Pearson, Roger C. 208, 213, 276-77, 278, 292, 323
Philips Petroleum Company; see Fertilizer Plants
Pioneer Acres Subdivision, 45, 138-39, 143, 263, 293, 294
Prairie Appreciation Week, 185, 189, 190, 231-32, 293
Prairie, restored, 2-3, 4, 6, 8, 54-57, 60, 64, 69, 74-81, 82, 92, 96, 110-12, 114, 120, 134, 137, 142, 143, 146, 156-57, 163-71, 173, 174-76, 177, 179, 182, 184-86, 203, 205-06, 222, 225, 232, 247-48, 259 262, 268-69, 274, 277, 279, 296, 298, 300, 303, 304, 306-07, 310, 311, 313-14
Prairie Trail, 6, 76, 81, 96-97, 101-02, 105, 110-11, 117, 118-20, 128, 129 134, 163, 183, 185-87 passim, 189-90, 198, 212, 224, 226, 270, 271, 305, 306
Prescribed burn, 6, 77-81, 146, 164-70, 176, 181-82, 185, 194, 276, 277, 279, 287, 306
Region II Office; see Midwest Regional Office
Region Two Office; see Midwest Regional Office
Rennie-Tucker, Keely, 160-61, 228, 325

Renning, Nellie M., 269, 322

Residences (employees), 6, 93, 101, 115-19, 120, 123-25, 134-36 passim, 272, 304, 306

Richter, Thomas, 111, 113, 183, 185, 186, 207, 209


River Basin Surveys, see Archeology

Rohn, John F., Jr., 75, 87-88, 107-13 passim, 129, 146, 199, 272, 274, 275, 322

Ruskamp, Ron, 261, 325

Scheiding, Martha, 279, 323

Scheve Family, 55-56, 58, 141, 142

Schools, see Education

Schultz, Clarence H., 4, 6, 7, 8, 42, 60, 61, 63-64, 69-72, 78, 79, 83, 89, 90, 93-94, 114-15, 121, 126-29, 151-52, 179. 196, 222-23, 268-69, 300, 302-03, 322

Scully, William B., 213, 237-38, 250, 253, 259, 295, 309

Seger, John, 260-61, 279, 325

Senior Rangers; see Volunteers

Shaver, Ralph K., 74, 75, 85-86, 89, 96-100 passim, 102, 122, 144, 154, 270, 271, 322

Shelterbelt, 36-37

Shum, Opal, 262-64, 266, 294

Soil Conservation Service, 53-54, 56, 68, 71, 78-79, 164, 173

Solar Eclipse (2017), 241-43


Sowl, John, 246-48, 309
Williams, Sherda, 174

Wirth, Conrad L., 68, 71, 87, 100, 121-22, 154

Zimmer, Karen L., 322