

HOMESTEAD



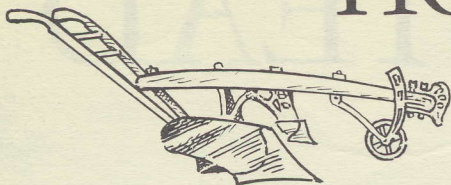
NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEBRASKA

HOMESTEAD

NATIONAL

MONUMENT



Site of the first "claim" under the Homestead Act of 1862, commemorating the American democratic land policy which accelerated the settlement of the western plains. It created a frontier of opportunity.

Free Land! Free Land! That constant cry of the American frontiersmen for nearly half a century was answered when President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862. By its terms, every citizen or person who declared his intention to become a citizen could file claim to "one-quarter section [160 acres] of unappropriated Government land." The act also stated that after paying a small fee, the homesteader had to work his "claim" for 5 years before receiving the patent or certificate of ownership.

On January 1, 1863, when the act became effective, hundreds of settlers flocked to local land offices to file their claims. In less than 60 years the Government gave away to more than one million individual settlers an acreage nearly equivalent in size to that of the combined States of Texas and Louisiana.

Homestead National Monument is on the site of the first claim entered under the act. It commemorates the influence of the "homestead movement" on American history; it is also a memorial to our hardy pioneer forbears who braved the rigors and scourges of the windswept prairies to build their homes and our Nation.

Our Early Land Policy

At the close of the Revolutionary War the newly formed National Government was

weak, heavily burdened with debt, limited in revenue, and uncertain of the future. It did, however, possess vast areas of public land ceded to it by the various States. It was reasonable that these public lands should be looked to for revenue. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton soon recommended the sale of land in large units—a practice which tended to favor large-scale purchasers and land speculation. Hamilton's policy was soon modified to give the small-scale farmer a chance at western lands. The disposal of the public domain to private owners, partly for revenue, continued until after 1900. Vast amounts of cheap land induced native- and foreign-born pioneers to play a leading role in the westward expansion of the United States. Free land, as a reward to pioneer settlers for their part in converting undeveloped lands into farms, was gradually recognized by law.

Homestead Movement

The basic principle of the Homestead Act—free land to settlers—was early advocated by western Congressmen. Senator Thomas H. Benton, of Missouri, argued that granting public land to a tiller of the soil was not a charitable gift. In his opinion, it was a just exchange in which the settler paid for his land by opening up the country, defending

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

the frontier, and adding to the store of national wealth.

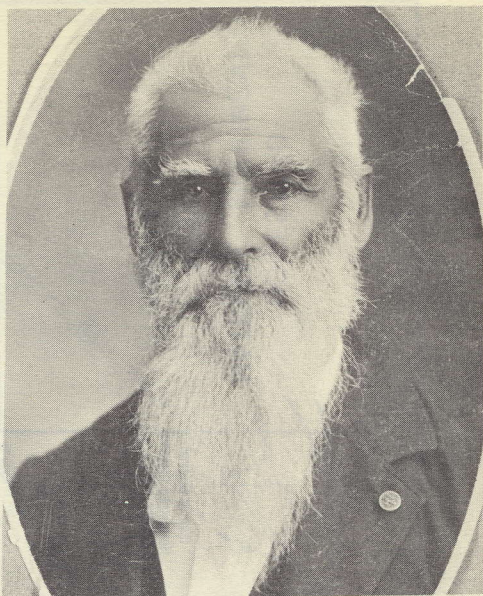
In 1825 Senator Benton moved that the Public Lands Committee consider donating land to settlers. From then until the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, the question of free land was debated in Congress and aired in the newspapers. Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee, Galusha Grow, of Pennsylvania, and Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, were among the champions of the cause.

The homestead movement was nonsectional in its origin, and growing support came from many quarters. First minor, and later major, political parties included it in their platforms. In 1848 the Free Soil Party advocated free land, and in 1852 the Free Soil Democrats did the same, asserting that man had a "natural right" to a portion of the soil. Later in that decade, the newly formed Republican Party urged the passage of a homestead act. Antislave groups who opposed extension of slavery in the Territories supported the free-land principle. Thus free land was entangled in the controversies leading to Civil War.

Three homestead bills came before Congress from 1854 to 1860. Enactment was delayed until secession brought about the withdrawal of the southern Congressmen.

The Homestead Act and Its Successors

The Homestead Act of May 20, 1862, has been "heralded as the greatest democratic measure of all history." A contemporary Canadian editorial eulogized it: "Partial offers of such gifts have often been made before, but we doubt whether any endowment on so magnificent a scale has ever been conferred on the moneyless sons of labor, not of one country, but of the civilized world." This editor thought the law a fitting complement to the Emancipation Proclamation—both were effective on January 1, 1863.



A family photograph of Daniel Freeman, the first homesteader.

The Homestead Act made it possible for any head of a family or person 21 or over, who was a United States citizen or intended to become one, to enter a claim for 160 acres of the public domain. The settler had to live on the land and cultivate it for 5 years before he became the owner. A filing fee of a few dollars was the only cash outlay required of the settler. Later acts made land even easier to get—especially for veterans of the Armed Forces. As settlement progressed westward into drier regions beyond the 100th meridian of longitude (along the line of Dodge City, Kans., North Platte, Nebr., and Bismarck, N. Dak.), a quarter section was not always an adequate farm unit. Heeding this, Congress passed laws increasing the acreage that could be homesteaded by one individual.

The intent of these laws was thwarted to some extent by persons who took advantage of their generous provisions by using land claimed for homesteads for other purposes. Partly because of these abuses, but largely because the supply of public land suitable for homesteading was exhausted, remaining pub-

lic lands were withdrawn from homesteading use in 1935. Occasionally since then, small areas have been opened to veterans for homesteading. At such times, the number of applicants so far exceeds the units of land that selection by lot is necessary.

Effects of the Homestead Act

The end of the Civil War released thousands of men to seek a livelihood in a country disrupted by 4 years of upheaval. Many took advantage of the free public lands offered by the Homestead Act. A free farm, added to the other opportunities held forth by a democratic nation, lured many Europeans to seek a new home in America. They and their descendants have taken an active part in the political life of the country which they have helped to develop.

The doubling of the Nation's population in the four decades after 1860 was due not only to industrial development, but also to the agricultural settlement of the West under the Homestead Act. Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana are particularly noteworthy among the States

whose growth was hastened by the free distribution of Federal lands.

The First Homesteader

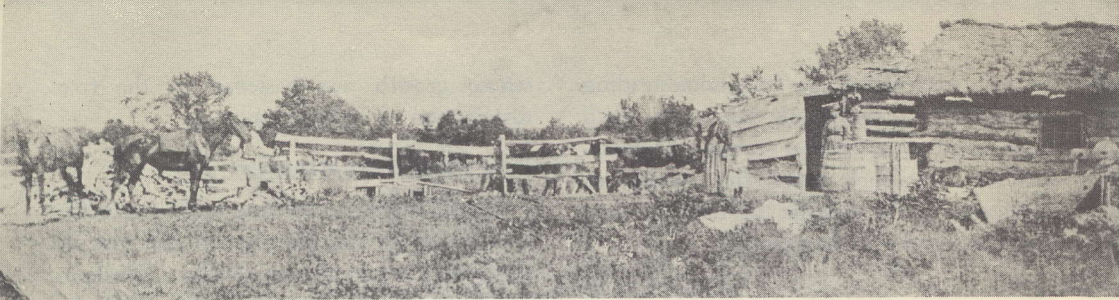
Daniel Freeman, the first applicant to file a claim under the Homestead Act, was in many ways a typical homesteader. While in the Nebraska Territory early in 1862, he located his claim near present-day Beatrice, Nebr. He planned to make formal application for the homestead when the law became effective on New Year's Day, 1863.

On New Year's Eve, 1862, Freeman and some friends were in Brownville, Nebraska Territory, where the land office having jurisdiction over his claim was located. They sought out the land office agent who was attending a local celebration. Freeman persuaded the agent to permit him to file his claim shortly after midnight on January 1, 1863.

The preliminary papers, which gave Homestead Entry No. 1 to Daniel Freeman, were then made out. In other land districts, there were also "first applicants," but the General Land Office (now the Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Department of the Interior)

On the treeless plains homesteaders lived in sod houses. (*Courtesy, Nebraska State Historical Society*)





An early picture of the Freeman cabin at the first homestead.

recognized Freeman's prior claim. His distinction as the first homesteader was further recognized by the fact that he was later granted Patent No. 1, dated September 1, 1869.

Settling on the land after the close of the Civil War, Freeman built a log cabin. Like the first log cabins and sod houses of other homesteaders, this was a rather primitive dwelling. Later, like most of his contemporaries, he built a more comfortable residence. This remained his home until his death in 1908. His remains, and those of his wife, are now buried within the monument grounds. Their graves, marked by a granite stone, are on the eastern boundary of the area.

The principal historic feature in the area is the surviving homestead log cabin erected in 1867 in a neighboring township and later moved to the monument. It is supplied with furnishings and tools as used by the pioneers in eastern Nebraska and suggests the pattern of life followed by the homesteaders in the eastern prairie region. In the semiarid West where timber was lacking, the sod house was the common frontier dwelling. Dugouts and board shanties were other types of dwellings characteristic of the early homesteader.

Establishment of the Monument

By the act of March 19, 1936, Congress directed the purchase of Daniel Freeman's

homestead from his descendants. On January 3, 1939, it was designated the Homestead National Monument of America. Congress directed that the monument should be "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."

Location

Homestead National Monument is 4 miles northwest of the city of Beatrice and about 40 miles southwest of Lincoln, Nebr. It is reached by State Route 4 and is accessible from State Route 3 and U. S. 77.

Mission 66

MISSION 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Administration

Homestead National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Beatrice, Nebr., is in immediate charge.

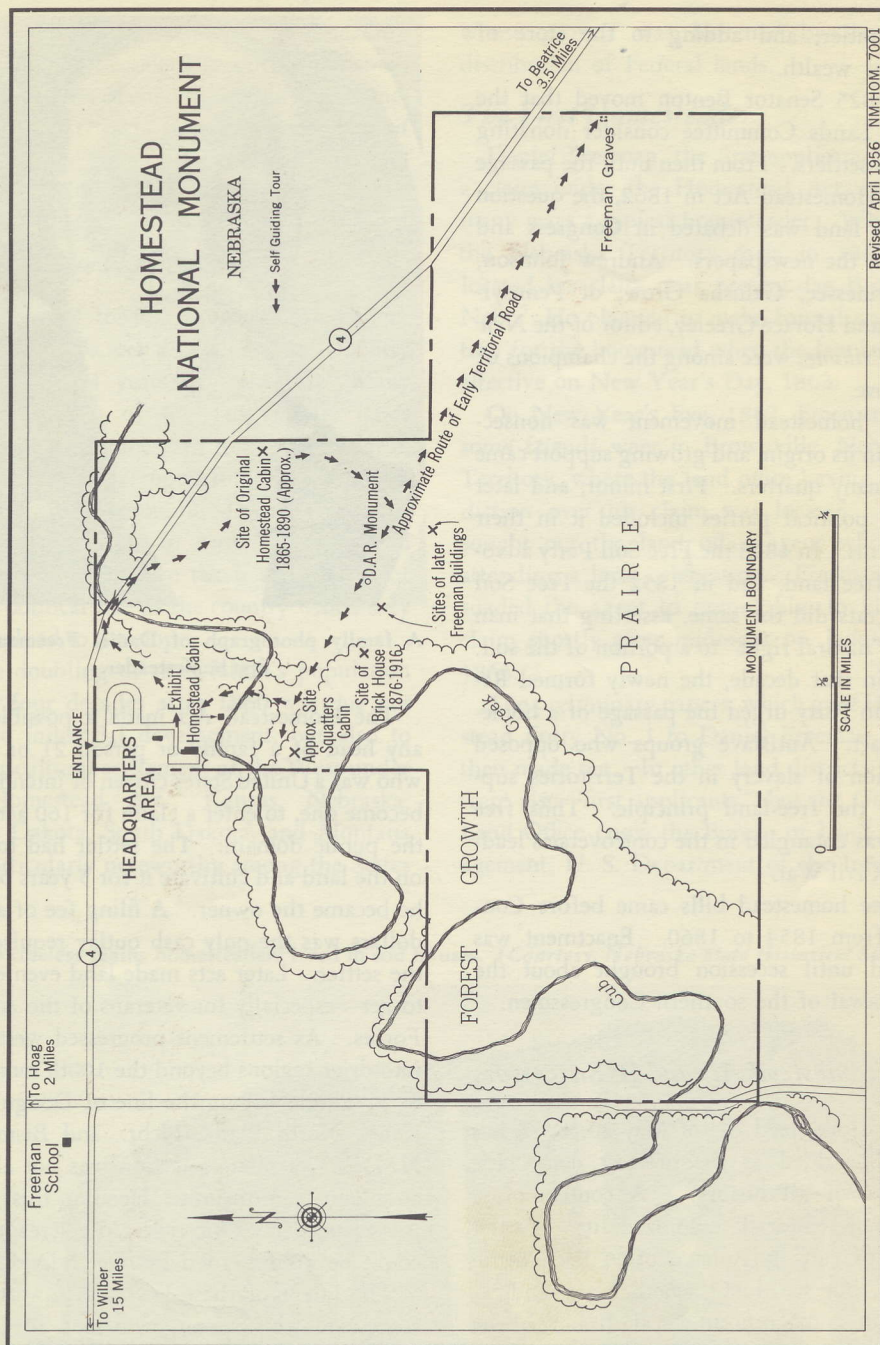


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*





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Cover: Detail of a painting of the Freeman Cabin at the first homestead by a native contemporary artist.

Revised 1958