



An Invitation to the World

For over a century the Homestead Act fed people's desire for land and a home of their own. It materialized an American dream.

Today's immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central and South America, and elsewhere share a dream with the homesteaders who came to America's interior in the post-Civil War era. Like today, it was a roiling, uncertain time of rapid social and economic change—migrants leaving northeastern factories; formerly enslaved people leaving Southern plantations; sharecroppers leaving worn-out fields. Many headed west. All acted on the promise of a dream: mobility and property for people who had none, or who wanted more.

Heritage Center at dawn



LANDS for the LANDLESS!
Homes for the Homeless!!
Millions of Acres almost donated to the brave Pioneers of the World by the generous government of America.
SOLDIERS
Of the war of 1861, come forward and take your Homesteads near some Railroad in
NEBRASKA.
For particulars address J. H. NOTEWARE, State Sup't of Immigration, Omaha, Neb.

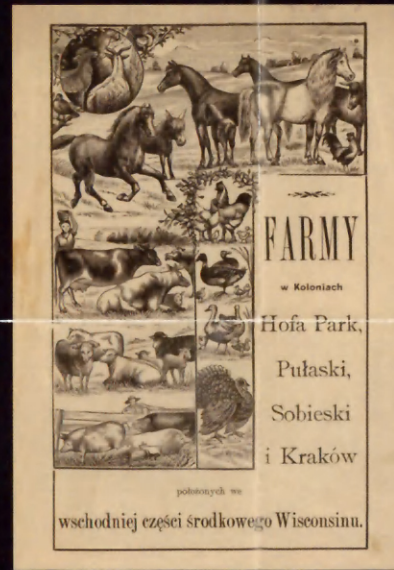
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, AMERICAN MEMORY



HUNTINGTON LIBRARY

In the 1800s and early 1900s, promise and hyperbole traveled via print media like handbills—but also by rail. The Great Pacific, Great Northern, and Milwaukee railroads launched campaigns

featuring agricultural display trains. The cornucopia (horn of plenty) theme (above) dominated lavish, mobile assemblages of foods and dazzling state agricultural fairs. It also appeared



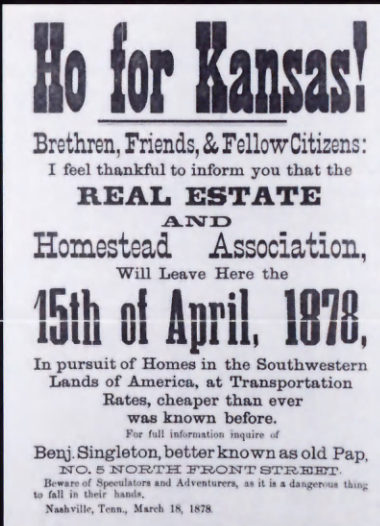
WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

in domestic arts such as embroidery.

Farm journals (above), flyers, and ads recruited immigrants from East European nations beset by crop failure

and depressed agricultural markets in the 1870s and 1880s.

Benjamin Singleton urged the formerly enslaved to file claims in the state of Kansas (above, near right).



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Officials elsewhere encouraged Civil War veterans to return to their home states to homestead.

A California woman receives her patent from the land agent (above right). A substantial percentage of homestead patents went to women.

Emblazoned with huge letters and line drawings in primary colors, an oversize canvas seed sack (right) targets homesteading farmers' priorities. In telegraphic style, it promises corn

that is weather resistant, high yielding, and deep rooted and "Makes You Money." It held about 50 pounds, or 93,000 seeds, in keeping with the scale of midwestern farming.

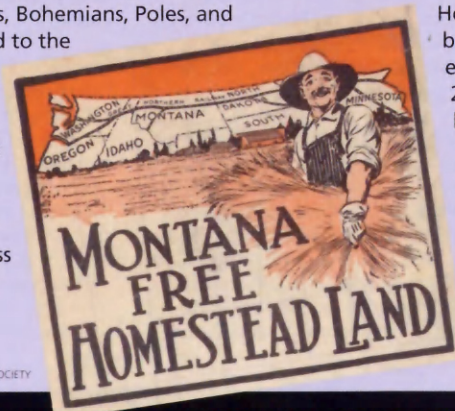


ALL PHOTOS—F&P'S UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

Homesteaders Took Risks, Found America

Twenty-five thousand Europeans, most of them German, crossed the Atlantic in the first half of 1862. The precise number of immigrants who followed with the intention to homestead, or how many first lived and worked in the cities before they caught "land fever," is unknown.

By 1870 one-fourth of the population of Nebraska was foreign born. By the turn of the century over two million Anglo-Americans, Swedes, Italians, Danes, Finlanders, Hollanders, Icelanders, Hungarians, Russians, Bohemians, Poles, and Ukrainians had relocated to the Great Plains—homesteading's heart. "Free land," but also civil freedom, the perception of unlimited resources, independence, and a chance for free education, drove the "briskness in immigration."



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Territories and states coined names like "The Treasure State" (for Montana, which had rich mineral deposits), enhancing their appeal. The Exoduster movement, led by Benjamin Singleton, a carpenter and undertaker from Tennessee, promoted a near-Utopian vision of homesteading as a way for former slaves to get land and homes in Kansas. Many African Americans, including women, managed to file and "prove up" (fulfill legal requirements) on claims.

Homesteading states mounted booster campaigns to entice emigrants. Women from age 21, including those who had been deserted, could take "free" land. Many did. While homesteading, some worked as domestics to earn cash. Karolina Miller Krause, an Austrian immigrant, did field work—usually considered men's work—to help buy a farm.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / LEWIS VICKES HIRE

Foreign-language advertisements and reports printed in the United States and distributed in Eastern Europe, where crop failures led to famine in the 1870s, promoted the idea of an American land of plenty. One Polish-language article published in 1875 described a rail tour through bountiful farmlands. The Bissie family (left, 1909) from Poland found work on American farms.

Despite immigrants' practical skills and willingness to work, not everyone welcomed them. The *New York Times* published an opinion on this in 1907: "The opposition to the present immigrant is uneconomic, illogical, and un-American."

Nineteen fifteen was a "miracle" year for homesteaders. Abundant rain, bumper wheat harvests, and high grain prices (owed to the Great War in Europe) caused Great Plains economies to boom. Government posters declared "Food Will Win the War!" But as the war ended, corn and wheat prices dropped. Economic depression settled in, as did severe drought.

Many homesteaders abandoned suddenly unprofitable claims. Yet even in the 1930s—America's bitterest decade—homesteaders moved westward. Undeterred, or made desperate by the Great Depression, they filed new claims.

Cycles of boom and bust, soaring hope and deep despair, would temper but not wholly destroy homesteading's promise. Many failed to "prove up" their claims. Many more—across 30 states, from diverse national, cultural, and economic strata—faced drought, prairie fires, hailstorms, tornadoes, grasshopper plagues, and often crushing loneliness. They persevered.

In 1976, the US Congress repealed the Homestead Act. Over 123 years, homesteading gave hope to many. It offered immigrants a road map that took them from serfdom to citizenship and property ownership. It offered the nation's own disenfranchised—the formerly enslaved, veterans of civil and world wars, emigrants from northeastern factory towns, and southern sharecroppers, men and women alike—a chance.

Wild Lands to Farmlands



THE HERBERT A. JONES
HARVEY E. CRAIG, PRIVATE
COLLECTION



IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES, 1911
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, BAIN COLLECTION

Alice and Harvey Craig, Colorado homesteaders, 1952 (right)
ALICE McDONALD CRAIG



Railroads moved homesteaders westward

ABOVE LEFT—THE AMERICAN WEST, CA. 1860s
ABOVE—ACROSS THE CONTINENT, 1868, PHILADELPHIA
MUSEUM OF ART / CURRIER AND IVES



ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1865
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, NATIONAL
PORTRAIT GALLERY / ALEXANDER GARDNER



Chrisman sisters' Nebraska homestead
NEBRASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BUTCHER COLLECTION



Daniel Freeman



Woman at Pie Town, New Mexico, barbecue, 1940

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / RUSSELL LEE (DETAIL)



Descendants hold portraits of their homesteader ancestors (above and left)



TALLGRASS PRAIRIE (BACKGROUND)
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Public Domain Lands Spur Debate

1785 Public Land Survey System (PLSS), first proposed by Thomas Jefferson, is established to divide public domain lands.

1800 Land Act reduces the size of a unit of public land from 640 acres (one square mile) to 320 acres (half parcel).

1803 Louisiana Purchase from France adds 800,000 square miles, doubling the public domain.

1830 Indian Removal Act adds 40,000 square miles to public domain lands east of the Mississippi.

1846 Oregon Treaty with Britain sets northern border of United States, adding 28,000 square miles to public domain.

1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo with Mexico adds 528,000 square miles to public domain (Texas excluded).

1848–52 Free Soilers support free homesteading and oppose slavery in new territories.

1849 California gold rush.

1850s The fight in the House and Senate over public lands builds to a crescendo. Many decisions turn on whether slavery will be extended to the western territories.

1853 Gadsden Purchase of parts of Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico adds 123,000 square miles to public domain.

1860 Abraham Lincoln elected president.

1861 Civil War begins.

1862 Homestead Act offers 160 acres of public land free to homesteaders; Pacific Railway and Morrill Land-Grant College acts.

1863 Daniel Freeman and other homesteaders begin to file claims, mostly in the Great Plains states and Nebraska and Dakota territories.

Populating the Land

1865 Civil War ends; Reconstruction in the South begins to gain momentum.

1866 Congress extends homesteading to the five public land states in the South—Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

1877 Racism, terrorism, and the enactment of Black Codes and Pig Laws cause freedpeople in southern states to migrate north and west. Many seek free lands and greater tolerance in Kansas, a Union stronghold during the Civil War. They become known as "Exodusters."

1889 Oklahoma Territory opens to homesteaders with a "land run." Thousands join the frenzied sprint to stake claims.

ca. 1901 First 4-H club.

1902 Land Reclamation Act, to provide water to arid and semiarid West and Southwest.

Peaks and Valleys

1901–20 Homesteading peaks; Land Office issues over 800,000 patents.

1913 Willa Cather publishes *Prairie Trilogy*.

1914–18 World War I; Congress passes 11 amendments to the Homestead Act to help returning soldiers and sailors start a new life once back home.

1929 Stock Market crashes.

1930–40 Land Office issues 40,000 homestead patents, many in the Southwest.

1934–36 Dust Bowl.

1936 Homestead National Monument of America established; Rural Electrification Act.

Resurgence and Repeal

1939–45 World War II.

1946 Department of Agriculture establishes Farmers Home Administration.

1948 Center-pivot irrigation delivers water to crop fields.

ca. 1950 Manufacture of most horse-drawn farm equipment ceases.

1956 Congress passes Interstate Highway Act, allowing faster transport of farm goods to market.

1960–86 Public lands in Alaska open to homesteaders.

1976 Congress repeals Homestead Act in lower 48 states.

1986 Congress repeals Homestead Act in Alaska.

1988 Last homestead patent issued.



Explore Homestead National Historical Park



Palmer-Epard Cabin

Homestead National Historical Park preserves the T-shaped, 160-acre claim that Daniel Freeman filed on January 1, 1863. It includes the school that some of Freeman's children attended (*far right*), a typical eastern Nebraska cabin (*above*), and 100 acres of restored tallgrass prairie (*below*).



Gray-headed coneflower

The park is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours vary seasonally; check our website.

Start at the **Heritage Center**, which offers information, exhibits, a bookstore, and a film. Visit the **Palmer-Epard Cabin**, see pioneer

farm implements in the **Education Center**, and walk the trails through tallgrass prairie. Enjoy the Heritage and Education centers' picnic areas. Check our website for special events and ranger-led talks. Call ahead for group tours.

FOR YOUR SAFETY

- Stay on trails. • Watch for poison ivy and nettles. • Check for ticks.
- Beware of steep drop-offs near Cub Creek. • Fires and smoking are prohibited. • Pets must be leashed and are not allowed in buildings or on trails. • Bicycles and vehicles are prohibited on trails. • For firearms regulations check the website.

Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park.

Emergencies call 911

Accessibility
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the Heritage Center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

Homestead National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more about national parks at www.nps.gov.



Freeman School

More Information
Homestead National Historical Park
8523 W. State Hwy. 4
Beatrice, NE 68310
402-223-3514
www.nps.gov/home

Join **Friends of Homestead** at www.friendsofhomestead.com

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Tallgrass Prairie Reborn



Between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains are remnants of the grassy expanse once called the Great American Desert. Foot-high buffalo grass and blue grama grasses covered the dry area east

of the Rockies. Needle-and-thread grass and little bluestem dominated the middle belt.

The easternmost lands of the lower Missouri valley, where rainfall is higher, are home to the tallgrass prairie. Its big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass, and switchgrass rise 8 or 9 feet tall, with roots that reach 15 to 25 feet down into the soil. Plants native to the tallgrass prairie are tough. They survive grazing, fire, and mowing.



Western meadowlark

By the 1930s successive droughts and overgrazing had destroyed much of the tallgrass prairie in eastern Nebraska. Plants native to the more arid prairies (western wheatgrass, blue grama, and buffalo grass) invaded.

In 1939 the National Park Service began restoring the tallgrass prairie here by planting grass seed from a nearby farm. Restoration continues today with methods like controlled burning. Burning in spring, before non-native grasses begin to grow, incinerates dead

plant debris. This allows sun and rain to penetrate and releases nutrients that promote growth and seed yields.

Not just tall grasses but also other plants and flowers (330 species) thrive here. The tallgrass prairie ecosystem includes trees, birds, mammals (60 species), insects, and microorganisms. Songbirds like the dickcissel and meadowlark (*left*) often sway precariously atop grasses and shrubs. They winter in South America and Mexico, then migrate to North American tallgrass prairies to nest and raise their young.

Tallgrass prairie
NPS / MEL MANN