



Foundation Document Overview

Homestead National Monument of America

Nebraska



Contact Information

For more information about the *Homestead National Monument of America Foundation Document*, contact: home_superintendent@nps.gov or 402-223-3514 or write to: Superintendent, 8523 West State Hwy 4 Beatrice, NE 68310

Purpose



The purpose of HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT OF AMERICA is to commemorate the Homestead Act and its influence on the country and the world; protect and care for the 160-acre original homestead's resources and the Freeman School; and erect and manage suitable buildings to be used as a museum for the preservation, education, and interpretation of homesteading literature, history, and culture.



Significance

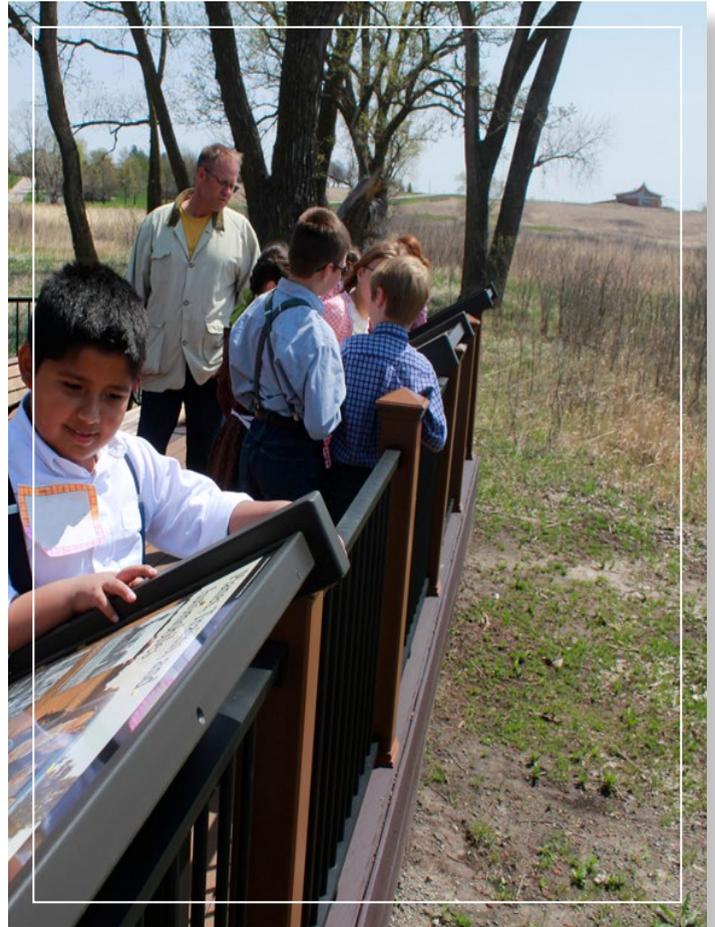
Significance statements express why Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. The monument encompasses a 160-acre homestead claim established on the first day of the Homestead Act's implementation, which is among the first of the millions of homesteads established under the act between 1863 and 1886.
2. The Freeman School was one of the longest continually operating one-room schoolhouses during the Homestead Era in Nebraska. It was in use from 1872 to 1969. The school structure is the original building located on its original site adjacent to Daniel Freeman's homestead.
3. The Homestead Act, signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 and implemented from 1863 to 1886, brought profound changes to the land and to the nation: it had major influence on federal land and immigration policy; it defined and hastened settlement and community development; it empowered women, African Americans, and immigrants; it increased opportunities for social, political, and economic mobility for all homesteaders; it promoted cultivation of millions of acres of land, which resulted in destruction of native ecosystems across the country; it hastened agricultural and technological development; and in some regions it contributed to the dispossession of American Indian tribes.
4. Homestead National Monument of America contains the second oldest tallgrass prairie restoration in the nation, and the Freeman School site contains one acre of tallgrass prairie that has never been plowed, which is among the last 4% of the native prairie remaining in the country.
5. The Freeman Homestead contains ideal conditions for a homestead: woodlands, water supply, good soil, adequate rainfall, convenient access to a road, and proximity to an established town.
6. Homestead National Monument of America is the world's primary repository of objects associated with homesteading. The museum housed within the Heritage Center preserves important resources related to the homestead story and was mandated by the park's enabling legislation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The original 160-acre homestead claim, including related landscape features such as Cub Creek, bur oak forest and woodlands, restored prairie, Freeman-planted Osage orange hedgerow, Freeman grave site, and wildlife found on site.** This area is defined by the “imaginary line” of Freeman’s application for a homestead.
- **The Freeman School grounds.** This includes the school, related outbuildings, play equipment, the native prairie remnant, and the connection between the school and the Freeman Homestead.
- **Museum collections, including family and oral histories.** Homestead National Monument of America preserves the material and social culture of the Homesteading Era, such as farming implements, photographs, letters, literature, tools, clothes, and artifacts used and valued by homesteaders.
- **Lowland bur oak forest.** This was part of the original landscape of the homestead, and is now a rare ecosystem in the state.
- **“Grain Grower’s Highway” freight road remnants.** The physical trace of this road from Beatrice to the Freeman Homestead and other points west still exists, along with culverts, bridge footings, and related structures. This road also connected the Freeman Homestead to the Freeman School.



- **Archeological sites related to habitation.** There are several archeological sites within the park, from before and during the Homestead Era. Together, they show the changes in occupation and land use on the parcel from American Indian tribes to the homesteaders.
- **Palmer-Epard Cabin.** This structure was built by a homesteader in Gage County in 1867, with the same materials and tools that Freeman would have used.
- **Sense of time and place.** Sights and sounds within the park provide a sense of time and place to the visitor. Views to and from the original 160-acre homestead help visitors experience the beauty and solitude that homesteaders encountered when they first approached their land. Looking outside the boundary, visitors see farming, industry, and housing development that resulted from homesteading. Relatively clear night skies and the natural sounds of bird songs, rushing water, blowing winds, and waving prairie allow visitors to experience what the homesteaders would have experienced.



Description

Homestead National Monument of America near Beatrice, Nebraska, was created on March 19, 1936, to commemorate and interpret the impacts of the Homestead Act on the United States and the world. Historians have often declared the Homestead Act to be one of the nation's most significant laws. This law declared that anyone who was a citizen, or intended to become one, could claim 160 acres (one-quarter square mile) of surveyed government land. Claimants had to build a home and live on the land for five years. During that five-year period, claimants were required to improve the land agriculturally. After five years, the government would transfer ownership of the land to the successful claimant.

Homesteaders faced a great deal of uncertainty and numerous hardships, including drought, locusts, and blizzards; 60% of all homesteaders abandoned their claims. Still, the US government distributed more than 270 million acres of land to 1.6 million successful homesteaders between 1863 and 1896. Homestead lands were located in 30 of the 50 states. Today there are estimated to be more than 93 million descendants of homesteaders in the United States.

This 211-acre monument commemorates the Homestead Act with displays examining the social, economic, and environmental impacts of this legislation. The park land encompasses 100 acres of restored tallgrass prairie and includes a T-shaped quarter section of tallgrass prairie, stream, and mixed hardwood forest that comprised the entire original claim of Daniel Freeman. On January 1, 1863, Freeman was

one of the first homesteaders to file under the provisions of the Homestead Act of May 20, 1862. The primary monument structures include the Homestead Heritage Center, the Homestead Education Center, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and the Freeman School, a one-room schoolhouse built in 1872 and located a quarter mile west of the Education Center.

Homestead National Monument of America is unique as the only location in the United States dedicated to the story of the Homestead Act in its broadest context. Through exhibits, films, educational programs, and special events, the staff educates the public about the importance of the Homestead Act to our nation's history. The exhibits and events examine a variety of topics related to homesteading, including agriculture, industrialization, American Indians, immigration, introduction of plant species, and prairie ecology. The park maintains excellent relationships with other organizations and facilities dealing with specific aspects of homesteading history, such as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The Friends of Homestead (a nonprofit organization) own and manage the 140-acre parcel directly to the south of the national monument. The Friends of Homestead's stated goal is to donate the parcel to the National Park Service in the future. The national monument also has authority to create the Homestead Educational Parkway in the vicinity of the park, if Nebraska Highway 4 is rerouted.

