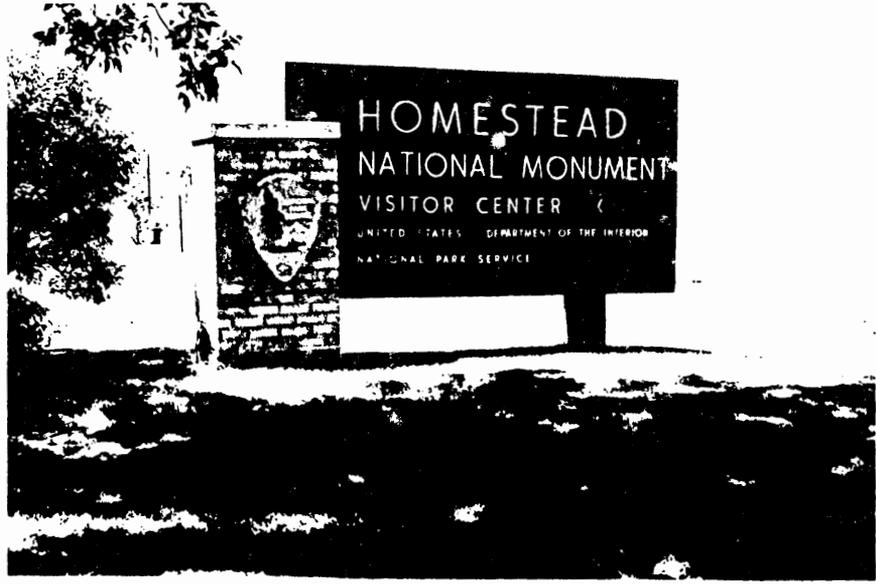


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HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT OF AMERICA:  
AN ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY  
1962 - 1981



by  
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1981

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2/26/82  
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Date

The Homestead National Monument of America was established in 1936 by an act of Congress to commemorate the Homestead movement and its contribution to the settlement of the trans-Mississippi West. In "Homestead National Monument: Its Establishment and Administration," Ray Mattison has provided us with a deep and incisive study of the youthful period of Homestead's existence.<sup>1</sup> He documented the long struggle for legislative enactment to establish the area, and clearly traced the first 20 years of its administrative history. The Monument originally consisted of the 162.7-acre Freeman homestead. The museum collection was started in 1948, and the Palmer-Epard Cabin was added in 1950.

The great potential of its resource programs, however, was not developed until after 1962 when the visitor center was finally completed, providing quarters for administrative offices and the rapidly growing museum collection. The other interpretive exhibits were expanded. In 1970 Congress authorized the acquisition of the Freeman school which enlarged the Monument to 163.9 acres. These developments have transformed Homestead National Monument since 1962 when Ray Mattison's administrative history was completed.

Homestead National Monument was created by an act of Congress, becoming Public Law No. 480 with President Roosevelt's signature on March 19, 1936.<sup>2</sup> The Monument was established to commemorate the hardy men and women who struggled to settle, cultivate, and civilize the trans-Mississippi West, and to memorialize the Homestead Act of 1862 which assisted in this great westward migration by providing free land from the Public Domain to qualified settlers.<sup>3</sup> The Daniel Freeman homestead, one of the first claimed under the 1862 act, was designated as the site for the new monument. Mattison gives us a flowery account:

The symbolism of the Freeman homestead is that of a great migration which carried a mighty flood tide of home seekers westward and onward into the wilderness to take up land virtually as a gift from a beneficent government.<sup>4</sup>

Although Congress authorized the establishment of Homestead National Monument in 1936, it neglected to appropriate the funds for carrying out the act. To alleviate this problem, Senator George Norris of Nebraska attached an amendment to the Interior Department Appropriations Act of 1938. This specified that \$24,000 was to be included in House Bill No. 9306 and allocated for Homestead National Monument.<sup>5</sup> President Roosevelt signed the bill as amended on March 5, 1938, and eight months later the 162.73-acre homestead was purchased from the Daniel Freeman heirs for \$18,000.

The next forty years saw the implementation of Homestead's interpretive programs in a manner stipulated by the 74th Congress in 1936:

It is expected, if this bill becomes law, that this homestead will become a museum in which the literature, the implements of agriculture, the means of transportation, and all the other past incidents of pioneer life of the period through which the western settlers had to pass in winning the great west, will be preserved to future generations.<sup>7</sup>

By 1940 Clarence Schultz, historian and first superintendent, had already initiated a project to restore the native grass prairie which existed in the area in 1863. In 1948 the Gage County Historical Society donated its museum collection to the Monument, and in 1950 the Palmer-Epard Cabin, a two-story log cabin, was acquired. Additional funding through the National Park Service's

Mission 66 Program fueled an expanded development program for the area in 1956. According to Mattison, Mission 66:

...was designed to 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 to make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.<sup>8</sup>

### MISSION 66

The Mission 66 Program was scheduled for completion in 1966, in time for the golden anniversary of the creation of the National Park Service. The program was committed to developing, staffing, and improving areas managed by the Park Service. At Homestead, Mission 66 projects included the construction of a visitor center, an employee residence, an agricultural implement display shed, a road and parking lot, a suspension footbridge spanning Cub Creek, and the installation of boundary and entrance signs.<sup>9</sup> The projects were completed much earlier than the 1966 deadline.

All the Mission 66 facilities except the employee residence were ready for the rush of tourists anticipated for the summer of 1962, which was the 100th anniversary of the Homestead Act. The visitor center (and surrounding landscaping) was completed, equipped, and staffed to provide the proper interpretive aids to "enable the visitors to learn the significance of Homesteading."<sup>10</sup> Approximately 40,501 people visited the Monument that year, the third largest yearly visitation ever recorded.<sup>11</sup>

Interpretive Programs  
Museum Collection

Although most Mission 66 projects were completed by 1962, development of the interpretive programs had only begun. The primary objective of these programs was to memorialize the men and women who homesteaded the trans-Mississippi West. This determined that the interpretive role of the museum collection be representative of these pioneers and their settlement of the Public Domain. "The collection will feature items 'typical' of the period, depicting the social, political, and economic life of homesteaders, representing a true impression of 19th and early 20th century homesteading."<sup>12</sup>

The Homestead museum collection was established when the Gage County Historical Society donated its collection to the monument in 1948. The collection continued to expand, with over 1,700 artifacts cataloged by 1960 and 3,500 by 1980.<sup>13</sup> Most, however, had to be stored first, due to the very limited facilities for displaying them. In 1960 Donald Warman, Park Historian, asserted, "A small number of items from the Monument's collection, placed in several old store display cases, constitute the museum facilities presently available to the visitor."<sup>14</sup> The limited facilities prohibited onsite programs or illustrated orientation talks from being presented to the public, and denied visitors access to the many artifacts.

The ambitious construction projects initiated under the Mission 66 Program greatly changed the museum situation. Space in the newly opened visitor center was available to serve the interpretive

functions of the museum collection. The center provided the necessary room for interior exhibits, and with the opening of the display shed, the larger farm implements could be adequately displayed.

By 1964 there were 29 interior displays providing a visual narrative of the homestead story. The story was explained from many different perspectives as the visitor was led through a step-by-step account spanning more than 100 years. Superintendent Vernon Hennesay described the interpretive exhibits in the new museum:

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 of the homesteaders 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.<sup>15</sup>

Housed within the large implement display shed were buggies, a wooden-vaned windmill, a cornstalk cutter, feed grinder, a sod breaker plow, two row corn planter, McCormick reaper (reproduction), and numerous homemade hand tools.<sup>16</sup>

### Native Grass Prairie

Sixty percent of the Monument, or 100 acres, has been devoted to restoration of the tall grass prairie. The intention was to show what the area probably looked like before it was broken by

the plow and cultivated by its first settlers.<sup>17</sup> This section of Nebraska was once dominated by tall grasses, often reaching nine feet in height and stretching as far as the eye could see.<sup>18</sup>

Management efforts, begun in the 1939-1940 period, were diligently pursued in order to restore the prairie to its pre-1863 state. Cultivation, mowing, spraying, and controlled burning were all utilized to suppress the spread of exotic grasses and to rejuvenate the native species. Mowing and spraying were found to be most effective in controlling weeds on a localized basis, with controlled burning used on larger sections of the grassland. Here the grass is burned off under careful surveillance by qualified personnel. This method allows the native species to prevail over the others because of their greater resistance to heat (deeper root system).<sup>19</sup>

The monument announced in 1962 that over 80 varieties of native grasses could be found on the 100-acre site.<sup>20</sup> By 1975 the native prairie was considered one of the finest examples of restored grassland in the Midwest. Dr. Roger Landers, grass land management expert, in referring to the southern section of prairie at Homestead, stated, "The sloping prairie in the south is the best example of prairie restoration in the Midwest Region and perhaps the oldest in the country."<sup>21</sup>

A 1963 innovation was the introduction of an interpretive exhibit for native grasses. Four species of grasses were imbedded in plastic, placed on stands, and located near the largest section of prairie. The representative species included Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass.<sup>22</sup> This exhibit

lasted only four years, and was then replaced by one more aesthetically pleasing in preparation for the 1967 Nebraska Centennial. Small plots of eleven native grass species were cultivated along the self-guiding trail. Ten years later the exhibit encompassed 19 species of forbes and 5 species of shrubs, as well as the 11 species of grasses, reflecting the wide variety of native plant life that had again taken root at Homestead.<sup>23</sup>

With over 30 years of trial and error experience behind it, grassland management at Homestead achieved a high degree of skill at restoring the prairie scene to that which existed during the early settlement era.

Prior to the area being established only a sparse stand of native grasses existed. Since establishment, through natural conditions and grassland management, the stand has increased both to species and vigor.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the existence of a few pesky exotics, the grassland approximates that which Daniel Freeman saw when he first homesteaded his claim.

#### Palmer-Epard Cabin

The 1970s brought a renewed interest in restoring one of the area's oldest historic structures--the Palmer-Epard Cabin. The cabin underwent extensive restoration in 1977, the first such operation since it was moved to the area in 1950. The structure, a squared oak homesteader's cabin built in 1867, had been used to store grain before being moved to Homestead National Monument.<sup>25</sup> The cabin was constructed by George Washington Palmer on his

homestead 14 miles northeast of the monument. Palmer later sold the cabin to J. B. Epard, who finally donated it to the monument in 1950.<sup>26</sup> Since relocation to Homestead, several projects have been accomplished to stabilize the structure; but the 1977 project was the first full scale restoration undertaken.

The project, under the direction of Ray Kunkel, Exhibits Specialist (Restoration) from the Midwest Regional Office, started April 11, 1977. The first task, following the removal of the chinking and whitewash, was to straighten and brace the cabin. This was necessary to correct the gradual tipping to the south and east which had developed through the years.<sup>27</sup> Suitable logs were needed to replace the rotting logs, but the wood in the Nebraska area was unsatisfactory. None could be found that had not been cut with a modern saw. The correct type of logs were eventually located at Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial at Lincoln City, Indiana, and shipped to Homestead.<sup>28</sup> The \$10,000 facelift was not unlike "archeological dentistry," and that is how Superintendent Vince Halvorson described the construction process: "Just like a dental expert we are pulling some, replacing some, and straightening the rest."<sup>29</sup> This metaphor aptly describes the laborious processes involved in giving an aging cabin new life.

Following the straightening and log replacement, the walls were rechinked, the interior whitewashed, and the clay floor relaid. The mortar used for rechinking was made from a pioneer formula researched by the Homestead staff. In revealing this formula, Superintendent Halvorson stated:

We are using seven parts of unwashed sand screened through a one-eighth to one-sixteenth screen, two parts of hydrated lime, one part masonry cement, and

adding, as the pioneers did, a small amount of fabric, weeds, rope, and horsehair cut into small pieces less than one inch in length. Finding the source of horsehair around here wasn't easy.<sup>30</sup>

The restored interior cabin walls were then whitewashed with a mixture made from another pioneer formula which waterproofs as well as whitens. Again Vince Halvorson provides an account of how the formula was duplicated:

...soaking a quarter pound of glue overnight in tepid water and then placing it in a tin vessel in a kettle of water over a fire while six to eight pounds of Paris white is being prepared in another vessel.

The mixture will be applied just like great-grandpa did while still warm.<sup>31</sup>

Replacing the clay floor completed the interior work. To provide an appearance more reminiscent of the 1860s, the old shingle roofing was replaced with cedar shakes. This work, accomplished by August 1977, completed the cabin project.

#### Freeman School

As with the Palmer-Epard cabin, the National Park Service had an early interest in the brick schoolhouse adjoining the Freeman homestead. Its interest in this structure can be documented from 1947 when a short study of the one-room country school was requested of Superintendent Schultz.<sup>32</sup> The possibility of including the schoolhouse in the interpretive program at Homestead was then being considered. Through the ensuing years, the interest in the property continued to grow. Proposals for its preservation and

incorporation were made again in 1960 and 1964. "The Historical Report on the Freeman School" was submitted April 1, 1965.<sup>33</sup> The report concluded that the school should be preserved as an interpretive exhibit for the Monument.<sup>34</sup>

The schoolhouse, built in 1871 of brick fired on neighboring Cub Creek, is located about one-quarter mile from the Daniel Freeman homestead. The school opened in the spring of 1872 with 14 students enrolled.<sup>35</sup> In 1881 School District 21 became the first in Nebraska to furnish textbooks for its students, ten years before the State required this practice.<sup>36</sup> The school, like most country schools of its day, was more than an educational facility. It was also the social and political hub of the frontier community, providing a centralized location for meetings, social festivities, and, of course, voting.<sup>37</sup>

The Board of School District 21 received national notoriety when in 1899 it became involved in a court case with Daniel Freeman. Freeman objected to the reading of the Bible in the classroom by the teacher, Edith Beecher. He charged that the teacher's actions "interfered with the rights of conscience of himself and his children," and brought his complaint before the school board.<sup>38</sup>

The school board, however, refused to end the readings, forcing Freeman to appeal to the State Supreme Court. On October 9, 1902, the High Court ruled in favor of Freeman, citing the district as being in violation of the State constitution "which forbids sectarian instruction in any school supported by public funds."<sup>39</sup> The case established a precedent for later cases involving religious activities in public schools. Following this episode there was little to disrupt the day-to-day business of education in the Freeman School for 65 years.

On June 4, 1967, after 96 years in operation, the school bell rang for the last time. The oldest continuously operated country school in Nebraska, and one of a few still operating in the United States, finally closed its doors.<sup>40</sup> By December of the same year, a move was already underway to incorporate the school as part of Homestead National Monument.<sup>41</sup> The National Park Service notified the Nebraska Congressional delegation that it supported the addition of the schoolhouse and the 1.2 acres of land on which it is located for the monument.<sup>42</sup> Now it was up to the Congressmen to act.

Representative Robert Denney and Senators Roman Hruska and Carl Curtis introduced bills in their respective chambers to make the schoolhouse site part of the monument. The bills were introduced in the first session of the 91st Congress on January 14, 1969, and became known as H.R. 3259 in the House, and in the Senate as S. 58.<sup>43</sup>

Clearances from the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of the Budget were provided to the Congressional committees examining the proposed addition. In a 1969 report to the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, the Acting Secretary of the Interior officially recommended the enactment of the bill stating:

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.<sup>44</sup>

The Bureau of the Budget also gave its support to the proposal. From the same Department of the Interior report:

The Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the Administration's program.<sup>45</sup>

One more obstacle had been cleared.

One oversight which delayed the 1936 action on the establishment of Homestead National Monument was the failure of Congress to specify in the bill the amount of funds to be appropriated for purchasing the Freeman homestead. This time, however, Congress authorized an amount not to exceed \$5,000 to be appropriated for the purchase of the school site. The anticipated donation of the 1.2-acre site by the Homestead Historical Association minimized the costs, with only the scenic easements needing to be purchased. A Department of the Interior report stated:

Since 1967, the Homestead Historical Association has held this 1.2-acre tract in anticipation that legislation would make it a part of the Homestead National Monument. We expect to acquire this tract by donation or at a nominal cost--not to exceed 5,000 dollars.<sup>46</sup>

Forty-five thousand dollars was appropriated for the restoration of the schoolhouse.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, on September 25, 1970, the bill became Public Law No. 91-411 with President Nixon's signature:

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 the 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.<sup>48</sup>

Restoration of the schoolhouse began in August 1974, after extensive planning and preparation.<sup>49</sup> Before the work was completed, the process would evolve into a long and painstaking ordeal as unexpected structural problems with the building demanded immediate solutions. The work, originally expected to take one month, dragged on for more than three months.

Stabilizing and restoring the schoolhouse to the 1880-1890 period was the object of their efforts. Workers replaced worn and damaged bricks and reinforced the walls with steel rods to halt deterioration and stabilize the structure. The work demanded considerable patience and a thorough knowledge of the historic period. Jerry Pruitt of the construction company doing the work described the process:

Original materials must be used wherever possible and new materials must conform to the texture and craftsmanship of the frontier workmen.<sup>50</sup>

The construction was expensive. The school, built at a cost of about \$850 in 1871, cost almost \$53,000 to restore.<sup>51</sup>

By summer 1978 the restoration and stabilization of the school was complete. Last minute repair work, painting, and landscaping concluded the enterprise. The addition of authentic period furnishings, acquired through donations or purchase, provided an atmosphere reminiscent of a late 19th century country school. Its bell rang again for the first time in 11 years as area personnel began giving living history demonstrations for visitors eager to learn about the now unfamiliar country school.<sup>52</sup>

### Living History Demonstrations

By 1973 living history demonstrations had become a very popular part of the summer seasonal repertoire. Every weekend, from May through August, seasonal interpreters in costume presented demonstrations of various chores as performed by pioneers. Three seasonal park aids and one seasonal park ranger contributed the talent for this interpretive program.<sup>53</sup> The demonstrations were an asset to the monument; Superintendent Halvorson called them "Homestead's greatest interpretive strength."<sup>54</sup>

The demonstrations covered a wide variety of pioneer chores and duties. The park aids rendered lard, made hand-dipped candles, washed clothes by hand, made lye soap, and spun yarn on the replica spinning wheel. Vegetables from the garden plot provided the ingredients for a pioneer meal prepared by the aids. In 1978, following the completion of restoration of the school, another aspect of pioneer life was reenacted. Visitors were delighted with the demonstration of a typical school lesson of the 1880s.<sup>55</sup> A seasonal ranger cared for the cash crop plot, answering questions, and providing background information as he labored on his corn, cotton, and potatoes. The schoolhouse, the Palmer-Epard Cabin, and the native prairie provided the historical backdrop for these activities.

Another important part of the living history demonstrations is the Volunteers in Park Program (VIP). As often as twice a week throughout the year since 1971, VIP's held quilting bees in the lobby of the visitor center. By 1974 15 quilts had been fabricated by these expert craftswomen from Beatrice, Nebraska.<sup>56</sup> This program was essentially terminated in 1976 because of the advancing age of the participants, causing deteriorating eyesight and dexterity.

The Palmer-Epard Cabin, school, exhibits, and demonstrations are all designed to provide the visitor with a comprehensive view of the pioneer's life on the prairie. The 19th century movement for a homestead act and the relationship of eastern industrial growth to western agricultural development are also explained through museum displays. A 1978 memorandum summarizes Homestead's administrative goals for its interpretive programs:

Visitors to Homestead will be exposed to three central ideas:

1. The challenges and lifestyles of the pioneer era.
2. The interaction of industrial growth in the east with agricultural growth in the plains.
3. The role of the movement for a homestead act in the history of the U.S. during the mid-19th century.<sup>57</sup>

#### Homestead's Energy Program

As important as well developed interpretive programs is an effective energy conservation program, especially in an era of rising energy consciousness. The development of an energy program began in earnest in 1973. At that time, small, but nevertheless effective, measures were initiated to cut back on energy consumption. The thermostat was turned down at night, doors were kept closed, and venetian blinds were installed.<sup>58</sup> The following year a more comprehensive program was begun which resulted in increased savings in energy costs: The reduced use of electrical lighting brought a 30 percent decrease in electricity used, winter and summer thermostat control curbed fuel consumption by 20 percent, and vehicle mileage was cut by 25 percent.<sup>59</sup>

The end of the 1970s saw more drastic measures being applied to reduce consumption as the ever rising energy costs made the situation more acute: working hours were standardized for all employees, museum and audio-visual room thermostats were lowered

to 60 degrees, offices to 65 degrees and 60 degrees at night, the temperature at the Freeman School was lowered to a chilly 40 degrees, and the utility building windows were covered with plastic.<sup>60</sup>

A new heating and cooling system was installed in the visitor center in 1979, and resulted in additional savings for the monument.

The Tempmaster system uses the latent heat of ground water, passed through an efficient heat exchanger, to heat or cool the building.

The water is pumped from a 70' deep well into a series of holding tanks. From there it circulates through a cupronickel coil, surrounded by a layer of freon. The freon is heated (or cooled) by the ground water and is then used to heat or cool air in much the same manner as an air-to-air heat pump.

Since the groundwater is in a closed system, it can be pumped right back into the ground.

The big benefit of a water-to-air system is that the groundwater stays at an essentially constant temperature year around. Water is also a much better heat-transfer medium than air.<sup>61</sup>

These measures continued to show impressive results; definite reductions in consumption patterns could be clearly seen. The number of BTU/GSF needed to heat Homestead's buildings declined from 108,000 in 1975 to an estimated 73,000 in 1980.<sup>62</sup> Due largely to the heat pump, the visitor center used 28 percent more electricity but no fuel oil in the first three months of 1980 as compared to the same period in 1979. Seven years of energy conservation had resulted in a 32 percent reduction in the amount of energy needed to run the monument's buildings, well ahead of President Carter's goal of a 20 percent reduction by 1985.<sup>63</sup> Much of the credit can be given to Park Technician Ray Brende, whose tireless efforts provided the initiative, motivation, and

interest for Homestead's successful energy program. His projects have saved the Federal Government over \$2,000 yearly, and have made the monument a leader in energy conservation.<sup>64</sup>

### The Growth of Personnel and Staff

To accommodate this growth and development, personnel and staff needs expanded accordingly. From an original staff of one ranger in 1938, the staff grew to three permanent and three seasonal employees by 1961.<sup>65</sup> The continued expansion and development of the monument placed new demands on the staff, requiring a further increase in personnel. The school necessitated adding one permanent less-than-full-time employee.<sup>66</sup> By 1981 the staff numbered five permanent employees plus one permanent less-than-full-time employee, five seasonal employees, and four CETA enrollees. The seasonal and CETA personnel have varied with funding and projects underway each season.<sup>67</sup> The growth of the Homestead staff has been consistent with the development of its cultural resource programs.

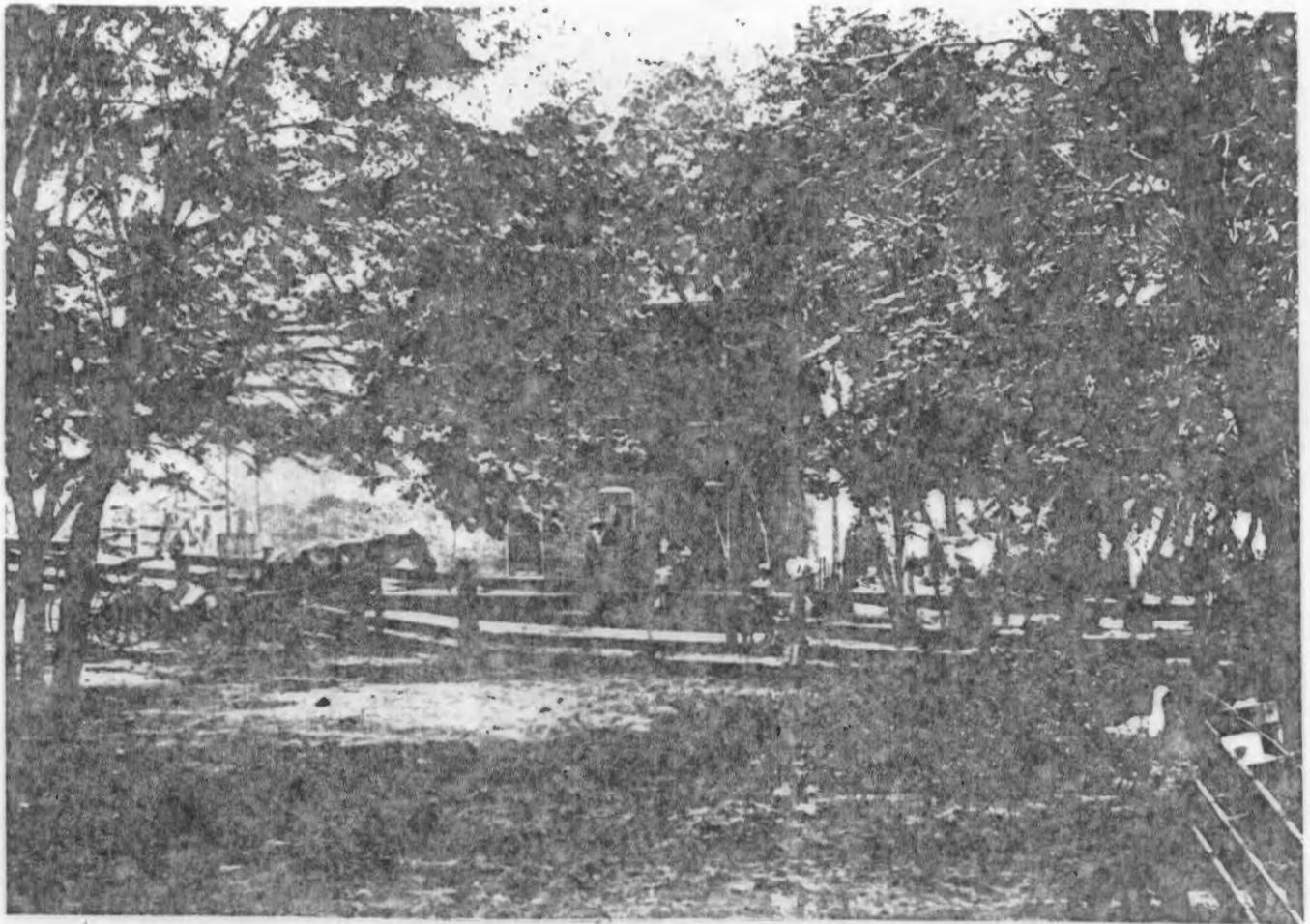
From the above discussion it is evident that the 1960-1981 period was characterised by the continuing development of Homestead's major programs. The potential of the interpretive programs was realized as new facilities were built, exhibits expanded, and new programs begun. Stabilization and restoration work on the Palmer-Epard Cabin and the newly-acquired Freeman School was completed. These programs conform to the mandate established for the monument by the 74th Congress in 1936. Finally, a comprehensive energy program was initiated and successfully implemented, cutting energy costs dramatically. It is apparent from these administrative developments that the Homestead National Monument clearly has reached a level of maturity unknown in 1938 or in 1962.



FIRST HOMESTEAD TAKEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

AMERICAN BOOK LITHO. CHICAGO

This lithograph of the original Freeman homestead probably derives from a Gale Photograph taken c. 1870.



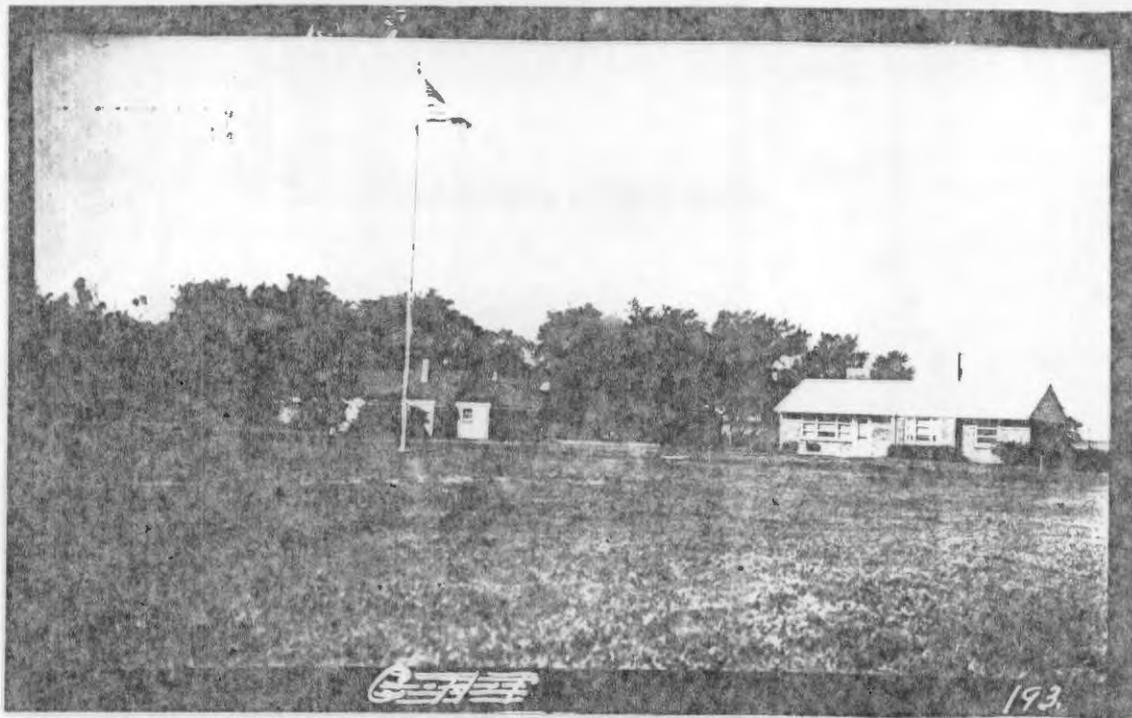
The north exposure of brick house. Daniel Freeman, his wife, grandchildren, and one son are standing in front of the structure. Photograph dated 1897 (N.S.H.S.).



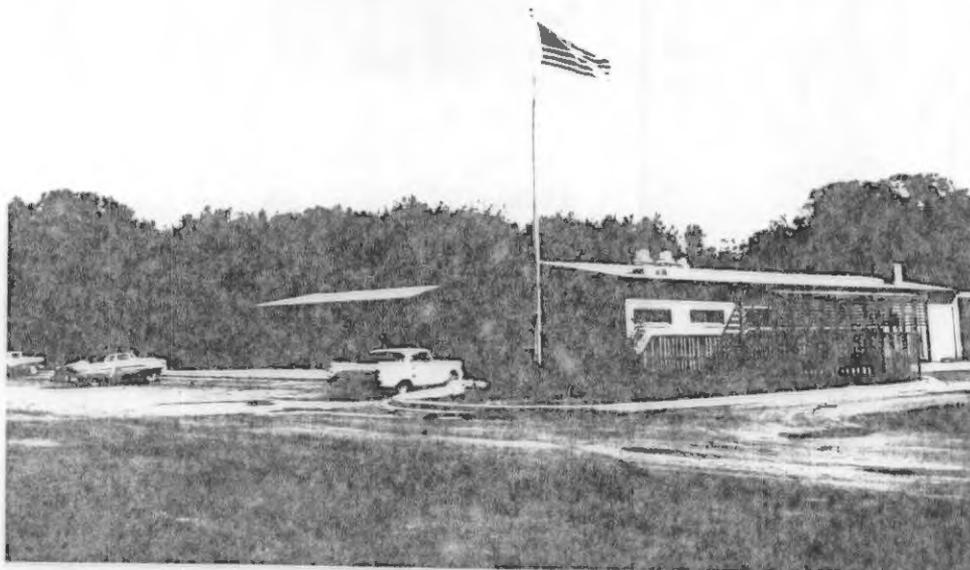
Freeman farm buildings north of highway, looking toward northwest. This photograph shows the barn, granary, sheds, and strawpile. Dated October 11, 1911 (N.S.H.S.).



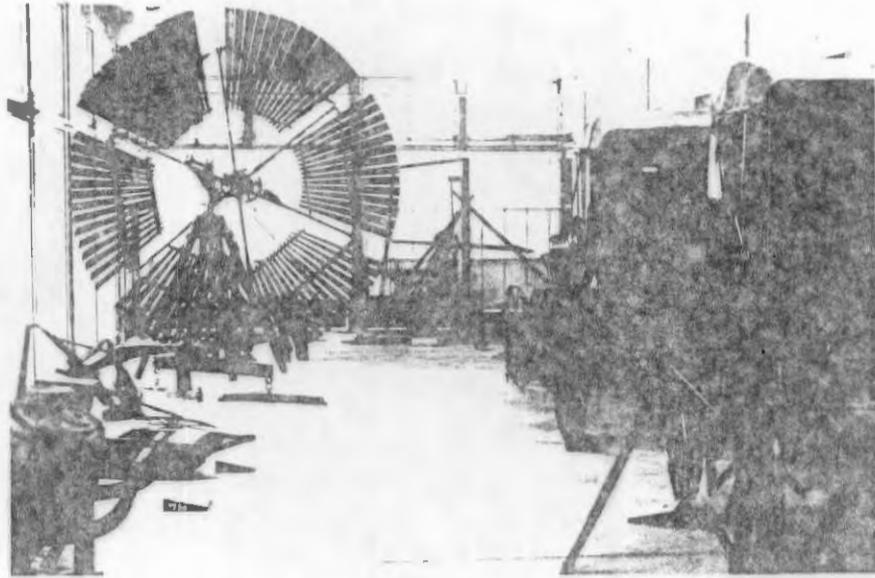
The Superintendent's residence December 1953.



The general view of headquarters area; utility building and the Superintendent's residence in September 1955.



The front of the new visitor's center building with parking lot, completed under the Mission 66 development program in 1962.



The museum and large implement displays--1969.



The restored prairie grassland in the summer of 1979.



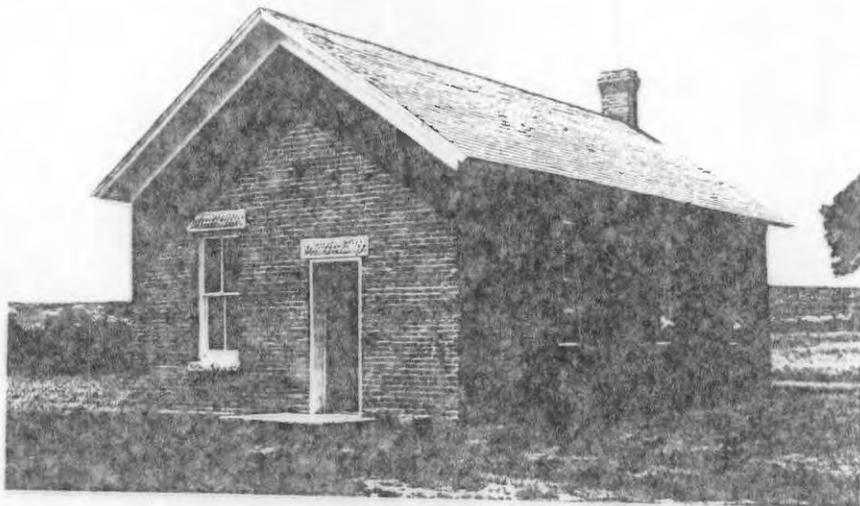
The north exposure of the Palmer-Epard Cabin following its relocation to Homestead. The photograph was taken in September 1951.



The Palmer-Epard Cabin in the summer of 1980 after extensive restoration work was completed.



The Freeman School about 1937 while still in operation as a country school.



The restored Freeman School September 1978.

## Endnotes

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APPENDIX A

Officials in Charge of Homestead National Monument

Clarence H. Schultz -----	10-4-40 to 6-2-42 (military furlough)
Russell A. Gibbs -----	11-17-42 to 3-3-43
Russell A. Gibbs (Custodian) -----	3-4-43 to 7-31-44
Elmer L. Hevelone (Custodian) -----	8-1-44 to 1-31-46
Clarence H. Schultz -----	2-1-46 to 5-30-54
George C. Blake -----	9-12-54 to 3-7-56
Ralph K. Shaver -----	3-8-56 to 4-25-59
Warren D. Hotchkiss -----	4-26-59 to 5-11-63
Vernon E. Hennesay -----	9-15-63 to 7-18-65
John F. Rohn, Jr. -----	8-1-65 to 2-28-69
John C. Higgins -----	4-20-69 to 1-10-71
Vincent J. Halvorson -----	3/7/71 to

APPENDIX B

Visitation 1947-1980

1947	-----	1,992
1950	-----	3,408
1953	-----	14,710
1955	-----	18,854
1961	-----	22,081
1962	-----	40,501
1963	-----	27,555
1964	-----	29,744
1965	-----	36,433
1966	-----	36,530
1967	-----	40,723
1968	-----	44,876
1969	-----	32,529
1970	-----	26,678
1971	-----	22,246
1972	-----	19,934
1973	-----	20,696
1974	-----	19,905
1975	-----	18,073
1976	-----	18,316
1977	-----	15,912
1978	-----	17,780
1979	-----	18,084
1980	-----	16,278

APPENDIX C

"The Historiography on the Homestead Act of 1863"

by

Robert L. Tecklenburg

Considerable research on the Homestead Act of 1862 and its effect on the settlement of the Public Domain, along with a growing interest in the history of the "common folk" have contributed immeasurably to our knowledge of the pioneers' life on the prairie. The Homestead Act became the object of controversy as historians debated whether it was actually instrumental in providing free land to millions of poor land-hungry settlers, or whether speculators, states, and the railroads were the principal beneficiaries. Regardless of how this debate is resolved, however, these historians have shed new light on this complex period in American History.

The debate focused on how effectively the Homestead Act opened up the Public Domain to prospective homesteaders eager for free land. Many scholars charged that speculators, the railroads, and the states were the primary beneficiaries by receiving millions of acres of the best land, thus leaving the poor settlers with the option of accepting least desirable parcels, or buying land from one of these agencies. Others asserted that the law made a significant contribution to the settlement of the trans-Mississippi West by having drawn millions of land-hungry immigrants westward.

Everett Dick and Homer Socolofsky maintain that the Homestead Act made a positive contribution toward settlement of the prairie states. Dick, in "Free Land for the Millions," wrote that free land was the drawing card which greatly stimulated immigration into the trans-Mississippi West. The free land slogan was a tremendous success in luring Europeans to America and Easterners further west. Whole counties in frontier territories like Kansas and Nebraska were settled in a year or two with the Homestead Act providing the stimulus for this great migration.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1870's and 1880's immigrant agents invited prospective settlers to America using the slogan, "Free Land for the Millions." Railroads utilized this slogan to increase

traffic on their lines and to entice settlers to purchase railroad land, previously taken from the Public Domain.<sup>2</sup> Dick concludes, however, that even though many settlers eventually bought from the railroads, it was still the lure of free land that had taken them westward to the prairie. For millions of poor Americans and Europeans the dream of owning their own land was too overpowering to resist. Although exploited by many, this dream led millions to the American frontier decade after decade for 70 years.<sup>3</sup>

Socolofsky's "Land Disposal in Nebraska, 1854-1906; The Homestead Story" examines the contributions the Homestead Act made toward settlement of Nebraska. The author believes this law stimulated immigration into the State after the Civil War and cites numerous statistics to verify his thesis. Between 1860 and 1870 the population of Nebraska increased 425 percent.<sup>4</sup> In 1880, the State had 452,000 inhabitants, and 10 years later almost 1,000,000 people claimed Nebraska as their state of residence.<sup>5</sup> He correlates this population increase with the settlement of the Public Domain through homesteading.

According to Socolofsky's figures:

...about three-fourths of Nebraska was available for homesteading and that almost three-fourths of that area was eventually acquired by the individual settler through the use of either the Homestead Act or the Timber Culture Act.<sup>6</sup> These acts gave land 48 percent of the settlers entering claim in the State. Of this number, 57 percent carried their claim through to successful completion.<sup>7</sup> By 1905 167,797 homesteads had been filed on with final certificates eventually issued of 95,998 applicants.<sup>8</sup> The author attributes the great increase in Nebraska's population to the widespread utilization of the Homestead and Timber Culture Acts for settling the Public Domain in that State.

Historians Paul Gates, Zochariah Boughn, Roy Robbins, Fred Shannon, and William Stewart, from studies based largely on Kansas and Nebraska, focus on the failing of the Homestead Act. They

have been critical of this law's ability to prevent speculation, and have concluded that the area of the Public Domain opened to the homesteader was considerably smaller than many believed. These historians also point out that the act was only partially successful in halting the process of land concentration in large holdings, and that tenancy and greater initial investment in land prevented the poorer classes of settlers from beginning farming free of debt.

Paul Gates in Fifty Million Acres stressed that the land available to the homesteader was much less than had been previously estimated. For example, in Kansas after 1863, 30 percent of the Public Domain was barred to the homesteader with the remaining land largely lying in the dryer counties of western Kansas, where 160 acres was insufficient to make a living. Also, continues Gates in History of Public Land Law Development, unsurveyed lands were off limits; the railroads and the states received their land grants before the homesteader, taking millions of acres of the best lands from the Public Domain. Indian reservation lands to be opened to settlement were not applicable to the Homestead Act. Finally, millions of acres fell into the hands of speculators because there were not adequate safeguards against speculation in this law.<sup>9</sup> According to Gates, closed to homesteading in the western states were:

125 million acres of railroad land, 140 million acres of state land, 175 million acres of former reservation lands, and millions of acres owned by speculators. 10

William J. Stewart also argues in "Speculation and Nebraska's Public Domain 1863-1872," that speculation closed millions of acres to the homesteader. Stewart provides the reader with a definition of a speculator:

... anyone entering at least four sections of land (2560) on the public domain. This establishes speculative intent.11

Following the Civil War, speculation increased dramatically with many seeking some form of investment for profits accrued during the conflict, and the Homestead Act did not thwart them in their search. Land speculation continued to increase in Nebraska until, finally in 1870, the Public Domain east of the 98th Meridian had disappeared. Between 1863 and 1872, a small group of speculators secured title to almost one million acres of the best Nebraska land, all at the expense of the homesteader.<sup>12</sup>

Between 1863 and 1872 98 entryment in Nebraska acquired at least 4 sections of land...securing title to 800,000 acres of the richest part of Nebraska's public domain...enough land to support 5,000-6,000 pioneer families. 15 had secured 359,280 acres of government land. 13

Stewart maintains that this had a negative impact on growth in Nebraska and assisted in the rapid creation of a tenancy class, dependent on large landlords and bankers. One settler in five, by 1880, held land shackled by some form of tenancy arrangement.<sup>14</sup>

In "The Free Land Myth in the Disposal of the Public Domain in South Cedar County, Nebraska," Zochariah Broughn charges that it is a fallacy that the Homestead and Timber Culture Acts were the "cornerstone of settlement" after the Civil War. Roy Robbins, writing in 1939, presents data revealing that of 552,112 homestead entries filed between 1863 and 1882, fewer than 195,000 were ever brought to completion.<sup>15</sup> Contributing further data is Fred Shannon, who states that there were 379,659 homesteads by 1890, comprising a mere 3.5 percent of all land west of the Mississippi River.<sup>16</sup> Despite only 142,000 applications filed on homesteads between 1863 and 1870, the number of farms in the United States increased 23 percent.<sup>17</sup> In the seven years after 1863 more land was purchased than homesteaded in Kansas and Nebraska, demonstrating that homesteading had not

taken the place of more traditional means to ownership.<sup>18</sup> Much of this land was purchased from the states, railroads, and speculators.

Jasuo Okada, a former student of Paul Gates, presents the most recent interpretation, revising earlier assessments of the Homestead Act. Okada, in Public Lands and Pioneer Farmers, provides an in-depth study of the public lands system in a limited geographic area--Gage County, Nebraska. He devotes his efforts to examining one county where homesteading took place, and from the study draws conclusions differing from those of his former mentor.<sup>19</sup>

Okada acknowledges that the law had its faults--abuse by speculators and inadaptability of the 160-acre farm to the arid plains. The amount of public lands available was greatly reduced by the failure of Congress to curb land speculation and halt the granting of large blocks of land to the states and railroads. No assistance was provided to get the poor settler to the land; no credit or guidance was extended to the struggling homesteader during the early years on his claim when success or failure was usually determined.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, contends Okada, the Homestead Act reflected the "triumph of the free land ideal." His research established that the proportion of successful homestead entries--those carried to first patent--was 60 percent in Gage County.<sup>21</sup> He concludes:

In view of the fact that more than 600 settlers obtained free land under the Homestead Act, and that most of them could select desirable tracts along the streams, we can conclude that the Homestead Law worked satisfactorily, both to its framers and beneficiaries, in Gage County.<sup>22</sup>

So, Okada, after examining its strong and weak points, concludes that the Homestead Act was important in settling frontier Gage County. Whether his conclusions can be verified for other frontier counties in states settled during this period awaits further historical studies.

This scholarship on the 1863 law has created a large out-pouring of research and has made a significant contribution to knowledge on the subject. The historians' differing interpretations of the Homestead Act's effect on the settlement of the trans-Mississippi West provide the reader with a multi-dimensional perspective on this interesting period in American History.

## Endnotes

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2  
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3  
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4  
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Ibid., p. 238.

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Paul W. Gates, History of Public Land Law Development (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 395-398.

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