



## HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT OF AMERICA

By Congressman H. C. Luckey

During the past session of the seventy-fourth Congress we started the fight to have the Daniel Freeman Homestead, the first homestead established under the General Homestead Act, established as a National Monument. Thus far we have not been successful, but the cause is by no means lost, and I confidently look forward to the day when the Homestead National Monument of America will be a reality rather than a dream.

During the first eighty years of our national existence the slow tide of empire crept gradually westward. Pushed by economic forces, many of the pioneers sought homes farther west where they might build for themselves and their children amid conditions offering the greatest opportunity. During these eighty years there were no free lands given by the federal government.

With the rapid settlement of the ever-advancing frontier there came to be formed a widespread movement for free homesteads. This led to the formation in 1852 of the Free Soil Party. The first actual attempt to establish a homestead law came as the result of the introduction of a bill by Congressman G. A. Grow of Pennsylvania. Under the provisions of this bill settlers were required to pay twenty-five cents per acre. The bill passed the House and Senate in 1860, only to be met with a veto by President Buchanan.

Again in 1862 the Grow Bill was proposed, and as a result of that bill and subsequent debates the Free Homestead Act was passed on May 20, 1862. President Lincoln signed the Act, which was to

become effective on January 1, 1863. This Act was a measure to relieve unemployment, which in the period following 1854 was quite acute, and to provide a wider economic field to those who were unable to pay the low purchase price the government had formerly demanded for the national domain.

The Homestead Act became effective January 1, 1863, at a period when the states were torn by the Civil War. Daniel Freeman was a soldier in the Union Army when the General Homestead Act was signed. While on furlough he selected a site on Cub Creek in Gage County upon which to file his homestead claim. He arrived in Brownville, Nebraska which was the nearest land office, on December 31, 1862. Many others had also gone to Brownville to file on land, but because of the fact that Daniel Freeman's furlough expired on January 1st it was arranged that he be allowed to make the first filing. By special consent the land office was opened at midnight and was kept open for the few minutes for Daniel Freeman to file his application for the first homestead in the United States. This enabled Daniel Freeman, following his service in the Union Army, to bring his bride to Gage County and to build a home on the first free homestead ever allotted by a wise and provident government.

In 1931 the citizens of Beatrice and the Chamber of Commerce of Beatrice began the movement to convert Homestead Number One into a national park. Two different bills were introduced in Congress to provide for the establishment of this park, but on neither occasion did the bills receive any consideration.

Believing that the General Homestead Act had been one of the most important factors in the winning of the West, and desiring to see the significance of that Act perpetuated forever, Senator Geo. W. Norris and I agreed to make an effort to secure the necessary legislation to establish this national park. For that purpose we introduced identical bills in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. These bills, S. 1307 and H. R. 4878, were referred to the Committee on Public Lands and Surveys in the Senate and to the Committee on Public Lands in the House of Representatives.

The Senate Bill was amended in the Committee on Public Lands and Surveys to provide for the establishment of the Homestead National Monument of America rather than the Homestead National Park. The Senate Bill was reported on March 23 and passed the Senate on March 29th. This action on the part of the Senate paved the way for House action.

The Honorable Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, on April 1 submitted the department's report on the two bills. In that report Mr. Ickes recommended the change from a national park establishment to that of a national monument establishment. He further recommended that the authorization for an appropriation be stricken out and that there be inserted provisions for acquiring the land by donation. These recommendations precluded any hope for

the bill's passage unless the proposed amendments were made, or unless the Department withdrew the recommendation eliminating the appropriation authorization. Secretary Ickes, in submitting his report, had been governed largely by a report given on March 7th by Acting Director of the Budget, Mr. D. W. Bell, who held that the appropriation of \$24,000 would not be in accord with the President's financial program.

To secure a favorable committee report on the bill from the House committee it was agreed between Senator Norris and myself to substitute the Senate Bill, already passed, for the House Bill and make an attempt to get Secretary Ickes to reconsider his stand on the appropriation. As the result of renewed negotiations with the Bureau of the Budget a report was filed by Mr. Bell with Secretary Ickes removing the budget difficulty in the way of establishing the National Monument. Upon the basis of the June 1st letter of the Bureau of the Budget, Secretary Ickes made a favorable report to the Committee on Public Lands, and on June 12th the committee reported the bill for House consideration and it was placed on the Union calendar.

Under existing procedure in the House it was necessary to have the bill placed on the Consent Calendar in order that consideration might be had before adjournment of the session. Upon request the bill was placed on the Consent Calendar. It is necessary to secure unanimous consent for the consideration of such bills, and it is possible for consideration to be blocked by the objection of any one member of the House. Thus began a long series of negotiations to enlist the support of the various members for this bill.

I cannot speak too highly of the fine cooperation given me by a great number of groups and also individuals. Chairman Rene L. DeRouen of the Committee on Public Lands and all the members of that committee aided and assisted me in many ways. The Freeman Park Committee of Beatrice, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and many other patriotic and public-spirited groups, as well as hundreds of public-spirited men and women, made direct appeals to various members of Congress.

My colleagues of the House who represent our state, Mr. McLaughlin of the second district, Mr. Binderup of the fourth, Mr. Stefan of the third, and Mr. Coffee of the fifth, aided me in contacting various members, and they also fought for the measure on both occasions when it came up on the floor of the House. All those who are interested in this legislation owe a debt of gratitude to those men.

I might also add a word of appreciation for the fine cooperation given by the Speaker of the House, the Honorable Joseph H. Byrnes, who has been very helpful in many ways and who sincerely supports this measure. 3

Perhaps little need be said of the results that came from the two attempts to secure passage of the bill. Representative Bacon of New York objected on the first unanimous consent appearance of the bill but withdrew his objection and allowed the bill to be passed over without prejudice, thus keeping it status quo, after Congressman Stefan had made a fine appeal to him to withdraw his objection and allow the bill to be passed. A second attempt to force the measure through was made when, after arrangements were made with the Speaker, the bill was called up under a consent request. This time Representative Taber objected, but again after a vigorous defense by my colleagues, Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Stefan, and myself, the bill was allowed to be passed over without prejudice.

I have by no means abandoned hope for the enactment of this bill. It now stands near the top of the Consent Calendar where it can easily be reached during the forth-coming session. Those who have so loyally devoted themselves toward securing its enactment are continuing their efforts. For my part I am quite frank in saying that I expect to continue the fight and will overlook no opportunities to secure its passage. 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.