

SETTLERS, SCHOOLTEACHERS, AND SUFFRAGISTS:  
FEMALE HOMESTEADING IN SOUTH DAKOTA

AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN IN  
History with an emphasis in Public History

Presented to the faculty of the University of Missouri-  
Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by  
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SETTLERS, SCHOOLTEACHERS, AND SUFFRAGISTS:  
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2017

ABSTRACT

Imagine packing all your possessions into a couple of trunks and leaving your home. You travel by train to South Dakota, sight unseen, to file a claim to the land so you can become a homesteader. The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 allowed any American citizen, who was at least 21 years old, and head of their household to obtain up to 160 acres of land. This landmark act even allowed single women to own land. For women, homesteading was both a dream and a means to escape the family home in the early twentieth century, and provided them with economic and individual freedom during a transformative time in America. Before 1901, women accounted for less than ten percent of homesteaders. At the turn of the twentieth century, women gained more civil rights, and socially, it was becoming more “acceptable” for women to work outside of the home. Between 1901 and 1920, women accounted for fifteen percent of all homestead entries. “*Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota*” details the positive effect homesteading had on women during the early twentieth century by giving them opportunity and agency in South Dakota. In this exhibit, you will meet female homesteaders who took a chance to improve their lives through land ownership and follow their triumphs and tribulations through the years. From settling to school teaching to gaining the vote, homesteading offered women greater autonomy in South Dakota.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined an interpretive plan titled "*Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota,*" presented by Caitlin Renee Eckard candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

### Supervisory Committee

Diane Mutti -Burke, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
HUMANITIES CONTENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	6
OUTREACH PLAN.....	14
INTERPRETIVE TEXT.....	16
MOCKUPS.....	26
GALLERY DIAGRAM.....	42
REFERENCES.....	43
VITA.....	45

## HUMANITIES CONTENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Homestead Act of 1862 opened up settlement in the west for almost any person willing to take a chance on farming. The lure of cheap land ownership beckoned hundreds of thousands of Americans. To apply for a claim, applicants had to be 21 years old, the head of their household, and never taken up arms against the United States government. Immigrants could also apply, given that they had applied for citizenship. Once the homesteader filed their claim, they had to “prove up” the land by erecting a dwelling and planting crops. After they lived on the 160 acre claim for five years, they received the patent to their land. Six additional Homestead Acts were passed in the following years until 1976, when the Federal Land Policy and Management Act ended homesteading.

Early scholars of western women’s history, such as Dee Brown<sup>1</sup>, did little more than place females in the West, and posed them as unwilling participants in western migration. Scholars, no doubt inspired by the modern women’s rights movements, reexamined the history of western women beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. Most notably, with Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller’s “*The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West*,” which challenged Dee Brown’s thesis and encouraged an ethnically broader and more expansive image of women in the West. This volume reinvigorated historians, and many began to complicate the history of women in the American West. They sought to dismantle the existing stereotypes of women in the West, arguing that women’s lives were much more

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<sup>1</sup> Dee Brown, *Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: Bison Books Publishing), 1958. Brown argued that white men “tamed” the physical landscape of the West while women “tamed” the social landscape. Even though this landmark book brings women into the story, there is no mention of any nonwhite settlers or Native Americans who already lived in the area.

<sup>2</sup> Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West” in *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1980): 174.

varied that the stereotypes of the reluctant pioneer, the prostitute with a heart of gold, or the happy homemaker.

The Women's West Conference in 1983 was the first national meeting devoted to western women's history. The result of this conference was "*The Women's West*,"<sup>3</sup> a groundbreaking collection of articles which tackled the image of women in western myths, reconsidered roles of white women, and attempted to place all western women in the narrative. *The Women's West* diversified the understanding in the role of women during the settling of the West, because the editors of the volume, Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, felt it was vital to study the histories of women in the years beyond the pioneer stage. They argued that what happened to women after they arrived in the West was just as important to study as the journey overland. Around this time, Patricia Limerick, in "*The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*,"<sup>4</sup> argued that the West was a place of conquest rather than a frontier process and that there was historical continuity between all stages of frontier settlement. This study was one of the first to directly address the idea of Anglos conquering the native people. However, she mentioned women only in passing as anecdotal stories in the bigger picture of the history of the West. Glenda Riley's *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*<sup>5</sup> adds onto these earlier works and argues that women were too complex and multi-faceted to make wide generalizations about them. Again, her work focuses primarily on white women, and not the experiences of Native Americans, European immigrants, or Hispanics.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: the Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987), 20.

<sup>5</sup>Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988).

While all of these works contribute to western history, they do not focus on female homesteaders or their impact in the history of the West.

In the 1990s, scholars began to study specific locations in the West to examine whether the experiences of women differed by region. They were also using new sources from the U. S. Bureau of Land Management, which gave scholars concrete numbers about female homesteaders. Katherine Harris and H. Elaine Lindgren are among the first scholars to specifically focus on women as homesteaders, an aspect of western women's history that had not received full attention from earlier scholars. *Long Vistas*<sup>6</sup> claims that women found greater autonomy in families and society in Colorado, but there is no mention of single women. *Land in her Own Name*<sup>7</sup> explores North Dakota female homesteaders. Lindgren studied land patents in select North Dakota counties to figure the ethnic, marital, and age of successful female homesteaders. However, she does limit the study to only two counties in North Dakota. Dee Garceau<sup>8</sup> studies two generations of women in Sweet Water, Wyoming trying to find out if women were liberated by the frontier experience. She argues that women did not find freedom in the West, because they were still beholden to their domestic duties. These monographs help to further understand the history of women in the West, but they only represent white, middle class women.

Finally, in Armitage's and Jameson's second book, *Writing the Range*<sup>9</sup>, scholars are presented with an inclusive history of women's life in the West. The editors acknowledge the

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine Harris, *Long Vistas: Women and Families on Colorado Homesteads* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 8.

<sup>7</sup> H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Dee Garceau-Hagen, *The Important Things of Life: Women, Work, and Family in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, 1880-1929* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 12.



exclusion of specific minority groups in *The Women's West*, and focus on the “other” women missing from the historiography of the West, including Mormon, Chinese, Native American, and Hispanic women. *Writing the Range* also represented a wider time period, discussing women's western history up to World War II, instead of stopping at the start of World War I. Understanding the complexities at play in this later time period presents scholars with a more complete history of the subject.

The early twentieth century saw a re-emergence of interest in western women's history, with authors claiming that women played a much larger role in settling the West than previously thought. Laura Woodworth-Ney's *Women in the American West*<sup>10</sup> argues that western women's history remains a relatively new field, even though scores of books and articles were written about the topic in the past twenty years. She strives to give women of all races and religions more credit in the settling of the West, since minority groups were largely ignored by previous scholars. *Women and Gender in the American West*,<sup>11</sup> summarizes and provides an ongoing discussion of current scholarship in western women's history. The collection of essays continues to diversify our understanding about western women as an increasing number of scholars are writing about western women, race, and gender.

This project builds on the momentum of interest in western women's history by focusing on homesteading women in South Dakota during a transformative time in American history, 1900-1920. These two decades saw the largest amount of homestead applicants, providing a wide array of sources to investigate and a unique window into homesteading history. There has not been a comprehensive case study of female homesteaders in South Dakota to date. Not only have

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2008), 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> James Brooks and Mary Irwin, eds. *Women and Gender in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

previous scholars neglected to concentrate on women in South Dakota, they also failed to explore the experiences of female homesteaders in particular. *Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists* shows visitors how women gained a degree of independence and agency through homesteading. By studying women's economic independence, community impact, and voting rights in South Dakota, this exhibit will further complicate the history of women homesteaders in this location and add to the growing knowledge of women's western history.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*“Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota”* is a museum exhibition that details the daily lives and experiences of female homesteaders in the early twentieth century. The goal of this exhibit is for visitors to learn more about women’s role in the settlement of the West. My research shows that women participated in homesteading in large numbers and through this experience demonstrated personal agency, as well as embraced economic opportunities and the possibility of personal freedom. However, most people are unaware of what the Homestead Act meant for westward expansion, let alone the fact that women took advantage of this program. Indeed, the role of women in settling the West should be celebrated. The West has long been viewed as a masculine space and my hope is that this exhibit will help to dispel the myth that only male cowboys, gunslingers, and Native American warriors occupied the region. South Dakota is an ideal location for study of this topic because there is little to no research done focusing on female homesteaders in the state. New sources continue to emerge and add to the growing number of women’s experiences. 1900-1920 saw the most successful homestead applicants, totaling in 811,112 land patents. More women homesteaded during these two decades than any other and represented fifteen percent of all successful homesteaders across the West.

The exhibit will consist of fifteen panels, covering the daily life and attitudes of women homesteaders from 1900 to 1920. Each panel will measure 36” by 24.” Upon entering the exhibit gallery, visitors are immediately inundated with homestead life. There will be a freestanding structure inside the room built to replicate a homesteader’s cabin. The walls of the cabin will resemble timber logs because most homes were made of wood and not sod at this time. The physical cabin will be the exact dimensions (10’ by 14’) homesteaders were required by law to

use to “prove up their land,” and it will contain a bed and kitchen area with no partitions. Kitchen utensils and farming tools will be hung on the walls throughout the cabin. There will also be a small table in the room with two chairs. Visitors will be able to touch and feel the objects inside the cabin. Exhibit panels will be printed on foam core and mounted on the walls in and outside of the cabin. *See figure 1.* Experiencing the small space and understanding the challenges these women faced makes the history much more real to visitors.

The gallery room will be larger than the ten by fourteen cabin dimensions, so the “outside” walls of the cabin will be utilized for hanging exhibit panels as well. The gallery walls will also be painted to resemble the South Dakota prairie, clothing will be hanging out to dry, and a small garden will be replicated as well. These components all reinforce the experience of homesteading to the visitor, because it emphasizes the work that must be done in and outside of the home in order to be a successful homesteader.

To see the landscape of South Dakota, the cabin will also have four glass windows, each depicting a different season. For example, one window will depict the Plains during the summer—prairies, lots of sunshine, and a rattlesnake or two in the distance while another will show the hard winters—high piles of snow, wind blowing, and limited daylight. Sound will also be a component to this exhibit, the stove will have the sound of a crackling fire, and visitors will hear the wind blow and every so often a coyote or wolf howl in the distance. Engaging multiple senses makes the exhibit more of an experience, which visitors are more likely to remember.

The lifespan of the exhibit would be three years to coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women’s suffrage in South Dakota in 2018 and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women’s suffrage across the United States in 2020. Since the exhibit is a celebration of women, the anniversaries contribute to the relevancy of women’s history. The target audience for this exhibit are ages eight

and above. Children at this age level should have a basic understanding of westward expansion, and the exhibit will build on their prior knowledge. Even if younger visitors attend and do not read all the panel text, they will see how homesteaders lived and take away an idea of how people used to live and how that is different from the way we live in today's world. Adults will gain a deeper knowledge of female homesteaders' day to day life and hopefully, rethink their preconceived notion of the history in the American West.

## OUTREACH PLAN

Ideally, I will market this project to the South Dakota State Historical Society's South Dakota Cultural Heritage Museum. The Heritage Center displays new exhibits every other year to keep visitors engaged, and 2018-2020 also coincides with the 100 year anniversary of women's suffrage in South Dakota and later across America. The majority of the primary sources used in the exhibition are from their collection and tie in with their mission statement—to promote, nurture and sustain the historical and cultural heritage of South Dakota by collecting, preserving, researching, and interpreting evidence of the state's irreplaceable past and making it available for the life-long education and enrichment of present and future generations. Currently, there are no exhibits on display that specifically target South Dakota women's history.

In the months leading up to the exhibit opening, SDSHS will add a new page on their website promoting the new exhibit. Currently, the website allows you to browse the current exhibits on display before you visit. "*Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists*" will also be featured on the Heritage Center's Twitter and Facebook accounts, in order to cut down the cost of marketing. Images from the exhibit will be shared via social media in order to gain attention in the months leading up to its debut as well. The SDSHS has various social media accounts for their different departments, i.e. archives, Heritage Center, etc. which will be utilized for cross marketing in order to reach more people. A small write up the exhibit will also be included in the quarterly journal "*South Dakota History*," published by SDSHS.

Public programming will be offered in conjunction with this exhibition, and will be marketed to members of the historical society, as well as the local community. Lecture topics include but are not limited to, South Dakota women's suffrage, the effect of the Homestead Act on America, and female images in western history. There will also be living history

demonstrations that tie into the exhibit, such as cooking demonstrations, laundering clothes, and harvesting crops, but these will be less frequent than the lectures. One program is scheduled every quarter in order to keep audiences engaged and encourage repeat visitation to the Heritage Center. The exhibit would be on display for roughly three years.

## INTERPRETIVE TEXT

### **Panel 1: Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota**

#### **Quote**

“This history of the homesteaders is paradoxical, beginning as it does in the spirit of a great gamble, with the government lotteries with land as the stakes, and developing in a close-knit spirit of mutual helpfulness.” –Edith Ammons



## Panel 2: Taking a Chance

### **Text**

Imagine packing all your possessions into a couple of trunks and leaving your home. You travel by train to South Dakota, sight unseen, to file a claim to the land so you can become a homesteader. The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 allowed any American citizen, who was at least 21 years old, and head of their household to obtain up to 160 acres of land. This landmark act even allowed single women to own land. For women, homesteading was both a dream and a means to escape the family home in the early 20th century, and provided them with economic and individual freedom during a transformative time in America. Before 1901, women accounted for less than 10% of homesteaders. At the turn of the twentieth century, women gained more civil rights, and socially, it was becoming more “acceptable” for women to work outside of the home. Between 1901 and 1920, women accounted for 15% of all homestead entries.

### **Image Caption**

Homesteaders arrived at train depots, like the one seen on left, from Watertown, S.D.

*SDSHS*

### **Image Caption**

Once you stepped off the train, it was time to find lodgings for the night. Most towns resembled the image below from Phillip, S.D. in the early 1900s, and had a boarding house and saloon, among other businesses.

*SDSHS*

### **Panel 3: Homesteading Women**

#### **Text**

*“Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota”* details the effect homesteading had on women during the early twentieth century by allowing them to embrace economic opportunities in South Dakota. In this exhibit, you will meet female homesteaders who took a chance to improve their lives through land ownership and follow their triumphs and tribulations through the years. From settling to school teaching to gaining the vote, homesteading offered women greater autonomy in South Dakota.

#### **Image Caption**

Homesteading sisters  
*Library of Congress*

#### **Statistic**

Women "proved up" (owned their land) at a similar or better rate than men, and an estimated 30,000-40,000 women across the West gained the title to their land. 1.6 million total patents were issued during the course of the Homestead Act.

## Panel 4: The Homestead Act

### Text

Passed the same day as the Emancipation Proclamation, the Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged western migration and settlement by “giving” 160 acres of public land to any adult citizen. Before the Civil War, southern politicians regularly voted against homestead legislation because they believed the law would hasten the settlement of western territory, adding to the number and political influence of free states. After the southern states seceded from the Union, the Northern dominated Congress finally passed the Homestead Act. This act shaped by the experience of the Civil War, ensured that slavery would not spread into western states.

Single women, newly freed slaves, immigrants, and men all qualified for the Homestead Act. Once homesteaders paid a filing fee, they had to improve the land before the land patent was granted. Improving the land – or “proving up” – required building a dwelling, planting crops, and residing on the claim for at least 5 years.

### Homesteading Claimant Requirements

- 21 years old
- Head of household
- American citizen or intended citizen
- Never borne arms against the U.S.

### Image Caption

The Homestead Act of 1862, *Library of Congress*

### Image Caption

David Freeman’s Homestead. The first homestead filed under the Homestead Act was for Daniel Freeman, a Civil War veteran. Freeman’s Nebraska log cabin is pictured here. *Library of Congress*

## **Panel 5: Journey to Statehood**

### **Text**

Sioux Indian tribes settled the area that is now South Dakota in the early 18th century, and French fur traders arrived a century later. The Dakota Territory was officially established in 1861. Small farming settlements sprang up in the new territory, but it was still an arduous journey by wagon. In 1868, the Chicago and North Western Line reached Sioux City, Iowa, just across the Dakota border. Finally, the Dakota Southern Line reached Yankton in 1873, and gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874. Miners in search of gold flooded the area, which belonged to the Sioux Indians. The influx of white settlers prompted many battles between the Native Americans and the U.S. army.

Between 1870 and 1890, the population of the territory jumped from 11,766 to 328,808. Many settlers took advantage of the Homestead Act, and the railroad crossed the state for easy access to these new settlements. In 1889, South Dakota joined the Union as a state due in part to the large boom in population. In the early 1900s, the U.S. Government began opening Indian Reservations for settlement, which prompted more land rushes to South Dakota.

### **Image Caption**

Rand, McNally & Co.'s new 1877 map of the Black Hills, marketed towards potential miners, included an index to "gold-bearing quartz lodes" and "silver-bearing lodes." *Library of Congress*

### **Image Caption**

McIntosh, South Dakota Land Sale Day *SDSHS*

## Panel 6: Why did they go?

### Text

There were innumerable reasons women went west to homestead. Marriage prospects, job opportunities, and independence were among the most popular reasons cited by women. Homesteading provided an outlet for women to experience freedom before settling down to marry. Many homesteaded with the intention of selling their land after they “proved up” and moving back home. This was an option for single women, as married women were unable to take advantage of the Homestead Act since they were not considered head of the household.

Edith and Ida Ammons left their childhood home in St. Louis because their father simply could not afford to provide for his adult children. With few career choices, the women chose homesteading because it offered more financial promise. If women chose to work, wages for schoolteachers and domestic labor were higher due to the demand for workers. It is also apparent that women homesteading had more freedom in their dating life- as their parents were not around to chaperone or influence who they dated.

### Quote

*"At that time, the prospect of making \$1200 a year instead of \$800 or \$900 teaching in a little red school house looked pretty good to me."*- Grace Fairchild on schoolteacher wages and why she decided to move.

### Image Caption

Popular magazines of the time also encouraged women to “go west” to seek adventure. *Sunset*, *Overland Monthly*, and *Atlantic Monthly* were all popular magazines at the turn of the century. *Advertisement, 1890, Library of Congress*

## Panel 7: Women's Changing Role in Society

### Text

Full citizenship for women was not acknowledged until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Up until the 1870s, most women were subjected to the laws of coverture. According to coverture, a woman had no legal identity separate from her husband or father. Only widowed women enjoyed the right to own and sell property. While the laws regarding women's property rights were changed in many states in the second half of the 19th century, the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 was an early opportunity for women to own their own land.

In the 19th century, women adhered to the notion of the "Cult of Domesticity," which stated that women should remain in the "private" realm of the home, and only be concerned with domestic duties. The "public" sphere, or outside world was left to the men. At the beginning of the 20th century, these ideals began to fade away as women became more involved in activities outside the home. Women coming of age during this time typically had more education than their earlier counterparts. The "New Woman" of the 20th century demanded a public voice as well as private fulfillment through work, education, and politics.

### Image Caption

Popular magazines such as *Godey's Lady Book* promoted the idea of "separate spheres" for men and women. Here, the audience can see a woman, in her home, presumably surrounded by her children.

*"The Sphere of Woman"*  
*Godey's Lady Book, 1850*

### Image Caption

The 20th century saw more women involved in civic groups. The Temperance League, who believed in alcohol abstinence, was especially popular at this time. *Deadwood Junior Temperance League SDSHS*

## **Panel 8: Financial Independence**

### **Text**

Many women went West with the intention to "prove up" their land and sell it for a profit. Women's access to land was constrained in the East both by the coverture laws and the higher price of real estate. With the money earned from homesteading, women could pay for college, purchase more land, or start a business.

Financial independence came easier to unmarried women because they did not have to share finances with their husbands. Women who homesteaded with their families typically contributed a portion of their wages to help with expenses, regardless of family structure. Women who homesteaded alone (without a family or husband) were not expected to share their wages, so living alone gave them ultimate financial freedom since they only had responsibility for themselves. However, Bess Corey did send a portion of her wages to her family in Iowa for the first three years she lived in South Dakota. This demonstrates that Bess achieved some degree of financial security if she was able to send money back home.

### **Image Caption**

Erikka Hansen earned the patent to her land in 1909 and sold her homestead for \$500. She used the money to pay for her teaching certificate, like the one seen above. Selling her land insured Erikka's independence, because she paid for her education which provided the means to earn money in the future. South Dakota Teacher's Certificate, 1896, *SDSHS*

### **Image Caption**

Bess Corey, a single homesteader from Iowa, at her homestead in the 1950s. *Nelson Dusen Personal Collection*

## **Panel 9: Two Sides to Every Story**

### **Text**

The Dakota's history with Native American tribes is long, ugly, and complicated. The Treaty of Fort Laramie signed in 1868, guaranteed the safety of pioneers traveling on the Overland Trails and opened construction of the Union Pacific Railroad through the Dakotas. The treaty also created the Great Sioux Reservation which exempted white settlement in the Black Hills. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874, miners illegally settled the area and clashed with the local tribes. Due to public pressure, the U.S. violated the Treaty of Fort Laramie and took the land, redistributing tribes onto smaller reservations. Battles broke out between the U.S. army and Lakota and Cheyenne Indian tribes, culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, where 300 Native American men, women, and children lost their lives at the hands of the U.S. cavalry.

Edith and Ida Ammons directly benefited from the mistreatment of Native Americans when the Lower Brule Reservation opened to white settlement in 1908. Edith filed a claim on the reservation and the sisters opened a post office and general store in town. When Sioux tribes arrived at the store, the sisters locked the doors and hid, because they heard (unfounded) rumors of settlers being scalped. However, their economic instincts kicked in because they realized the Native Americans had money to spend, and they wasted no time filling orders. Ida even learned Sioux language, and the local tribes became repeat customers.

### **Image Caption**

This map shows the land taken from the Sioux through the past two centuries.  
*LakotaDakotaNation.org*

### **Quote and Caption**

*"The Sioux had cherished this tall grass country as a hunting ground, and we had invaded it,"* Edith wrote in her memoir. The Ammon sisters were fearful of the Sioux due largely to rumors of violence. She seems completely aware of the unfair treatment to the Native Americans, yet she still took advantage of the reservation opening up to white settlement. However, the mistreatment of one group meant the success for the Ammon sisters.



## **Panel 10: Home Labor**

### **Text**

Women contributed to the economic productivity of the household by creating products and performing domestic labor, such as cooking meals, doing laundry, and making clothing. Families were hard pressed to thrive without the domestic labor of women. Gardening and tending to the cows and chickens was left up to the women in the family as well. Milk and eggs were sold to neighbors and the family subsisted on the fruits and vegetables grown in the garden. Unmarried men were forced to purchase these comforts, which women used to their advantage, to get paid for labor they would otherwise do for free.

The reality of homesteading was to work until the first season of crops came in, which might take a couple years, so married women contributed to their family's income. Homesteading families were poised to be more successful than a lone homesteader, because they had multiple family members contributing to the family's revenue. Therefore, putting the family in a better position to achieve success.

### **Image Caption**

Grace Fairchild sold vegetables from her garden and rented out beds in her home, because her husband, Shiloh, was "never quite fitted into the life of a homesteader," so Grace needed to bring in an income for her family. *SDSHS*

### **Image Caption**

Women feeding chickens, 1920s, *SDSHS*

## **Panel 11: Keeping it in the Family**

### **Text**

Homestead applicants received 160 acres of land, but that was not enough to make a living farming. To add to their land holdings, families often filed multiple claims on surrounding acreage. Since a "head of household" could file for land, adult children homesteaded with their parents and/or siblings to increase the size of their farm. Families that homesteaded as a group rarely failed, because they all worked interdependently with each other. The success of one homestead meant the triumph of another was not far behind.

Grace Fairchild, established a successful homestead with her husband Shiloh, who increased their land holdings buying abandoned claims. Many family members joined the Fairchilds in the years to come, with Grace and Shiloh buying their land once they received the patent. The couple separated in 1930, and split up the land 50/50. When Grace Fairchild passed away in 1949, she owned 1440 acres in South Dakota.

### **Image Caption**

Families divided up roles on the homestead to work more efficiently. Everybody had a job to do. The entire family helped on large tasks like cutting wood, as you can see above. *Cutting Wood, Getty Images*

### **Image Caption**

Homesteaders sometimes built their homes on the borders of their land. As seen above, these two women built their homes next to each other so they would not be lonely. *SDSHS*

## Panel 12: Suffragism in South Dakota

### **Text**

The woman's suffrage movement existed in the Dakota Territory years before it reached statehood. A state suffrage organization attempted to pass a full suffrage bill in four referendums held in 1890, 1894, 1898, and 1910. All of them failed. Suffrage leaders in the state opposed the liquor industry, which flourished due in large part to the number of immigrants. The German American Alliance tied the advocates for woman's suffrage to the prohibition movement and, therefore, actively worked against the suffragists, buying newspaper ads and printing anti-suffrage rhetoric. Despite this, South Dakota passed suffrage in 1918.

Female homesteaders varied in their opinion and involvement with the suffrage movement. There were a number of barriers to women's participation. Most women active in the movement did not have to work outside the home, suggesting the majority of suffragists were middle class. Women typically mentioned voting or women's rights in passing, although Bess Corey recalls going to political meetings. However, she did not become politically involved until she "proved up" her land, suggesting Bess had more time to pursue other activities once this economic goal was met. Once women entered the "public" realm, they wanted to continue their participation in these activities, and eventually removed the barriers that restricted their actions.

### **Image Caption**

*Argus-Leader*, Sioux Falls, S.D. November 9, 1916

### **Image Caption**

Suffrage Parade, undated, Armour, S.D. *SDSHS*

### **Quote**

*"Was not very well pleased with the returns of the election- in the county."* Bess Corey writing to her mother about her disappointment in the outcome of the 1916 election in S.D. Women finally received the vote in S.D. in 1918.

### **Panel 13: Sully Co. Colored Colony**

#### **Text**

The Homestead Act stipulated that African Americans could also take advantage of the opportunity to own land—something that was more difficult in East. The Sully County Colored Colony became a safe haven for African-Americans in the late 1800s. Norvel Blair, a former slave, experienced harassment while attempting to vote in an Illinois local election, so he and his family moved to South Dakota, where two sons already lived. Norvel and his family founded a settlement near Fairbank, and established a successful farming operation.

The Blair's wanted to share their freedom and success with other African Americans and created the Northwestern Homestead Movement to entice migration from the South. Norvel Blair's daughter, Betty, promoted the settlement and acted as a land agent to help newcomers find land. The Sully County settlement represented freedom to many African Americans, where they could escape the prejudice and racism rampant in the South. It also provided better opportunities for a community that typically did not have access to land ownership. Before the Great Depression ended the success of the Sully County community, there were 200 residents farming and ranching in Sully County.

#### **Image Caption**

Norvel Blair, 1880

*South Dakota Magazine*

#### **Image Caption**

The popularity of the colony even prompted state newspapers to comment on the community.

*Argus Leader*

## Panel 14: Community Impact

### **Text**

After women settled in South Dakota, they became involved with their community. Martha Stoecker Norby held a box social fundraiser in Stanley County in support of preaching and a Sunday school. She raised over \$60 and purchased an organ and a dictionary stand that were used in the local schoolhouse. Similarly, Emma Head Cumiford and a neighbor started a Sunday school for the children in LaPlant, S.D.

Community gatherings became an important part of homesteading. These events broke up the monotony of farming and ranching, and allowed people to socialize with one another to ward off feelings of isolation. The creation of these community spaces, in which women had a large role, signaled that homesteaders invested in their new home.

From school boards to suffrage organizations, they made their voices heard. Single women typically gravitated towards the suffrage movement and church organizations. Married women with children often rallied around schools, because they wanted a decent education for their children in these often-remote areas.

### **Image Caption**

La Plant, S.D. *SDSHS*

### **Image Caption**

Sunday Picnic, *SDSHS*

### **Image Caption**

Class was often held inside homes before schoolhouses were built. *The Claim Cabin School*,  
*Getty Images*

## **Panel 15: The Decline in Homesteading**

### **Text**

The Homestead Act did not officially end in the continental United States until 1976, but America's entry into World War I in 1917 resulted in a major decline in Homestead entries. Many male farmers were drafted into the military, and others sold their farms for better paying industrial jobs in the city. In the late 1920s, the Dustbowl and Great Depression hit and crops failed and livestock prices collapsed. Homesteaders who kept their land looked for non-agricultural jobs to stay afloat.

While the Homestead Act always presented problems, including fake claimants and the physical challenges on the frontier, it did fuel economic growth and allow people to own land at a relatively low cost. While women gained a degree of independence through homesteading, it was at the expense of the people who were native to the land. The Homestead Act was a stepping stone in women's progress, because it gave them more options, they could teach, get married (or not), and freely control their own land. These range of options was more difficult for women in the East. Roughly 15% of successful homestead patents belonged to women from 1900-1920, clearly demonstrating that there were many women who were willing to take a chance in the West. Homesteading opened up opportunities for women and helped set them on the path towards breaking out of the "private" sphere and pushing for increased rights.

### **Image Caption**

Final patents received, by decade, throughout the Homestead Act's history. Only 50% of homesteaders were successful in "proving up" their land to receive ownership. *NPS*

# Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota



**“This history of the homesteaders is paradoxical, beginning as it does in the spirit of a great gamble, with the government lotteries with land as the stakes, and developing in a close-knit spirit of mutual helpfulness.” -Edith Ammons**

# Taking a Chance



**Homesteaders arrived at train depots, like the one seen on the left, from Watertown, S.D.**

*SDSHS*

Imagine packing all your possessions into a couple of trunks and leaving your home. You travel by train to South Dakota, sight unseen, to file a claim to the land so you can become a homesteader. The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 allowed any American citizen, who was at least 21 years old, and head of their household to obtain up to 160 acres of land. This landmark act even allowed single women to own land.

For women, homesteading was both a dream and a means to escape the family home in the early 20th century. Before 1901, women accounted for less than 10% of homesteaders. At the turn of the twentieth century, women gained more civil rights, and socially, it was becoming more “acceptable” for women to work outside of the home. Between 1901 and 1920, women accounted for 15% of all homestead entries.

**Once you stepped off the train, it was time to find lodgings for the night. Most towns resembled the image below from Phillip, S.D. in the early 1900s, and had a boarding house and saloon, among other businesses.**

*SDSHS*





## Homesteading Women

*“Settlers, Schoolteachers, and Suffragists: Female Homesteading in South Dakota”* details the effect homesteading had on women during the early twentieth century by giving them economic opportunities in South Dakota. In this exhibit, you will meet female homesteaders who took a chance to improve their lives through land ownership and follow their triumphs and tribulations through the years.

From settling to school teaching to gaining the vote, homesteading offered women greater autonomy in South Dakota.

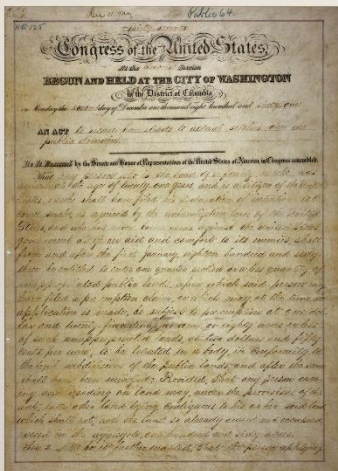


Homesteading sisters,  
*Library of Congress*

**Women "proved up" (owned their land) at a similar or better rate than men, and an estimated 30,000-40,000 women across the West gained the title to their land. 1.6 million total patents were issued during the course of the Homestead Act.**

# The Homestead Act

**The Homestead Act of 1862**  
Library of Congress



Passed the same day as the Emancipation Proclamation, the Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged western migration and settlement by “giving” 160 acres of public land to any adult citizen. Before the Civil War, southern politicians regularly voted against homestead legislation because they believed the law would hasten the settlement of western territory, adding to the number and political influence of free states. After the southern states seceded from the Union, the Northern dominated Congress finally passed the Homestead Act. This act shaped by the experience of the Civil War, ensured that slavery would not spread into western states.

Single women, newly freed slaves, immigrants, and men all qualified for the Homestead Act. Once homesteaders paid a filing fee, they had to improve the land before the land patent was granted. Improving the land – or “proving up” – required building a dwelling, planting crops, and residing on the claim for at least 5 years.

## Homesteading Claimant Requirements

- 21 years old
- Head of household
- American citizen or intended citizen
- Never borne arms against the U.S.



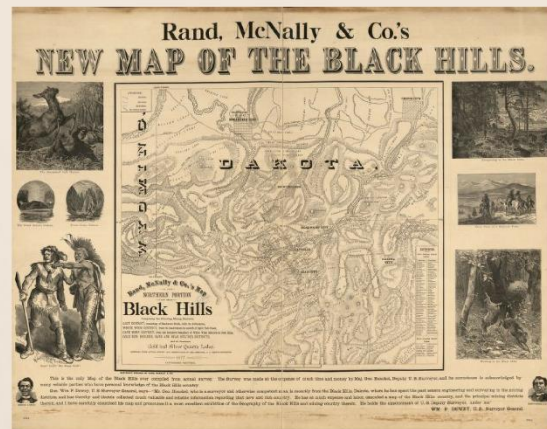
**The first homestead filed was for Daniel Freeman, a Civil War veteran. Freeman's Nebraska log cabin is pictured here.**

Library of Congress

# Journey to Statehood

Sioux Indian tribes settled the area that is now South Dakota in the early 18th century, and French fur traders arrived a century later. The

Dakota Territory was officially established in 1861. Small farming settlements sprang up in the new territory, but it was still an arduous journey by wagon. In 1868, the Chicago and North Western Line reached Sioux City, Iowa, just across the Dakota border. Finally, the Dakota Southern Line reached Yankton in 1873, and gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874. Miners in search of gold flooded the area, which belonged to the Sioux Indians. The influx of white settlers prompted many battles between the Native Americans and the U.S. army.



**Rand, McNally & Co.'s new 1877 map of the Black Hills, marketed towards potential miners, included an index to "gold-bearing quartz lodes" and "silver-bearing lodes."**  
*Library of Congress*



**McIntosh, South Dakota  
Land Sale Day  
SDSHS**

Between 1870 and 1890, the population of the territory jumped from 11,766 to 328,808. Many settlers took advantage of the Homestead Act, and the railroad crossed the state for easy access to these new settlements. In 1889, South Dakota joined the Union as a state due in part to the large boom in population. In the early 1900s, the U.S. Government began opening Indian Reservations for settlement, which prompted more land rushes to South Dakota.

## Why did they go?

There were innumerable reasons women went west to homestead. Marriage prospects, job opportunities, and independence were among the most popular reasons cited by women. Homesteading provided an outlet for women to experience freedom before settling down to marry. Many homesteaded with the intention of selling their land after they “proved up” and moving back home. This was a viable option for single women, as married women were unable to take advantage of the Homestead Act since they were not considered head of the household.

Advertisement,  
1890  
*Library of Congress*



**Popular magazines of the time also encouraged women to “go west” to seek adventure. *Sunset, Overland Monthly, and Atlantic Monthly* were all popular magazines at the turn of the century.**

Edith and Ida Ammons left their childhood home in St. Louis because their father simply could not afford to provide for his adult children. With few career choices, the women chose homesteading because it offered more financial promise. If women chose to work, wages for schoolteachers and domestic labor were higher due to the demand for workers. It is also apparent that women homesteading had more freedom in their dating life—as their parents were not around to chaperone or influence who they dated.

**"At that time, the prospect of making \$1200 a year instead of \$800 or \$900 teaching in a little red school house looked pretty good to me." - Grace Fairchild on school teacher wages and why she decided to move.**

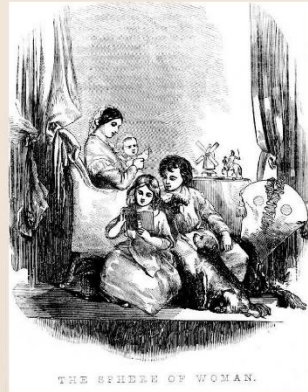
# Women's Changing Role in Society

Full citizenship for women was not acknowledged until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Up until the 1870s, most women were subjected to the laws of coverture. According to coverture, a woman had no legal identity separate from her husband or father. Only widowed women enjoyed the right to own and sell property. While the laws regarding women's property rights were changed in many states in the second half of the 19th century, the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 was an early opportunity for women to own their own land.



**The 20th century saw more women involved in civic groups. The Temperance League, who believed in alcohol abstinence, was especially popular at this time.**

*Deadwood Junior Temperance League  
SDSHS*



Popular magazines such as *Godey's Lady Book* promoted the idea of "separate spheres" for men and women. Here, the audience can see a woman, in her home, presumably surrounded by her children.

"The Sphere of Woman"  
*Godey's Lady Book, 1850*

In the 19th century, women adhered to the notion of the "Cult of Domesticity," which stated that women should remain in the "private" realm inside the home, and only concern themselves with domestic duties. The "public" sphere, or outside world was left to the men. At the beginning of the 20th century, these ideals began to fade away as women became more involved in activities outside the home. The "New Woman" of the 20th century demanded a public voice as well as private fulfillment through work, education, and politics.

# Financial Independence

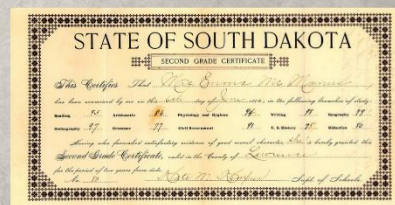
Many women went West with the intention to "prove up" their land and sell it for a profit. Women's access to land was constrained in the East both by the coverture laws and the higher price of real estate. With the money earned from homesteading, women could pay for college, purchase more land, or start a business.



Bess Corey, a single homesteader from Iowa, at her homestead in the 1950s.  
*Nelson Dusen Personal Collection*

Financial independence came easier to unmarried women because they did not have to share finances with their husbands. Women who homesteaded with their families typically contributed a portion of their wages to help with expenses, regardless of family structure. Women who homesteaded alone (without a family or husband) were not expected to share their wages, so living alone gave them ultimate financial freedom since they were only responsible for themselves. However, Bess Corey did send a portion of her wages to her family in Iowa for the first three years she lived in South Dakota. This demonstrates that Bess achieved some degree of financial security if she was able to send money back home.

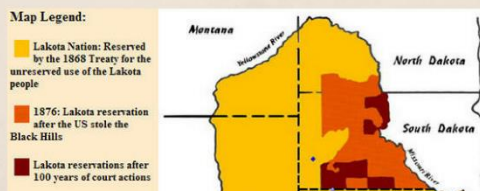
Erikka Hansen earned the patent to her land in 1909 and sold her homestead for \$500, roughly \$13,000 today. She used the money to pay for her teaching certificate, like the one seen below. Selling her land insured Erikka's independence, because she paid for her education which provided the means to earn money in the future.



South Dakota Teacher's Certificate, 1896  
SDSHS

## Two Sides to Every Story

The Dakota's history with Native American tribes is long, ugly, and complicated. The Treaty of Fort Laramie signed in 1868, guaranteed the safety of pioneers traveling on the Overland Trails and opened construction of the Union Pacific Railroad through the Dakotas. The treaty also created the Great Sioux Reservation which exempted white settlement in the Black Hills. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874, miners illegally settled the area and clashed with the local tribes. Due to public pressure, the U.S. violated the Treaty of Fort Laramie and took the land, redistributing tribes onto smaller reservations. Battles broke out between the U.S. army and Lakota and Cheyenne Indian tribes, culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, where 300 Native American men, women, and children lost their lives at the hands of the U.S. cavalry.



Land taken from the Sioux during the past two centuries.

*LakotaDakotaNation.org*

Edith and Ida Ammons directly benefited from the mistreatment of Native Americans when the Lower Brule Reservation opened to white settlement in 1908. Edith filed a claim on the reservation and the sisters opened a post office and general store. When tribes arrived at the store, the Ammons' locked the doors and hid, because they heard (unfounded) rumors of white settlers being scalped. However, their economic instincts kicked in because they realized the Indians had money to spend and wasted no time filling orders. Ida even learned some Sioux language, and the local tribes became repeat customers.

**“The Sioux had cherished this tall grass country as a hunting ground, and we had invaded it,”** Edith wrote in her memoir. The

Ammon sisters were fearful of the Sioux Indians due largely to rumors of violence. Edith seems aware of the unfair treatment to the Native Americans, yet she still took advantage of the reservation opening up to white settlement.

However, the mistreatment of one group meant success for the Ammon sisters.

## Home Labor

Women contributed to the economic productivity of the household by creating products and performing domestic labor, such as cooking meals, doing laundry, and making clothing. Families were hard pressed to thrive without the domestic labor of women. Gardening and tending to the cows and chickens was left up to the women in the family as well. Milk and eggs were sold to neighbors and the family subsisted on the fruits and vegetables grown in the garden. Unmarried men were forced to purchase these comforts, which women used to their advantage, to get paid for labor they would otherwise do for free.

**Grace Fairchild sold vegetables from her garden and rented out beds in her home, because her husband, Shiloh, was "never quite fitted into the life of a homesteader," so Grace had to bring in an income for her family.**

*SDSHS*



The reality of homesteading was to work until the first season of crops came in, which might take a couple years, so married women contributed to their family's income. Homesteading families were poised to be more successful than a lone homesteader, because they had multiple family members contributing to the family's revenue. Therefore, putting the family in a better position to achieve success.



**Women feeding chickens,**

**1920s**

*SDSHS*



## Keeping it in the Family



**Families divided up roles on the homestead to work more efficiently. Everybody had a job to do. The entire family helped on large tasks like cutting wood, as you can see above.**  
*Cutting Wood, Getty Images*

Homestead applicants received 160 acres of land, but that was not enough to make a living farming. To add to their land holdings, families often filed multiple claims on surrounding acreage. Since a "head of household" could file for land, adult children homesteaded with their parents and/or siblings to increase the size of their farm. Families that homesteaded as a group rarely failed, because they all worked interdependently with each other. The success of one homestead meant the triumph of another was not far behind.

Grace Fairchild, established a successful homestead with her husband Shiloh, who increased their land holdings buying abandoned claims. Many family members joined the Fairchilds in the years to come, with Grace and Shiloh buying their land once they received the patent. The couple separated in 1930, and split up the land 50/50. When Grace Fairchild passed away in 1949, she owned 1440 acres in South Dakota.



**Homesteaders sometimes built their homes on the borders of their land. As seen above, these two women built their homes next to each other so they would not be lonely.**  
*SDSHS*

# Suffragism in South Dakota



Suffrage Parade, undated,  
Armour, S.D.  
SDSHS

The woman's suffrage movement existed in the Dakota Territory years before it reached statehood. A state suffrage organization attempted to pass a full suffrage bill in four referendums held in 1890, 1894, 1898, and 1910. All of them failed. Suffrage leaders in the state opposed the liquor industry, which flourished due in large part to the number of immigrants. The German American Alliance tied the advocates for woman's suffrage to the prohibition movement and, therefore, actively worked against the suffragists, buying newspaper ads and printing anti-suffrage rhetoric. Despite this, South Dakota passed suffrage in 1918.

**"Was not very well pleased with the returns of the election- in the county."  
Bess Corey writing to her mother about her disappointment in the outcome  
of the 1916 election in S.D. Women finally received the vote in S.D. in 1918.**

Female homesteaders varied in their opinion and involvement with the suffrage movement. There were a number of barriers to women's participation. Most women active in the movement did not have to work outside the home, suggesting the majority of suffragists were middle class. Women typically mentioned voting or women's rights in passing, although Bess Corey recalls going to political meetings. However, she did not become politically involved until she "proved up" her land, suggesting Bess had more time to pursue other activities once this economic goal was met. Once women entered the "public" realm, they wanted to continue their participation in these activities, and eventually removed the barriers that restricted their actions.



*Argus-Leader, Sioux Falls, S.D. November 9, 1916*

## Sully County Colored Colony

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Norvel Blair, 1880  
*South Dakota Magazine*

**COLORED RECRUITS.**  
Pierre, Oct. 6.—(Special to the Argus-Leader.)—Several new recruits for the Blair colored colony, in Sully county arrived this week. None are being brought out who are not able to purchase lands, and up to the present about a dozen families have been located on the lands in western Sully county, where it is desired to establish such a colony.

The popularity of the colony even prompted state newspapers to comment on the community.  
*Argus Leader*

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# Community Impact



La Plant, S.D.  
SDSHS

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Sunday Picnic  
SDSHS

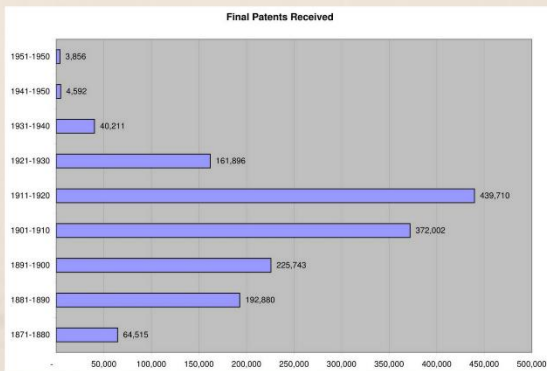


**Class was often held inside homes before schoolhouses were built.**  
*The Claim Cabin School, Getty Images*

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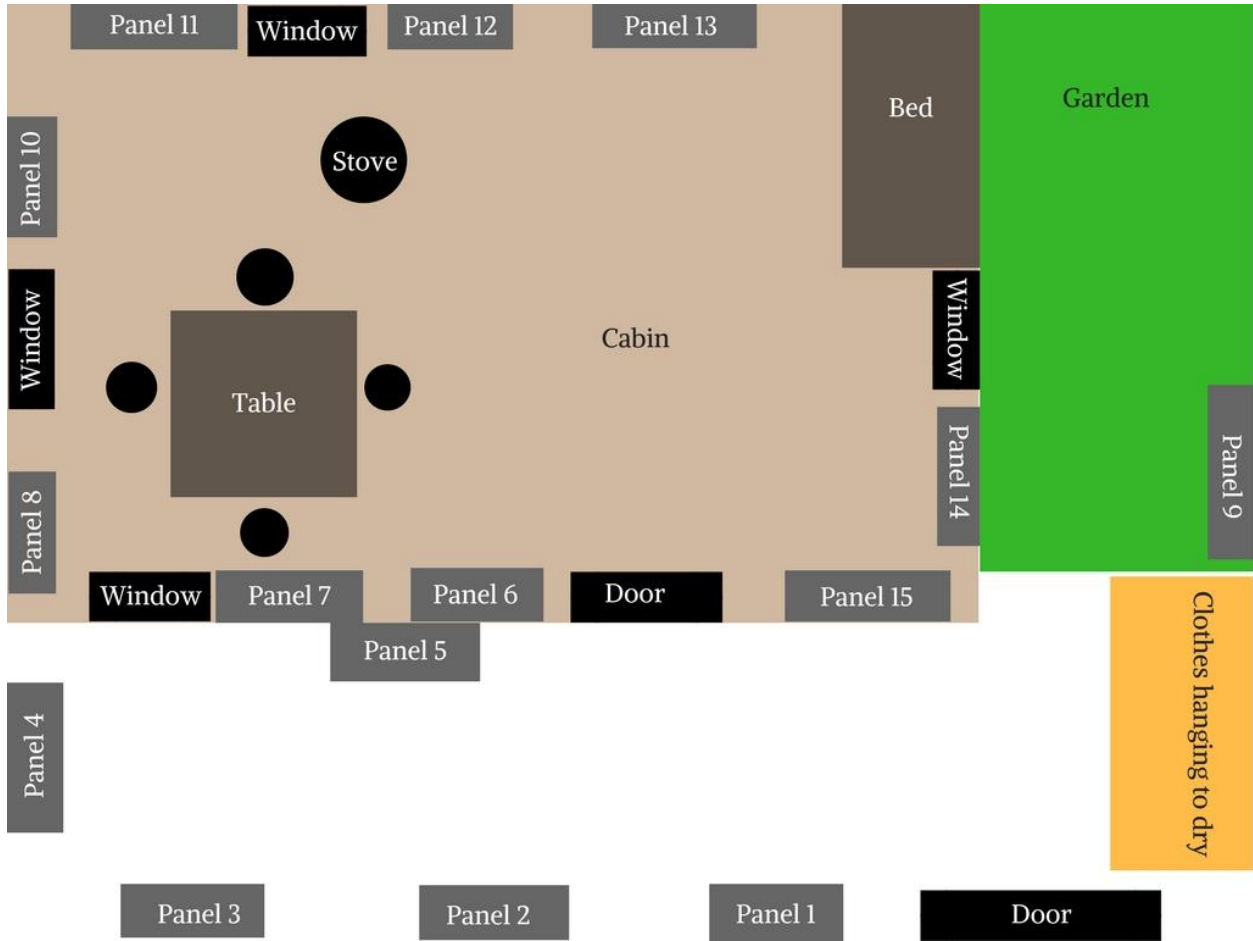


**Final patents received, by decade, throughout the Homestead Act's history. Only 50% of homesteaders were successful in "proving up" their land to receive ownership.**

*NPS*

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FIGURE 1



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## VITA

Caitlin Renee Eckard was born in Merriam, Kansas on July 17, 1987. She grew up in the Kansas City area and attended primary and secondary school in the Shawnee Mission School District, graduating from Shawnee Mission North in 2005. In 2010, Ms. Eckard graduated from the University of Missouri-Kansas City with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

Ms. Eckard began volunteering at the Johnson County Museum in January of 2011, and subsequently was offered a part time position of education assistant in June of that year. In 2012, Ms. Eckard enrolled in Graduate School at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She pursued a Master of Arts in History with an emphasis in Public History. During this time, Ms. Eckard continued employment at the Johnson County Museum.

In her final years of the Graduate program, Ms. Eckard received a job offer from the American Truck Historical Society (ATHS) and worked there until August 2015. Ms. Eckard was the lead photo digitizer for the ATHS's photographic collection, estimated at 100,000 images. In September 2015, the Jackson County Historical Society (JCHS) offered Ms. Eckard full time employment as the archivist/ operations manager. In January 2018, she will take over as the Executive Director for JCHS.