

**Volume 2**

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**Nebraska and the Homestead Act**

**Lead: Born of the slavery controversy, the State of Nebraska enjoyed explosive growth after the Civil War in large part due to a policy made in Washington.**

**Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In 1854 the Congress of the United States, in response to those desiring a railroad to the Pacific Coast, an expansion in the number of states, both slave and free, and a solution to the growing number of emigrants wishing to settle in lands west of the**

**Mississippi, passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The legislation enshrined the concept of "squatter sovereignty," and created two new territories which could choose whether they would be slave or free states. Nebraska would enter the Union in 1867 but first it had to grow a bit. The two factors that contributed to its expansion were the construction of the railroads and an Act passed by Congress during the Civil War.**

**The Homestead Act signed by President Lincoln in May 1862 made it possible for anyone to secure valuable land for no more than the price of his or her own labor. It provided that anyone twenty-one years or older, a citizen or on the way to becoming one,**

**who had never borne arms against the United States government, could for the payment of \$10.00, receive 120 acres of unimproved government land. After five years of living on and cultivating it the citizen could receive the land title free and clear.**

**This Act and others allied to it formed the foundation for the explosive settlement of Nebraska and other western states. The first claimant under the Homestead Act in the nation was Daniel Freeman, a soldier in the Union Army home on furlough. He persuaded the Register of the Land Office in Brownville to open up shortly after midnight on January 1, 1863, the date the law went into effect, to claim a piece of land along Cub Creek**

**northwest of Beatrice near the Kansas border.**

**In the years between 1862 and 1900, in Nebraska, thanks to the Homestead Act, more than a million others had joined Mr. Freeman in making the state their home.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

**Olson, James C. *History of Nebraska*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.**