



U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Standards Addressed:
SS8.4, SS9.1

Wyoming Homestead Lesson Plan (8th Grade +)

The lesson is based on the Homestead Act of 1862, General Land Office Records, and the family research and historical account of Martin J. Gothberg gathered by staff at the National Historic Trails Interpretive Center. Utilizing primary documents, maps, and photographs, students will explore the Homestead Act, western expansion, geography and development and local Wyoming history from the 1860s-1840s.

Objectives

- Students will determine how the Homestead Act impacted the growth of the West.
- Students will learn how the Homestead Act impacted ranching in Wyoming from a local example.
- Students will determine how the Homestead Act impacted the development of the local community or region.
- Students will build familiarity with using primary documents for research.
- Students will examine how socially perceived standards for women and men in the West were influenced by the Homestead Act.

Preparation

Print the following texts and worksheets.

- [Homestead Act of 1862](#)
- [Homestead Example in Natrona County](#)
- [Worksheets One-Five \(1-5\)](#)

Print or utilize digital versions of the following:

- [Map: Martin Gothberg's Homestead](#)
- [Eight Primary Documents](#)
- [Photo: Gothberg Homestead circa 1910](#)

Directions

Lesson One: Introduction to the Homestead Act Read the *Overview of the Homestead Act of 1862* as a class and assign student to small groups to answer questions on [Worksheet One](#). Utilize a class discussion to clarify knowledge about the Homestead Act. Be sure that the students understand the criteria for being a homesteader and the steps homesteaders needed to take to claim land.



National Historic Trails Interpretive Center
1501 N. Poplar St.
Casper, WY 82601
307-261-7700
blm_wy_trailscenter@blm.gov



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Lesson Two: Gothberg Ranch Introduce the *Homestead Example in Natrona County* handout. Read it as a class or in small groups. Assign groups to complete *Worksheet Two*. Signal to groups that the reporter will be randomly selected from each group. Review *Worksheet Two Questions* as a class.

Lesson Three: Analyzing Primary Documents Divide the class into small groups and assign each a set of primary documents. Have the groups access the documents on-line or provide a printed version. Instruct students to answer corresponding questions in groups and report to the class. Note that not all students may be able to read the cursive of the primary documents, seek extra support for groups needing assistance. Host a class discussion after the reports with *primary documents questions*.

Primary Documents Questions

- Were the documents easy to read?
- What type of information could be found on them?
- Was there anything interesting?
- How did Martin Gothberg file all these documents without a computer?
- What would it have been like for Martin if computers existed when he was filing his claims?

Lesson Four: Mapping the Gothberg Homestead Pass out copies of the map to small groups (or use digital version). Discuss what students see on the map. If they are unable to read the map, introduce basic map reading skills. (Local classes: Does anyone know where the ranch is located by reading the map? What are familiar landmarks?) Have each group answer the questions on *Worksheet Five*. Finish with a class discussion on how Martin Gothberg built a ranch in Wyoming by using the *Overview of the Homestead Act* and *Homestead Example* documents as reference materials.



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Overview of the Homestead Act of 1862

The Homestead Act, which was signed on May 20, 1862, by President Abraham Lincoln and passed into law on January 1st of 1863 significantly influenced the development of the United States. The Homestead Act made acquiring 160 acres of land possible for any man *or woman* willing to fulfill a list of requirements. The Homestead Act opened the west for settlement and eventually led to the granting of land to around 800,000 people before it was repealed in 1976.

To gain the title to free land, the following criteria had to be met first:

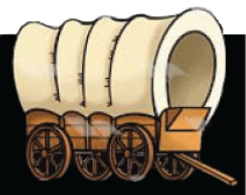
- A homesteader who was the head of a family, 21 years of age and an American citizen or person who had filed a declaration to become a citizen must file an application for a claim.
- A filing fee of \$10 and a commission between \$2 and \$4 must be paid at the local land office.
- The homesteader then had six months before he or she must take permanent residence on the land. The homesteader could not leave the land for a period longer than six months or the claim is forfeit.
- The homesteader must build a house and work the land for a period of 5 years prior to settling the claim. (The homesteader had a seven-year interval to work the land as an allowance for severe weather, plagues, insects, etc.)
- After working the land for five years, the homesteader then must find two witnesses who could verify that he or she had worked and resided on the land for the five-year period. The witnesses must then go to the local land office with the homesteader to sign the final documents which declared he or she “proved-up” on the claim. Another fee of between \$4 and \$6 was due.
- The homesteader also must post an ad in the local paper detailing his/her intention to file final claim on the land.

Other methods were also available to gain the land title.

- The homesteader could pay for the land at \$1.25 per acre after proving a six-month residency and trivial improvements.
- Veteran soldiers after 1872 could count their years of service towards the five-year requirement but were still required to prove a one-year residency.



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Worksheet One: Discussion Questions on the Homestead Act 1862

Name the three basic requirements for filing a homestead application.

1. *Family Status:*
2. *Age:*
3. *Citizenship:*

List at least three requirements which made "proving-up" on a claim difficult?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How was everyone able to benefit from the Homestead Act?

Pondering Questions:

What was a woman's social role in American society during the 1800s?

Were all women in the United States normally given title to land in the 1860s?

How did the Homestead Act benefit women?



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Homestead Example: Gothberg Ranch Natrona County, WY

Martin J. Gothberg moved to New York in 1864 when he was six months old with his Swedish father, German mother, and siblings. His father, an artist, headed a foundry in New York where Martin learned useful skills. In 1880 at the age of 16, Martin began his adventures to move west. He worked several jobs in railroad construction and finally reached Cheyenne, Wyoming in August of 1880. He moved to Denver for a while to work at Elitch's Restaurant, then moved on to Ft. Laramie to work with the post butcher. He worked for several different ranches for the next several years, including starting a foundry to fix wagon wheels and other metal goods at the Goose Egg Ranch near present day Casper, WY.

In 1885 while attending a meeting for the Wyoming Stock Growers Association in Cheyenne, Martin began steps to file a homestead. He declared his intention to become a U.S. citizen by renouncing his allegiance and fidelity to the Emperor of Germany on April 4, 1885. He then filed application (July 21, 1885) for his first Homestead at Dobbin Springs not far from the Goose Egg Ranch. He filed under the *Pre-Emption laws. His chosen land was a fertile meadow area located about nine miles west of Ft. Caspar.

During the fall of 1885 Martin began working his ranch. He built a small log cabin. His ranch was distant from existing towns and getting supplies was often difficult. In his own words:

"In the spring of '86, I made a trip to Rock Creek for supplies with team and wagon. It took me three days to get there. I got my supplies, (which were hauled from Laramie to Rock Creek) and started on my return trip. I was 27 days on the road on account of the terrible deep snows and high waters."



Gothberg Ranch circa 1910

In 1888, Martin left the ranch to go work for a Mormon outfit for the round-up season. When he came home from the Big Horns in the fall Martin began working for the CY outfit where he worked through the next summer.



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In July of 1891, Martin filed his public notice of intention to make final proof of his claim in the local paper. Then in September of 1891, Martin changed his claim from a *pre-emption claim to a homestead claim; and took his witnesses, Robert M. Devine and J.S. Huntley, to the Douglas Land Office to file proof of testimony. He finalized his documents on September 4, 1891.

Further in 1891, at the request of his family he traveled east and stayed for 18-months running the family business in New Jersey. In 1892, letters of his father's naturalization of citizenship and testimonials of childhood friends claiming Martin was a minor at the time of his father's naturalization were sent to the land office. Martin was possibly having trouble with his homestead claim.

In the spring of 1893, after experiencing the loss of his first wife to childbirth, Martin returned to Wyoming and found that his friend, Louis Spalding to whom he had leased the ranch (while he was in the east) had left the country. Martin took up his ranch again and bought out Spalding's claims.

Life on the ranch was not always easy. As Martin explains, "in the early days and what our menu consisted of: bacon, beans, dried fruit, and a lot of wild meat. Later on we cultivated our own gardens and raised our own vegetables." Most leisure time was spent hunting and fishing.

On April 29, 1893, Martin finally received patent for his land claim (033N-080W section 33). He re-married, began a family and soon filed further land claims utilizing other acts such as the Timber Act of 1873. Martin continued to grow his land through acquiring other homesteads and lands filed by other family members. In 1932 Martin also used the Homestead Stock Raising expansion to add nearly 500 acres to his land holdings. During the time the ranch was the most successful, Martin ran around 10,000 sheep and 500 cattle.

*The Pre-emption Act of 1841 allowed homesteaders the right to file claim and work their land without initial payment for land. To retain ownership, they had to work the land for a minimum of five years but at least 14 months before paying the purchasing price of \$1.25 per acre. Like the Homestead Act they were not allowed to vacate the land for more than six months at a time.

Sources: GLO Records; "M.J. Gothberg, Pioneer Range Rider and Rancher" documented by Lewis Spalding (no date); "A History of the Gothberg Ranch" by Hilery Walker (2003)





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Worksheet Two: Homestead on Gothberg Ranch Discussion Questions

Answer the following questions in your group. Use the supporting documents from **Lesson One** to help support your answers.

- Does Martin qualify for the Homestead Act by meeting the three basic requirements? (Explain)
Head of Household:
Age:
Citizenship:
- What factors made proving-up on homestead applications near present day Casper, WY difficult? (List 3)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- How do you know Martin Gothberg was successful in proving-up on his claim?
- What could have prevented him from proving up on his claim? (List 3)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- If Martin had not made return trips to his land while cowboying with the Mormons and CY outfit in 1888, what could have happened to his claim?

Thought question: Can Martin be absent from the land if his wife lives there instead?

- What qualities did Martin's homestead have which helped make it successful?
 - Where was the claim located?
 - What land qualities helped the homestead?
- If you were Martin Gothberg in 1893 and your Homestead claim was denied, what would you do next?



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Worksheet Three: Discussion Questions for Primary Documents

Each group will answer questions to one set of documents. View the primary documents online. Prepare final answers to share with the class.

Set One: Declaration of Intention & Declaratory Statement for Pre-emption

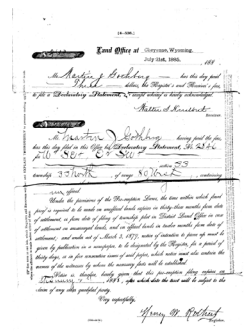
Declaration of Intention:

- What is Martin declaring in this document?
- When is this this document dated?
- Where (in Wyoming) was this document signed?



Declaratory Statement for Pre-emption

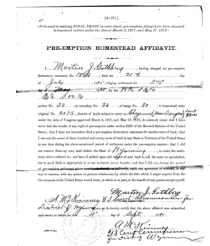
- How much did the fee cost?
- When is the document dated?
- When does the pre-emption file expire?



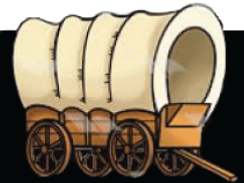
Set Two: Pre-emption Homestead Affidavit & Notice for Publication

Pre-emption Homestead Affidavit

- When did Martin file to change his pre-emption claim to a homestead claim?



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Notice for Publication

- When did Martin file the Notice for Publication?
- In which Land Office did Martin file his intention to give final proof?
 - How far is this from his land?
- Who are the witnesses he listed?



Set 3: Homestead Proof- Testimony of Witness One and Two

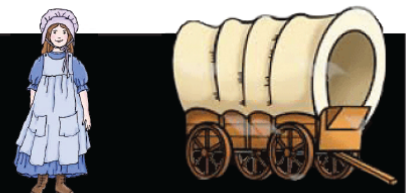
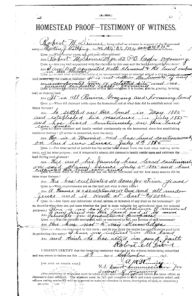
Testimony of Witness One

- Who was the first witness?
 - When did this witness claim Martin established actual residence?
- (Question 5)
- Has Martin been absent from his land? (Question 7)



Testimony of Witness Two

- Who was the second witness?
- Why does Question 2 ask the witness if he is well acquainted with Martin and the land?
- When was the testimony dated?
- Why did Martin list four witnesses in the newspaper?



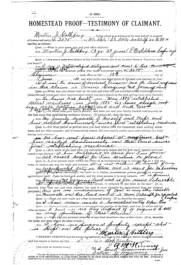


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Set Four: Testimony of Claimant & Final Affidavit

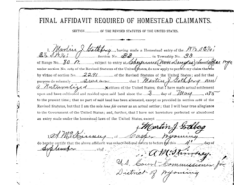
Testimony of Claimant

- Who is the claimant in the Testimony of Claimant?
- How old is he?
- In question 12 it asks if he had sold, given, or rented any portion of the land. Why do you think it is important that the homesteader not have done so?



Final Affidavit Required of Homestead Claimants

- Martin already filled out a testimony of claimant and once more must fill out another form to claim his land. What final proof must Martin swear to receive his claim? Summarize in your own words.
 1. (Citizenship)
 2. (Settlement)
 3. (Ownership)
 4. (Allegiance)
 5. (Obeyed Law)



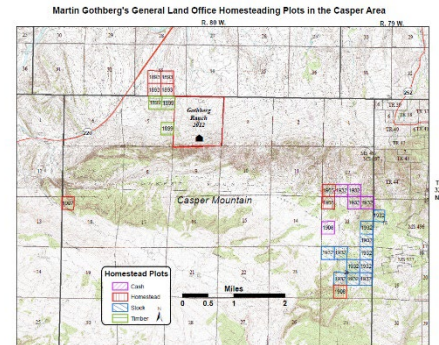


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Worksheet Four: Mapping the Gothberg Homestead

Directions: Download the [map](#) and review the [Homestead Example: Gothberg Ranch](#) to answer questions in your group.

- What are the earliest dates on the map?
 - What type of claim is filed under this date?
- When was Martin's first homestead claim finalized?
- Does the first date represent his first homestead?
- What did Martin do for a living?
- Martin has many Stock Grazing, and Cash Sales claims in the eastern portion of the map. Why do you think Martin wanted this land? What could he do with it?
- Why is Martin's land not all in one area? Why do you think he spread out his holdings?
- Which act gave Martin the most FREE land? (Cash sales were not free.)
- Not shown on the map are the claims and holdings of all of Martin's family and lands he bought from others not registered with the GLO. Do you think the lands would look like a checkerboard like they are now, or would the family ranch look more like a large square if they were all shown?
- Why do you think the Gothberg Ranch of 2012 is not located on the original homestead land?



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