Free Land

In the 1800s, only about one out of 100 people in Europe owned land. Even when they owned land, it was usually no more than five acres. Many thousands of Europeans left for America, trying to escape poverty, famine and religious differences.

When the United States passed the Homestead Act in 1862, it gave millions of people a chance to live the American dream. The Homestead Act offered to give citizens, or people promising to become citizens, enough free land for five acres.

People in America owned land. Even when they lived on that land for five years. If they made improvements on it, build a home there and lived on the property for five years, they could get title to the land.

Homesteading was difficult. It was so hard that only about four out of every 10 homesteaders were able to stick it out on the frontier for the necessary five years.

Plowing the land was rough work, especially on the plains. Prairie grasses had long roots that made the soil hard to cut through. To plow one acre of land, a farmer had to mow it three or four times.

Children as young as 2 or 3 years old had chores. They brought in firewood, gathered honey, and harvested, cooking and cleaning. Communities often built schools before permanent homes so that children could be educated. Students might share books and slates brought from their former homes.

Hard labor

Homesteading was difficult. It was so hard that only about four out of every 10 homesteaders were able to stick it out on the frontier for the necessary five years. Plowing the land was rough work, especially on the plains. Prairie grasses had long roots that made the soil hard to cut through.

Everyone helped

Women and girls often did all the housework, cleaning the house, preparing food, making clothes, cleaning and ironing — all without electricity or running water.

Children as young as 2 or 3 years old had chores. They brought in firewood, gathered honey, and harvested, cooking and cleaning. Communities often built schools before permanent homes so that children could be educated. Students might share books and slates brought from their former homes.

Mini Fact:

About 270 million acres in 30 states were settled through the Homestead Act.

A monument to hard work

The Homestead National Historical Park in Beatrice, Nebraska, has a museum and exhibit space in the Heritage Center, built in 2007. The monument is built on the site of Daniel Freeman’s original homestead from 1862.

At the park, visitors can visit the Freeman-School, where children were educated between 1872 and 1967. The building also served as a church meeting place; a polling place and gathering spot for homesteaders.

The Palmer-Epard Cabin, built in 1867, shows visitors how homesteaders lived on the prairie in the years following the Civil War.

Some homesteads around the country are still being farmed by descendants of the homesteaders. The last person to receive free land under the Homestead Act was Kenneth Deardorff. He gained title to his land in 1988.

Try ‘n’ Find

Words that remind us of the Homestead Act are hidden in this middle puzzle. Some words are hidden backward in the center. All answers are two words.

- exclamation mark
- question mark
- ladder
- pig’s face
- number 2
- cat
- word MINI

Try ‘n’ Find

Words that remind us of the Homestead Act are hidden in this middle puzzle. Some words are hidden backward in the center. All answers are two words. See if you can find:

- exclamation mark
- question mark
- ladder
- pig’s face
- number 2
- cat
- word MINI

Mini Spy Classics

Mini Spy and her friends are homesteading. See if you can find the hidden pictures. Then color the picture.

Books from The Mini Page are wonderful resources and make great gifts! See all of our Mini Page products of MiniPageBooks.com, or order directly through our most popular Internet Mail order house, Andrews McMeel Universal, Mini Page Books, 150 W 40th Street, Kansas City, MO. 64111. Include $2.00 shipping and handling per order.

Try ‘n’ Find

Words that remind us of the Homestead Act are hidden in this middle puzzle. Some words are hidden backward in the center. All answers are two words.

- exclamation mark
- question mark
- ladder
- pig’s face
- number 2
- cat
- word MINI

Mini Spy Classics

Mini Spy and her friends are homesteading. See if you can find the hidden pictures. Then color the picture.

Books from The Mini Page are wonderful resources and make great gifts! See all of our Mini Page products of MiniPageBooks.com, or order directly through our most popular Internet Mail order house, Andrews McMeel Universal, Mini Page Books, 150 W 40th Street, Kansas City, MO. 64111. Include $2.00 shipping and handling per order.