

1862

CONQUERING THE WEST

The Homestead Act of 1862

The Homestead Act was passed by Congress to encourage the settlement of land in the west. Any man over 21 years old could get the title to 160 acres of land if they lived on the land for five years and improved the land. Or, a settler could pay \$1.25 an acre instead of living on the land. Eastern politicians believed at the time that the land was not worth very much if it wasn't improved, and if settlers moved in, the land would be made into farms, which would enrich the country.

Between 400,000 and 600,000 families received farms and land because of the Homestead Act. It offered a new life and a new chance for many families brave enough to weather the challenges the West provided. However, there were problems, too. Farmers weren't used to weather conditions on the plains and many had trouble making a living on their homesteading land. Railroad companies and other men took advantage of the act and aquired large resources in the west. However, the Homestead Act helped to settle the west in an astoundingly short time.

Draw below other items or natural resources a settler would need to make it on the frontier.



1870's

IF I LIVED IN THE WILD WEST . . .

I'd Want to Share the News

Choose a place you'd call home in the West with your parents' help. Use the outline below to make a poster showing the wonders of the western lands near you, and inviting people to move near you.

