

January 21, 2013

S

oday we celebrate the 57th Inauguration of the President and Vice President of the United States, just as Americans have done every four years since George Washington took the oath of office in 1789. This peaceful transition of power, from one term to the next, is a visible sign of the continuity of our government, our unity as a nation, and the enduring promise of American democracy.

The 2013 Inauguration takes place in the sesquicentennial year of the crowning of the new Capitol dome with the Statue of Freedom. The story of the struggle to continue building the dome despite wartime conditions in the nation's capital, the diversion of funds to pay for that effort, and other major obstacles, captures the personal sacrifice, perseverance, inspiration, and vision needed to embrace the hope of a better future at a time of national crisis. Thus, the dome is a visible symbol of our faith in America's future.

The year 1863 was one of the most fateful in our nation's history. The foundations of future growth and progress were being laid in the midst of disunion and war. The year began with the Emancipation Proclamation on the first of January. It saw the spread of homesteaders across the western territories, the opening of the first land grant college, the strengthening of the nation's financial system, the start of construction of the first transcontinental railroad, and President Lincoln's declaration of a "new birth of freedom" at Gettysburg. The roles of women and African Americans were changing dramatically, transforming American society. The year ended with a ceremony marking the placement of Freedom.

In 2013, for the second time in history, the Presidential Inauguration takes place on the national holiday honoring the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. It also marks the 50th anniversary of the civil rights march in Washington, D.C., where, a century after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address, King proclaimed his dream of a better future for all Americans.

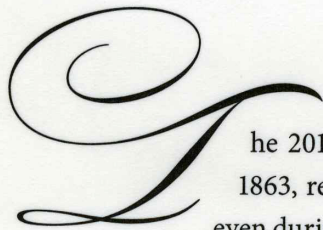
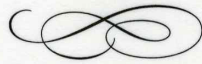
I welcome you to the Presidential Inaugural Luncheon. This portfolio was compiled to celebrate our theme and commemorate the day's historical events. I want to thank the distinguished historians who were asked to contribute their thoughts in essays about milestones of the sesquicentennial year, 1863. Each essay is illustrated with appropriate artwork, photography, or historical documents, many from U.S. Capitol collections. I hope this portfolio will be a lasting reminder to you of this important day in our nation's history.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer

*Chairman, Joint Congressional Committee
on Inaugural Ceremonies*

Faith in America's Future



he 2013 Presidential Inauguration takes place during the sesquicentennial of 1863, recalling one of the most momentous periods in our nation's history. Yet even during that time of division and war, the belief in America's promise endured, and the foundations for greater freedom, growth, and prosperity were being built.

This belief was reflected in the release of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863; the call for a "new birth of freedom" in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in November; and the unveiling of the Statue of Freedom on the new U.S. Capitol dome in December. In the West, 1863 saw the first homesteaders file their claims, the first Land Grant College open in Kansas, and construction start on the first transcontinental railroad. Congress passed the National Bank Act to reform the financial system and create a national currency. African Americans and women responded to the crucible of war with fresh courage and hope.

Late in the year, construction on the Capitol dome continued after nearly being abandoned at the start of the war. President Lincoln found inspiration in this perseverance in the face of great difficulty, remarking that "if people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign we intend the Union shall go on."

As the nation celebrates the 57th Presidential Inauguration, it looks to the future with faith in the continued fulfillment of America's promise of liberty, equality, and opportunity for all.

Homesteading the Prairie

by Richard Edwards



Just after midnight on New Year's Day 1863, Union army scout Daniel Freeman paid a \$10 filing fee and staked his claim as the nation's first official homesteader. Fifty years later, in 1913, Isabel Proctor, a young single teacher living in Stanley, North Dakota, received a letter from her brother in Montana. "Come out and homestead," he wrote. "The government is giving land away." Isabel moved to Rapelje, Montana, a remote community in the Stillwater County flatlands, and staked her claim. Every weekday during the school year she rode her horse fifteen miles to and from town to teach her class, often riding through heavy snow and bitter cold. By living on her land, she fulfilled the Homestead Act's residency requirement, allowing her to prove up her claim. She owned the 160 acres the rest of her long life.

Isabel Proctor and nearly two million others continued what Daniel Freeman started. (Freeman's farmsite in Beatrice, Nebraska, is now the Homestead National Monument of America.) Under the 1862 Homestead Act, formally "an act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain," the federal government offered settlers like Proctor and Freeman free public land—all one had to do was live on it for five years, build a small house, and make "improvements," usually by plowing ten acres. It was open to male citizens over twenty-one, war veterans of any age, widows and single women, married women who were heads of households, even new immigrants who swore they intended to become citizens. After 1866, when a civil rights act recognized them as citizens, African Americans could homestead too.

The idea of free land created a frenzy, and settlers poured into states where land was available. Yet in practice the land was hardly free. Successfully creating a farm required years of labor, plus investments in a house and fields, livestock, a barn, and fencing. Settlers paid in other ways too, enduring brutal conditions, long freezing winters and hot searing summers, often losing crops to drought or wind or disease, and suffering deep social isolation. As one homesteader put it, "The government bets you a quarter-section that you can't survive on the land for five years." Roughly half who tried it failed. Despite the obstacles, 1.6 million successful homesteaders earned title to some 270 million acres of the public domain.

In most of the thirty homesteading states, homesteading occurred long after Indian land titles were settled and served to regulate who obtained public land. Previous laws allowed big investors, political insiders, and speculators to claim much of the public domain by exploiting land sales, railroad grants, warrants for veterans, and agricultural college scrip. With the Homestead Act, by contrast, Congress conferred these benefits on actual settlers.

One hundred and fifty years after Freeman filed the first claim, homesteading has become a cherished part of our national narrative, cited favorably by presidents, scholars, and citizens. President John F. Kennedy declared it to be "probably the single greatest stimulus to national development ever enacted." President George W. Bush linked the Homestead Act to "a broader definition of liberty." The author Mari Sandoz observed in 1963 that "The Homestead Act was the hope of the poor man," and columnist George Will in 2005 enthused, "Rarely has a social program worked so well." Those judgments rest on the achievements of a Civil War Congress and president, as well as Daniel Freeman, Isabel Proctor, and millions of other homesteaders who fulfilled this American promise.

(Affidavit)

Homestead
Land Office.

Brownville N.T. January 1st 1863

I Daniel Freeman of Yage County Nebraska Territory
Having Filed my application No. 1 for an Entry under
the Provisions of the act of Congress approved May 20th
1862 Entitled; an act. To Secure Homesteads to actual
Settlers on the Public Domain Do. Solemnly Swore
that I am the Head of a Family and over the age
of Twenty one years and a Citizen of the United States
that I never has Borne arms against the Government
or Given aid or Comfort to its Enemies that Said
Application No. 1. is made ^{for} my Exclusive Benefit;
and that the Said Entry is made for the purpose of
actual Settlement and Cultivation and not Directly
or Indirectly for the use or benefit of any other
person or Persons Whomesoever

Daniel Freeman

Sworn to and Subscribed this 1st day of January 1863
before Richard F. Barrett
Register U.S. Land office
Brownville N.T.