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State Historical Society celebrates 150th anniversary of Homestead Act

PIERRE, S.D. – The year 2012 marks the 150th anniversary of the Homestead Act, and the South Dakota State Historical Society is commemorating the event with three displays in the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

A display case in the lobby of the center has items from the State Historical Society-Archives, including photographs of homesteaders, a homestead certificate, a homestead register book, and maps showing the lands open to settlement. There is also a case featuring homesteading-related books in the archives research room. The displays will be up through mid-November.

The center's education room contains "The Homestead Series," an exhibit of 12 watercolor paintings by Midwest artist Judy Thompson depicting the homesteading movement and life on the prairie in the 1860s. This exhibit runs through Sept. 9.

The Homestead Act was signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 and made public domain land available to private citizens. Adults 21 years of age and over could claim 160 acres of land. After five years of living on the land and making improvements, a homesteader could "prove up" and take legal possession of the land. The total fee for the land was \$18, but the time and effort put forth by the homesteaders was arduous. The Homestead Act remained in effect until 1976, affecting 30 states.

The museum in the Cultural Heritage Center is open 9 a.m.-6:30 p.m. CDT Monday through Saturday and 1-4:30 p.m. Sundays and most holidays. Call (605) 773-3458 for more information or visit www.history.sd.gov/Museum. The archives research room is open 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CDT Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month. Call (605) 773-3804 for more information or visit www.history.sd.gov/Archives.

Editor's Note: A homestead jamboree near Wessington Springs is pictured in this undated photo from the collection of the South Dakota State Historical Society-Archives.



The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.