

Last week, I wrote about my grandfather's experience with the Homestead Act of 1962. He applied and received 162 acres of free, fertile land from the United States government on March 20, 1916. Today, only 40 of those acres remain in the hands of his descendants. Too many times Blacks won this opportunity and then for various strange reasons we lost much of that land. In Louisiana alone (home of my roots) over 2.5 million acres were settled by nearly 23,000 applicants. Many of these applicants were Black.

Many of you have contacted me and want assistance in how you can research the possibility of your relatives participating in this gigantic program. A lot of you have family land but have no clue about how it was obtained. Thus, I decided to do a little "homework" and pass it on to those of you who are curious.

First of all, there were 30 states that were eligible for this land give away. They are: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. If your family lived in one of these states then you can research this.

Get on the Internet and go to: www.glorerecords.blm.gov. On that page you will see an icon "research documents". Click there and then input the accurate spelling of your ancestor's name. I went back after learning about my grandfather, Thomas Harry Alford. I then started researching other relatives. I eventually put in his father's name, my great grandfather, Cicero Alford, entered the state and county and then clicked "search patents". Bingo! It was another shocker!! Cicero Alford received a land grant also. On June 28, 1901, he received 163 acres which are located right next to the plot that his son received 15 years later. No one in my family seems to know about this. All we know is that we don't have a "teaspoon" of that land today. I printed out the award document and filed it in my folder of sadness along with the other sad news.

I will go back to Bossier Parish, LA courthouse soon and find out exactly how we lost that land. Another horror that I found out is that another great grandfather of mine, Harry Watkins, also had acquired 130 acres by direct purchase. He immediately borrowed \$200 using this land as collateral. His balloon payment was due in two years. A funny thing happened right before the due date – he disappeared. Yes, Harry Watkins disappeared and hasn't been seen since 1877. Thus, we lost those 130 acres. My guess is that great grandpa got "whacked" for the land.

In sum, my namesakes had a total of 456 acres. Today, we can only identify 40 of those acres. Keep in mind that this land is in the middle of the “Haynesville Shale” – one of the richest pockets of natural gas and oil in the United States. I and my relatives would have all been born millionaires just through possession of those 456 acres. What a tragedy!

The above is a hard lesson that must be explained to my children and grandchildren. Never again will an Alford be so naïve as to let a legacy escape our descendants. How many of you have similar experiences? Go to the above website and see for yourselves.

I also received the following from the National Park Service, as a result of last week’s article: “Homestead National Monument of America, a unit of the National Park Service located in Southeast Nebraska, is seeking individuals who participated in the Homestead Act of 1862 or are descendants of those who received land through the Homestead Law. One volunteer from each of America’s 30-Homestead States is needed to carry their state’s flag for the Homestead Act’s 150th National Commemoration Event on Sunday, May 20, 2012 and then again for the Homestead Day’s Parade on Saturday, June 16, 2012.”

I think if I would participate in the above I would march with tears streaming down my face. Those of you who are eligible can pursue this via: <http://www.nps.gov/home/planyourvisit/volunteers-needed-flag-carry.htm> . Let me know what happens please.

Now, those of you with land to hand down to your children. Please plan your estates wisely. Make sure the succession/transition goes smoothly without creditors, IRS and challengers trying to raise hell on the inheritors of your hard earned estates. As generations go by, we should be enjoying the American dream more and more. For some reason, Blacks have lagged in this process and we must devote more attention to it.

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