

Theme: Woman Homesteader

Location: Hart Mountain NWR, Oregon

The Homestead Act of 1862 was found to be too restrictive for areas in the western states where agricultural land was not very fertile, but could be used for grazing. Cattle grazing required large land tracts on the open range. In 1877, the Desert Land Act provided settlers with 320 acres if single and 640 acres, a full square mile, if married.

ANNA FLOOK RANCH

In the nineteenth century, women, for the most part could not own land in their own name. In fact, they were considered the property of their husband, father, or guardian. The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, provided for married couples to acquire twice as much land, but if the couple split or the husband died, the land did not belong to the wife. The 1862 Homestead Act was innovative, because it allowed women and minorities to acquire land and thereby transform their status from being property to owning property.

Anna Flook was a 43 year old housekeeper from Kansas, when in 1901 she filed for a Desert Land Act patent in Central Oregon's high desert. She was living in Plush, a farming-ranching community in Warner Valley at the time and her property was not too far from this fertile valley. Yet, her homestead parcel could not be more different, it was several thousand feet above the valley floor on a rocky plateau, with thin soils, and a short growing season. She is referred to as Mrs. Anna Flook in the patent records, but there is no mention of a Mr. Flook.

Flook found a parcel with water from Rock Creek running through it and set about completing the terms of the patent. First she built a log cabin, then a wood-frame school house, where she taught school to earn some income. Later she built a combination house and school, with a classroom in the front and a kitchen, parlor, and bedroom in the back.

Drought conditions in the 1920s forced many homesteaders across the country to give up and move on. The Hart Mountain Antelope National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1935 by purchasing the failed homesteads.



Anna Flook homestead, Hart Mtn. NWR (FWS 2010).



Anna Flook, first claim cabin (FWS 2010).



Anna Flook, combination school and house (FWS 2010).



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