

Celebrating Clay County History: Homesteading in Rural Clay County

By Vishi Garig, Historical Archives Supervisor

A Service of Tara S. Green, Clerk of Court and Comptroller

The events of 1862 included the passing of a momentous piece of legislation - the Homestead Act of 1862. This act was the catalyst for the expansion of not only the West, but also of Florida.

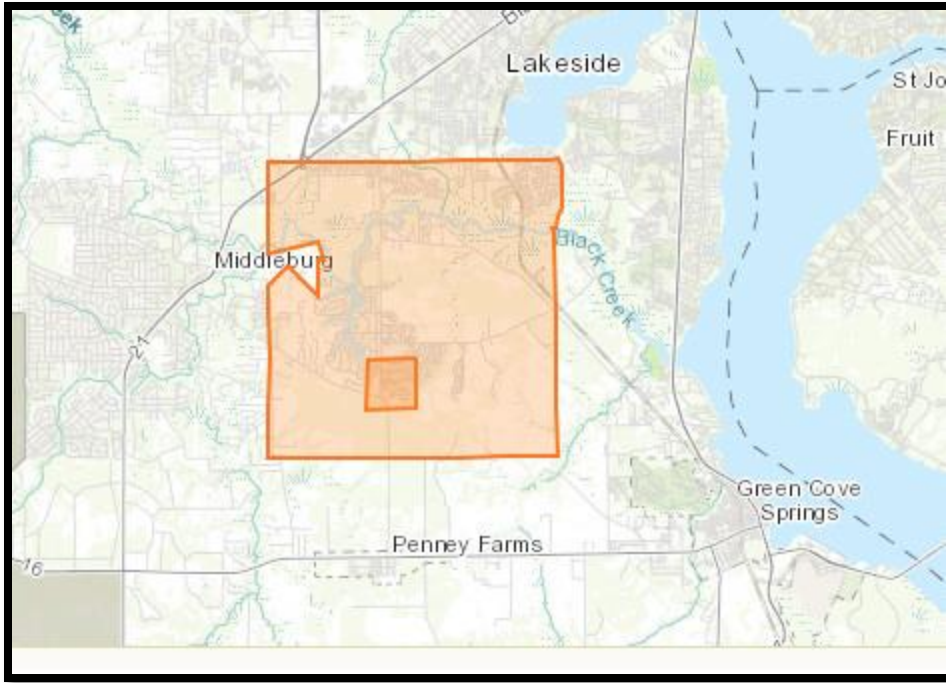
In an 1861 speech, President Abraham Lincoln reminded citizens that the true purpose of government was to “elevate the condition of men, to lift artificial burdens from all shoulders, and to give everyone an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life.” He kept his promise with the passage of the Homestead Act.

After the Civil War, the South was left destitute. The economy was in ruins and thousands of soldiers lay in graves. Florida represented a second chance for Southerners. Leaving Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, these pioneers came to Clay County to start over. The Homestead Act made it all possible. Granting 160 acres of free land to applicants, the act gave them a fair shot at success. By the time it was all said and done with the repeal of the act in 1976, 270 million acres (10% of the area of the United States) was claimed and settled under this act. According to the National Park Service, a total of 28,096 homesteaders were “proved up” in Florida. The total acreage of homesteaded land here was 3,326,712.

The requirements to be a homesteader were simple: the applicant had to be at least 21 years old and be the head of the household to receive 160 acres of free federal land. The applicant had to be a citizen of the United States or someone who legally declared intentions to become a citizen. They must not have fought against the United States or aided an enemy of the United States. One wonders how many Civil War veterans from the South fudged that part of the application.

A small filing fee was the only money needed. The real work began when “proving up” the claim. During five years of continuous residence on the land, the claimant was required to build a home, farm the land, and make improvements. Two references were needed from folks who could affirm that the applicant had fulfilled all the requirements to receive the land patent. Union soldiers caught a break, as they could use their Civil War service to avoid the five-year residency rule.

One such Clay County homesteader was Hiram Burroughs, a native Floridian. With his wife Elizabeth Wiggins Raulerson, he had five children. As soon as they were able, these children worked the land side-by-side with their parents. Hiram’s 164 acres would have been due north of Penny Farms in Section 28, Range 25 East, Township 5 South. Hiram was a farmer by profession. Once his children were adults, several of them moved to Duval County to pursue “big city jobs”. After years of hardwork and preserverance, Hiram did prove up his homestead and was awared the land patent in 1914.



Hiram Burroughs' claim is inside the smaller box.

Burrows, Hiram.	Head.	M.	W.	63	Md.
_____ David.	Son.	M.	W.	29	S.
_____ Henry.	Son.	M.	W.	22	S.
_____ Edwin.	Son.	M.	W.	21	S.
_____ Hamp.	Son.	M.	W.	20	S.
Farmer.	Hamp Head, O.A.				

The 1910 census showing Hiram as a widower. He lists farming as his occupation and specifically included note that he was a "home steader". Burroughs' name was also spelled Burrows, which was the decision of whoever was writing it down. Per the census, Hiram could not read or write. Only one of his children, Edwin, was literate.

Gainesville 05113

4-1000-B.

The United States of America,

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at **Gainesville, Florida,**
has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 20, 1852,
"To Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain," and the acts supplemental thereto, the claim of
Hiram B. Burroughs
has been established and duly consummated, in conformity to law, for the **north half of the southeast quar-**
ter and the west half of the northeast quarter of Section twenty-eight in
Township five south of Range twenty-five east of the Tallahassee Meridian,
Florida, containing one hundred sixty-four and twenty-hundredths acres,

according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Land, returned to the GENERAL LAND OFFICE by the Surveyor-General:

NOW KNOW YE, That there is, therefore, granted by the UNITED STATES unto the said claimant **the tract of Land above described;**
TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land, with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said claimant **and to the heirs and assigns of**
the said claimant **forever.**

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, **Woodrow Wilson**

President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made
Patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the **TWENTY-FIRST**
day of **OCTOBER** in the year of our Lord one thousand
one hundred and **FOURTEEN** and of the Independence of the
United States the one hundred and **THIRTY-NINTH.**

By the President: *Woodrow Wilson*
By *M. D. LeRoy* Secretary.

L. B. Linn
Register of the General Land Office.

RECORD OF PATENTS: Patent Number **436890**
4-5118

Hiram's 1914 land patent.



Florida with a cutout representing the amount of land homesteaded in Florida.



Hiram's homestead likely resembled the small home in this photograph; a Cracker-style house in Clay County, circa 1880's, belonging to Charles and Emmaline Powers.