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**(Wyo.)- Wyoming Celebrates 150th Anniversary of Homestead Act**

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 11/03/2012 08:59 AM

CASPER, Wyo. (AP) - Crumbling wooden shacks and sagging windmills dot Wyoming's landscape - remnants of old homesteads.

This year marks 150 years since the Homestead Act of 1862, legislation that turned federal land over to the public to be homesteaded for free.

The act was part of a larger set of laws passed from 1820 to 1916 that encouraged people to settle land in Wyoming and elsewhere.

Laws helped create a particular kind of society of small landowners and individual owner-operated farms and ranches that helped shape Wyoming in its early years.

Some 457 farms were counted in the territory in 1880. By 1910 there were nearly 11,000 farms and ranches in Wyoming, and 89 percent of them were owner-operated.