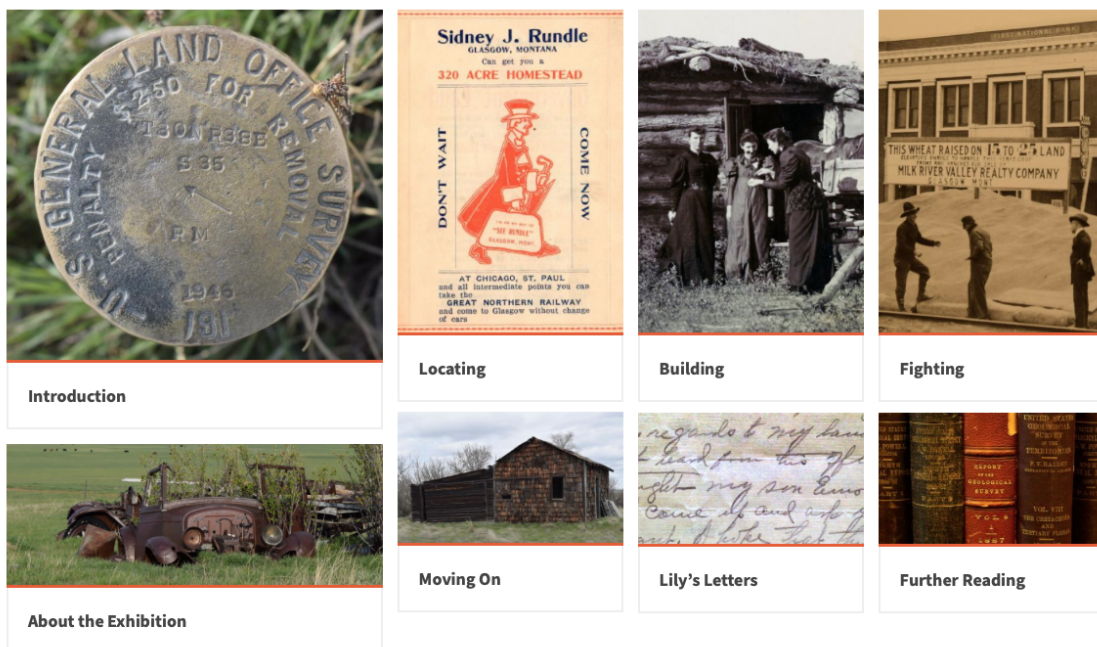


## American Land Rush: “A Lonely Homesteader” Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom

Sara M. Gregg

Swept up in the optimism of the 1910s, Lily Stearns settled with her four children on a promising homestead in northeastern Montana, where she found her fate conscribed by extreme weather and the limits of her endurance. This richly illustrated virtual exhibition tells the story of one participant in the largest homestead boom in US history, revealing the erratic fortunes of farm life reflected in the abundant economic, political, and personal uncertainties of the era.



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Sara M. Gregg

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### About the Author

Sara M. Gregg (PhD, Columbia University) is an associate professor of history and environmental studies at the University of Kansas. Her current project, *Little Piece of Earth: The Hidden History of the Homestead Era*, examines the process of state formation from Native dispossession through the several US Homestead Acts using historical GIS and grassland microhistories of the homestead booms in Kansas, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and Montana. She is the author of *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (Yale, 2010) and co-editor of the anthology *American Georgics: Writings on Farming, Culture, and the Land* (Yale 2011).

### About the Exhibition

The author would like to acknowledge the support of Montana historians in helping to shape this story, especially Mary Helland, who provided both shelter and inspiration during the early days of this research. Mary's boundless energy and passion for both place and history is a gift to northeastern Montana and to the Valley County Pioneer Museum, and I am grateful for that institution and its bountiful resources and generosity. The Montana Historical Society provided a first glimpse into the story of Lily's claim, and its stewardship of the robust records of homesteading is a credit to the state. The author would also like to thank Don and Sheila Nelson for their willingness to accommodate a writer with no clear connection to their ranch, and Don, especially, for his tour of the property and the guidance he offered on the Nelson and Stensland families in Montana.

The Fellows of the Rachel Carson Center (RCC) provided an invaluable Work-in-Progress session dedicated to a chapter on Lily's life in July 2017, and I am grateful to David Biggs, Cameron Blevins, Jenny Carlson, Simone Müller, Byron Santangelo, and Jim and Alison Webb for their engagement with this research during that session. More broadly, the support of the RCC was instrumental in permitting me to carve out the space to craft the larger book project, and I am indebted to Arielle Helmich, Annka Liepold, Christof Mauch, and Donald Worster for having helped in various ways to facilitate that fellowship. Finally, Jonatan Palmblad was an extremely patient editor, and I was lucky to have the opportunity to work with him both during my residency in Munich and over the years that followed.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal, Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

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**Chapter:** About the Exhibition

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## **Introduction: The Promise of Free Land**

This Virtual Exhibition features one of the millions of small stories of homesteading in the US West. Lily Bell Murray Stearns Schuld Lampp overcame early tragedy in Illinois that left her an orphan, moving through Saskatchewan and Iowa before she arrived in Montana to claim 320 acres (129.5 hectares) of “free land” under the terms of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act. Stearns’s saga captures both the risks and the opportunities of the Great Plains during the early twentieth century. Stearns was one of 14,891 homesteaders who successfully proved up in Montana in 1917, the year of greatest homestead success during the long homestead era (1863–1986), but her experiences evoke how the erratic fortunes of farm life reflected the abundant economic, political, and personal whims of the era.

This exhibit is derived from research conducted for a book project, *Little Piece of Earth: The Hidden History of the Homestead Era*, that uses microhistorical methods to excavate the multiple histories of areas that achieved high rates of homesteading success, reclaiming the histories of the land and peoples on which these land claims were sited. Lily Stearns’s story, placed within the largest successful homestead rush in history, foregrounds the personal saga of one woman who struggled to find security and a sense of pace within the sweeping demographic and geopolitical changes of her day.

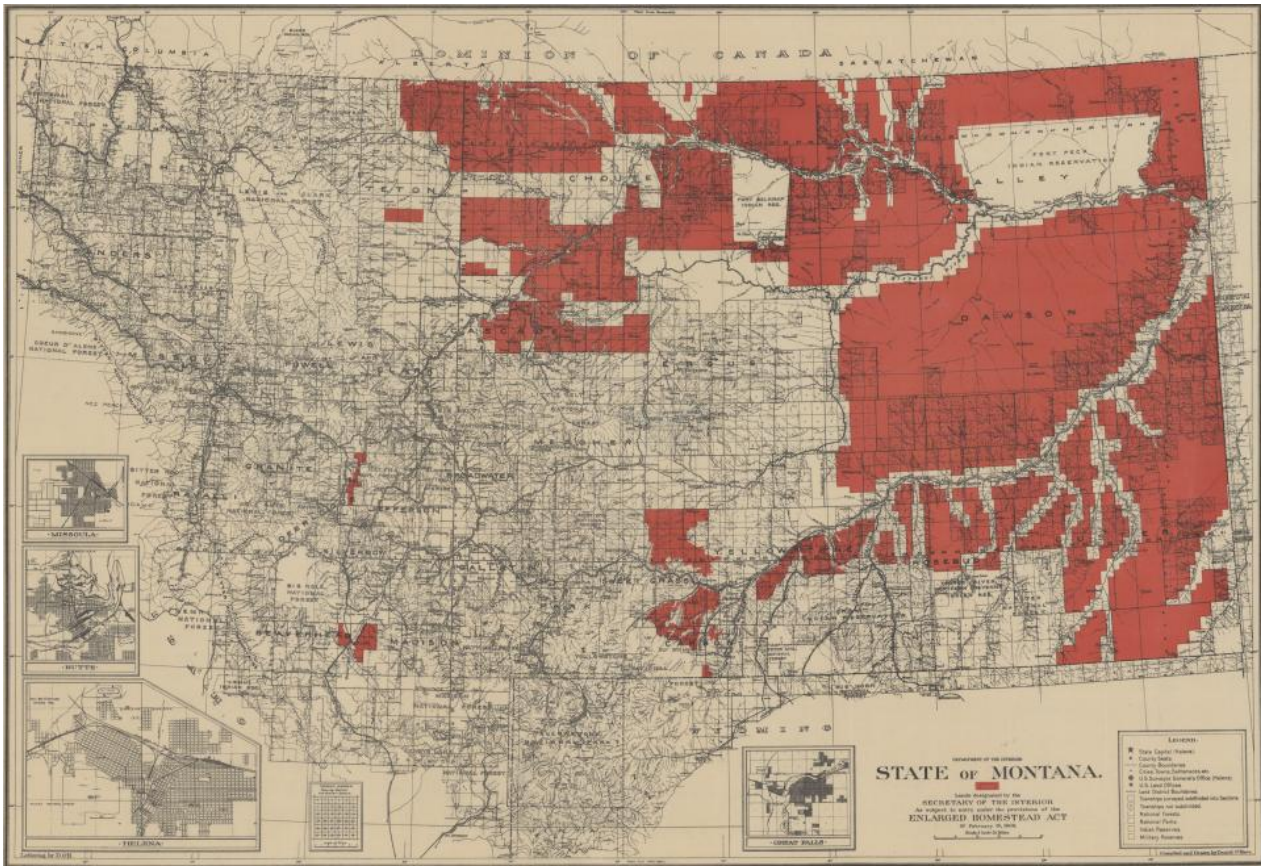
Gregg, Sara. “American Land Rush: ‘A Lonely Homesteader’ Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom.” Environment & Society Portal, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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**Chapter:** Introduction: The Promise of Free Land

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Map of the Enlarged Homestead region of Montana, 1910, with the Fort Peck Indian Reservation featured prominently in the upper left corner, and Glasgow just west, along the north bank of the Milk River.

Courtesy University of Montana Special Collections.

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## Arriving in Montana

In October 1912 Lily Bell Stearns stepped off the westbound Great Northern train at the squat depot in Glasgow, Montana, poised to gamble on the promise of a booming country. She had set her sights on homesteading in Montana decades into the homestead era, hoping to find stability and land of her own from a national land policy that demanded little capital yet proffered security for aspiring farmers.

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Glasgow Depot, where Lily Stearns disembarked from the Great Northern Line. Unknown photographer, no date.

Unknown photographer, n.d.

Courtesy Valley County Historical Society, Glasgow, Montana.



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Beginning in 1862 a series of Homestead Acts conveyed territory from the vast public domain to individual settlers in exchange for their labor and improvements. This land transfer represented the culmination of a long process of Indigenous dispossession, and a gamble for farmers unaccustomed to the challenging climate of the Northern Plains, but it was masked by the rhetoric of US policymakers who emphasized that the homestead laws worked to expand access to land more democratically than ever before.

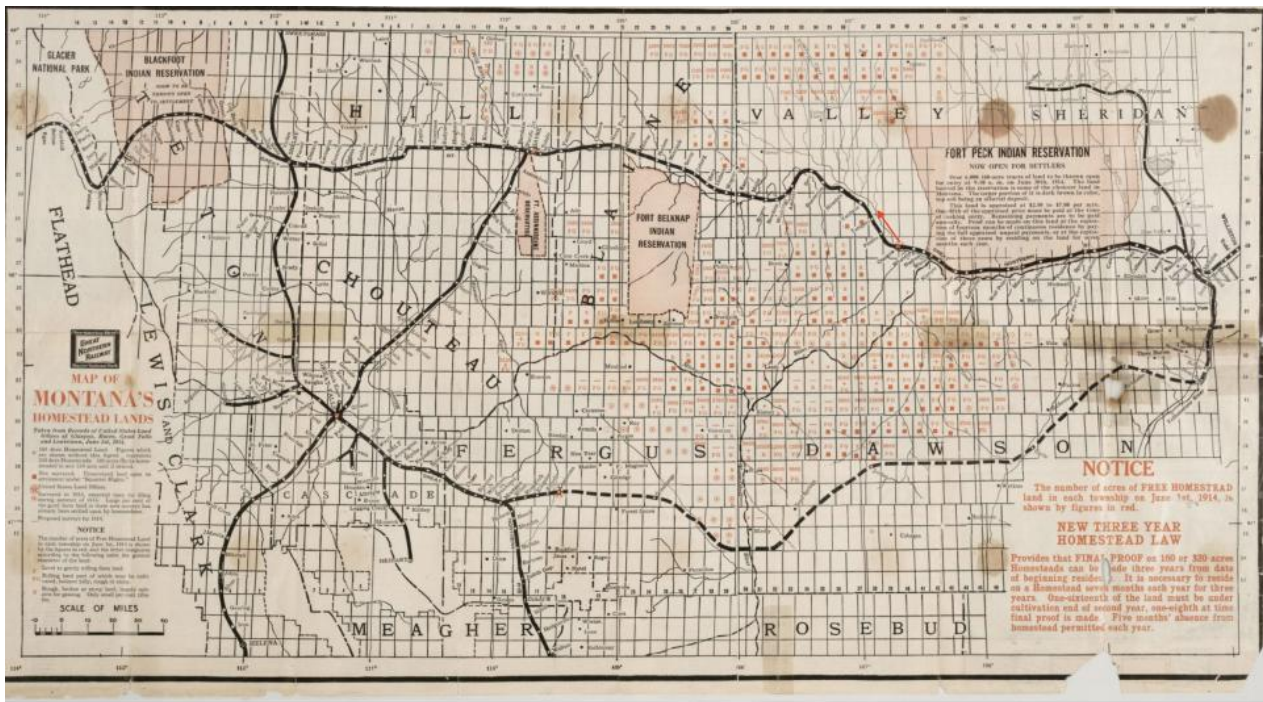
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The railroads were instrumental in advertising the expansive homestead lands still available on the Northern Plains, as shown by the red markers on the townships with land available for enlarged homestead claims. Great Northern Railway Map of Montana, 1914.

Unknown cartographer, 1914.

Courtesy University of Montana Special Collections and the Montana Memory Project.

Click [here](#) to view source.

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Advertisement from the back of the Great Northern Railway Map of Montana.

Unknown photographer and artist, 1914.



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New arrivals thronged the US Land Office in Glasgow in the years following the passage of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, which promised to unlock the potential of this region for dry-land farming by doubling the maximum acreage of homesteads (to 320 acres/129.5 hectares). The ensuing surge into Montana represents the largest successful movement of homesteaders in US history, and it briefly transformed the northeastern quarter of the state from a vast expanse of rolling grasslands into a patchwork of small farms.

This tumultuous last rush onto American homesteads was encouraged by members of Congress, local boosters, and railroad promoters, who joined with one voice to urge land-seekers from around the world to claim their share before it was all snatched up. In this semiarid region the Glasgow Commercial Club celebrated how “the fertility of the soil is not leached out by too much water as is the case in other districts,” a dubious benefit about which any clear-headed farmer would have thought twice. As had been the case during earlier homestead rushes,

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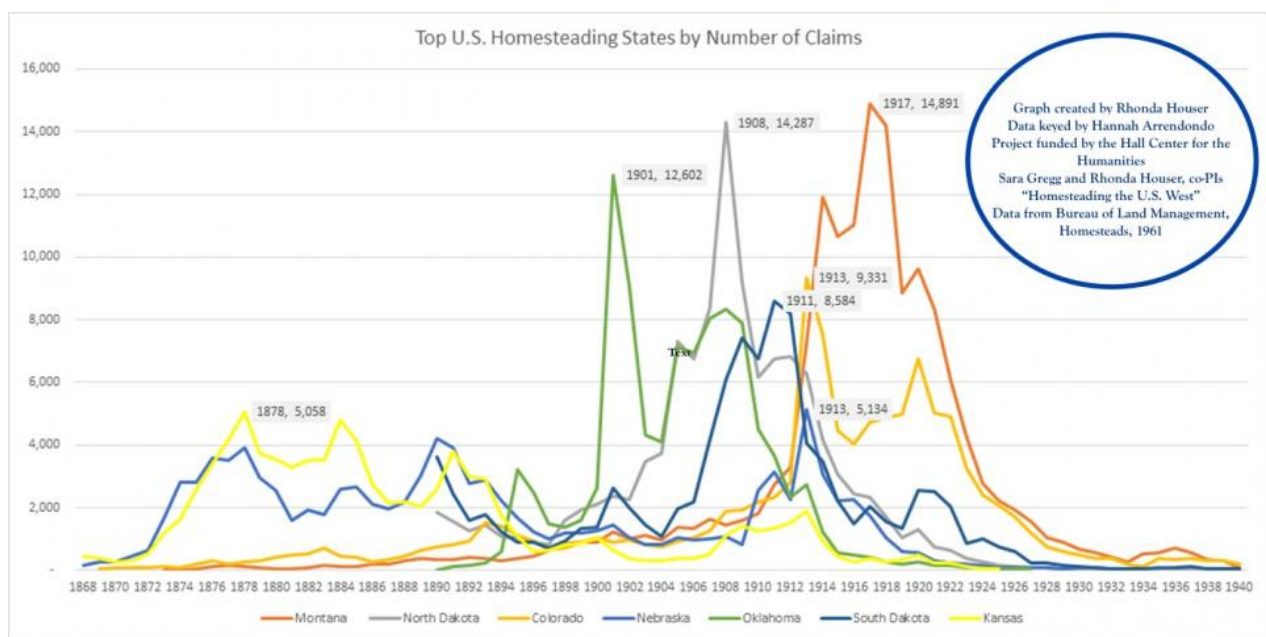
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a boomer mentality dominated in eastern Montana, where the ancestral knowledge of the challenges of thriving in this region had been cordoned off among the Dakota and Assiniboine people who had been removed to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation under the 1886/1887 Agreements of Shortgrass Hills. These peoples would have stressed that the key to survival was movement across the occasionally punishing prairie, a strategy that was the antithesis of the homesteading ideal.

Opportunity beckoned, and aspiring settlers arrived imbued with the confidence that evolving technologies and new methods would guarantee crop yields under even the toughest conditions. Homesteading offered the possibility of security on the rich soils and rolling terrain of the northern Great Plains, but the speed of the homestead movement elided the difficulties presented by precipitation, soils, and the short growing season in this challenging region. The following chapters trace the arc of Lily Stearns’s experiences on the shortgrass prairie of northeastern Montana, as she scratched a farm within a community and a landscape that challenged her hopes of securing a stable future for her family.



Contrary to popular beliefs, the peak of successful homesteading took place after 1900, and this graph demonstrates the impact of successful claims by year—with peaks in Oklahoma, 1901, North Dakota, 1908, and Montana, the national height, in 1917—the year that Lily Stearns finalized her claim. Graph by Rhonda Houser.

Graph by Rhonda Houser.

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**Websites linked in image captions:**

- <https://www.mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p15018coll5/id/549/rec/2>

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## Locating

The story of Lily Stearns illustrates how nature and culture combined to shape opportunities on the land. Her struggle to sink roots in Montana contextualizes the larger economic, social, and environmental challenges for those who envisioned taming the land—and themselves—in the face of larger climatic and geopolitical forces.

Stearns (née Lily Bell Murray, and legally divorced from her first husband, William Stearns, a month before she moved to Montana) arrived in the middle of this great rush to “free land,” recognizing that with a well-chosen site and some luck she might find stability just south of the 49th parallel. With six years of experience with her husband and four children on a Dominion Lands Grant in Saskatchewan, Canada, that ended abruptly in 1911, she had come to recognize what to look for, and hired Glasgow land locator Sidney Rundle to guide her to a good claim.

The original exhibition contains a dynamic gallery for viewing this multi-page document.

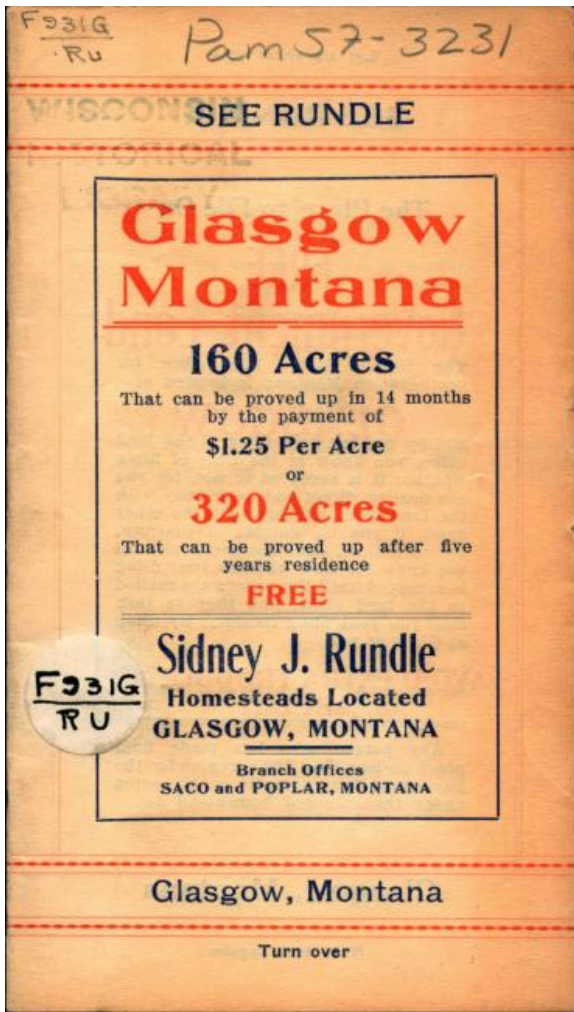
The “See Rundle” three-color brochures celebrated the opportunities abounding on northeastern Montana’s shortgrass plains. The advertisement captures the quirky creativity of this land locator working to capture the attention and the cash of aspiring homesteaders—and the progression of clever inducements merits a closer look: “Come to Glasgow... And we will show you... What other settlers are doing...”

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### The “See Rundle” brochure

Rundle’s three-color brochures celebrated the opportunities abounding on northeastern Montana’s shortgrass plains. The advertisement captures the quirky creativity of this land locator working to capture the attention and the cash of aspiring homesteaders—and the progression of clever inducements merits a closer look: “Come to Glasgow... And we will show you... What other settlers are doing...”

Public domain. Courtesy Wisconsin State Historical Society.

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Let us show you

**SEE RUNDLE**

**The Place to File On**

**FREE  
Government Land**

The United States land office for northeastern Montana is located at

**GLASGOW**

and by making your filing at the land office, you know at the time of filing whether it is accepted or not, for you are dealing direct and personally with the land office officials. On the other hand, if you file outside of Glasgow, before a U. S. Commissioner, you will not know for sure whether your filing is accepted until the papers are mailed to the land office, and they in turn mail you your filing receipt. By filing at Glasgow you

**AVOID EXTRA TROUBLE AND  
DELAY**

Any person who has made final proof on less than 160 acres under the homestead laws, can file on 320 acres under the enlarged homestead act.

**Glasgow, Montana**

Now turn again

Now

**SEE RUNDLE**

**Thousands of Acres of**

**FREE  
Government Land**

North of Glasgow there is still a tract of land about twenty-five miles square, practically unoccupied, that has

**Good Water and Native  
Coal**

in abundance; which insures settlers two of the most essential necessities—water for family use and stock, and inexpensive fuel for winter months.

**You Can Homestead 320  
Acres**

by living on the land five years, or if you only take 160 acres you can

**COMMUTE IN 14 MONTHS**  
by paying \$1.25 per acre.

All inquiries for additional information relative to Homestead Entries, will be cheerfully answered, by addressing Sidney J. Rundle, Glasgow, Montana.

**Glasgow, Montana**

Keep on turning

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Some of the finest crops

you ever saw growing

SEE RUNDLE

SEE RUNDLE

### Homestead Entries May Be Made By

Every male citizen of the United States, (or those who have declared their intention to become such) 21 years of age or over, who has not used his homestead right, or who does not own more than 160 acres of land.

All male citizens over the age of 18 who are married, or are the recognized head or sole support of a family.

A married woman who has actually been deserted by her husband, or where her husband is incapacitated by disease, or otherwise from earning the support for the family. Or where the husband is confined in a penitentiary, and she is the sole support of the family.

By a former homestead entryman who committed his entry prior to June 5, 1900.

By any person, who, for any cause lost, forfeited or abandoned his homestead entry prior to February 3, 1911. If the former entry was not cancelled for fraud, or relinquished for a valuable consideration. In filing under the Act of February 3, 1911, it is necessary to file affidavit with application, giving former entry number, land district where filing was made, and the section, township and range.

For all locations made through my

office, this additional affidavit will be made without additional charge to the entryman.

### SOIL OF NORTHERN MONTANA

The soil in this section of Montana is of two classes—Bottom or Bench land.

**BOTTOM LAND**, is a rich, heavy, dark soil, 20 to 30 feet deep, and lies along the Milk river or tributary streams and is adapted to irrigation. Congress has already appropriated about \$4,000,000 to be expended about \$1,000,000 each year for the next four years, to complete the Milk river irrigation project. This not only means water for irrigation as the farms are developed, but will provide work for a large force of men and teams for the next four years, and will thus greatly aid new settlers to make a living out side of their homestead, during the first two or three years.

**BENCH LANDS**—The bench land is a beautiful rolling prairie, extending for miles, and is composed of a rich, sandy loam covered with a luxuriant growth of Blue Joint and Buffalo grass, that has proven to be as nutritious in its self-cured state during the winter, as it is in the growing season or when put up and properly cured as hay.

Glasgow, Montana

Glasgow, Montana

Your turn next

Give it another turn

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Wheat that will yield 35 bu. per acre

Alfalfa—Three crops this year

## SEE RUNDLE

## SEE RUNDLE

### Deeded Lands Listed with and for Sale by Sidney J. Rundle

320 acres irrigated land, nearly all under cultivation. 1-2 mile from town and railroad. About 15 acres in wood. \$20.00 per acre if taken at once.

1500 acres, irrigated, and adjoining railroad. 500 acres in Alfalfa from which three crops of hay can be cut per year, and this same tract netted \$75.00 per acre last year from seed. 500 acres under cultivation. Balance hay land. This land is in Milk river valley and can all be irrigated. PRICE \$45.00 per acre.

466 ACRES, 3 miles from City of Glasgow, in the great Milk River Valley. Good house, chicken house, all fenced with wire, 30 acres of timber, good well water, fine hay meadow growing blue joint hay. PRICE \$25 per acre.

700 acres, Chocolate loam soil, 125 acres already cultivated and all under irrigation with plenty of water, private irrigation plant. 30 acres in Alfalfa, balance beautiful hay meadow growing blue joint hay; 4-room house in good condition, with telephone accommodations for long distance and town. Sheds, granary and machine shed. PRICE \$30.00 per acre. Terms: half cash, balance 2 years time.

Glasgow, Montana

Just keep turning

### Crops You Can Grow

The average growing season in this part of Montana is about 120 days, between the last frost in the spring and the first killing frost in the fall, and anything that will grow in the temperate zone, will grow here.

#### Grain

Wheat, Corn, Oats, Barley, Millet, Rye, all yield exceptionally well, while the greatest of all forage crops

#### ALFALFA

is in its natural element, yielding

#### THREE CROPS A YEAR

#### Vegetables

There is not a country on earth that can produce finer Potatoes, Onions, Beets, Radishes, Carrots, Mangel Wur-zels, Tomatoes, Musk-melons, etc., while

#### Sugar Beets

one of the most profitable crops in the United States, finds in this soil just the elements for producing the greatest per cent. of sugar to the pound of pulp.

Glasgow, Montana

Turn once more

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If you want Government Land

That you can crop the first year

SEE RUNDLE

SEE RUNDLE



Field of corn on Wm. Hallock's homestead, near Glasgow, grown first year without irrigation.

### Fruit

Many young orchards are being started on the new farms here, and the oldest of them, started three or four years ago, are thriving and already commencing to yield.

### GOOD SCHOOLS

GLASGOW has a fine \$35,000 High School and a good two-story brick

Grammar School. The High School is one of the finest in Montana and is equipped with the most modern facilities. Every grade, from the primary to fourth-year high school, is under competent instructors who are second to none in the northwest.

**CITY LOTS** may be bought very reasonable if you wish to have your children live in town while going to school.

Glasgow, Montana

Glasgow, Montana

Now look on the other side

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Come to Glasgow	And we will show you	What other settlers are doing
<b>SEE RUNDLE</b>	<b>SEE RUNDLE</b>	<b>SEE RUNDLE</b>
<p><b>GLASGOW Churches</b></p> <p>are well represented in Glasgow, the Methodist, Congregational, Catholic, and Episcopal denominations having church buildings of their own, while other denominations are holding services here and preparing to establish regular places of worship. The Lutherans hold regular services and expect to build a church this year.</p> <p><b>WHAT IT COSTS</b></p> <p><b>TO GET POSSESSION OF A GOVERNMENT HOMESTEAD</b></p> <p>There are many unreliable land locators throughout the northwest who take advantage of new comers, who have to depend on someone to pilot them through the process of locating and filing on a government homestead. You can not be too careful about this point, especially if your finances are limited.</p> <p><b>Our Guarantee</b></p> <p>We are permanently located here, and besides owning considerable property in the Milk River Valley, we conduct branch offices at Saco and Poplar, and will back up all our entries until filing [is accepted.</p> <p><b>SACO</b></p> <p>At Saco, Montana, we have a man</p>	<p>who has lived in that section for twenty years and is personally acquainted with the character of all the land in that locality.</p> <p>Saco offers great opportunities to the business man, being surrounded for miles by fine agricultural and hay land.</p> <p>We can locate hundreds of settlers north of Saco on fine Agricultural land anywhere from 10 to 30 miles from town. We also have several hundred acres of deeded land, all under irrigation in the Beaver Creek and Milk River Valleys.</p> <p><b>POPLAR</b></p> <p>Montana, is located on the Great Northern Railway, on southern border of the great Fort Peck reservation. North of the reservation are miles of fine homestead land, while south of Poplar homesteads can be taken within 10 to 30 miles of town.</p> <p>We have in our employ an experienced civil engineer and run the lines of your homestead, according to Government corners, so that you know exactly where your lines are before you file, and we guarantee that you get the land that we show you, if you fulfill the government requirements in regard to establishing your residence.</p>	<p><b>SHOW THIS TO YOUR FRIENDS</b></p> <p>Tell them I can locate them on 320 acres of fine agricultural land for \$62.50, which includes filing fees, locating fees and livery expenses.</p> <p>I am located across the street from, and opposite the</p> <p><b>U. S. Land Office, at Glasgow</b></p> <p>and am admitted to practice before the land office, therefore I can handle anything for you in the way of Filings, Relinquishments, Contests, Amended Filings, etc.</p> <p><b>WRITE TO RUNDLE</b></p> <p>and give us an idea of what you want picked out for you by the time you get to Glasgow, and we will thus save you both time and expense.</p> <p>We will locate you on a 320-acre homestead, pay all filing fees, livery and locating expenses for</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>\$62.50</b></p> <p>All you will have to pay in addition to this amount will be your carfare here and your hotel or other personal expenses.</p>
<b>Glasgow, Montana</b>	<b>Glasgow, Montana</b>	<b>Glasgow, Montana</b>
We can satisfy the most particular	Finest 320 acre homesteads in	Montana are right here

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You can get to Glasgow, Montana, by three Great Northern passenger trains daily—east or west.

SEE RUNDLE

SEE RUNDLE

**MONTANA LEADS THE WORLD**

For the Year 1909 Montana Raised 10,746,000 Bushels of Wheat Valued at 9,304,000.00  
(From Official Bulletin No.47, Issued by Bureau of Soils, U.S. Department of Agriculture)

**WHEAT**

**MONTANA AND U. S.**

**OATS**

North Dakota	12.3
Washington	23.3
Nevada	26.0
North Carolina	6.8
United States, Ave.	12.7
Illinois	13.2
Minnesota	13.6
Wisconsin	13.7
Kansas	13.9
Ohio	14.0
Vermont	18.5
<b>MONTANA</b>	<b>26.7</b>

Compared with other states in the union, Montana ranks first in the yield per acre of Wheat: 26.7 bushels per acre is the average production.

**FLAX**

Kansas	6
Missouri	6
United States, Ave.	8
The Dakotas	9
Minnesota	9
Nebraska	10
Iowa	10
Wisconsin	12
<b>MONTANA</b>	<b>14</b>

Montana Flax averages 14 bushels, and is of a very high quality

Valley county corn stood third in competition with the world at Omaha in 1909.

Missouri	22
Iowa	24
Kansas	26
Pennsylvania	28
United States, Ave.	28
Nebraska	29
Wisconsin	32
Minnesota	32
The Dakotas	33
New York	34
Michigan	30
<b>MONTANA</b>	<b>46</b>

Montana ranks first among the states in the yield per acre of Oats, the average being 46 as against 28 bushels per acre, the average for the United States.

**BARLEY**

Missouri	18
Pennsylvania	21
Iowa	23
Minnesota	25
Michigan	25
The Dakotas	26
New York	26
Nebraska	26
United States, Ave.	26
Wisconsin	27
Kansas	31
<b>MONTANA</b>	<b>40</b>

The average yield of Barley for the United States is 26 bushels per acre—for Montana 40 bushels.

Glasgow, Montana

Glasgow, Montana

You don't have to grub stumps

to clear a farm in Montana

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." Environment & Society Portal, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

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Chapter: Locating

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<b>SEE RUNDLE</b>	<b>SEE RUNDLE</b>
<p><b>ABSTRACTS OF TITLE</b></p> <p>We have a complete set of records and are the only firm in Valley county using exact photographic copies of all county records. Let us do your abstract and plat work.</p> <p>We have our own</p> <p><b>EXPERT CIVIL ENGINEER</b> who does all surveying and running of government lines.</p> <hr/> <p><b>New Land to be Opened</b></p> <p>Government surveyors are now in the field and a number of new townships of fine farming land will soon be ready for entry. Write now for further particulars.</p> <p><b>320 Acre Homesteads</b> In These Tracts</p>	<p><b>Sidney J. Rundle</b> GLASGOW, MONTANA</p> <p>Can get you a <b>320 ACRE HOMESTEAD</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> </div> <p><b>DON'T WAIT</b>      <b>COME NOW</b></p> <p>AT CHICAGO, ST. PAUL and all intermediate points you can take the <b>GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY</b> and come to Glasgow without change of cars</p>
<b>Glasgow, Montana</b>	<b>Glasgow, Montana</b>
Just start in and plow	

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Rundle helped her identify a promising 160-acre parcel that beckoned fourteen miles (22.5 km) northwest of Glasgow, and Stearns filed her first homestead application on 6 December 1912. This land was suited to cultivating small grains and grazing, and prime for capitalizing upon the district's natural advantages. Water and shelter were crucial in this region, and this quarter-section provided easy access to both: Loamy soils had been deposited by the river over the course of millennia; two springs bubbled within three-quarters of a mile; and the Milk River meandered less than a mile (1.6 km) to the south.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal, Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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The Milk River abuts Lily Stearns's second claim, and its reliable flow of water is a central defining feature of the landscape near Glasgow. US explorers Merriweather Lewis and William Clark named the river in 1804, recording in their journals that the distinctive color of the water was noteworthy for its "peculiar whiteness, such as might be produced by a tablespoon of milk in a dish of tea."

Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2016.



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Stearns arrived in the middle of a period of generous rainfall and temperate weather, golden years when nodding fields of flax and wheat encouraged the ambitions of eager homesteaders. She embraced the potential embedded within these rolling terraces, explaining in a letter to her church's newspaper: "I came here believing it was best for me and for my welfare." There was tremendous promise resting in these rolling grasslands, and she envisioned that it would provide a stable home for her family: the fertile soils would support good crops, while the abundance of cottonwoods along the river would provide "plenty of timber for posts and fencing and fuel."

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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The expansive spaces of northeastern Montana, where Stearns homesteaded in 1912, emerge as unmarked territory in this General Railway Map of the United States in 1918. The State of Montana is outlined in red in this map, and Lily's homestead is marked with a dot.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



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## Building



Homesteaders at Enright Ranch on Porcupine Creek. Unknown photographer, no date.

Courtesy of the Valley County Historical Society.



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Stearns worked in Glasgow to earn the cash that she needed to meet the General Land Office's requirements of five years' residency on the land, constructing a dwelling, and cultivating farm crops. By May 1913 she had accumulated enough money to build a house on the northeast corner of her claim. Like many other women homesteaders (an estimated 15 percent of the total), Stearns cobbled together the resources for improving her tract—hiring out construction, laboring with her son on the farm, and piecing together domestic work to raise funds for improving her property.

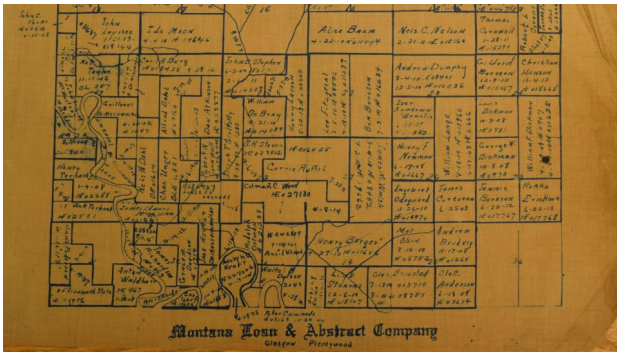
Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

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Early land ownership plat map, with Lily Stearns's original quarter-section in the center, bottom row. The Milk River winds its way through the bottom left quarter of the map. Donated to the Valley County Historical Museum by Charles Brocksmith and E. T. Peterson.

Courtesy Valley County Historical Museum.

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GLO surveyors worked to make the Western landscape legible to the state, and laid corner markers across the public domain. General Land Office corner marker, Stearns claim, Township 30 N Range 38 E, Section 34. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

Sara Gregg, 2019.

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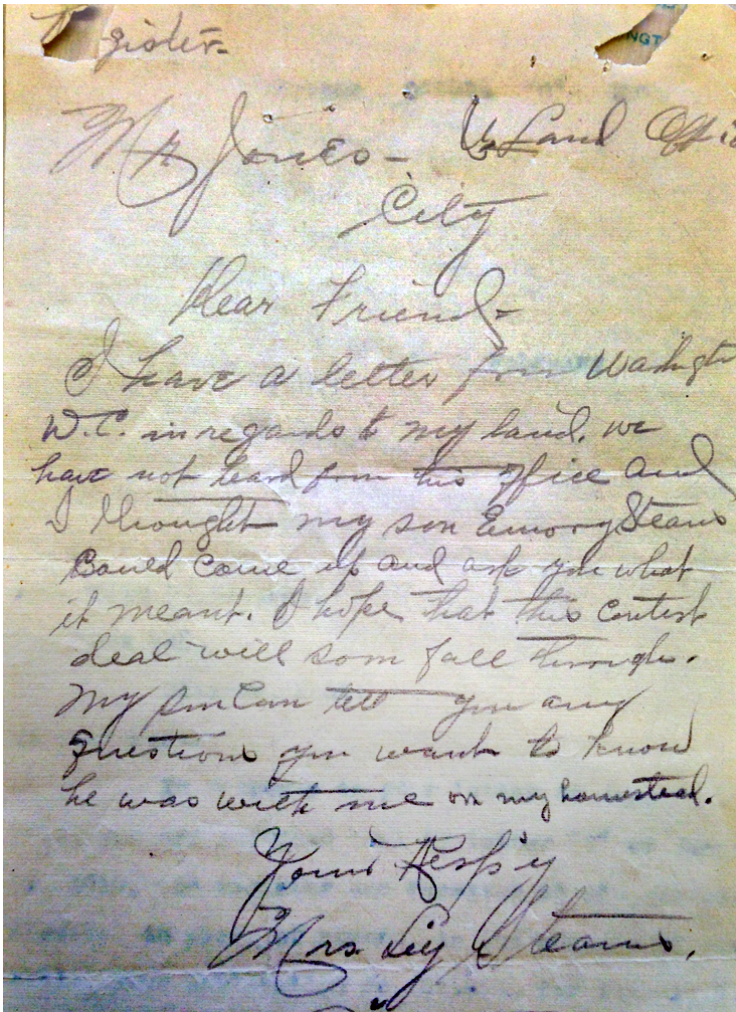
Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

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One of dozens of communications Lily Stearns mailed to federal officials. This letter to “Mr. Jones, U.S. Land Office, City,” 1914, inquired about the status of her claim.

Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society Research Center.



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In spite of her best efforts, a litany of trials challenged Stearns’s resources and perseverance, and over the years this artful, persistent, and capital-poor homesteader filled pages with pencil-written pleas to the US Secretary of the Interior and other government officials. These letters stand out as exemplary within the vast archival records of the homestead movement for their expressions of aspiration and determination, nested among evocations of the challenges of an unfamiliar landscape. Stearns wrote plaintively but assertively, describing her struggles to far-away federal officials with a combination of despair and pride:

I am in so much trouble over this piece of land & you have restored and permitted me to file on .... last april I hired a carpenter to build a shack 16 x 14, put 1 large window 1 small w-[window]. I

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lived there as much of the time as my means permitted me my son 18 & my baby 3.... I my self dug my well, I had my bed & bedding and household articles & groceries there but my only means of support was laundry work.

Stearns's hard-won improvements were ravaged two months later: "A terrable ciclone struck our neighborhood.... My shack all the home I had was tetotlay destroyed, tore up, and smashed up—Gon all my groceries. Dishes were smashed." In the following years, she continued to write to countless government officials as her fortunes ebbed and flowed alongside commodity prices, the punishing weather of the Great Plains, and ostracization by the neighbors surrounding her homestead.



Three women at a homestead west of Lily's claim. Unknown photographer, 1911.

Courtesy of the Valley County Historical Society.

The original caption reads: "Mother, Elsie, and Emma, September 26, 1911."



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## Fighting for the Farm



Thomas and Erenstene Olinger homestead, two townships west of the Stearns claim. Unknown photographer, c. 1918.

Courtesy Valley County Historical Society

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Stearns, who was supporting her four children while seeking to establish herself in Montana, encountered plenty of resistance. A robust archival record testifies to the suspicion she engendered—likely stemming from hostility to her faith (Reformed Latter Day Saints), her sexuality (neighbors accused her of conducting an affair with her son’s employer), and her dishonesty (adjacent homesteaders joined in contesting her expanded homestead, arguing that she did not reside permanently in her shack). Particular acrimony grew around Stearns’s second homestead entry, which she applied for in December 1913 to complete her 320-acre claim; this parcel was prime benchland just above the Milk River—and sought by many of her neighbors, including Elias Stensland, whose mother and wife had filed homesteads on adjacent parcels. While Stearns persevered in defending her land against her neighbors’ legal and extra-legal efforts to force her to relinquish the land, she was left battered by the hostility expressed in the land office hearings, and retreated onto the farm, and a brief second marriage to homesteader Frank Schuld, who was developing his own homestead claim seventy miles east.

Gregg, Sara. “American Land Rush: ‘A Lonely Homesteader’ Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom.” *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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The challenges of agriculture on the rolling benchlands of the Milk River Valley are suggested by the topography of the Stearns claim.  
Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

2019 Sara Gregg

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In spite of the drama embedded in her personal life, Stearns profited from the wet weather, and 1916 rewarded farmers with a banner harvest that maximized the year's record-high precipitation, 20.47" (519.9 mm). With Frank and her son Emory she dug a well and worked the fields, ultimately cultivating nearly one hundred and thirty acres: ninety-five acres yielded 600 bushels (16.33 tonnes) of flax; thirty-three acres in oats and rye provided ample livestock feed; and the garden on another acre produced an abundance of vegetables.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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Piles of wheat in front of the Glasgow, Montana First National Bank Building. Photograph by Ellis, no date.

Courtesy of Valley County Historical Society.



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The oil pressed from the Stearns's flax flowed into a vast stream that met the call for increased agricultural production during the first months of US engagement in the war in Europe. President Woodrow Wilson emphasized in an address to the nation that "Upon the farmers of this country... in large measure, rests the fate of the war and the fate of the nations." Patriotic fervor and soaring prices induced breaking new ground across the country, and in 1917, US farmers put in their largest crops yet, increasing the acreage planted in cereals, potatoes, tobacco, and cotton to a national record of 283 million acres (114.5 million hectares), up eight percent from the year before.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.  
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Montana's "Big Sky Country" provides vast vistas, and little shelter, as evoked by this photograph taken one mile west of Stearns's claim. Photograph by Sara Gregg, September 2016.

2016 Sara Gregg



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In spite of the national agricultural boom, economic and meteorological fluctuations stressed the limits of adaptation among homesteaders tucked into the Milk River Valley, and weather thwarted the aspirations of Northern Plains farmers during the years that followed. Wartime high prices and piercing drought descended almost simultaneously; and even though the people of Europe were desperate for American crops, and Montana homesteaders were vying for cash, the clouds withheld both rain and relief. The total precipitation for 1917 amounted to a near-record nadir of 7.83" (199 mm) in Glasgow, plunging the surrounding farms below the threshold of aridity and marking the onset of three brutal years of extreme weather.

When the General Land Office issued the patent to Lily Stearns's homestead on 6 August 1917, the devastation of the drought was only beginning to become clear. Hail damage and grasshoppers compounded a dry period so

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pronounced that seed failed to germinate and forage barely grew. Stearns moved her stock to pasture further west, seeking “a place to keep them from starving” as record temperatures magnified the suffering for both farmers and their animals. The potential consequences were dire, and she reflected in a note published in her church newspaper, “We are certainly having perilous times.”

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## Moving On

Drought ultimately doomed Stearns's gamble on the shortgrass steppe, and in the spring of 1918 she conveyed her homestead and its punishing mortgage to her son, Emory. Once again transient, she moved west to Great Falls, Montana, where she remarried for a third time, and then followed this husband down to the Texas coast, where, divorced once again, she died in 1931.



Abandoned homestead building of similar construction, located a few townships to the northeast. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

2019 Sara Gregg



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Stensland house, located just across the section line from Lily's claim. The mowed green strip just to the right of the building delineates the two parcels. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2016.

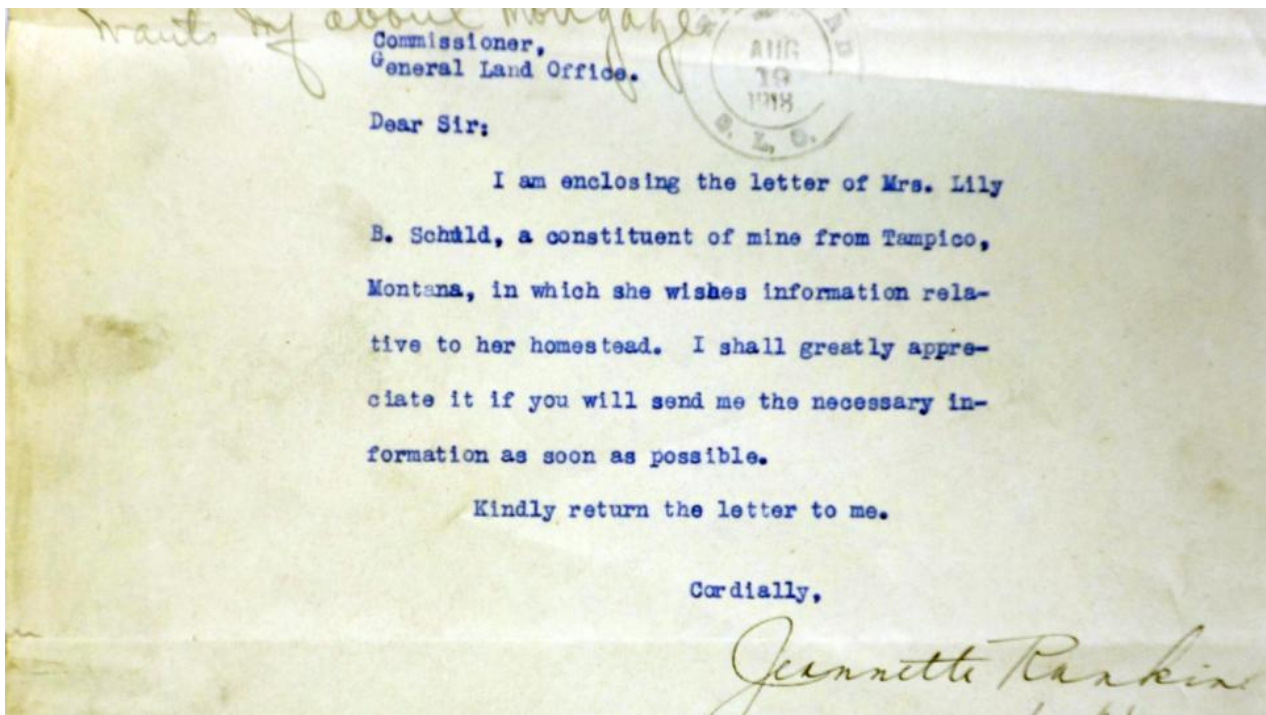
Emory almost immediately fled drought and disaster for California, leaving the homestead's mortgagors as absentee owners until neighboring ranchers (the Stenslands, who had contested Stearns's claim in 1914) bought the parcel in the 1950s. Their descendants still own the land today, and families like the Stenslands provide the continuity of community in Valley County. While these "stickers" trace their roots back to the early-twentieth-century land rush, the majority of settler-colonists who tried their luck in Montana, known as "boomers," drifted off like Lily in search of more reliable pastures.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8996>.

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Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin was the first woman elected to the United States House of Representatives, in 1916, and during her first term in office she garnered worldwide renown for her vote in opposition to the U.S. entry into the Great War. The sole Representative to Congress from the State of Montana, she was elected as a Republican. Among Rankin's other efforts (she was a suffrage organizer, a reformer, and a pacifist) she did the daily work of advocating for her constituents, including Lily Stearns Schuld. This letter to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, dated 17 August 1918, was a typical piece of congressional correspondence with federal agencies, advocating for the interests of a constituent, in this case, Lily Schuld (formerly Stearns) on a question relating to Schuld's mortgage.

Lily B. Stearns Homestead Application, Records of the General Land Office, Serial Patent Files, 1908–1951, Homestead Entry #018907 (Accession # 595690), Lily B. Stearns, RG 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



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Ultimately, unpredictable weather and grain surpluses overwhelmed the inducements of free land and wartime prices, and the homestead boom in Montana dried up below the clear skies of the episodic El Niño-Southern Oscillation. The dry climate and abundant space conserve the traces of the land rush that remain visible in sprawling ranches and clusters of rusty machinery, but the mirage of free land and endless opportunity has long since faded from the ledgers of local businesses.

Gregg, Sara. "American Land Rush: 'A Lonely Homesteader' Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom." *Environment & Society Portal*, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8996>.

Chapter: Moving On

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2018 postcard by Sean R. Heavey. "Glasgow, Montana, More of What Matters, In the 'Middle of Nowhere' you will find your sense of peace, place and pride."

© 2018 Sean R. Heavey

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This part of northeastern Montana garnered newfound notoriety in 2018, as reporters for the *Washington Post* adapted geospatial datasets to determine that Glasgow was the "The Middle of Nowhere," a designation used to locate the US city of more than 1,000 residents located farthest from a major urban center. Glasgow embraced the title with enthusiasm, and Valley County's glorious landscape once again features prominently in local advertising. Local photographer Sean R. Heavey's postcard, "Middle of Nowhere — Glasgow, Montana," widely available around town, features an open road overshadowed by towering cloud formations that allude to the impetuous weather that continues to shape the livelihoods of those whose lives unfold within these wide-open spaces. Today, Valley County houses an average of 1.5 people per square mile, just over half the density of 1910 (2.8 people per square mile), and their fortunes remain tied to the grazing districts, farms, and small businesses that support Glasgow and the surrounding communities.

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What remains: an abandoned car and farm equipment on the Stensland homestead adjoining Stearns's land. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

2019 Sara Gregg

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Stearns's story should be read within a broader interpretation of US history: the perpetuation of American myths of opportunity has demanded that in privileging individualism and self-determination we ignore the perennial constraints imposed by community, markets, and weather. Lily Stearns's Montana years illustrate how her lifelong quest for security was shaped by the social networks, weather, and crop prices necessary for securing success on the Great Plains of North America. The rich experiences of the homesteaders who sought to cobble together a livelihood on their farms have shaped the demographics, culture, and politics of the US West, and the personal and environmental dramas embedded in their stories have contributed in material ways to shaping the understanding of American history on a global stage.

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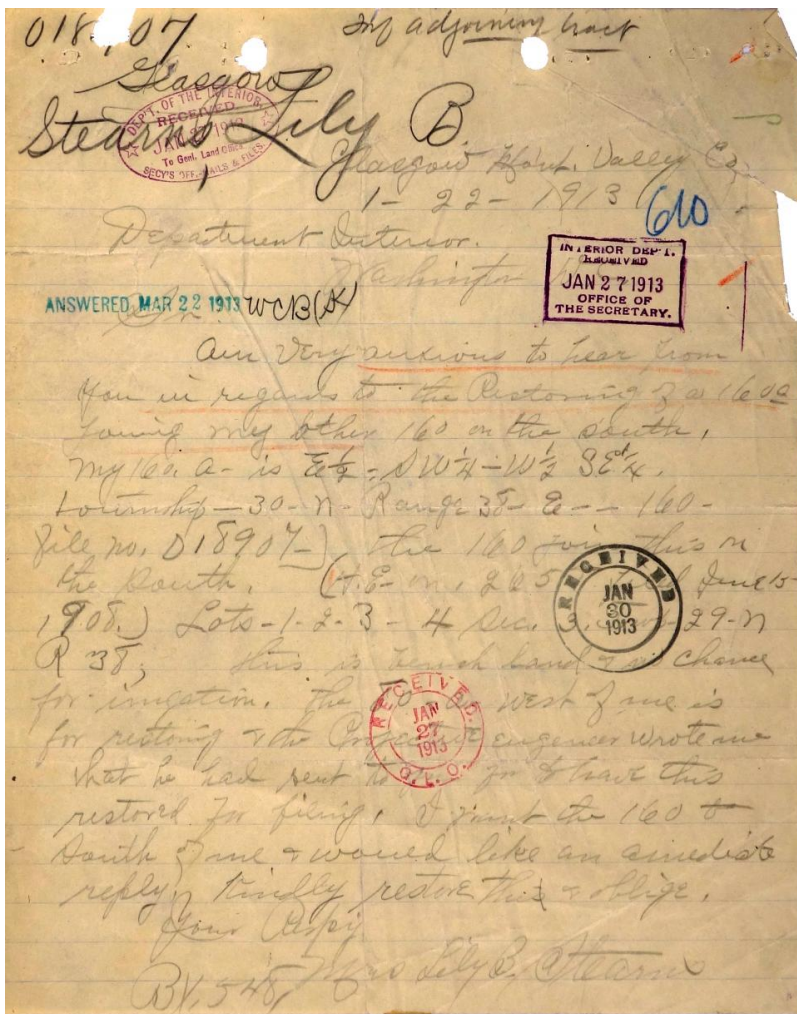
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## Lily's Letters

Lily Stearns wrote dozens of letters pleading her case to federal officials in Glasgow, Washington, DC, and elsewhere. A selection is accessible in Lily's homestead file at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC, and a few other letters are in the collection of the Montana State Archives in Helena, Montana. Given Lily's prolific pencil, and her adept use of persuasion to garner attention to her case, certainly many other letters are scattered or lost. A selection is included here, from the National Archives homestead case files.

Sara Gregg has transcribed all of these letters to the best of her ability, and left the capitalization, spelling, and punctuation as they appear in the documents. This captures Lily's pacing and language usage, evoking her voice without corrections or editing.

There is no record of Lily's childhood, or of her access to school in her hometown of Vermillion County, Illinois, but she had learned to read and write, and had honed her persuasive letter-writing skills over time, using her correspondence as a way to build support for her case.



22 January 1913.

Lily B. Stearns Homestead Application, Records of the General Land Office, Serial Patent Files, 1908–1951, Homestead Entry #018907 (Accession # 595690), Lily B. Stearns, RG 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



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1-22-1913

Department Interior, Washington

Sir,

Am very anxious to hear from you in regards to the Restoring of a 160 a joining my other 160 on the south. My 160 a. is E  $\frac{1}{2}$  SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  W  $\frac{1}{2}$  SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  Township 30 N Range 38 E—160-file no. 018907) the 160 joins this on the south. (HE no. 02653 filed June 15 1908) Lots-1-2-3-4 Sec 3 Twp 29 N R 38. This is bench land & no chance for irrigation. The 80 west of me is for restoring & the Project engineer wrote me that he had sent to you for to have this restored for filing. I want the 160 a South of me & would like an amediate reply. Kindly restore this & oblige.

Your Resp'y

Mrs. Lily B. Stearns

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Chapter: Lily's Letters

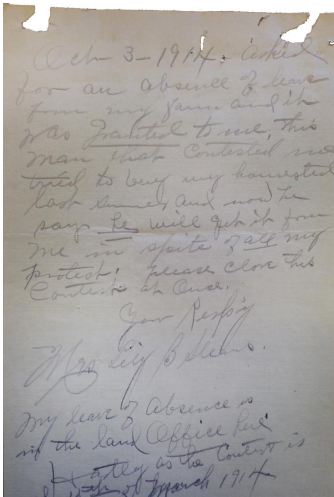
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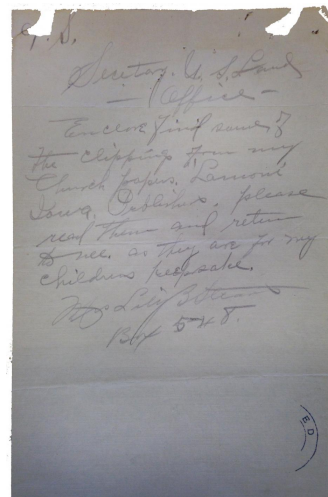


The original exhibition contains a dynamic gallery for viewing this multi-page document.

Lily B. Stearns' letter from 3 October 1914.



Oct 3-1914. Asked  
for an absence of leave  
from my farm and it  
was granted to me, this  
man that contested me  
tried to buy my homestead  
last summer and now he  
says he will get it from  
me in spite of all my  
protest! please close this  
contest at once.  
Your Peppy  
Lily B Stearns.  
My leave of absence is  
not the land office but  
it is the contest is  
closed March 1914



Secretary, U.S. Land  
Office—  
Enclose find some of  
the clippings from my  
Church papers. Lamoni  
Iowa, Publishers. please  
read them and return  
to me, as they are for my  
childrens keepsake.  
Mrs Lily Stearns  
Box 548.

3 October 1914. Page 1 & 2.

Lily B. Stearns Homestead Application, Records of the General Land Office, Serial Patent Files, 1908–1951, Homestead Entry #018907 (Accession # 595690), Lily B. Stearns, RG 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



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Oct-3-1914

Asked for an absence of leave from my farm and it was granted to me; this man that contested me tried to buy my homestead last summer and now he says he will get it from me in spite of all my protest; please close this contest at once. [2]

PS

Secretary U.S. Land Office—

Enclose find some of the clippings from my Church papers. “Lamoni Iowa, Publishers. Please read them and return to me, as they are for my childrens keepsake.

Mrs Lily B Stearns  
Box 548

Gregg, Sara. “American Land Rush: ‘A Lonely Homesteader’ Searches for Security in the Montana Homestead Boom.” Environment & Society Portal, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2020, no. 3. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.

<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8996>.

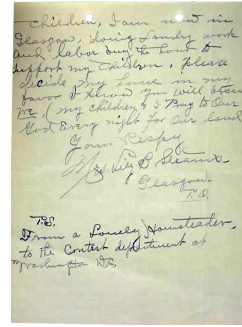
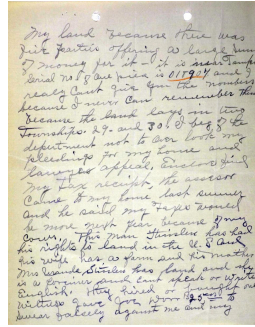
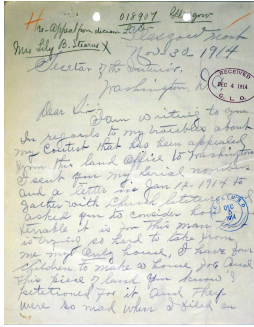
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Lily B. Stearns' letter from 30 November 1914.



30 November 1914. Page 1 -3.

Lily B. Stearns Homestead Application, Records of the General Land Office, Serial Patent Files, 1908–1951, Homestead Entry #018907 (Accession # 595690), Lily B. Stearns, RG 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



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Glasgow Mont

30 November 1914

Secretary of the Interior

Dear Sir—

I am writing to you In regards to my troubles about my contest that has been appealed from this land office to Washington. I sent my serial numbers and a letter in Jan 12, 1914 to gather with church lititure and asked you to consider how terrable it is for this man that is trying so hard to take from me my only home, I have four children to make a home for. And this piece of land you know I petitioned for it and they were so mad when I filed on [2] My land because there was five parties offering a large sum of money for it-it is near Tampico Serial No. of one piece is 018907 and I realy can't give you the numbers because I never can remember them because the land lays in two townships, 29. and 30. I beg of the deperment not to over look my pleadings for my home and lawyer appeal. Enclose find my tax receipt, the assesor came to my home last summer and he said my taxes would be more next year because of my cows. This man Stinslin has had his rights to land in the U.S. and his wife has a farm and his mother Mrs. Randa Stinslen hasland and she is a

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foreiner and cant speak or write English. They hired or bought one witness gave Joe Dorr \$25.00 to swear falsely against me and my [3] children. I am now in Glasgow, doing landry work and labor by the hour to support my children. Please decide my home in my favor I know you will because we (my children & I Pray to Our God Evry night for our land.

Yours Respy

Mrs. Lily B Stearns

Glasgow, P.O.

P.S. From a Lonely Homesteader, to the Contest department at Washington D.C.

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**Chapter:** Lily's Letters

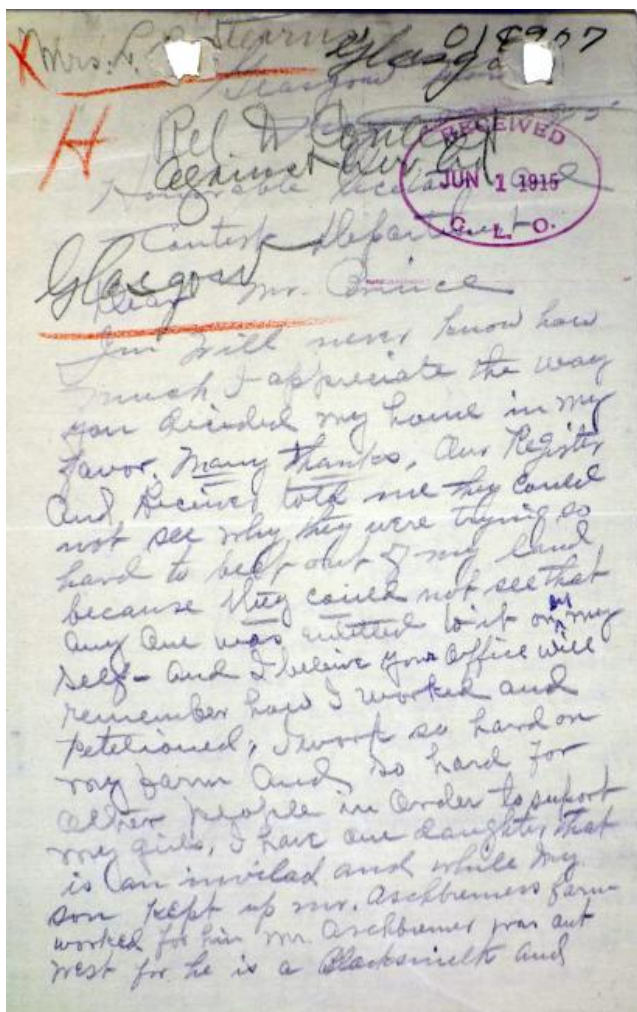
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Lily B. Stearns' letter from 1 June 1915.



1 June 1915. Page 1. Lily B. Stearns.

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Worked for the Anaconda Co.  
I lived on my homestead all  
I could and drove to Glasgow  
to bring out laundry for the  
big rooming house and R. R.  
Men, Mr. Aschbrenners place  
was direct on my way to town  
I stopped there as my journey  
was 14 miles in and 25 miles  
a day in a big wagon was a  
long sick head trip besides  
the team belonged to him and  
was needed to haul water. Here  
is where J. Don (notice the contest  
papers for reference) would come to  
my window at night and watch  
babe and I undressing and  
going to bed, "Think I if  
friends, an old widower that  
wanted me to marry him and  
because I hated him, testifying  
he looked through my window.  
Of course I found his tracks  
of some ones but I am no

1 June 1915. Page 2. Lily B. Stearns. Public domain.

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3 =  
Law-ard, it takes a brave lady  
to prove up a homestead and  
I am not afraid of no one if  
they will face me, let me tell  
you, dear friends, you will  
never know what it is to try  
to earn a home here, they will  
come and steal from me, last  
summer some one came at night  
and stole my things and me at  
home, this spring they stole my  
post hole ~~the~~ spade and  
my horse, came last night,  
last winter while I was in Glasgow  
doing laundry work, J. Dorr came  
along took my wood - that I cut  
and hauled here myself, How  
do I know who stole the wood?  
I found the pile where the  
wood was loaded, when the  
cyclone swept my home  
away many of my things were  
taken "Chow bar" that layed  
by my door, now they have  
appealed this contest the

1 June 1915. Page 3. Lily B. Stearns. Public domain.

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4

second time and if the  
judges doubt me any  
time as for my unfortunates  
I am willing to write a long  
letter of explanation, you  
will note their charges of my  
marriage with Dr. Aschbender  
he bought the license to marry  
me, because our business  
deals required the ~~same~~ me  
at that time, later my son  
came home he asked my  
son to help me on my home  
stead & work part the time  
for him, as he was going away  
later he asked me, do you  
want to marry me or do you  
want your land, I said I  
want my land for my  
self and children, he  
left and went west  
to the shops.

1 June 1915. Page 4. Lily B. Stearns. Public domain.

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= 5 =

When I went and mailed  
him, I had filed on  
my land, he said do  
you want me to help u  
on your farm, if you do  
you will have to give me  
100 - a - I said I'll not  
part with my farm for  
no man, Harry Woodard  
(see context pages) witness  
said will you sell me 50  
of the west half - I said no  
he then offered 75 - if  
any one would help him  
get me of this land, I  
J. Dorr wanted 100 for his  
son, Stansler wanted  
the whole 100 now for

1 June 1915. Page 5. Lily B. Stearns. Public domain.

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6-6=  
Can see how hard I have  
to struggle to hold my farm  
it is all I have, I spent nearly  
\$600 — on this place since  
I came to Montana, the  
Register of our local land  
office here knows me well,  
Miss Georgia Scott one of your  
head clerks that used to help  
you in your land office at D. C.,  
and Glasgow knows me, if  
your authorities doubt me, may  
write to them. I sincerely hope  
you will grant a favorable  
return and end Mr.  
Randa's trouble contest  
against me. Your Lonely  
Homesteader  
Mrs L. B. Stearns..

1 June 1915. Page 6. Lily B. Stearns. Public domain.

1 June 1915.

1 June 1915, Received stamp, Department of the Interior

Mrs LB Stearns  
Glasgow Mont  
Rel. Contest Against Her  
Honorable Secretary and Contest Department

Dear Mr. Prince {?}

You will never know how much I appreciate the way you decided my home in my favor. Many thanks. Our Register And Receiver told me they could not see why they were trying so hard to

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keep out of my land because they could not see that any one was entitled to it only myself—and I believe your office will remember how I worked and petitioned, I work so hard on my farm and so hard for other people in order to support my girls, I have one daughter that is an invalid and while my son kept up Mr. Aschbrenner's farm worked for him Mr. Aschbrenner was out west for he is a Blacksmith and [2] worked for the Anaconda Co.

I lived on my homestead all I could and drove to Glasgow to bring out laundry for the big rooming houses and R.R Men, Mr. Aschbrenner's place was direct on my way to from I stopped there as my journey was 14 miles in and 28 miles a day in a big wagon was a long sick hard trip besides the team belonged to him and was needed to haul water. Here is where J. Dorr (notice the contest papers for reference) would come to my window at night and watch baby and I undressing and going to bed, "Think of it friends, an old widower that wanted me to marry him and because I hated him, testifying he looked through my window. Of course I found his tracks or some ones but I am no [3] coward, it takes a [brave?] Lady to prove up a homestead and I am not afraid of no one if they will face me, let me tell you, dear friends, You will never know what it is to try to earn a home here, they will come and steal from me, last summer some one came at night and stole my things and me at home, this spring they stole my posthole spade and me home, came at night, last winter while I was in Glasgow doing laundry work. J. Dorr came along took my wood—that I cut and hauled here myself. How do I know who stole the wood? I found the pipe where the wood was loaded. When the cyclone swept my home away many of my things were taken "crow bar that layed by my door, now they have appealed this contest the [4] second time And if the judges doubt me any time as for my truthfulness I am willing to write a long letter of explanation, you will note their charges of my marriage with Mr. Aschbrenner he bought the license to marry me, because Our business deals required he [illegible] me at that time, later my son came home he asked my son to help me on my home stead + work part the time for him, as he was going away later he asked me, do you want to marry me or do you want your land, I said I want my land for my self and children, he left and went west to the shops.

[5] When I went and married him, I had filed on my land, he said do you want me to help you in your farm. if you do you will have to give me 160\_a\_ I said I'll not part with my farm for no man, Harry Woodard (see contest pages) witness said will you sell me 80 of the west half- I said no he then offered \$5000 if any one would help him get me of this land, and J. Dorr wanted 160 for his son. Stenslen wanted the whole 160\_ Now you [6] can see how hard I have to struggle to hold my farm it is all I have, I spent nearly \$600- on this place since I came to Montana, the Register of our Local land office here knows me well. Miss Georgia Scott one of your head clerks that used to help you in your land office at D.C. and Glasgow knows me, if your authorities doubt me write to them. I sincerely hope you will grant a favorable return and end Mr. Randa Stenslen contest against me.

Your Lonely Homesteader  
Mrs L.B. Stearns

## Further Reading

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## Notes on Archival Material

The National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC, holds one of the triplicate copies of all homesteading documentation. The General Land Office records contain hundreds of millions of individual pages, mostly administrative records documenting the process of homestead proofs (over 10 million individual

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land transactions). Among these records are cached some treasures, including the 99-page transcript of the contest to Lily Stearns' second claim in 1914, which captures her voice and the ambitions of her neighbors as they sought to control the 160 acres of prime benchland abutting the Milk River. These Land Entry Case Files (General Land Office, Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49) are available to the public at the National Archives Building at 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, in Washington, DC.

**Websites linked in this text:**

- <https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/8919>

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GLO surveyors worked to make the Western landscape legible to the state, and laid corner markers across the public domain. General Land Office corner marker, Stearns claim, Township 30 N Range 38 E, Section 34. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

Sara Gregg, 2019.

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What remains: an abandoned car and farm equipment on the Stensland homestead adjoining Stearns's land. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

2019 Sara Gregg

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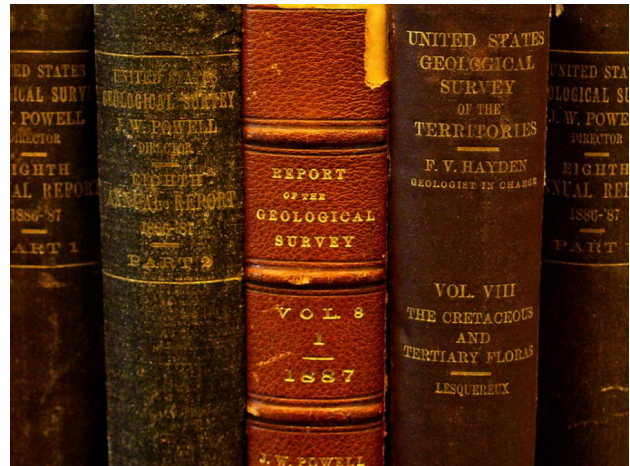
Abandoned homestead building of similar construction, located a few townships to the northeast. Photograph by Sara Gregg, 2019.

2019 Sara Gregg



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Homesteaders at Enright Ranch on Porcupine Creek. Unknown photographer, no date.

Courtesy of the Valley County Historical Society.



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Piles of wheat in front of the Glasgow, Montana First National Bank Building. Photograph by Ellis, no date.

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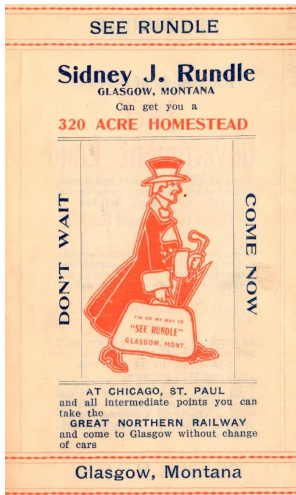
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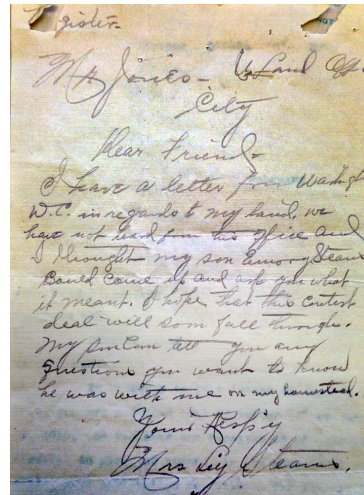
Rundle's three-color brochures celebrated the opportunities abounding on northeastern Montana's shortgrass plains. The advertisement captures the quirky creativity of this land locator working to capture the attention and the cash of aspiring homesteaders—and the progression of clever inducements merits a closer look: "Come to Glasgow... And we will show you... What other settlers are doing..."

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Public domain. Back cover of a brochure by Sidney J. Rundle, no date. Courtesy of Wisconsin State Historical Society.



One of dozens of communications Lily Stearns mailed to federal officials. This letter to "Mr. Jones, U.S. Land Office, City," 1914, inquired about the status of her claim.

Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society Research Center.

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Public domain. Letter by Lily B. Stearns, photographed by Sara Gregg. Courtesy of the Montana Historical Society Research Center.

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