

# **CHANNELED SCABLANDS WOMEN HOMESTEADERS: SUMMARY STATISTICS AND SPATIAL PATTERNS FOR FIVE COUNTIES**

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## **Abstract**

Western historians estimate that nearly a quarter of American homesteaders were women and that most women's homesteading occurred after 1900, shortly before American homesteading was at its peak in the 1910s. An analysis of western Washington homestead records concluded that female sole women comprised only 3.5% of homesteaders, and that homesteading peaked in the late 1880s and sharply declined in 1899. How does this compare to the homesteading history of the Channeled Scablands, where the Homestead Act requirement to farm presented distinct challenges? This poster presents summary data of women's homesteading history in Washington's Channeled Scablands and explores the temporal and spatial patterns of women's homesteading history.

## **Goals**

The Washington Women Homesteaders project aims to develop a historical context for Washington homestead history that includes female homesteaders. Previous studies (Mathews 2019, 2020, 2021) have established that the homesteading history of Washington may have unique local variations from that of the West in general. The goal of the present study was to summarize statistics for women homesteaders in Washington's Channeled Scablands to explore 1) how common it was for women to homestead; 2) when homesteading peaked; and 3) if spatial or temporal patterns exist in women's homesteading. The Channeled Scablands region was selected as a study area because of this region's unique American settlement history and the difficulty of farming in this area.

## **Methods**

Summary statistics for this research were collected by browsing Homestead Act (12 Stat. 392) records in the [glorecords.blm.gov](https://www.glorecords.blm.gov) land patents database. Records were browsed by county and tallied by gender by year. In many cases additional research into homesteader's gender was done through primary sources such as census or marriage records. For this study, homesteaders were classified as women homesteaders if they were apparently legally female sole not listed with a male patentee or if they were identified by their maiden name and their husband was later included on the patent.

## **Channeled Scablands Homesteaders, 1878-1943**

Trends in women's homesteading generally follow those of all homesteaders in the Scablands, but this region's homesteading history has substantial local variations. The temporal distribution of patents in this region is bimodal, suggesting that the history of homesteading was influenced by distinct regional

historical events (Figure 1). Homesteading sharply peaks in the Scablands in 1891, and then peaks again in the 1900s and declines after 1911. Women’s homestead patents in the Scablands peak slightly later than they did in western Washington, but more women patented land under the Homestead Act in this region (Figure 2).

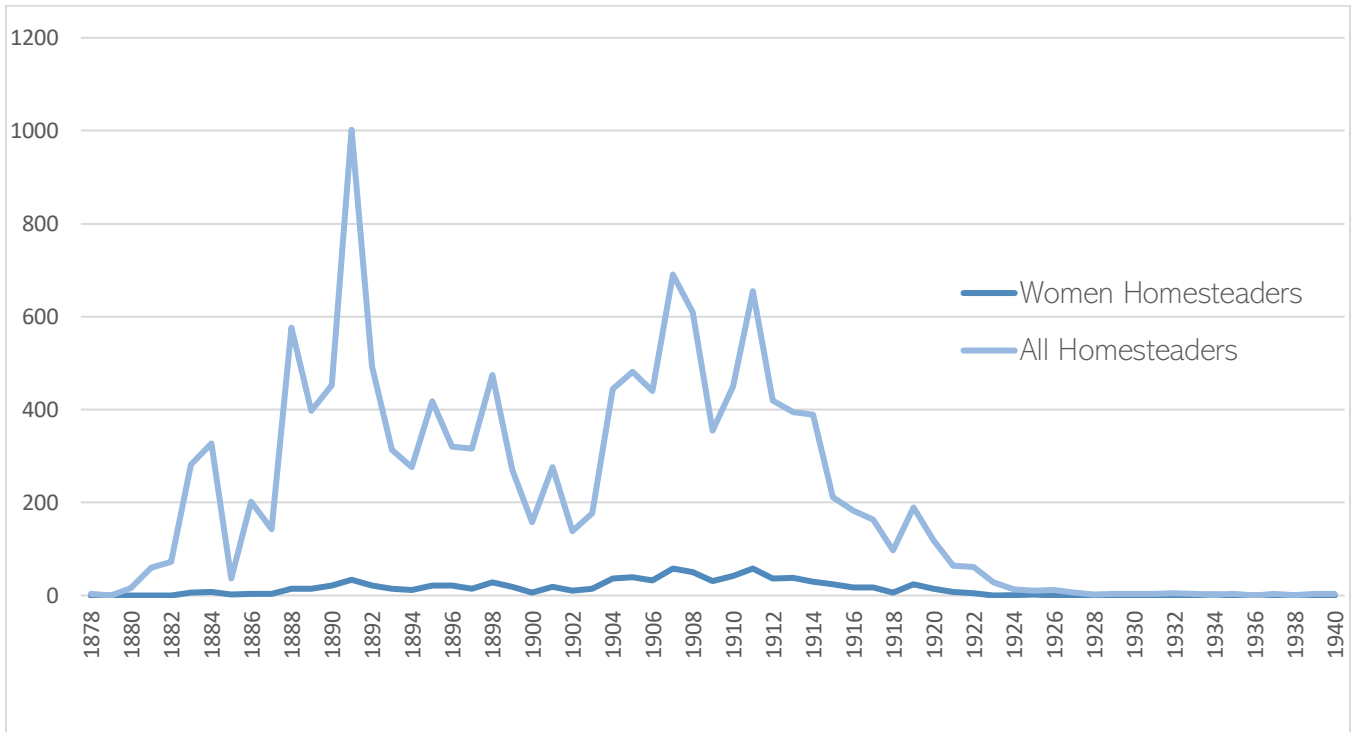


Figure 1. Channeled Scablands Homesteaders.

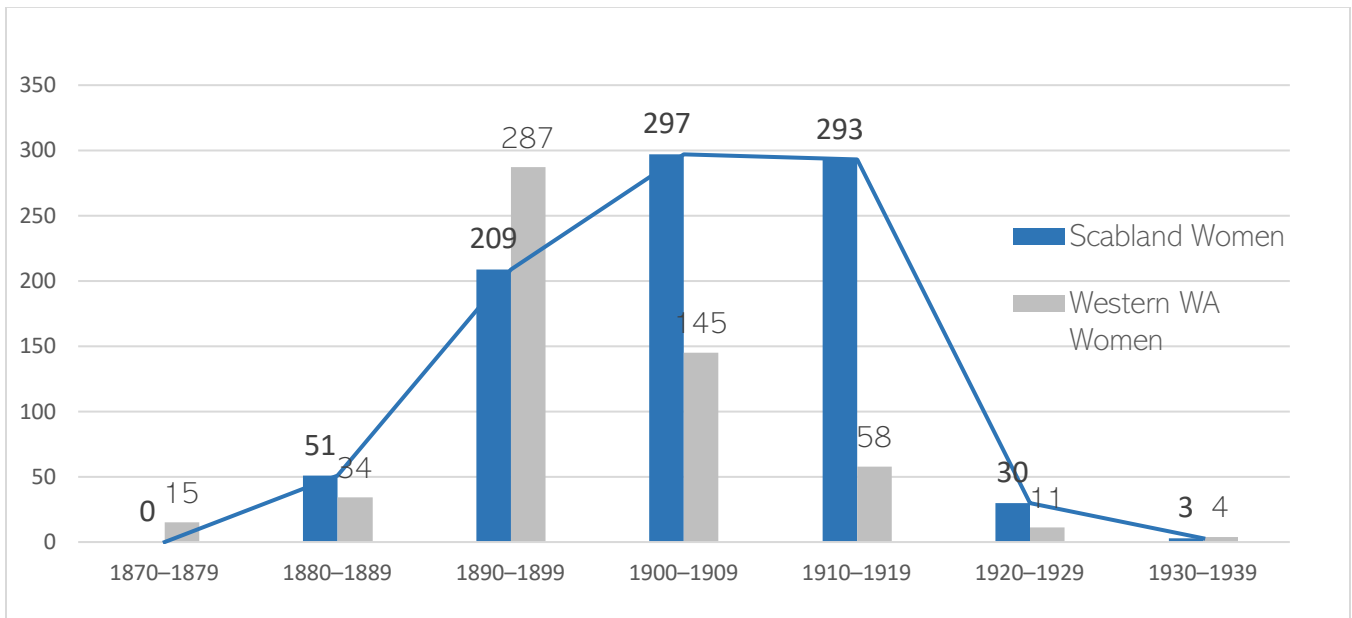


Figure 2. Women’s homestead patents by decade.

The history of homesteading in the Channeled Scablands appears correlate with trends in the local wheat farming industry (Figures 3-7). Homesteading peaks first in Whitman county in the 1880s, at the time the wheat industry begins booming here. Homesteading peaked in Spokane and Lincoln counties in the late 1880s to early 1890s, when the local wheat industry was nationally renowned, and the local railroad system was expanding access to the region. Homesteading in Grant and Adams counties peaks later in the late 1900s to early 1910s, in line with national homesteading trends and influenced by Adams county’s “Big Crop of 1897” bumper wheat crop.

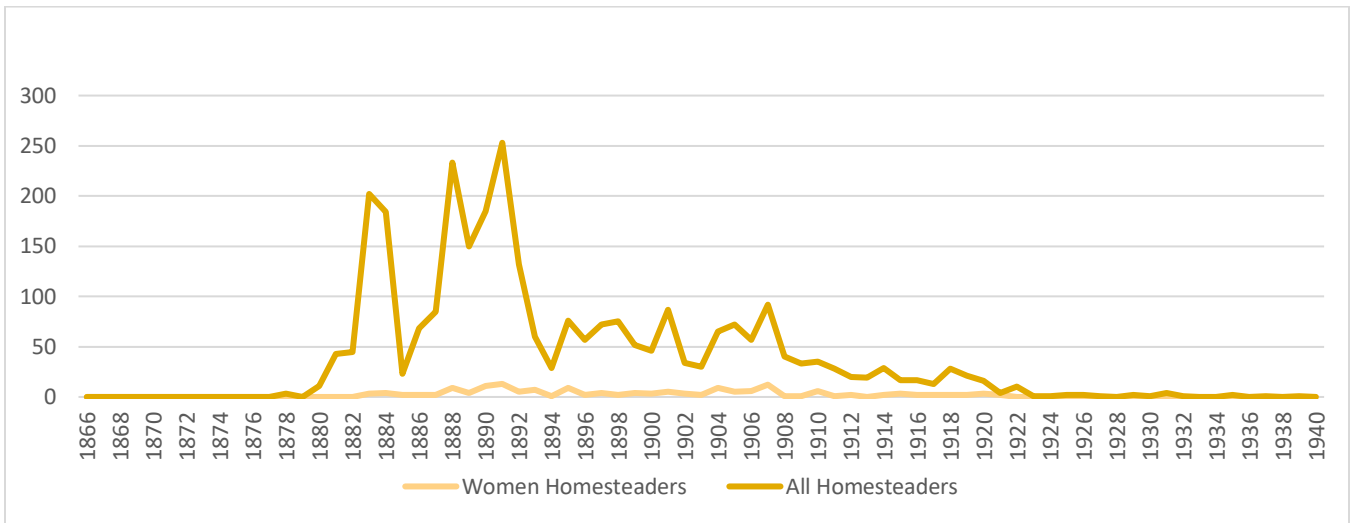


Figure 3. Whitman county homesteaders.

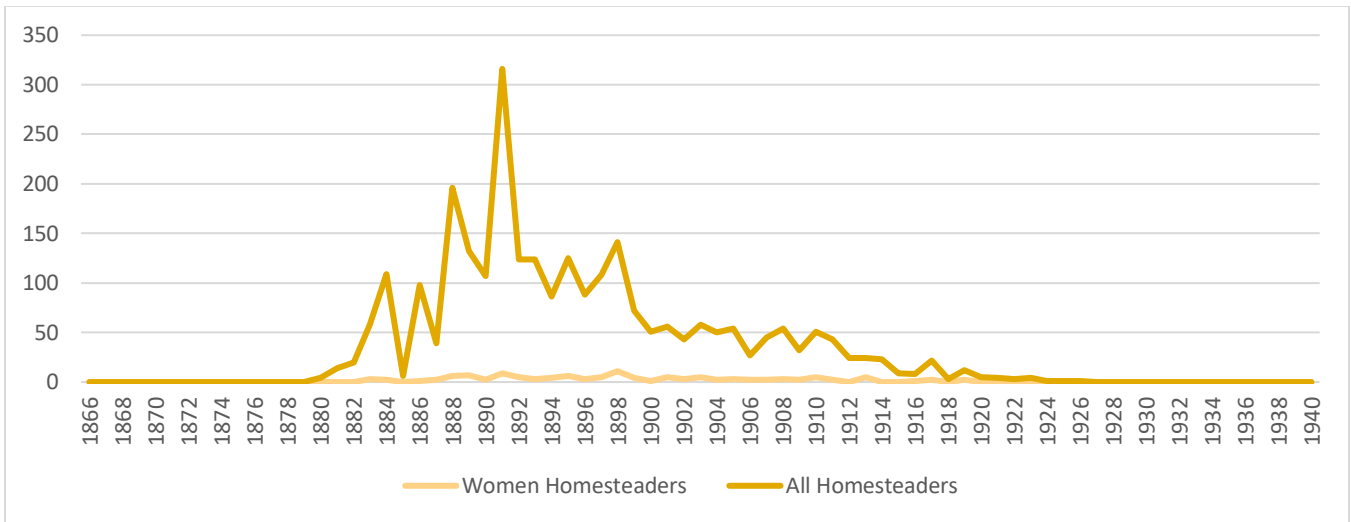


Figure 4. Spokane county homesteaders.

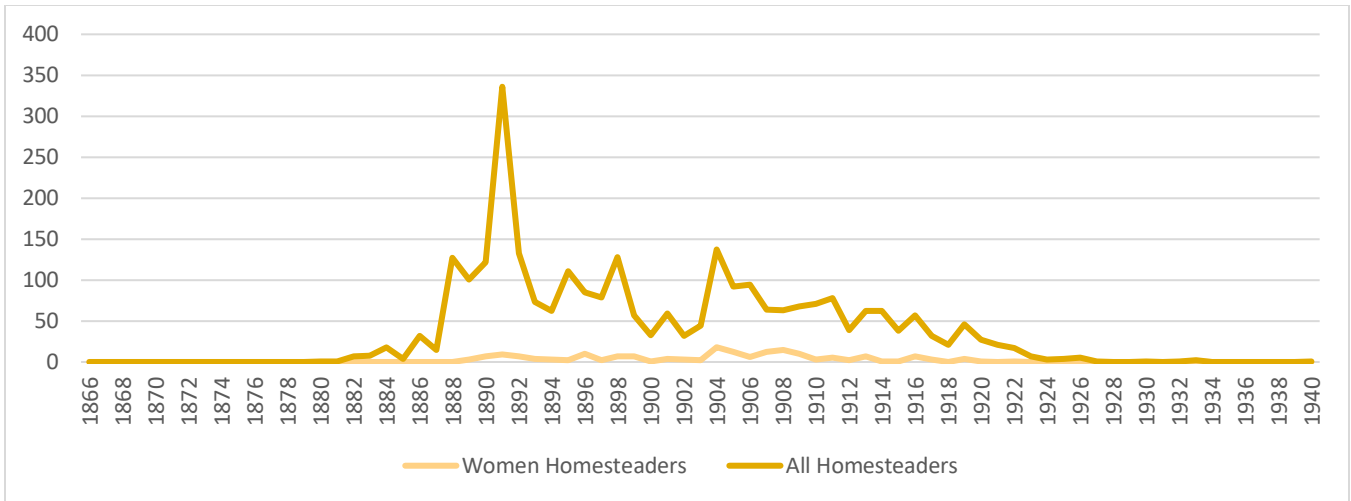


Figure 5. Lincoln county homesteaders.

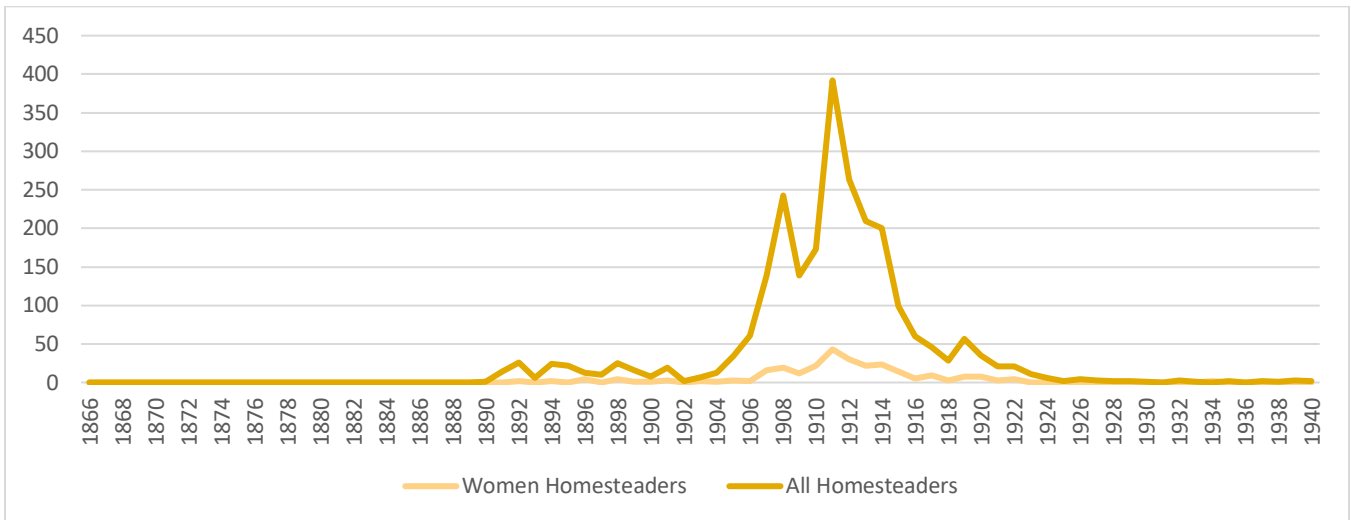


Figure 6. Grant county homesteaders.

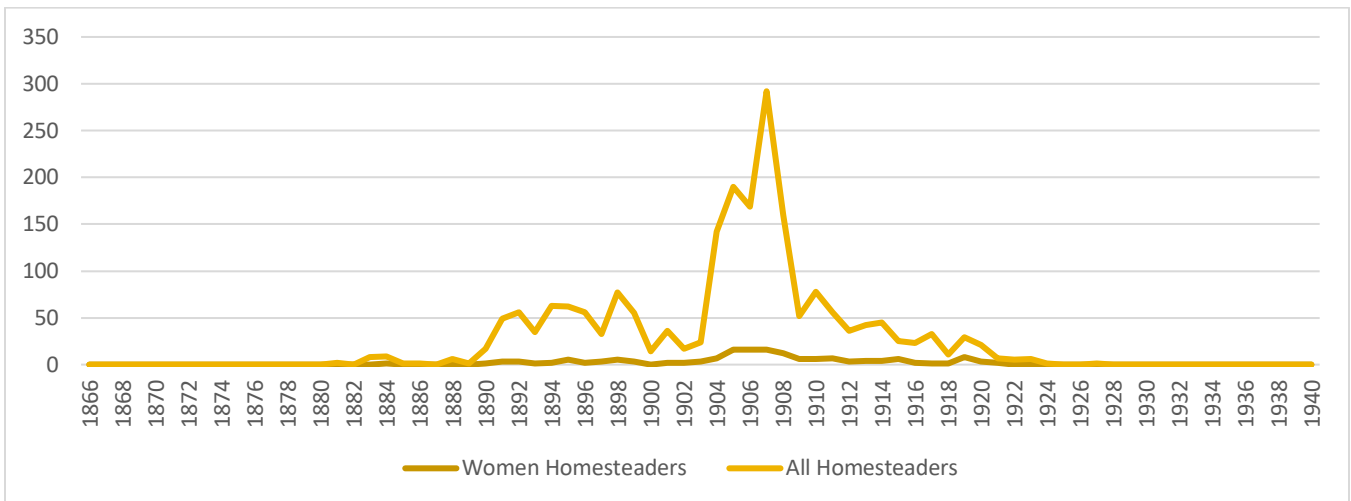


Figure 7. Adams county homesteaders.

## Women Homesteaders by County

Women were issued 6.9% of the Homestead Act patents in the Channeled Scablands (Table 1). By county, the rate of women homesteaders ranges from 4.4% to 10.9%, which is greater than most of western Washington's counties but not as high as estimates in other parts of the West.

*Table 1. Channeled Scabland women homesteader patents by county.*

County	Women	All	Women
Western Washington	554	16043	3.5%
Channeled Scablands	883	12845	6.9%
Spokane	119	2675	4.4%
Lincoln	181	2782	6.5%
Grant	269	2471	10.9%
Adams	156	2046	7.6%
Whitman	158	2871	5.5%

## Feme Sole Homesteaders Claiming Family Lands

Although homesteads were most often claimed by individuals, homesteading was not done in isolation. To understand how common it was for women to work cooperatively with family to claim homesteads in the Scablands, an analysis was done on the peak homesteading years in each of the five Scabland counties. Statistics were collected by searching the GLO database for the women's maiden names and determining whether any family had patented lands within one Township and within five years of her patent date (Table 2).

*Table 2. Number of family claims near women's claims in peak homesteading years.*

County	Peak Year	Women	% w/ Family Nearby
Spokane	1898	11	36%
Lincoln	1904	18	61%
Grant	1911	43	51%
Adams	1906	16	69%
Whitman	1891	13	54%

In Adams, Grant, Lincoln, and Whitman counties, over half of the women homesteaders had family living nearby at the time of their patent. In Spokane county, only about a third of women apparently had family living nearby at the time of their patent. Most often only one family member patented land nearby, but in some cases as many as ten family members were homesteading in the area at the same

time. Although this analysis is cursory, the data suggests that family support or the economic motivation for families to claim large tracts of land were important factors for about half of women's homesteads in this region and family support was likely an important consideration for many homesteaders.

## References

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