



Homestead National Monument of America

An important judicial decision regarding the separation of church and state took place in Nebraska in 1902. Beginning in 1899, Daniel Freeman, one of the United States' first homesteaders, made public grievance over the use of the Bible in public school instruction at the Freeman school near Beatrice. He requested that the teacher in question, Edith Beecher, cease using the Bible as a textbook and reference during her classes. Beecher refused, stating that she had been granted permission by the school board to read passages from the Bible, offer prayers, and sing hymns from a gospel hymn book. Undaunted, Daniel Freeman took his case to the school board.

The school board defended Beecher, noting that the ten-minute exercises she conducted were "in the best interests of the students." The board also commented that if anyone was guilty of any offense, it was Freeman, who hounded teachers and interfered in the affairs of the school board.

Freeman pursued the case, eventually going to the Gage County District Court. When that body did not find to his liking, he went as far as the Nebraska Supreme Court. The case, known officially as Daniel Freeman versus John Scheve, Et. al. (Scheve was an officer of the school board), was decided on October 9, 1902. The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled in favor of Daniel Freeman, stating that the actions of Edith Beecher and the school board did indeed violate the Nebraska Constitution's provisions regarding the separation of church and state. Interestingly, the state of Nebraska brought to conclusion this issue many years before the United States Supreme Court ever addressed it.



Today, visitors to Homestead National Monument of America can visit the Freeman School, where Edith Beecher's instruction led to Daniel Freeman's lawsuit and, eventually, a landmark legal decision in the United States. The Freeman School is located one-quarter mile from the Homestead National Monument of America Visitor Center on State Highway 4.