

# Robert Ball Anderson

1843–1930



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Robert Ball Anderson was born into slavery and served in the Union Army. After the war, he became a successful landowner and rancher in Nebraska.



*As you read the biography below, think about the success Robert Ball Anderson achieved once he was free. What qualities led to his success?*

Freedom for formerly enslaved African Americans in the South meant new economic opportunity. Some remained in the South and worked for former owners. Some moved to cities to find jobs. When hopes of gaining land from plantation owners faded, Robert Ball Anderson and others moved west in search of land. For Anderson, Nebraska became a land of promise.

Robert Ball Anderson was born a slave on a Kentucky plantation in 1843. When he was just six years old, his mother was sold. Anderson never saw her again.

At the age of 14, Anderson returned late with drinking water from the well. The slaveholder's wife beat him with a rawhide whip. She then rubbed black pepper in his wounds, mopped up his blood from the floor, and poured salt water over his wounds until Anderson fainted. Later he wrote, "Though I live to be a hundred, I will never forget the one punishment I received." A year and a half later, when the woman raised a whip to Anderson again, he said he "used that whip on her, exerting all my strength."

Because Anderson was a favorite, the slaveholder did not sell him as his wife demanded. Instead he assigned Anderson to field work. When the Civil War began, Anderson asked his owner for permission to enlist in the Union Army. His owner reluctantly agreed, and Anderson left Kentucky to enlist. He joined the 125th Colored Regiment. When the war ended six months later, Anderson had not seen battle. He went on to fight as a Buffalo Soldier in the Indian Wars.

In 1884 Anderson headed west to Nebraska. The Homestead Act of 1862, signed into law by Abraham Lincoln, had turned over vast amounts of public land to private citizens. The act made land available free of charge to anyone who would live on and farm it for a period of time, usually five years. Anderson became one of the first African Americans to succeed as a homesteader. Homesteading was difficult, even for the most experienced farmers, and Anderson suffered through some financial

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Reconstruction**

## **Biography**

disasters. Over time, though, he was able to add to his land holdings. By 1918 he owned more than 2,000 acres and specialized in breeding horses.

In 1922, at the age of 79, Anderson married 21-year-old Daisy Graham. Graham was a teacher. After the two met at church, she said that "Mr. Anderson was so graceful. He held his hat in his hand, and smiled at me, and started talking about his life." Thirty days later, the two were married. Anderson took his new wife home to his ranch, which had 20 ranch hands and two cooks. The two traveled the country. Graham said their years together "were a honeymoon."

In 1930, after eight years of marriage, Anderson was killed in a fatal car accident. Graham died in 1998 at the age of 97, honored as one of the last living widows of a Civil War veteran.

### **WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. **Recall** What early event left Anderson scarred for life?

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2. **Make Judgments** What character traits do you think contributed to Anderson's success?

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### **ACTIVITY**

What was Robert Ball Anderson's life as a homesteader really like? Read to learn more about the lives of African American homesteaders. Then write a journal entry representing a day in the life of a homesteader.