

Were there restrictions to claiming a homestead on federal land in Alaska?

Similar to homesteading in the contiguous Lower 48 states, federal land in Alaska had to be officially open to homestead entry before homestead claims could be filed. Prior to 1918, the land had to be surveyed to register claims with the General Land Office. Even so, people who settled on land before an official opening or survey generally had preference rights to file a claim on their land. Early newspapers in Alaska often carried information on new land openings. For instance, a notice in the Valdez, Alaska paper on August 11, 1912 reported that the "first surveyed township in Alaska will be thrown open to entry next Thursday, Aug. 15." It was for land near the Copper River. The article also stated: "Actual settlers on the land prior to the survey thereof are allowed a preference right of ninety days in which to present their filings." In that way, many settlers from the early 1900s got homesteads but with patent dates long after their original settlement on the land, sometimes 20 or more years later. For example, John McCrary, an early settler at Copper Center, Alaska in 1902 finally received patent to his homestead claim in 1938.