



***Kenneth Deardorff  
Farmer, Business Owner, Carpenter, Fur Trapper,  
Vietnam Veteran, Homesteader  
1944 -  
Stony River, Alaska***

In 1974, a young Vietnam veteran and native Californian made his way to Alaska to look for work with the U.S. Geological Survey or anyone else that could use a recent college graduate with a degree in geography. Once Ken Deardorff arrived in the nation's 49<sup>th</sup> state, however, he decided to forgo that life and undertake a new one: that of a homesteader on America's last frontier.

Ken Deardorff was born about as far away from the wilds of Alaska as one could imagine: just outside Los Angeles. After high school, he entered the United States Army and served in Vietnam, where he was wounded in action. After being discharged from the Army, he returned to California and earned his college degree before heading to Alaska. Once there, he went to the office of the Bureau of Land Management in Anchorage and inquired about homesteading lands. He eventually settled on an 80-acre claim on the Stony River in the southwestern part of the state.

Like the lives of countless 19<sup>th</sup> century homesteaders, the life of a 20<sup>th</sup> century homesteader was difficult. No roads came anywhere near his homestead, so Deardorff had to charter a plane, take his boat, or walk if he wished to go anywhere. Mail often came only once a month or so, and even picking that up required a long journey to another village. To supplement his income while homesteading, Deardorff opened a small general store on his property that catered to those traveling the Stony River. He also hunted and trapped furs to help make his homestead successful.

Ken Deardorff fulfilled all legal requirements of the Homestead Act in 1979. However, for reasons still unknown, it took nine years for him to receive the patent to the land he worked so hard for so long. Finally, in May 1988, the title arrived from the U.S. government. By then, the Homestead Act had been repealed for twelve years in the lower 48 states and two years in Alaska. Through meticulous research, it was determined in 2001 that Kenneth Deardorff was indeed the very last person to obtain the title to a homesteaded property.

Like his 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, Deardorff worked long and hard to make his homestead a success. He is without question as much a pioneer as those that came before him.