

Rare Characters Aid Settlers in Matanuska

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
OF THE JOURNAL STAFF
Palmer, Alaska—(By Mail)—Who's building an empire, if one is being built?

Colonists from off the relief rolls of the states, yes, but also college bred drifters, preachers and priests, traveling printers and traveling painters, butchers, bakers and troublemakers. Tested executives, yes, but also executives who but a year ago were "on their uppers."

In our Matanuska valley colony of some 1,500 population there are men from every state, and from the strange corners of the earth. There is even a man named Port Said, although he's never been there.

Max H. Sherrod and his wife, both registered nurses, heard about the rural rehabilitation here, loaded their daughter, Janet, 3, in the family car and started for Seattle from Battle Creek, Mich.

Nursed Sick Kids

"We were lucky," Sherrod says. "We got a job on the North Star, nursing the sick kids who'd been left behind when the Wisconsin and Michigan families sailed on the St. Mihiel. Then we came on to Palmer. We just had a tent and a little baggage. But Irwin (the colonization director) says we can have a little land and work part time at nursing."

A man named "Shorty" blew in with only a bedroll on his back and nothing in his pocket. He says he's a newspaper man, and he wants to start a weekly—mimeographed at first and printed after while. Now he's working in the commissary at \$100 a month. A preacher beat him to the newspaper business.

The Rev. E. L. Bingle, educated at Naperville, Ill., in an evangelical seminary, dipped into Alaska seven years ago. Before he came here he was telling the good people of Cordova about the Lord.

"Why did I come to Palmer?" he says, repeating your question. "Reckless, that's it—a reckless rascal, and a reckless rascal is a hard hitting fellow. If it wasn't for reckless men there'd be no pioneering. I just got to be moving around."

that interests a fellow like me is the movies—there's no responsibility there."

"A Reckless Rascal"

Short and round, with a heavy head, Bingle can't be distinguished from a colonist. He dresses like them, works with them, and even occasionally swears with them. He

with the Lord is Merrill Sulzman. A young priest out of Manhattan by way of Seward, the colonists call him "regular." Much of the time when he goes among them he takes off his clerical collar.

Some Strange Dialects

No outfit on the project embraces more odd characters than the construction crew, gathered from the transient camps of California and working under portly Frank U. Bliss, who's so kindly he smiles when telling an incorrigible to "get moving out."

In its tents sleep men in their early thirties who've sailed the seven seas and seen the world at its wierdest. They talk in dialects from Kentucky, Texas, New York's east side, the middle west, Florida and the Ozarks of Missouri.

Two per cent of the crew are college educated. Somehow they went

"haywire," drifted into some California transient camp and enrolled for this Alaskan adventure. In black moods they curse the fate that set them down here among the mosquitoes. But they work, and there have been but few deserters. Some of them take Bliss at his word when he says, "Boys, you're making history."

Nicknames tell a story. In the camps we've got "Oklahoma Slim" and "Oklahoma Jack" (who's fresh from the dust storms but still wants to farm), "Montana Moore," "Muddy Mississippi," "Tex," "Pawnee Bill," "Buttercup," "The Duke," "Heavy," "Jersey Kid," "Big Tiny," "Dago Joe," "Chink," "Dutch," "Sweat Pea" and "Elmer." For this is a land of wandering men, and many have wandered here.

Desertions Threatened as Work Lags in Colony

Secondary *June 16, 1936*
Some Families Ask Return to States, Others Talk of Tackling It Alone; Officials Worried

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN

OF THE JOURNAL STAFF

Palmer, Alaska—(By Radio)—It is now confessed by officials that the magnitude of the task of settling 200 families in the Matanuska valley was not realized when undertaken and, recognizing the tremendous amount of work remaining to be done, authorities here are making desperate efforts to get more help.

Already the administrative personnel of the colonization division—as differentiated from the construction division, manned mainly by California transients—has been bolstered. Howard Lyng of Nome has been added as assistant to General Manager Don Irwin and Ed Croning of Anchorage as purchasing and disbursing agent.

Huge Job Barely Started

To date the transient laborers and some of the colonists have been in the valley more than a month and have not made a dent in work promised the settlers. Trouble ahead is revealed by a brief summary of the work to be done:

The colony must construct a community center, a monumental task in itself considering available facilities.

Erect homes for all colonists (except for a few who happened to draw tracts with houses on them). Just one cottage is now started.

Erect shelters for livestock. Provide a water supply for settlers' homes and livestock.

Clear 12 acres of land for each colonist.

Build thirty-odd miles of new roads in the valley, plus 12 miles connecting Palmer with the Anchorage road now ending at Eklutna; and this includes a \$150,000 bridge.

Prepare and harvest community garden and field crops for settlers and livestock during the winter.

Most of these tasks have not even been started and others just barely touched. For instance, the road program, under the Alaskan highway commission, is about a month behind. Director Irwin concedes that conditions are serious and other officials privately admit the situation is most alarming.

The colonists themselves are be-

coming apprehensive. Some of them talk about cutting loose and going into the woods and building their own shelters, even if they must give up their colony tracts to do it. They say that this is a big country with a lot of land open; that they already like Alaska and will find new places to settle if they have to.

Tiny Railroad Swamped

Others of the new settlers are sick and tired of delays, bickering and mismanagement. Irwin says that four families have asked to be sent home, but rumors around the camps are that more than 30 are ready to quit. Those with serious complaints are asked to sign affidavits that conditions were misrepresented to them by case workers backed home. Then the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation corporation will investigate the charges and may provide transportation, according to Irwin. Nothing is definitely promised, however.

Transportation, more than any
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