

The Sad Alaskan Tale of Charlie's Blue Milk

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BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN

Palmer, Alaska—(By Radio)—Out here in the great alone where the mountains bare their fangs to heaven and hem you in with their forbidding stares, a man's got to get along without a lot of things.

You don't have any funny movies, nor any tragic ones, and you don't have soft luxurious things to eat such as—well, such as ice cream. That is, you don't if you are an ordinary mortal just digging for gold or building an empire or whittling a 40-acre farm out of the timber.

Now Comes Charlie

But if you are our commissary storekeeper, Charles Warter, you might get ice cream once in a while, and the story of how Charlie got his is the story I have to tell.

Now Charlie is a squatty, short legged sort of guy who blew into Boom City to take over the Matanuska colony commissary at the best, supposedly, of the territorial powers that be. His salary was put at \$2,400 a year, whereas his young predecessor, who came here from Washington, was getting \$1,500.

To some of the colonists, stubby Charlie soon grew distasteful. They didn't like his prices, and they didn't like his storekeeping otherwise. They petitioned Colonization Director Don Irwin to replace him for sundry dark offenses. But Irwin placated the colonists and Charlie kept his job.

Wives Get Suspicious

Well, things came to pass in such and such a way that the colony cows gave milk. And presently came also an arrangement whereby the col-

onists milked the cows, turned the milk in to the commissary, and bought it back from Charlie at 15 cents a quart.

There developed some colonist dissatisfaction with that scheme, naturally, but Charlie stuck to his guns until—well, now we are come to the ice cream.

Some of the alert housewives got to noticing that the milk they bought from Charlie was pretty blue. Yes, it was very blue. In fact, it looked like it had been skimmed. Some of the men got to investigating and, lo and behold, they saw Charlie pumping a little ice cream churn at noon and at evening and feasting on the product of his labors.

Too Bad for Charlie

And so they got some inside information and found that our Mr. Charlie was getting some cream for himself and selling some blue milk to colonists and having his ice cream twice a day, out here in the great alone where the ordinary man has to get along without such things of the feast as ice cream.

But it is a well known fact that two and two make four, even in the wilderness, so Charlie Warter isn't handling the milk from the colony cows any more and he isn't having any more home made ice cream for lunch and dinner.

And that's the story of the cows and Charlie and the cream and the ice cream, and it's the truth. And it's too bad that Robert Service isn't around the arctic circle any more to tell some more about how "there are strange things done in the midnight sun," such as the cremation of Sam Magee and the icecreamery of Charlie Warter.

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Crops Grow Fabulously in Alaska's Magic Soil

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
OF THE JOURNAL STAFF

Palmer, Alaska—(By Mail. Written June 13)—Bluebells are blooming in the woods and oats are sprouting in the fields. Things are growing in the Matanuska valley. Summer is at hand with its abundance.

Here you plant a hard little pea seed and in three and one-half days it is kicking an infant stem out the top of the rich earth. Oats seeds push their shoots from dirt to sunlight in four days. You lay a line of radish seeds and in 25 days you are salting their husky progeny and enjoying them at the dinner table.

Yes, things grow and grow swiftly in the Matanuska valley. About the soil's fertility there's not the slightest doubt. About the slanting sun rays' power to give quick life and lusciousness there is no question.

Richness in Vegetables

Even the old prospectors, "clean mad for the muck called gold" and not giving a tinker's damn for much else, admit that the valley will produce. One time an ore hunter named Wentworth put down an acre of potatoes in the clearing around his shack. Then he went back into the Willow creek gold country. He returned for July 4, hilled up his spuds and went back to the hills. In the fall he came home. Bless you, what a crop he got!

From that one plot he filled his shed and he filled his house, all but room enough for him to crawl atop the potatoes to sleep. He filled it so full, in fact, that he had to cook his meals outside until he could sell some of his bountiful harvest.

A lean fellow named Harry Sears (on the project they call him John Farmer) has been putting down the community fields and gardens for the new Matanuska valley colonists from Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. Behind with planting at first because his equipment was delayed, he took a handful of inexperienced helpers and rammed in 295 acres spread in patches over 60 square miles.

22 Hours a Full Day

"That man worked 22 hours a day.

but only 60 acres of it had been cultivated last year. I figured some of it had been pretty well worn out and we had to fertilize 135 acres of it. We'd have fertilized more but the fertilizers didn't come in time.

"I expect a pretty good yield, though, especially on the fertilized stuff. You hear about some fellows not having had any luck farming in the valley. They were just old prospectors who ran out of gold, then took out homesteads and sat around wondering why something didn't happen to give them another million in gold. Anybody who tried made a living off little four and five acre patches. The only thing is when you got growing weather here you got to give it hell. You got to plant all hours of the day and night and you got to cultivate the same way, for this old sun doesn't wait for any man. It's got other stuff besides yours to tend to."

Sears is putting up wild hay for winter feeding for the colony's stock, on the Cottonwood flats at the lower end of the valley. A sweet grass, some of it high as a man's head or better, grows there in an immense level plain.

"If they'll give me nine men I'll put up 100 tons in two weeks," he said at the start of his labors, "and it won't cost us but about \$4 a ton. The only thing is I want to get as much done as I can before the rainy season. I've lost some hay by spoilage because I couldn't get it dry."

Boiled Too Long

Many of the colonists have heard stories that Matanuska potatoes won't ripen, that they have to be harvested while green. Sears has an answer.

"You get low ground and put your spuds in late—and of course they won't ripen," he replies. "They won't any place in the United States, either. If you put spuds on the right place they're as good here as you can raise 'outside.' I've had people try out both 'outside' potatoes and ours and they can't tell the difference. In fact, the only complaint the lady in the hotel over at Wasilla has against our potatoes is that they're too mealy. I told her she was boiling them too long—and she was."