

Pioneer Life Full of Work

Alaska Colonists Would Like to Hunt or Fish, but Duty Is Stern

This is the third of a series of stories on family life in the Matanuska valley colony.

BY STAFF CORRESPONDENT OF THE JOURNAL
Palmer, Alaska—(By Mail)—What every man up here would like to do is get out and fish or knock over a bear, but what he has to do is keep working—sometimes until his tongue hangs out.

The summer days are long, but there are not many of them, and the big problem for the head of every family in the Matanuska valley colonization project is to get his family under cover before the snow flies. Tents now being used would be inadequate.

Chancey Poor has found cutting cabin logs no snap even though he's a good woodsman.

"It's the Mosquitoes"

"It isn't cutting the logs," he said. "That part's easy. It's the mosquitoes. At first the mosquitoes were so thick I didn't dare take off my head net to eat lunch. I just grabbed a couple bites off a sandwich and took a sip of coffee. Finally I got the idea to take some netting into the woods with me and build a little room to eat lunch in. When you're working like we are up here you got to eat."

In the woods by 6 or 7 a. m., the men slash away at brush and timber until what would be nightfall in Wisconsin or Michigan and then sometimes go back after supper to work until 11 p. m. or even until midnight.

"A man has to do it," said Carl Erickson, who is aided by a strapping son, Cameron. "This land up here doesn't clear so bad, but there's a lot to be done."

For the average cabin, 125 logs with 12-inch butts and 7-inch tops are needed. Some men had them cut in the first two weeks; others are still chopping away.

Two Boil Lancers

In off hours the men handle the cows and horses, aid around the commissary, help unload freight or build furniture for their own homes.

Paul Jahr and Walter Huntley are the unofficial veterinarians helping to keep the stock well. They lance boils with jackknives and give cows laxatives out of a Milwaukee beer bottle. Huntley is considered the best cow man in camp. Guernseys that kick the milk pails from some men are docile with him.

Huntley is accomplished in other ways as well, so he's a very busy fellow. He sings a mean baritone at all the community gatherings and is getting things lined up for a Boy Scout troop.

Men with carpentering ability have been assigned to help other colonists prepare their homes. That's where a man like Victor Johnson comes in handy. Industrious and intelligent, he's told many a settler how to chip a log to strengthen his home.

For the women folk their "tenting out" life in Alaska is mostly one wash day after another. Here there

is not much more than dirt for children to play in and not much more than dirt for men to work in. Not content with all the family laundrying, a few women take in washing from single men in the booming village.

"I made \$30 in three weeks," Mrs. C. H. Meier boasted proudly. "I don't charge much, just according to what the men are making and I get a lot to do."

With their men busy in the fields, several women are doing all the family gardening and soon they'll be busy canning a winter's supply of beets, cabbage, carrots and wild fruits. They have found, too, that sometimes they must step in where the men ordinarily would be.

In any tent city, fire is a great hazard. Thus fire fighting equipment that can be pulled from place to place has been made available at some camps. It was planned that the men should operate them, but Mrs. I. M. Sandvik put her foot firmly down on that plan.

Women Must Learn

"You got to learn the women how to run these do-hinkies," she insisted. "The men have plenty to do, and the cows always get out when the man's away."

To reduce health hazards, the women have even gone out and dug ditches for burning and burying garbage.

Director Don Irwin of the project had his women colonists sized up right when he told a group of them: "I want to tell you women now that the success of the men depends upon you." If it wasn't for the wives driving toward their objectives—a home in this new land—half the men might go off fishing instead of getting their cabin logs cut.

24 Men and Four Hammers

The Alaskan colonization project is running true to form. Government, undertaking to do something as a vast community enterprise, does it as badly as possible.

Here was a project that called for careful planning. Not only planning, but co-ordination of all the agencies that would be asked to help. Labor would be needed, so it was to be expected that whatever department carried the responsibility of furnishing men would have plenty of help on hand. The administration is woefully short of labor. Somebody else would be furnishing shovels and hammers but it was to be expected that there would be plenty of tools. Instead, 24 men appear to do carpenter work on some construction, and they have four hammers among them!

The first materials needed, of course, would be those basic supplies necessary to construct a colony, get the colonists under shelter, provide water and food. Along with that would go the clearing of some land and the planting of such crops as could yet be raised.

Washington had the water level in the valley marked on the charts at from 15 to 60 feet. But the water level disagrees with the charts and as a result wells must be from 60 to 100 feet. Never mind, they would drill the wells. But when the drilling machinery arrived it was discovered that the drills were too large for the casing in which they must work. Some government clerk at Washington probably does not yet know that in the process of sinking a well the drill goes inside the casing.

On some things, however, the government is prompt. Off the ship rolls a nice new potato grader, all geared and set to grade the big crops which the valley is to produce. But there are yet no crops, and the land is not even cleared to plant a crop!

All this, as related by Arville Schaleben, The Journal's staff writer who went to Alaska with the colonists, is discouraging; for it is the way government seems to work out nearly every time. With all our experience, with a horde of government employes such as this country never saw before, except in war days, one might have thought that this colonization job could be done correctly. But a bureaucrat seems never to learn.

Perhaps the reason is that he never has to. This project was supposed to cost a million dollars. Now, with the short northern summer soon to close, it appears certain that the whole colony will require government support for another year, and the talk is that the cost will be two millions. If private enterprise had figured on a million, it would have made sure that this million was the cost; otherwise, it would go broke. But if all you have to do is to send to Washington for another million, why figure? The taxpayers will make up any deficit.

Yes, all this is discouraging, but it also is enlightening. Politicians and political groups are forever saying what they will do, and how they will do it, if elected. The Socialists are particularly good at that. They know exactly how to put the city in the milk business or the food business, any business. To hear them tell it, they are qualified to run every human activity. In the nation, there are a lot of New Dealers who seem to have pretty much the same idea.

Well, look at Alaska—24 men standing around a badly needed barn, with four hammers to put it together! And no more hammers closer than Seattle. *Sen. Fawcett*