

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.

Every Day Is Wash Day

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-bunkies," she in-

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—

'Heat' of Battle Over



Colony's First Funeral Described by Reporter

BY STAFF CORRESPONDENT OF THE JOURNAL
Palmer, Alaska—(By Mail)—Jack Lund's long shadow stooped on the warehouse wall and it held a measuring stick in its hand, and Dick Bennett's shape cast by the gasoline lamp pulled a dull saw across a thin fir board.

It seemed the shadows were talking, that eerie, wet June night in the Matanuska colony warehouse, and that Jack's was saying:

"I made one of these once, when I was booming in Idaho years ago. A fellow named Colbert died and all he had in the world was his watch and his bar. So I made him a coffin out of his rosewood bar. It was a fine job, too, and we buried him in it with honors because he was a good guy."

And Bennett's was saying:
"I'm not much of a carpenter tonight. I measured the little boy for the coffin and when I cut out the sides and the cover I always think maybe it might be my own boy lying there."

Shadows Work All Night

We walked a hundred rods up a muddy rise in the ground to the hospital tent, which was the pioneer colony's mortuary that sad night. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Clayton sat huddled in the front part around a round gasoline heater with small isinglass windows in the door that the blue light danced through.

Mrs. Clayton said Donald Henry Koenen had been a fine, lively boy with a wistful smile that everybody liked. And Clayton took us in to the hospital cots and pulled the white covers from one of them. And he struck a match and held it over the delicate features of the charming child who had been the first of America's "last pioneers" to die on the "last frontier."

All through that night and until 10 the next morning the shadows bent and calculated and worked on the warehouse wall until they had built a simple coffin of fir. And Mrs. I. M. Sandvik and Mrs. Grant France lined it with white cloth and adorned its lining with blue strips of ribbon.

Laid on a Sawhorse

Then they carried it to the mortuary on the knoll and Mr. and Mrs. Clayton surrendered their lifeless charge.

For the funeral, in temporary Memorial hall, the women and the children went into the wild flowering woods and gathered bluebells and their waxy buds and pale roses. crosses and these they arranged appropriately when the coffin came

and was laid on boards across two sawhorses in the hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Huntley sang "Good Night Here, Good Morning Up There" and "Sometime We'll Understand." The women, and children, too, wiped tears from their eyes. The mother cried on her husband's shoulder and the father, Henry Koenen, held tight around her shoulders to lend her his strength in her mournful hour.

"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me," the pastor quietly read.

After awhile the services ended. They lifted the coffin into the back of a small truck and drove it to the edge of a brush clearing, with the people filing sadly along behind.

March to a Clearing

Five hundred paces along a path through the brushy willows marched the cortege until we came again to a clearing, at the back of where the community center will be. They banked the flowers around the fresh grave and lowered the fir coffin into it while the Rev. B. J. Bingle read again:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is within men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death,