

Former Resident Tells Interesting Story of Trip to Alaska and Life In the Rich Matanuska Valley

Winnett Times
Winnett, Montana

Dear Editor and Friends,

Before we left Montana several asked us to write a letter to the paper telling all about this colony in the Matanuska Valley. We had such a wonderful trip that I would like to tell you a little about that too.

On October 23 we left my parent's home on Sage Creek and started on our long journey, really not having a very good idea of what we were going to find in this distant territory. We travelled to Seattle in our car, arriving the morning of October 27. Herb bought our tickets to Seward on the S. S. Yukon, which was supposed to leave October 29. Then the strike was called but the report was that the trouble would be settled within a few days. Helen and Delmar Cole invited us to stay with them until we could start for Alaska, so we spent several days with them and enjoyed a visit. They were so interested to know all the news of the folks back home. We saw that the strike was not to be settled so soon as we first thought so we rented a cabin in a tourist camp not far from Cole's and lived there until November 12. Then Delmar took us to their home to stay until the boat sailed the following day.

At 11:30 P. M., Friday the thirteenth, we left Seattle aboard a Canadian boat, Princess Alice, and went to Vancouver, B. C. At Vancouver we got off Princess Alice and went straight to Princess Norah, which we travelled on as far as Juneau. It was a wonderful trip as we were on the inside passage and in sight of land most of the time. The last day of our trip the passage was so narrow that it looked like a river. The scenery on both sides of us was wonderful. The further north we came the more beautiful the scenery we found. We got off the boat at Juneau not knowing what we were going to do or where we were going to go.

Of course, during the strike, no passenger boats were sailing for Seward. The mail was carried on Canadian boats to Juneau and from there on U. S. coast guard cutters. We had hoped to ride on a coast guard cutter but were informed in Juneau that they did not take passengers. Well, Herb called on the governor, told him that we wanted to go to Seward on a cutter and also that our money was nearly gone. He promised to help us but we had to wait for a cutter to come to Juneau. It was not many days before the U. S. C. G. Tallapoosa arrived. We could not find out when it would leave for Seward and it was very plain that they did not want women aboard as they were not equipped for passengers. Then came the terrible Juneau slide and we can feel very thankful that the apartment we were living in happened to be on the opposite side of town. More slides were expected if the rain did not

Palmer, Alaska,
June 11, 1937.

cease and it continued to come down in torrents. It was on the afternoon of November 22 that the captain of the Tallapoosa received a telegram to take us to Seward and the boat sailed the following morning. There had never been a time in my life that I had been more thankful I guess.

The hospital room was turned into our living quarters and we started for Seward. We had two single births for six of us. All the medicine on the boat was in the room, and we couldn't open a port-hole because the water would come in. The children promptly got sea-sick and stayed that way a big share of the way. I might add that Herb and I fed the fish one day. The sailors were wonderful to us. Our room was kept well supplied with candy, nuts, oranges and apples and the children were entertained by the whole crew at the times they were not seasick. Now, if any of you ride on a cutter you need not be in a hurry to get to your destination. The cutters cruise along the coast doctoring sick natives and enforcing fishing laws, etc. It was not until November 30 that we arrived in Seward. The children had taken cold and we were all nearly exhausted.

December 1 we rode to Anchorage on the train and saw wonderful mountain scenery and an enormous glacier. We traveled most of the way through wild, uninhabited country. In Anchorage we spent the night and were still more tired than when we got to Seward. The children had the earache and a doctor had to be called. The next day when we got on the train to travel the last forty miles to Palmer we were a weary family.

The hospital was the first place we went to in Palmer and there they kept the three oldest children until we could get settled. Herb, Baby and I were kept at the dormitory where teachers and all single members of the staff live.

Right after we had eaten our dinner Herb drew our land by picking a slip of paper out of a hat. It happened to be Tract Number 74, located two miles south of Palmer—three miles via road. The next morning he was taken to our farm but I remained at the dormitory another day so he could get the house warm and everything in condition for us to move the children into.

Our tract of land was covered with dense timber and about a third of which was birch and the rest spruce. We had a two-acre clearing on which stood our six-room log house, a temporary barn, and work shop.

Our house is so much nicer than we had expected to find it. It is very comfortable, finished with ply-wood. Downstairs we have four good-sized rooms and clothes closets; upstairs we have two bedrooms and two clothes closets. In one bedroom downstairs we have a good second-hand bed and dresser, in the other new twin beds and a good second-hand chest of drawers.

In our living and dining room combined we have an overstuffed chair and sofa to match, an end table, dining table

and six chairs, buffet and circulating heater, all second-hand. The kitchen has built-in cupboards and a sink with outside drain, a breakfast set and enameled range. Upstairs we have two beds and two dressers. We have an A. B. C. power washing machine which is a wonderful help to one who has four small boys to wash for. We brought our sewing machine from Montana.

By the end of this summer we expect to have our barn, chicken house and well house completed. (They must be built according to specifications.) We have a drilled well close to the house that has soft, ice-cold water.

The Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation has the stumps pulled with a big "cat", then it bulldozes them into piles, plows the land the first time, and gets it ready to be seeded. The cost of course, is added to our debt.

To live we have the work program which pays so much cash for each kind of work done on the farm. For instance, we got \$50 an acre for slashing, burning the brush and skidding logs. The money thus earned is charged to our account.

The temperature last winter surprised us very much. We expected Alaska to be a cold place but most of the winter the thermometer registered above zero. The coldest here in this part of the valley was thirty below, dry cold, and no wind. (It stayed that cold only a few hours). No cold spell lasted more than a few days and then we had a "chinook". Most of the time last winter Herb slashed in his shirt sleeves.

The length of time that one sees the sun during the winter depends on how close he is to the mountains. on the south side of the valley the sun is low in the sky. Here, on the shortest day last winter, it was two hours from the time we first saw the sun until we last saw it but it was out of sight behind mountain peaks more than half of that time. In places in this valley there is quite a period of time that the sun is never visible. We did not need a lamp all the hours on our shortest day.

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was married in Fairbanks a few weeks ago to a girl that taught in the Palmer school last year. Jim's partner knows the Newmans—ate dinner at their home once. I met a man from Scobey who had been in Valentine. He knew Gladys

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Now, it is daylight in the Matanuska. One can read a newspaper at any hour of the night without needing a light.

We find that this world is small after all for we have met people who know folks we know and I even met a girl I had met before. Anton Anderson, who ran the Great Northern survey through Winnett and lived in the Northern hotel, was the engineer in this colony until a few weeks ago. Jim Perrin, who was formerly the editor of the Geraldine paper, lived next door to Frank Nelson in Geraldine. He also knew the Weingarts. It will no doubt be of in-

these people to hear that Jim was married in Fairbanks a few weeks ago to a girl that taught in the Palmer school last year. Jim's partner knows the Newmans—ate dinner at their home once. I met a man from Scobey who had been in Valentine. He knew Gladys Sederholm and two other friends of mine from Whitetail. Peggy Pimper-ton from Belt, who attended normal at Dillon when Inez Eld, Gladys Sederholm and I did and who we helped elect Carnival Queen, taught in Palmer last year. We had a fine visit.

A gravelled road reaches every tract in the colony. If this were not so an airplane would have to be the only means of travel at certain times of the year because of the mud. This is not due to a great amount of precipitation but to little evaporation. It would be impossible to raise a crop here if it were not for the fact that there is so little evaporation. Since we have been here the sun has shown most of the time but the soil is always moist. We are having our dry season now. The

wet season is expected to begin at any time.

The ground is covered with moss which is an insulator, preventing the ground from thawing out. At any time of the summer one can kick his heel down to ice in the timber. When the timber and moss are rMOVED, of course, the ground thaws out as elsewhere.

We have free bus service carrying children to the modern school in Palmer. The bus passes within a few feet of our house. Friday nights we have free bus service so people can attend the movie in Palmer and, also Sundays for church services. There are also special occasions for free bus service so as to make it possible to attend plays, special religious services, etc. Grown people may ride on the buses when they are going to the school if they pay twenty-five cents a-piece.

We have been told that Palmer has the best equipped hospital and the best doctor in the territory. All hospital and doctor bills were cancelled for colonists before 1937. Now colonists are given special rates.

A telephone line is strung through the colony so no has to go very far to get to a telephone in case of an emergency. Herb had occasion to use the telephone in the house on the adjoining forty twice last winter soon after we arrived. Our baby had pneumonia and we needed the doctor.

Until about a month ago we had a Red Cross nurse. She made a visit to each home once a month and, if any one were reported sick, she made a visit at that home every day until he had recovered. At present no funds have been raised to support a new nurse but we may be able to have one a little later.

Every child in the colony was vaccinated free of charge for diphtheria and for small pox. the test for tuberculosis was also given.

For lights we have the Aladdin lamp that we brought with us and a Coleman lamp. Perhaps in time we will have electricity and also running water, but we cannot expect that for a few years.

Alaska has no law requiring a fishing license but you must be a resident for a year to get a hunting license. Last night Herb went fishing and came home with five large rainbow trout. Fish are plentiful in these streams but sometimes they refuse to bite. We believe that Herb will be able to get his limit of game when the time comes that he can hunt. Moose, mountain sheep, mountain goats and black bear are found here. One does not need to venture far to find huge Kodiak bear. A real bear gun is a necessity if one is going to hunt here. A few miles north of here one can find plenty of caribou.

We have not been here long enough to see a crop or to know what the market will be but we believe that it will be possible for us to make a very good living here in one of the most beautiful places one can imagine.

A short time ago Mr. and Mrs. La Duke, formerly of Big Timber, invited us to go with them to visit Harold Gershmel. We had a fine visit and Mrs. Gershmel gave us a stack of "Winnett Times" to bring home. We enjoyed them very much. Gershmels seem well satisfied with the farm they drew. They have a very cozy home situated in a beautiful place.

Your friend,
Thelma Caulkins.

P. S. If you read "I'm a Cream-Puff Pioneer" by Mrs. Victor Johnson in the June "American" you will get an excellent picture of this colony. Mrs. Johnson is one of the first ladies that I met in Palmer.