

Colonists Voice Thanks for New Chance in North

Led by Minister, Pioneers Hold Memorial Day Rites in New Commu- nity Building

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Palmer, Alaska - (By Radio) - By the light of the soft midnight sun the Matanuska colonists Thursday remembered the brothers and fathers who died for them in the World war.

They met in the tiny temporary recreation hall hammered together out of spruce logs and finished boards hauled into the valley by the railroad which runs one regular train a week.

Under the sheltering canvas roof they bowed their heads and prayed and thanked God for the "new chance" He had given them.

Flag at Front of Hall

Presiding was the Rev. E. J. Bingle, stumpy Presbyterian pastor who came with the first of the colonists and has tramped about in boots through the forest helping them with the many pioneering troubles that beset them.

"Thank God," the pastor said, "that we can meet here amid all His glory on this fertile soil with its majestic mountains and retreating forests."

At the front of the hall hung a faded American flag whose staff was a splintered stick. Around the piano gathered a violinist, a guitar player and two singers. Cramped on wooden benches and cluttered around the hall's edges was the audience. Eight little girls with braids in big ribbons wriggled on the first bench. Seven little girls and a girl conscious boy snuggled on the second.

Mosquitos Bothersome

Claire Laftam of Shell Lake, Wis., dressed in his best brown suit, assisted the Rev. Bingle. It was his duty to announce the program.

"Now the ladies' chorus is going to favor us with a couple of numbers," he announced gingerly.

Ten women and girls sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and when applause flattered them beyond words came back with "Johnny, Get Your Gun."

In an aside, as the cheerful clapping subsided over the hills, the pastor remarked, "Those lousy mosquitos are getting bad."

And indeed they were. Only one person in the hall had wisely prepared against them. She, Mrs. Carl Erickson of Rhinelander, Wis., switched the pests away with a spruce bough.

Then there came still other disturbers to mar the pastor's triumph. Midway of the services he had to yell out the open side of the hall and say: "Somebody tell those kids out there that if they have to play baseball they should keep their mouths shut."

Hall Is Dedicated

The booming voiced strawboss

from the transient laborers' camp did—and the kids did.

Lester N. Troast, the Alaskan architect on the project, spoke briefly in dedicating the building.

"I dedicate this hall to no religion, to no social group, but to you pioneers of Alaska," he said. "Let's call it Memorial hall. Let's dedicate it to those brothers and sisters and fathers who are not here. May it be of service to us in making this project succeed."

30 Seconds of Silence

Now came the wandering preacher's turn to lead the flock in song.

"We are going to sing together," he explained. "Those of you who have books lead—those of you who haven't can hum the tune. We're going to sing 'Taps' and then have 30 seconds of silence. This program is being sponsored by the colonists who were World war veterans—there must be 40 or 50 of them. You all know what 'Taps' means."

Erect and with heads undraped the pioneers stood. Rev. Bingle broke the silence. These are his words:

"God bless those who yet live that were connected with that terrible conflict. God bless those who live no more. Help us to be worthy followers of them. Amen."