

State Press

MATANUSKANS CUT LOOSE

(Wausau Record-Herald.)

Wisconsin and Minnesota have a special experiment in Alaska, since most of the colonists of this curious pioneer effort came from these two states. So it is newsworthy hereabouts that on October 1 the colonists are to be set adrift, and will thereafter have to work out their own salvation. Their "security payments," their unlimited credit with the government, will cease. And they will be expected to pay for their homesteads out of income.

The government has spent large sums in establishing the 168 families in the valley, which produces lush crops in its short summer. But it has its drawbacks, too. The insect pests are numerous and vicious, and the ground is so damp that hay will not dry. It is hard to find a market for their produce; and there has been incompetence and worse in management which reflected upon all the colony, for it has been operated as a sort of communal experiment—one of those little pocket-edition efforts to try out some other than the American way of life with which the New Deal has been so taken. In any event, about a quarter of the families originally brought to the land have packed up and left, most of them thoroughly disgusted. Yet many liked it from the start and still do, and expect to get along.

Their prospects are not too good. The director of the colony openly admits that the most the colonist families can expect from their homesteads is something like \$360 a year each. Maintenance, of course, is supposed to come from their lands. But how do all else that a family needs, and meet the payments on an average \$4,000 debt to the government, on \$360 a year? Certainly it is much less than the \$75 a month "security payment" which each family has been enjoying since they were settled.

When one thinks of the over-all cost to the government, a great share of which has already been written off, it would seem that not only the colonists but the government would have been better off if the benevolent Uncle Sam had simply purchased outright a good farm for each of the families in their home states, and let them go to work, near their friends and relatives.