

Colonists Voice Thanks for New Chance in North

Friday, May 31, 1935

Led by Minister, Pioneers Hold Memorial Day Rites in New Community Building

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
OF THE JOURNAL STAFF

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 off 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.

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Draw Farms From a Box

Alaska Pioneers Get Plots but Some Trade, Now for Hard Work

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
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Palmer, Alaska—It was journey's end Thursday for the 128 men settlers from Michigan and Wisconsin who are to establish new homes in the Matanuska valley.

After a sleepless rail ride from Seward they lined up in the open under a warm, smiling sky. They were joined by the Minnesota settlers who arrived here two weeks ago and drew lots for the 40-acre plots which will be their future farms.

Farm From a Box

Director Don Irwin stood on a crude platform of planks over steel barrels and briefly explained the procedure. Then a cardboard box was brought forth, containing little folded slips of paper, each giving the legal description of one of the 40-acre farms. Each settler stepped forth and drew his slip. Fate ruled those moments. It smiled kindly on some, giving them land near this tiny railroad station and to some tracts on fish filled creeks or placid blue lakes. Others it put on the outer fringes of the project, seven or eight miles from the proposed community center.

But the settlers had held their own little lottery first to determine places in line for the important drawing. Some of the Minnesota settlers played "hunches" and designated their wives or one of their children to draw for them. Arthur Hack of Ogilvie, Minn., pulled first. He got No. 168. No 1 stayed in the box until but a handful remained, then fell to Martin McCormick, East Tamas, Mich. So McCormick, tall and rawboned, stepped up to pick, sight and unseen, the little slip that would allot him his new farm. He was intensely sober that moment. Not a muscle of his face moved as he thrust his hand into the lottery box, but his fingers trembled.

Lands Were Bartered

McCormick slowly withdrew the slip, unfolded it and read aloud to the others the description. He pushed through the crowd to the map and discovered that his luck had indeed been good. He had drawn a fine piece just two miles from the station.

"That suits me," he smiled. "That's good land. I can make it there."

The drawing continued for three hours. Some got what they had hoped for, smiled ear to ear and clapped comrades on the back. Others were disappointed because they would be separated from close friends, or because they would be far from good fishing.

All this led to considerable consequent bartering. The men got together and exchanged slips. Some of those who had drawn better tracts demanded something to boot in the

Alaska Perils Have Altered

Sun. — May 26, 35
Men Get Their Guns to Bring Down — of All Things—an Aviator

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN
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Palmer, Alaska . (By Radio) - Scattered by families in eight tent camps, located near the 40-acre farm tracts drawn by lottery, the Wisconsin and Michigan colonists in the Matanuska valley spent Saturday tramping through the brush and timber of their frontier possessions and getting ready to pitch in and start clearing their land as soon as they get the word to go.

The ambitious settlers are almost unanimous in declaring themselves satisfied with the property which has been allotted to them. A heavy black soil, uniform throughout the 8,000 acres, is most pleasing to the farmers after close examination.

Find Soil Like Garden

"This is the kind of soil you dream about," said Henry Larose, jr., of Phillips, Wis. "They say there is not a bad piece in the valley. Give us a couple of years and we'll make a garden out of this territory."

Most of the settlers figure that they will not get more than a few acres cleared this season, but hope to have cabins up within a few weeks and cozy and complete by winter. Carpenter settlers are to be given two or three men each to help build the log homes.

exchange—and got it. Others tried to drive too hard a bargain and found no takers. A surprising number were completely satisfied when the drawing and bartering was all over and most of the little groups who had come from Michigan or Wisconsin or Minnesota together had managed to get farms near each other.

One settler had swapped a strip along the crystal clear Finger lake to a fishing enthusiast for a tract near town with buildings and 30 acres cleared. That partly cleared farm was considered a particular prize, as indeed it should be, for most of the tracts are covered with brush and light timber.

Care had been taken, however, that no sterile land should be assigned. Every piece was examined and tested for fertility before it was surveyed.

Friday many of the settlers were plodding out over narrow dirt roads or across lots through the brush to get their first look at their farms. They must have realized as they stood looking over the valley that "Uncle Sam's joy ride" was over and from now on it was sweat and lame backs and aching arms.

metal strut and the loss of half his oil drained out while the plane lay on its back, Waterworth righted the crippled plane and took off.

"That's Alaska," said veterans impressively. "You take chances; and sometimes you make it—sometimes you don't!"

Director Irwin was especially angered for he had ordered Waterworth not to leave the ground. He will demand that the reckless pilot be grounded for endangering the pioneers.

Earlier, the settlers had an exciting time when the Wisconsin and Michigan women and children arrived and found the tents not yet ready for their occupancy.

"Where can we go? Where can we go with the children!" some wailed. "No one can live outside in this wilderness!"

Minnesota colonists, already well settled and imbued with the free hearted hospitality of the frontier, made room, and with hasty dinner preparations, saved the day.

Saturday all moved to the various camps where they will live until the individual cabins are ready, and life took on a rosier hue.

"This is more like it," they said, as their ambitious spirits speedily revived. "Now we're ready to make a couple more pages of history!"