

50 Dwellings Rise in Colony

Settlers, Transients Losing Hatred of Each Other in Race to Finish

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Palmer, Alaska (By Radio)—A new snap has come into the Matanuska valley colonization project. Construction is going forward at a greatly accelerated pace and the spirits of most of the colonists are responding enthusiastically. Bickering, although still evident, is fading, and the worst rifts among officials have been closed.

What could have revived the morale of the settlers more than sight of the houses they have dreamed of since reaching this new frontier? Under the reorganized construction program 50 were growing from the ground Saturday. An increased number of skilled Alaskan carpenters have the urgent community center construction program moving. Seventeen wells have been drilled until they tapped water.

Fewer Needed Now

It appears now, therefore, that barring unforeseen difficulty such as failure of lumber to arrive, construction work can be completed by winter, now that it has been trimmed to absolute essentials. This trimming has been extended even to cottage porches, of which there will be none until every colonist has a roof over his head.

The latest estimates are that 160 houses will be needed. The remainder of the 200 structures which were planned will be abandoned because of returning colonists and because the rest have houses already on the tracts good enough to last the winter.

Of the houses under construction, six are complete sufficiently so that families have moved in. The colonists are expected to do their own inside finishing. The remainder range from first work on the foundation to final work on the roof. Transient crews of 10 men each, aided by colonist owners, are working on or have put up 41 houses. Crews of colonists are building the other nine of the 50 now under construction.

Wants Outdoor Plumbing

A few colonists have decided on much cheaper homes, built according to their own plans.

"I'm living in Alaska and I'm going to put up an Alaskan house," Harold Davis of Lansing, Mich., explained. "None of this fancy stuff for me. My wife and I laid out a

three-room place and we're going to start it and be in it in a week. It'll be easier to heat and won't cost me over \$300. I'm not even going to have an inside toilet. No, sir, not in Alaska. Those other places are costing about \$900 with a well or a fence, so I'm going to have plenty of credit left over to buy socks with."

For a long time there has been real antagonism between the transient workers and the colonists. Each group felt that the other wasn't worth a plugged nickel in the woods. Now that they are working side by side they are learning that neither is so bad.

"I can't kick on these guys," said Colonist Henry Roughan of Monico, Wis. "They're helping me build my house and they're doing a good job. All I wanted was to see those timbers going up."

While the men are pitching into building homes, the women and older girls are preparing food for the winter. They are making wild berries into sauces and jellies and at the experimental farm have been working in groups canning salmon which are now running up streams from the Knick arm of the Matanuska river. The men catch them in their spare hours.

"Tough but Possible"

Col. L. P. Hunt is practically dictator of the project since S. R. Fuller, Hopkins investigator, left. Saying that he senses a greatly improved spirit in all divisions of the project, Hunt has been readily mixing in with the colonists, to such an

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extent that one pioneer found him "as common as an old shoe."

"We're not over the hump yet by a long way," Hunt said Saturday, "but anyway we can see the light. This construction job is tough but it isn't impossible. The construction boys and the colonists are beginning to realize that they're all human. That's what we need. This project looks sound and my guess is that it's going to go over."

Fuller, a New York industrialist who was sent here to investigate the project, after the United States senate had asked Relief Administrator Harry L. Hopkins for a report, is due to report soon to Hopkins, and probably to President Roosevelt himself, on the project. He declined to comment before leaving here last week.

"You've been here a long time. You know as much about it as I do," he told this reporter. "All I can say now is that we've made an organization out of what we had at hand, and I think it'll do the job."

Flouts Health Rumor

Fuller avoided peeking into reasons behind the "black eyes" the project has received. He ignored the commissary controversy, and stopped in at Juneau both coming and going to pay his respects to the territorial political powers against whom the colonist had so often shouted. Instead of cutting off the heads of certain officials he simply bent them into niches of less importance without altering their titles—or their salaries. In other words he poured oil on troubled waters instead of draining them off.

The hue and cry from some quarters that the valley is a naturally unhealthy spot was refuted by Dr. R. G. Davis of the Fuller party.

"We visited all the camps and found conditions good," Davis said. "I can say that without reservation. I consider the valley as healthy as any similar number of acres in the United States. The colonists have no

health hazards here that they didn't have at home."

15 Families Leave

Their number increased by last day defections, 15 families were to leave the colony Saturday for the States, after 24 hours' delay occasioned by a change in the sailing plans for the North Star. On Friday 39 more men also left the transient division.

Five families were added to the list at this deadline for signing out while one earlier signer, William Dingman of Benzie county, Michigan, had to forego immediate return because his one child had contracted measles.

Their reasons were the same as those previously given except that Sherman Way of Roscommon, Mich., added a new touch.

"I've always wanted a team of horses," he complained. "I thought I'd get them by coming to Alaska, but I didn't. But I think by selling my stuff and working here I've got enough money to get that team when I get home again."

Colony Cut 15 Per Cent

William Schultz of Lincoln county and Henry Koenen of South Range, Wis., who has a child buried here, were the only Wisconsin signers in the new group.

The other families signing to leave Saturday are Art Hack of Kanabeck county, Michigan, and Ernest Porterfield and Henry Lipke, both of Wexford county, Michigan.

Persons scheduled to leave the Alaska colony totaled 57. With these departures 25 families—or 15 per cent—are now out of the colony. No more may leave at corporation and state expense, with the possible exception of Dingman, until Dec. 1, when the San Mihiel is scheduled to return to Seward on project business. Officials feel that few will leave then, provided they have houses.

[Editor's Note: Early in June it was predicted in a survey article by Mr. Schaleben that 15 per cent of the colonists would leave the Matanuska project.]

A total of 145 transients, excluding deserters of the original 434 construction workers, are now being shipped back because of homesickness, disgust with the work, insubordination or inefficiency. Of the original construction division administrative staff of 19, nine have left from time to time.

Encounter With Bear

Two colonists tangled with a bear Thursday night and embarrassed it mortally. Mr. Bruno came snooping around the new cottage of Russell Pakonen. The young couple ran to the nearby home of Harry Nichols

for help, Pakonen's wife fainting in the driveway from fright. Pakonen and Nichols returned to find the bear still there.

"Nichols shot him high in the rump, while I was getting my gun," Pakonen related. "The bear charged him and we shot him four more times from my front porch. He was only about 15 feet away when he rolled over dead. I got his hide hanging in a tree; it's seven feet long and the bear weighed 400 pounds."

It's against the law to shoot black bear but the colonists claim self-defense.

"If you'd seen him shake his head and open his mouth you'd know he didn't mean us any good!" Pakonen vowed.

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