Colony Houses Rushed in Big Push by Officials

Alaskan Winter Moving Closer, More Men to Be Rushed to Valley to Shelter Families

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Palmer, Alaska—(By Radio)—Out among the timber, now in full beauty of summer green, houses are going up. The big push is on. Man is making the race against an Alaskan winter.

Ten new houses began growing last week where only seven had sprouted in the nine previous weeks since the first colonists came into the Matanuska valley. There’s action—at homesteads, in the forests and in administrative offices—yet the race still is not swift enough to match winter’s relentless stride. No one realizes this better than the present ruling authorities. Col. L. P. Hunt said Saturday that he had asked for enough men to increase the force here by 225, including the 75 transients and 80 Alaskans ordered but a few days ago.

“We need all the help we can get,” says Hunt, a grim, straightforward realist. “We’ve got this house building licked on paper—but that won’t keep families warm. We’ve got to build those houses and there’s some tough roads to travel before we do.”

Transients Laugh Last

Almost as certain as that snow will fall this winter is this fact: All houses cannot be built of logs. Lumber already ordered will have to be put to use.

About four houses are completed to the point where they are livable. The first is that of Vernon Olmstead of Minnesota, who moved in last week even though inside the finishing was barely begun.

“This is better than a tent any day,” Olmstead boasts. “We got a roof at least and will get a better inside when there’s time.”

The transients who built Olmstead’s place are having a good laugh at some of the colonists. There had been complaints that the transients weren’t exercising care. Last week several colonists started new cabins. They got up three logs high on each when an architect looked over the work. He promptly condemned their construction. You actually could run your fist through some of the cracks between the logs. Now those houses must be started anew.

Well Drills Inadequate

Another fine example of colony management was discovered last week. In the face of genuine danger, unable to drill even 60 wells for the 200 colonists, Purchasing Agent Ed Cronin two weeks ago ordered two more well drilling machines, making a total of four on the project. When they arrived they were found too small for any practical purpose.

In desperation the corporation chartered an airplane and the chief well driller and this correspondent flew to Fairbanks to examine a drill on mining property there. That cost $150 but it proved money well spent, for the corporation had been on the verge of chartering a train to bring the machine immediately and it would not be practical here.

Now two more machines have been ordered from the States. When they arrive two more weeks will be lost and at least $8,000 more spent. Thus again a contingency rooted in poor planning necessarily nicks the public purse.

Colony Separates Grumblers

A scheme to check grumbling among the colonists is being effectuated. Wherever possible, colonists’ tents are being moved out onto their own property on the theory that this will keep a man separated from his neighbor and they won’t know of so many things to complain about. About twenty-odd have been moved to date.

Two colonists, however, have cleared entirely out of the valley. Carl Ellison and Walter Olson, both of Minnesota, have moved their families to Anchorage and began hunting work.

Meanwhile, with another date nearing for the ship North Star’s departure for the States, colonists are speculating again on how many families will leave.

Handicapped Sent Home

A few are going to be returned whether they want to or not, including one man with a wooden leg. How case workers ever selected him for such a trying expedition as this mystifies the best official minds. His case equals that of a mother with pernicious anemia whom a doctor said “would benefit from the Alaskan climate.”

Like the cottage builders, the Alaskan road commission is making a race against time. It has thrown 169 men to graveling old roads and building new ones in the valley, working 24 hours a day. More than 100 are working on the Anchorage-Palmer road; the belated start, however, precludes any possibility of completing the Anchorage road before next summer.