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

BY ARTHUR SCHAFER

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 and 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.

Farms From a Box

Director Don Irwin stood on a crowd platform of planks over steel rails 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 far 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 who was 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 Heck of O'Gillie, Minn., pulled first. He got No. 186. No. 2 stayed in the box until but a handful remained, then fell to Martin McCormick, East Tamas, Mich., Bob McCormick, tall and rawboned, stepped up to pick. He smiled and unseen, the little slip that would allow 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.

He quickly 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 muck it in there.

The drawing continued 'til three hours. Some got what they had hoped for, smiled ear to ear and clapped commas on the backs. 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 bickering. The men got together and exchanged slips. Some of those who had drawn better tracts demanded something to boot in the exchange—and got it. Of course they lived a bit a day found no takers. A surprit would be completely satisfied the drawing and boisterous and most of the life who had come from Michigan and Wisconsin had managed to get farms other.

One settler had swapped along the crystal clear fi to a fishing enthusiast for near town with building near town with building close.

Carc had been taken, that no sterile land should signed. Every piece was and tested for fertility before surveyed.

Friday many of the set plodding out over near or across lots through the get their first look at the They must have realized stand looking over the ve "Uncle Sam's joy ride" and farm on it it was the same backs and sching ars.

The men were no tearful at parting from their toasts. It was a 4,000 mi. "from home and can hardly be blamed for being upset.

The women and children will sleep and eat aboard the St. Mihel until they leave for camp. The men were to draw lots Thursday for their 40-acre lots in the Matanuska valley.

All the colonists were at the rail Wednesday when the St. Mihel steamed up to Seward's timbered dock. As the boat nosed in the 13-place boat on the pier burned from martial music an' 200 or so smiling Alaskans were a hand to welcome their new patriots. Others were few, but the crowd on the dock left no doubt of Seward's curiosity about the strangers from the States.

Little Girl First Ashore

Of all the newcomers little Vir- ginia Larrow of Phillips, Wis., was 1st to disembark. She stepped shyly to shore looking cute as the doll she clutched to her. Her deep dimples shown no tears. Two men wrapped her and what she said was not "Alaska, we are here," but "Oh, daddy, they took my picture and it's going to be in the newspapers."

After Virginia came pioneers. They murmured excitedly about the mountains scenery which enfolds Seward, about stowaways who were already wrestling with their fright.