

# Dance Night in Alaska New Thrill for Colony

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN  
OF THE JOURNAL STAFF

Palmer, Alaska—It's dance night in Matanuska, the next village down the tracks, and the sign on our camp bulletin board says:

"Welcome, Colonists! Bring Your Own Instrument if You Know How to Play."

So at 8:30, when here it's still light as afternoon in Wisconsin, we catch a ride to friendly Matanuska.

Matanuska's dance hall is near the center of its 15 or 20 houses and half dozen frame business buildings. It is recently built, of lumber from razed buildings. Gray, black and green painted boards squeeze in among many unpainted ones. Tarpaper shields the roof.

## Trio Plays "Goofus"

The hall is decorated with American flags and red, white and blue bunting streamers stretch to a focal point in the center of the peaked ceiling.

In one corner sits an upright piano, scratched and scarred. The only light in the hall, a gas lamp, rides atop it. The woman who handles the music box is gray haired and bursting with tunes. Standing around her and looking jazzy are two gents sawing on violins, and a fat accordion man.

Now they're doing "Goofus" (remember it, back in 1930?) and keeping time with feet, arms, heads and hips. By and by they get waltzy and ease into "Down the River of Golden Dreams" and then do a little two-stepping with "When I Was a Boy from the Mountains, and You Were a Girl from the Hills." Later on somebody comes with drums. He knows "All the World Will Be Jeal-

ous of Me." He does it, and the crowd cries for more.

## All Kinds of Dancing

Meanwhile, out on the floor, the boys are swinging their ladies, and their ladies are swinging them. 'Round and 'round, crisscross, up and down, back and forth—lea hoppers, one-steppers, two-steppers, a couple of charlestoners, and a gentleman in overalls who just walks forward and backward and varies that not a mite except for a little trotting in a stiff sort of way.

There's a native Indian couple shuffling around. She's got on tennis shoes, he's wearing a buckskin shirt.

"Damn it, you don't dare cut in," says a colonist to another. But the fellow's had just enough Brigadier General (bottled, for you can't buy by the drink in Alaska) and he's gone. He taps the buckskin shirt on the shoulder and bundles the tennis shoed one in his embracing arms.

"Let's dance!" he shouts, and they do.

Most of the women wear boots and breeches, but a few boast fancy dresses. They are flowered or striped or solid colored. Some of the colonists, and the resident women, too, make mighty fine pictures a whirling there on the floor. There are dudes among the men, in loudly striped suits and ties, but mostly there are just plain ordinary farm men in heavy shoes and work clothes.

Toward 2 o'clock the music stops. The sun starts coming out again, after only an hour or two of rest. Folks get in their cars and ramble home through wooded lanes; so ends dance night in Matanuska.

# A City Booms as of Yore in Alaska Wilds

## You Walk Down a Street in Palmer, When You Come Back There Is Something New

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN  
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Palmer, Alaska—(By Mail)—Boom City, where things that can't be done are done every day . . . Boom City, mushrooming out of a wilderness . . . Boom City, which never sleeps . . . which throws grime in your eyes and makes you take it . . . Boom City, that's

Palmer. Incredible, fantastic, confused, blundering, blustering, miraculous, every man for himself and yet every man for his neighbor, contrary today and obedient tomorrow. America, that's your Palmer.

Uncle Sam is doing this. It's his gold that's gilding the city. It's his men that are peopling the streets. It's his money that's peopling the valleys. It's his miners that are leveling the world.

## Five Are Now 1,500

They said in the Colorado and Yukon and Nevada gold rush days that it wouldn't be done again—this mushroom city business. Maybe they were right. But Uncle Sam is weaving a pattern as incredible.

On May 5 Palmer's population was five, all members of the Felton family. On May 6 it jumped to 122. That was when Uncle Sam's transient laborers from California hit town. Now the population exceeds 1,500. The FERA settlers from the states have scrambled in with their families; additional transients are on hand; the administrative force has doubled, tripled and grown to tenfold, and the inevitable boom town drifters came along with their varied wares. Why we even have a pastor or two.

I said things that can't be done are done every day. They dumped 400 women and children settlers on this town at 5 o'clock one afternoon. There wasn't any place for them to sleep or eat. But they slept and they ate.

## Tents Fairly Bulged

Settled families gave room until

## Airplanes Drop in

Special excursion trains run out from Anchorage. The fare is 6 cents a mile—one way. Wealthy excursionists zoom in out of the clouds, for Alaska is air-minded and enterprising pilots from Anchorage quickly established connections. The 40-mile trip costs \$25.

Before Boom City boomed, the Alaska railroad ran one train a week into Palmer. It operated this branch line by the calendar, instead of the time table. Now trains come in every day, bringing gravel, baggage, food, coal, lumber, stoves, tools, tractors, pencils and what have you.

Much of this stuff is dumped off along the sidings. The tiny station platform can't begin to accommodate it. Mattresses, bed springs, suitcases, big timbers and all clutter the railroad grade. By and by they disappear, when the consignee gets time to wander among them and find his own, only to be replaced in night or day by new shipments.

Trucks roll ceaselessly along the dirt roads—always either dusty or muddy. The workers operate them in shifts, for transportation is a real problem in Palmer and available equipment must not stand idle. Loaded until their sides bulge with freight and men, the trucks cut roads to oblivion. Roads must be repaired continually. A mudhole develops. Gravel rattles off the rail cars into dump trucks. Two or three loads are poured into the road hole. Half a dozen men spread them and the parade of trucks over them renews.

Forty-horsepower caterpillar tractors wriggle through the town, lugging wagons and trailers laden with supplies. They attack the cleared lands with their glistening plow blades and slicing discs.

## In every great development cap-

tured power has made man's achievements possible. In the winning of America's west it was the horse. In the building of America's metropolises it was the steam shovel and the derrick. In Palmer it is the truck and the tractor. What has been done could not have been done without them.

## But Things Are Done

Yes, we're jumbled and rough in Boom City. But there's direction here, too, that steps in miraculously and rights things just when it seems confusion is getting the upper hand. And there's no confusion about the main objective—putting 200 farmers into operation in the Matanuska valley. It is just the individual effort that is jumbled, as most individual effort appears to be when things move as swiftly as here.

Whittier said it like this:

"I hear the tread of pioneers,  
Of millions yet to be;  
The first low wash of waves where

# Wisconsin

## Best of Luck Given S

## 'Brother, Let Me It.' One Pic claims on Se Loam of Valle

BY ARVILLE SCHALEBEN  
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Palmer, Alaska—(E) can't find a man as shaven, tobacco spit who inhabit this valley who speaks better. Even the dour boys who since Klondike d "clean mad for the gold," concede its fer

Small wonder then the new colonists from Michigan and Minnesota tered a complaint as they have come to the Take Nicholas Weis Wis. He digs his pile of gold in his hands.

"See this?" he can't beat it. There's where I come from. and a lot of it—red and the sand is black as loaded with humus. do is work it up and Then leave your cro and it'll push 'em up hold of some land here produce."

"This is the kind of dreams about," Arville Crystal Falls, Mich. in a road cut where 10 feet deep."

Claire La Flam, from Wis., said that he had a bit around the Un he had never seen looked better to him. The land does make on anyone who knows about farming, especially compared with the sterile patches abandoned. You it works up. No rocks, no sandy soil that black, fancy soil that right growing wheat heavy yields.