

St. Michael's Parish, Palmer, celebrated its golden jubilee on Sunday, June 9. The parish was founded at the time of the establishment of the Matanuska Colony in 1935.

Archbishop Francis T. Hurley was the principal celebrant of the jubilee Mass. Msgr. Francis A. Murphy, pastor of St. Benedict's Church, Anchorage, and pastor of St. Michael's from

1967-70 preached the homily. Cocreating the Mass with Archbishop Hurley and Msgr. Murphy was Father Gerard T. Ryan, the parish pastor; Father Harry W.

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of the Colony and later general manager, along with priests of the Archdiocese of Anchorage.

A reception was held in the parish hall following the Mass.

A hard-cover memorial book of the golden jubilee of the parish is available from the parish.

The establishment of the Matanuska Colony and St. Michael's parish go hand in hand.

Colonists from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan arrived by boat in Seward during May of 1935 and traveled by rail 150 miles to Palmer. There the colonists lived in tents until homes were built.

The first Mass was said in a tent in Palmer on Sunday, May 26, 1935, by Father Merrill Sulzman, the founding pastor who came from Sacred Heart Parish, Seward, with the colonists.

The actual building of the first St. Michael's church did not begin until June 2, 1936. The site for the church was called the Civic Center. There along with St. Michael's, Presbyterian and Lutheran churches were built. The first

The present St. Michael's Church and rectory were built in 1966-67, by Msgr. John A. Lunney, now pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Anchorage. Msgr. Lunney also built the church at Big Lake in the summer of 1966.

The church in the past two years has undergone renovations which include a new entrance, rest rooms, kitchen and belfry.

St. Michael's has had a dozen pastors over the past 50 years. Msgr. James P. Snead served for 27 years from 1939-1966. Father Gerard T. Ryan, C.S.Sp., an Irish Holy Ghost Father, came to Alaska in November of 1971. Prior to becoming pastor at St. Michael's, Father Ryan was pastor of St. Bernard's, Talkeetna from 1974-79. He became an American citizen on January 28, 1983.

Other priests currently serving in the Archdiocese of Anchorage who were pastors of St. Michael's include Father Ernest H. Muellerleile, 1972-74, pastor of Holy Cross Parish, Anchorage; and Father John Marx, 1974-77, living in Seattle.



Valley Press/Michael Bowen

Patriots celebrate with flag burning

by Michael Bowen

A group in Palmer will celebrate Flag Day tomorrow by burning the American flag.

No, these people are not radicals relishing the sight of Old Glory in flames. Rather, they are the American Legion Post 15 performing their honorable duty of disposing unserviceable flags.

The flag burning ceremony, which is open to the public, will begin at 8 p.m. on Friday, June 14, in the front parking lot of the Palmer Tourist Information Center.

Palmer Post 15, under the direction of Commander Donald Robertson, is reportedly the only American Legion post in Alaska that performs such a service.

According to legionnaire Bob Maloney, 87 torn and ragged flags are scheduled for burning.

"These flags are brought from all parts of Alaska. Two flags were even sent up from Trenton, New Jersey," Maloney said.

After the flags are inspected by three different stations, they are brought to a burning rack where they are doused with diesel fuel and set aflame. Only seven flags will be burned for public observance. The other 80 will be treated similarly in a private ceremony.

As a prelude to the burning, the Air National Guard from Kulis Air Force Base will present a special ceremony called the "Avenue of Flags." All the flags ever flown over the United States will be displayed, with a brief dissertation given for each. Senior Master Sergeant, Jayne Shorie, will serve as the director and narrator.

"The whole ceremony is quite impressive. I think the public will enjoy it," said Maloney.

The American Legion, an organization for the mutual benefit of veterans and their dependents, promotes patriotism and community service. There are 2.7 million members in approximately 16,000 Legion Posts nationwide.

Lawmaker to consider constitutional amendment

Editors Note: This is the third installment of stories based on interviews with legislators who represent the Mat-Su Valley. This week State Rep. Katie Hurley of Wasilla comments on the controversial pay raise for lawmakers.

by Ray Tyson

State Rep. Katie Hurley, D-Wasilla, chairman of the House State Affairs Committee, said this week her committee this summer will look at formulating a constitutional amendment to establish an independent salary commission that would set pay scales for the governor, lawmakers and top bureaucrats.

Hurley also said she may continue pushing her bill next session to repeal the controversial \$46,000 per year pay raise for legislators, which narrowly failed to pass the House last session 21-19.

Hurley's pay raise repeal bill remains in the House Judiciary Committee, where it will either sink or swim next session. If the Alaska Legislature again turns up its nose at the pay raise issue, then voters will have the final say in the November, 1986, general election.

Lawmakers generally work hard during the four months they are in Juneau, Hurley said, but the work they put in during the remaining eight months of the year doesn't justify their annual salary.

However, there may be a motive behind lawmakers' reluctance to kill their own pay increase, Hurley said.

"I believe it has something to do with retirement," she said. "Retirement for a legislator is based on (his) three highest (pay) years. Everyone who qualifies wants to get in their three years" before the issue goes to a vote of the people, or the Legislature repeals the raise.

But Hurley said lawmakers may be more willing to repeal



Katie Hurley

their pay increase next session, in order to avoid it becoming a campaign issue in the upcoming election season.

The long-term solution to the pay issue, she said, may lie in an amendment to the state constitution to establish a salary commission, similar to one adopted by the municipality of Anchorage several years ago.

Although Hurley said "I don't like to meddle in the constitution," she added that it may be the only way to remove salaries from the political arena.

Much of her work this summer, she said, will be conducting research into the possibility of drafting a constitutional amendment that could be placed on the ballot in the future.

In addition to the pay issue, Hurley last session was actively involved in legislation addressing the Longevity Bonus Program, beefing up the Alaska Permanent Fund, liquor licensing, the Older Alaskans Commission, games of chance and campaign ethics.

And like many of her fellow lawmakers, Hurley next session will be looking at ways to cut the state budget in the wake of dwindling state revenue.

Although some programs Alaskans have enjoyed over the years are likely to be axed by the

legislature next year, Hurley said cuts also can be made in lawmakers' personal expenses to help defray costs.

For example, she said, lawmaker's 10,000 pound shipping allowance from their home to Juneau and back again each session is too much. As a member of the Joint House-Senate Legislative Council, Hurley was unsuccessful in changing that policy last session.

"But it seems to me some money can be saved here," she said.

She also said the legislature will have to take a hard look at the way it distributes money throughout the state. While rural school districts end up with huge surpluses of money some years, more populated areas struggle to make ends meet.

But Hurley does not want to see further cuts in funds that support the Legislative Information Office (LIO) network in Alaska. She said the LIO system is one of the few ways citizens can keep up to date on what is happening in far away Juneau.

As a whole, Hurley said the Mat-Su Valley fared well this year, with most of its priorities financed by the state.

"We did a lot better this year," she said. "Cooperation was very evident."

Colonists return to good old days

by Mike Raven

"This has been a great reunion — truly sensational," said Colony Days committee Chairman Louis Odsather, who was already living in Anchorage when the 1935 Matanuska Colony was formed. Odsather ran the commissary, which later became the trading post.

"I got to know each and every one of the colonists. I attended more open houses and barn parties than anyone else in the Valley and I've kept in close contact. There are about 30 or 40 of the original colonists here who moved Outside shortly after settling here in '35 and have not been back since."

Quite a few of the returning colonists were reunited for the first time in as many as 50 years at Friday's registration proceedings in the Irwin Building at the fairgrounds. "The chatter and the embraces were overwhelming," Odsather said.

It took seven months for the

committee to organize the Colony Days activities, he said adding that the weekend had been "very successful."

The daughter of colonists Neil and Margaret Miller, Janell Mickel and her husband, Eugene (Jiggs), returned to Palmer this weekend from Dubois, Wyo., for the first time in 35 years. "There are some people here I haven't seen for even longer than that, some of the fellows were in the service when I left."

Jiggs and Janell met when he was stationed here in the Air Force. The reunion weekend, he said, had been "fantastic. Everybody's just thrilled to death and I'm sure those that couldn't make it will be very disappointed."

Janell's sister, Priscilla Bacon, who still lives in Palmer, also attended the reunion. She went Outside to college and worked in Seward for a number

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Reunion — Many colonists who returned to Palmer last weekend had not seen each other for almost 50 years.



Leland and Bruce Graham. Bruce opened Palmer's first service station in 1936. He worked for the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Commission as a machinist.



Louis Odsather, chairman of the Colony Days Committee, lived in Anchorage when the colony was formed and moved to Palmer to run the commissary.

50-year reunion

Colonists return to Palmer

From page 2

of years before returning to Palmer in 1951.

Bruce Graham moved to Ketchikan from Mt. Vernon, Wash., in 1925. He arrived in Palmer in 1936 and opened the area's only garage and

service station. He also worked as a machinist/welder for the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Commission.

He and Ralph Caruthers built the Valley's first swamp buggy, he said, and used it

for moose hunting. Graham later worked for the Dept. of Fish & Game "when there was only two of us in this part of the state." He retired at age 72.

His wife, Leland, has only

been in Alaska for 14 years and though she was not a colonist, she said she thoroughly enjoyed the reunion.

"It was wonderful to see the comradery and fellowship they felt for each other. They were so glad to see each other. They went through

some rough times — sad times, good times..."

A set of "bingles" was handed out to each colonist by committee member Larry Vasanoja. The bingles were metal coins manufactured by the federal government for use in the colony as money. "Everything was bought

on credit in the colony," Vasanoja said. The bingles were used for one-and-a-half years and saved the commissary department and stores from a lot of work in keeping track of every purchase made on credit, Vasanoja said.

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Couple's lives shaped by Colony

by Jo Blahut

Louis and Estella Odsather weren't part of the contingent of settlers who came to the Mat-Su Valley in 1935 as part of the Matanuska Colony Project, but both became an integral part of it.

Louis, of Norwegian stock, was a young logger and adventurer from Ballard, Wash., when he arrived in Anchorage in 1935.

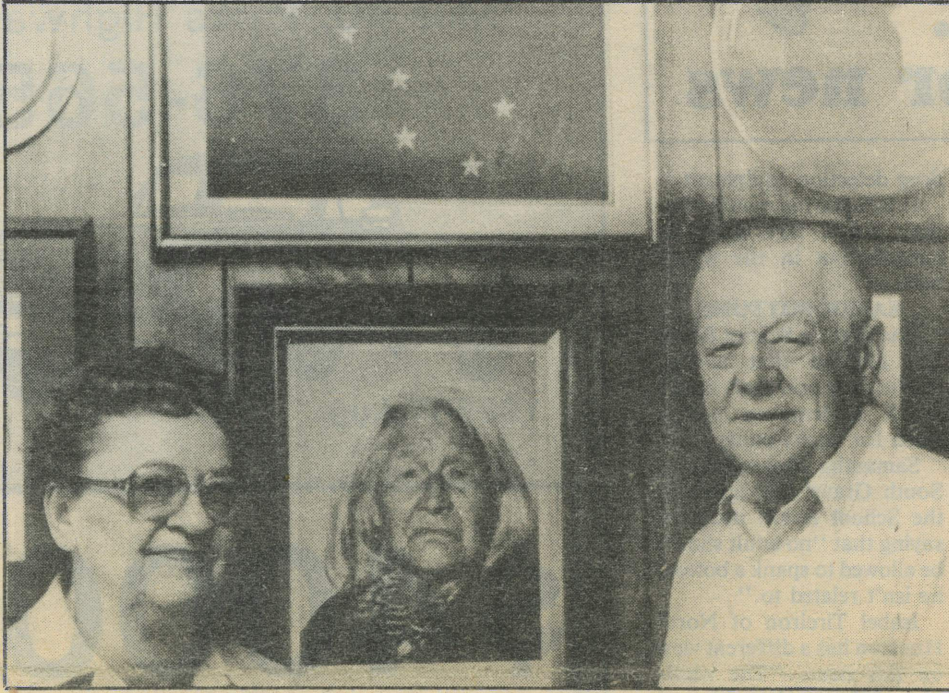
Estella arrived in the Valley with her parents in 1935. They came from Wyoming. Her father, Don Irwin, had been appointed manager of the University of Alaska's Experimental Station.

But, stepping back two years into the history that was to affect their lives, it began with the birth of the Colony Project in Washington, D.C. It was 1933, and the bleak height of the Great Depression was sweeping the nation. Americans, especially those in agriculture, were in dire financial straights, and Washington had to do something to help.

Someone had come up with a plan of embarking on an experimental agricultural project of sorts — of putting some of the farmers from Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota into developing farming in Alaska. President Roosevelt thought the project had merit and gave it the go-ahead. Congress passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 which included the Matanuska Valley project.

After the Irwins arrived in the Valley in 1935, Estella's father was enlisted into becoming the first general manager of the Colony project.

Back in Anchorage, Louis got himself appointed to the Colony project, too. He was general storekeeper in charge of all supplies. That also included assuming the job of chief steward for the hastily thrown-together dormitories



Louis and Estella Odsather have hundreds of artifacts going back to the Matanuska Valley Colony Project days displayed on the walls of their home on Wasilla Lake. They are especially proud of the flag of Alaska, signed and given to them by their friend, Benny Benson, designer of the flag.

Estella, however, went on for home economic studies at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, and Louis went on with the business of running the commissary for the colonists. But it was inevitable, (stepping on shoelaces works every time), and Louis and Estella were married in the Presbyterian Church of a Thousand Logs in Palmer in 1937. Theirs was the first wedding in the little church.

A year later, they bought a little store on Fourth Avenue in Anchorage and called it Lucky's Self-Service. The store grew along with Anchorage. In 1953, they sold it and Louis took on the hotel business. He bought out the old Parson Hotel on Third and H streets, the first real hotel in Anchorage, he said. Later, he sold that to Hickle Development Co., and became a silent partner in an

insurance firm.

His experience with managing the colony dormitory probably influenced his interest in architecture, and he designed and built a three-story business office building on Second and E streets. He sold that in 1969, but his interest in land and acreage was piqued and he began some real estate development of his own.

Louis and Estella have three children; Richard and Kenneth in Fairbanks, and

Kathy in San Francisco who manages a hotel. There are four grandchildren.

In 1976, they moved to their home on Lake Wasilla, which is a study in uniqueness. The house itself was built from logs taken from the old colony granery, Louis said. Its addition is part of an old Alaska Communications System building and wood from the first temporary hospital in the colony.

The house's interior widens eyes in wonder, for most of

that served as accommodations for the teaching staff and for project officials.

It didn't take long for Estella and Louis to meet. In fact, it was unavoidable since she had stepped on his shoelace and wouldn't remove her foot until they were introduced to each other.

all the wall space is covered with artifacts taken from colony days. It's memoirs of times and people past that are kept fresh; reflecting from the multitude of pictures, the awards and the antiques, Louis and Estella's life and their great involvement in the Matanuska Valley Colony Project.

Coming Events!



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to
Matanuska
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Tuesday, October 8, 1985

7:00 p.m. at MEA's

Palmer Headquarters Building

Agenda Items to Include:

- * Power Supply Study
- * Progress Report on Management Review

For more information,
contact Member Relations at 745-3231 ext. 215



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