

Alaskan winter grips the cabins of 170 families, colonists from the States, who are building a new life in a new world. A reporter who shared their hardships from the beginning gives an intimate picture of their life in Matanuska Valley



Typical pioneers of 1936, just arrived from the States, ready to conquer the Alaskan wilderness

Our New Pioneers

THE year 1936 isn't dawning in the Matanuska Valley, just beneath the Arctic Circle in south Alaska. Right now it is 1620 there—the year the Pilgrims from the Mayflower founded New Plymouth.

In that broad, rich valley, primitive with plains and forests of alder, birch, and spruce, 170 farm families from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota—America's new pioneers—are beginning life again. Around them, across the flat expanse, rise the icy Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains, and at the foot of the valley boom the wintry waters of Cook Inlet, arm of the Pacific. Brown bear, some of them twice as long as a man is high, hibernate in the foothills, and over the crusted snow, from inches to many feet deep, herds of moose go

roving, sniffing a new odor in the air.

Four thousand miles from their native land, these men and women of America and their little children, seventy-nine of them under five years of age, are facing their first winter in stout log cabins, hewn with the ax. Impoverished by the depression and unable any longer to wrench a living from the stony, cutover lands of their states, they accepted the invitation of the Federal Relief Administration last spring and struck for a new world and a new life—uprooted themselves and began again—for economic freedom. They who failed in the States are the standard-bearers of their government's first attempt at colonization. And just as FERA, with the stroke of a pen, turned back the clock three centuries for these men and women, they, them-

selves, are turning it forward with labor, modern tools, and the stout hearts of pioneers.

A YEAR ago at this time, silence and desolation lay upon the valley. But now, on 40-acre tracts over an area 60 miles square, the snow-laden roofs of cabins peep from the deep snow on the ground, smoke rises against the perpetual stars of arctic night, and banjos and guitars plink and plunk the strains of *O, Susanna*, the trekking song of the pioneers.

During most of December, darkness lay upon the valley night and day, but few of the pioneers were depressed. Their eyes had been tired from a summer of daylight, of staring sleeplessly at the bright ceiling of a canvas tent. It was

good to have a long night. Even now the daylight is very brief, too short for much work, and the temperature might sink to 40 degrees below zero. But the new pioneers can laugh at the cold. Their log walls are thick, and the government has provided an abundance of warm clothes—heavy boots, heavy underwear, leather jackets, snow suits, fur-lined mittens. Although their first summer was consumed in cutting roads and pounding their houses together, so that they did not have an opportunity to reap much of a harvest, their food supply, I know, is assured for the winter, even when roads to the settlements are blocked with snow.

When I left them there, after having lived in their midst for more than three

ing that the colonization project has been a fizzle so far and is doomed to failure. Their pessimism, I think, is not well grounded. And yet I would not say the project is bound to succeed. It depends upon the men and women of the colony, whether they are real pioneers. Some of them are, I know. I saw them fight and endure. . . . Solitary men lived in the valley before the pioneer families came. It can be done. But as to the project as viewed from an economic standpoint, well, that's something else again.

IT SEEMS simple enough for the government to endow 200 farm families with a credit of \$3,300 each and transport them to a primitive valley near a railroad,

establish them on 40-acre farms under expert guidance, and wait for them to produce crops. At a glance that does not seem to be pioneering. But I was with those uprooted families from the time they left their native homes until the snow came to the mountains of Alaska, and I feel that I have had the privilege of participating in one of the greatest dramas of modern times. Early pioneering was a struggle merely with nature in the raw. These men and women fought not only with raw nature, but with raw politics, inefficiency, and themselves. But you will not understand until I have told you the story from the beginning.

Colonel Otto F. Ohlson, of the government-owned Alaska railroad, one of the best poker (Continued on page 90)



Colonists of the Matanuska Valley may look upon grandeur like this—the jagged Chugach Mountains. At right: The author, hooded and gloved against Matanuska's mosquitoes



months as a newspaper reporter, one month's supply of food was available in the community store in the heart of the valley and another was cached in a big white warehouse near by.

They have provided well against the subarctic winter. Most of them are finding a deep contentment in that wilderness—a peace they never knew in the shacks and cabins on the poor soil of their native states. The wolf at their door was figurative then. Now it is real. But they prefer the real one when the door is thick enough to keep it out. Those who dwell in the valley now are survivors of a terrible summer and fall of hardship and embroilment more disheartening than mere physical privation. They endured it all because they knew how to make the best of things. Those who failed have packed up and returned to the States. They are back on relief rolls now, fighting the battle for enough to eat.

Even as I write, some critics are say-

By Arville Schaleben

Our New Pioneers

(Continued from page 23)

players on the Arctic Circle, is usually credited with persuading the government to establish the pioneering colony in the valley. For years he and his railroad have been inducing people to farm there. A few of the hardy, grizzled ones stayed, but most of them returned to the States or found something else to do in Alaska. They could raise crops—fine ones—but they could not sell what they produced. And the battle with the wilderness slowly drained their vitality and courage.

Through FERA, the Roosevelt administration selected 66 families in Minnesota, 67 in Wisconsin, and 67 in Michigan, all of them on relief or the margin of relief. The credit allowance of each family, \$3,300, included the cost of a 40-acre tract in the valley, a cabin, and a provisions stake. It is repaid over a period of thirty years.

The project has a double-barreled purpose. It is to open up a new country to indigent Americans and, by making them self-sufficient, open up a new market for American products which Alaska does not produce. And eventually, it is hoped, Alaska, through the foundation work of the pioneers, will become self-sufficient in agriculture.

A FEW years ago an American farmer, rich or poor, would have scoffed at the idea of leaving his native land to pioneer in "foreign parts." But last spring it was not difficult for the government to find strong men and women of the soil eager to go anywhere, if only they could find an opportunity to make a living and rear their children. More than 500 families applied for a part in the expedition. But only 200 were chosen—those who had fared most miserably in the States but who, at the same time, were most likely to succeed in Alaska.

There were young Mr. and Mrs. Martin Soyk, for instance, who, soon after their marriage, bought a little plot of land in northern Wisconsin and attempted to eke out a living from the stubborn soil. Soyk, with his own hands, built a log cabin among the young pines and tried to till the stumpy, rocky soil. Sonny and Jimmy were born and there were three mouths to feed besides his own. Soyk struggled on. Then Sonny, undernourished, sickened and died. And one day the Soyks came home from the fields to see their cabin in flames. It was a land fertile in tears. . . .

Others had suffered like the Soyks—strong men, grim with desperation, watching their children starve because the soil was poor. Go to Alaska? They would go anywhere.

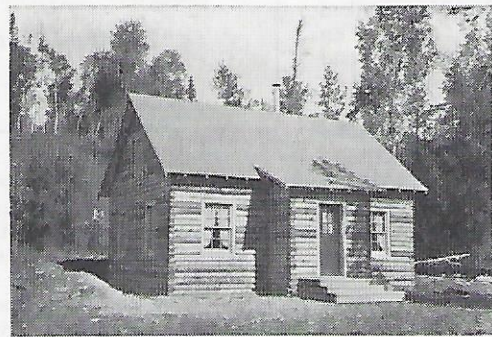
And then there were dreamers like Mr. and Mrs. Victor Johnson, who had been married only a year. For years they had read of Alaska and wished for its freedom. But they never got enough ahead. He was a farmer; she a former schoolteacher. They were a splendid couple for the new world. . . .

The great adventure began in May, when we boarded a train of day coaches at Rhinelander, Wis., for Seattle, the sea, the new world! Young mothers with babies in arms bade farewell to parents, sisters, and brothers, even as pioneer mothers of old, who took the long, long trail with their husbands. The hope of beginning again, so alluring when the cabins were being dismantled, became despair that night on the station platform. . . . And then we were off. When the train went through tunnels, babies cried and mothers hushed them. Dogs in the baggage car howled dismally. And the children, unused to confinement, fretted and tossed.

These modern times! We can span a six months' oxcart trail in four days. We can switch a wilderness three centuries



*J. J. Bugge,
who settled in
the valley be-
fore the pio-
neers—and
made a living*



One of the log-cabin homes in the colony

the troubles beauty wheeled outside the windows and, at every stop, delegations greeted the pioneers with refreshments and merry receptions.

By the time the pioneers reached Seattle, their good spirits were restored. This was a great lark. A theater opened its balcony to the pilgrims. Motorcars were provided for tours of the city. The hotel rooms were luxury compared to the cabins back home. And the food, served at long wooden tables in the transient relief station, was excellent and abundant. Pioneering for Uncle Sam seemed to be very pleasant, indeed.

BUT the day came for cutting away, and the crowd, bundles on back, lined up to board the white transport, St. Mihiel, that was to carry them to Alaska. There were misgivings then. "Is it safe?" the women whispered, and the men, a little white around the lips, said, "Sure!" And then someone screamed, "Where's Willie? Willie! Where are you? . . . He's lost! Oh, he's lost!" A ship's officer quieted the woman. "He can't get away," he said. "You're all hemmed in by rope." And all of them realized that nobody could get away. There was no turning back.

Two days later the St. Mihiel was plowing along at fifteen knots through swells twelve feet high. I was one of few adults who were not seasick. Most of the children were up and around chasing one another across the decks, poking their noses into every cubbyhole of the ship. But the men lay groaning between decks, and the mothers, who alone were given cabins, were turning away from food served by Filipino boys. But, through sickness and despair, an improvised orchestra played,

ahead in a few years. The train roared across plains and mountains, and one lanky, bearded fellow stretched his legs and cried, "The whole darn' Middle West is behind us now. I wouldn't go back for anything." But one could not know what was in most hearts. The men stared out the window grimly and the mothers looked dumbly at their children. . . .

As the train soared upward over the mountains, little Donnie Ellsworth, of Ontonagon, Mich., got the nosebleed, and some of the women, who hadn't spoken for hours, moaned and said their ears felt as if they were full of water. Then Raymond Puhl, a seven-year-old adventurer from Rice Lake, Wis., got the measles, and had to be segregated from the rest of the passengers. But in the midst of all

There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding, which didn't make things any better.

We all thought, of course, that the families would go together into the wilderness, but when we arrived at Seward, the women and children were instructed to live aboard the transport until the men had gone up-country and prepared camp. When we left, the women and children wept as if we were off to die on a battlefield. I don't know why. I suppose it was because the women felt for the first time that they were far from home, uprooted, homeless. But we went up merrily.

The winding little Alaska railroad, which has only 70 freight cars to its name, twisted and squirmed through the forests like a scenic railroad. It was a miserable trip to Palmer, the tiny town in the valley,

but it was so much better than the rough Pacific that we sang. And, for the first time, we saw the beauty of Alaska—its colored, snow-sprinkled mountains, its virgin forests, its clear streams and pools.

Nicholas Weiler, of Medford, Wis., dug a toe into the black, loamy soil, fashioned a tiny pile, and rolled it in his palms.

"Black as coal and loaded with humus," he said. "Jet-black . . . no clumps . . . no rocks . . . no sandy wastes. Gosh, but it's good! It's sweet!"

They all stood around, marveling at the soil and the mountains and the lush greenery of the place, while Don Irwin, from Oklahoma, general manager of the project, mounted a platform set on four gasoline drums and announced that the pioneers must draw lots for their land. In a large pasteboard box Colonel Ohlson held were mingled slips of paper, and on each slip a description of a 40-acre tract.

These men were drawing opportunity. Some cried out in joy when they found they were owners (on credit) of a 40-acre tract on a small lake shore, or a rich, loamy farm, half cleared, near the tiny town of Palmer. But some, who had drawn uncleared tracts twelve miles away, said nothing and took the blow. But, after the excitement had died down, some of the men who had not fared so well bartered with those who had done better—offering concessions, money to boot, possessions, for a trade. Many of them struck out afoot for their land, their hearts high.

WHEN the women and children arrived the trouble began. The families were to be sheltered in tents, in eight different camps in an area of 60 square miles, until cabins and roads were built and wells were dug. But there weren't enough tents to go around. A mother stood out in a clearing and cried at the top of her voice, "I've got five children. We can't sleep out in this cold." It didn't sound much like 1620 or 1849. Some of the Minnesota crowd, which had arrived first, took the homeless in.

Then the clouds of mosquitoes swept down—huge ones that droned and circled, and pestilential little ones. Some excited official directed that eighteen miles of mosquito netting be extricated from the freight, which had been dumped beside the railroad tracks, and soon the tent doors and beds were covered. The air was redolent with citronella.

The grumbling began. The men wanted to go to work building their permanent homes, but there were only a few tools. Maybe they were in the freight along the railroad track. The little railroad had been working overtime. There had been no time to build a warehouse. The boxes were piled in confusion. One had to look for labels. The searchers found everything except tools. They found whiffletrees, but no wagons. They found eight carloads of cement which wouldn't be used for months. But the men wanted hammers, axes, saws, levels, planes. . . .

Irwin received complaints quietly. He had ordered 200 kits of tools months ago. He had wired the agent at Seattle time and again for needed supplies.

Inaction settled upon the camp. Couldn't work without tools. The nights were turning to day; we were getting red-eyed from so much light. Some of us, veiled with mosquito netting, roved through the valley

"Why tell us about it?"



IT'S PEOPLE LIKE YOU who have to know. It is men and women between twenty-five and forty-five who are often responsible for making funeral arrangements.

Do you know, for instance, anything about caskets? Do you know what a funeral costs and why?

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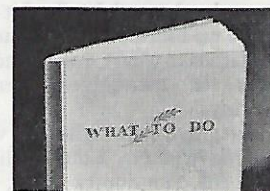
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WILL DISCUSS COSTS
FRANKLY**

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in quest of game, but the territorial game warden stopped that. We could not hunt without nonresident licenses, and they cost \$50. But we were residents, weren't we? Pioneers?

"Not," he said impressively, "until you've lasted a year."

And that meant more than we realized.

But guns continued to crack in the woods occasionally—somebody fighting a bear and killing it in self-defense, although a little black bear is slow to attack. The streams sparkled with fish. We could catch salmon and trout to our hearts' content. But discontent was growing.

Some families, naturally indigent, reverted to type. I went into some tents where things lay just where they were dropped. On the floors in the dirt were rags and paper and half-eaten slices of bread. The family baby toddled around, half-dressed, covered with grime. Some families, given unreserved credit at the community store, drew as much as \$200 worth of groceries a month, never thinking of the day they would have to pay. One man drew provisions and sold them to sourdoughs, roving gold-seekers. He was deported.

Some mensat around and played rummy, hearts, and whist. But there were others, the true stock of pioneers, who walked every day through mud and rain to their tracts and worked at something all day long.

IN THE Palmer camp there were tent-houses where the most fastidious could live in peace.

The pride of the camp, in my opinion, was the tent home of Mrs. Bud Holler, of Pine City, Minn. A planed wood door, made with a few tools Bud had thoughtfully brought with him, led through the tent flaps. Her kitchen range shone. A tanned raccoon hide softened the seat of a trim chair. Cooking utensils hung in neat array. Her husband's hunting equipment was arranged neatly along the walls.

Bud made two rooms out of the tent by stringing heavy blankets along a wire across the middle of the home. It was all very simple, and I tell of it here only because we found it amazing up there in the wilderness, where men made some hogpens for themselves, then whined at destiny.

But there were legitimate wails going up. Charlie Wartars, a dumpy little chap who kept the community store, was charging \$1.25 for a 40-cent coffeepot, \$2.25 for \$1 washtubs, and 10 cents for a nickel yeast cake. He said the freight rates were high. But when the cows arrived and Charlie became distributor of the milk, we discovered that somebody was skimming off the cream. Later Charlie was fired.

There were illegitimate wails, too. For instance, when hand-propelled washing machines arrived at \$16 each, some of the pioneers insisted on gasoline motor machines at \$60. They were paying for them, weren't they? In thirty years.

But most of the pioneers, serious in their undertaking, went on working against all odds, trying to build log cabins, turn the black loam, and establish their families. They lived on limited supplies. They meant to pay for what they got, and reckoned against the future.

The rumpus over the cost of things at the government store gave them an idea that "a crowd of rascals" whom they

loosely described as "Juneau politicians"—Juneau being the capital of the territory—had started playing politics with their pioneering. Furthermore, a month had slipped away with no start made toward home construction. They began to think they wouldn't have homes by snowfall. They started to fight for them.

"We're paying for everything. It's all charged up against us," roared plump Clyde Cook, out of Walker, Minn. "We're in a new country, but we're still under the American flag. We're still citizens!"

He and his friends cursed delays and hammered politicians. They became known to the colony's conservative element as "radicals" and "agitators." There were hints about communism—for, after all, these folks were typically American and prided themselves on being patriots.

But weeks slipped away with little done. The conservatives started getting "radical." They, too, became fighters. They wired President Roosevelt. Purge the project of politicians, they demanded.

President Roosevelt sent a new administrative staff into the valley. They lifted the lid off the project budget, originally \$900,000. They completed the pioneer homes just before winter. The colonists had won their fight for shelter with the "politicians" and with the wilderness.

Meanwhile, they had been adjusting themselves socially. They had left their friends, and their enemies, 4,000 miles behind. They had to make new ones. The few farmers already in the valley came down to the village store, joshed with one another and with the new colonists, and told tall tales about the fertility of the land.

There were true stories, too, that held promise for the pioneers. One old sourdough said he had cleared an acre for potatoes, planted the potatoes in the spring, and left for the hills to look for gold. He returned in July and hilled them, then returned to his quest. Returning before snowfall, he harvested enough potatoes to half fill his house and barn.

The social life picked up considerably when the Rev. B. J. Bingle blew into

town. Educated in an evangelical seminary at Naperville, Ill., he had "sojourned to" Alaska seven years ago, as he put it, simply because he was a rascal.

"I'm a reckless fellow," he used to tell us, puffing his round cheeks.

Short and round, with a heavy beard, Bingle couldn't be distinguished from a colonist. He dressed like them, swore with them, worked with them. And once when he held a meeting in the plank shack we were using for a community hall, he stopped his speech short with, "Tell them kids out there to shut their mouths or play baseball somewhere else."

IF PIONEERING is hard on the elders, it is life abundant for the children. They rove in bands through the valley. At early morning they pack sandwiches and set out for the foothills. Some of them are developing into first-class mountain climbers.

Mrs. Lloyd Bell, of Wisconsin, a one-time schoolteacher and a nifty housekeeper, brought her piano with her. At evening the women gathered with her for entertainments. The Bells were more or less aristocrats in the colony. Besides a piano, they had a radio. And the experimental Mr. Bell ordered several hives of bees. Nobody had had any luck with bees in the valley, but Bell liked bees.

It wasn't long before a women's club was going strong, and Mrs. Frank Ring, who was always taking care of somebody's child in addition to her own six, helped the younger girls organize a 4-H Club. Jack Lund, one of those skinny world wanderers who's been everywhere, formed a Boy Scout troop that went tramping across the valley and up the mountains.

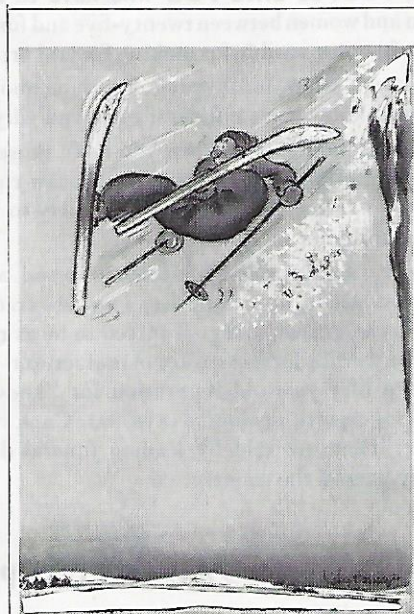
At first in the evenings the colony used to get together around a campfire and sing. But by and by the necessity of getting the project going full steam became so great that the evenings had to go mostly for business meetings. Most important of these were the common council meetings.

With the colonists scattered in the eight tent camps situated near their tracts, some general voice for the colony had to be developed. The common council became that voice. A man and woman were elected from each camp and four from headquarters. Eighteen sturdy men and women made history at the first meeting out of garbage, dogs, and cows.

At exactly 8:05 p.m. by Mrs. Carl Erickson's wrist watch, the councilmen and councilwomen pushed into headquarters tent. As Irwin, opening the session, talked lengthily on the aims and duties of the council, the women studiously took notes. The men sat serious-faced, with chins in cupped hands.

Then came the election for chairman. Delegates nominated young Henry Campbell, from Abrams, Wis., Pat Hemmer, and Allen Frederick, the latter two from Minnesota. I tore ballots from my scratch paper. Two men distributed them.

Campbell, under thirty, won friends and prestige with his quiet manner, his always neat appearance, his insistence that what the colony needed more of was work, not talk. Hemmer is fast-lipped, rugged, aggressive, brusque in manner, but diplomatic in speech. Frederick had an idea about every circumstance. He knew how to solve the log-sawing problem, he knew how to handle the fire hazard. Once when a cow broke her leg and had to be shot, the



"Oh, well, in Florida I'd probably have gotten a terrible sunburn!"

Jay Irving

authorities decided to distribute the meat free. Frederick's camp got to arguing about who should get the tenderloins and who the briskets. Frederick, the Solomon of Matanuska, solved the dilemma. "Grind it all up into hamburger and distribute that," he ordered.

All three nominees had become well known and well liked. When the ballots were read, Campbell proved to be the winner.

He stepped to the plain board desk, rapped for order with a pair of scissors.

"The meeting will come to order," he began shakily. "There are some men who sleep in this tent and they want to get it over with as quickly as possible."

The council tangled over how to dispose of garbage. It decided that each camp should appoint a garbage disposal committee. That was the first law.

Frank Swanda, with a determined glint in his eye, brought up the next problem.

"We got a fine bunch of dogs runnin' around these camps, ain't we?" he growled. "I like dogs, but I take care of them like my children, not like some people do."

"I move that the dogs in these camps be tied up so they won't run wild at night," interposed Councilman George Connors, a wiry woodsman from Douglas County, Wis.

"I would amend that motion that all dogs be tied up unless out for exercise," Frederick suggested with alacrity.

It was so amended and ordered posted, and Mrs. Roy Hopkins, of Arcadia, Mich., who said little at these meetings unless angered, hastily demanded the floor.

"Out at Camp Six," she exploded, "we got fifty-two kids and only two gallons of milk. I think milk should be divided more equally among the camps. We adults can get along, but we got to have milk for our children."

The council agreed. Campbell said it was late and time to be getting home. So at exactly 12:05 A. M., by Mrs. Erickson's wrist watch, the delegates filed out—but, just to make the record straight for history, her watch was ten minutes fast.

SO THE council passed laws. Who would enforce them? Colonists in Camp No. 1 discovered for themselves who would.

Some of the colonists got the idea that in the absence of any uniformed officer they could run things to suit themselves. Particularly, they proposed to ignore the council's ordinance on dogs.

Hemmer called his Camp No. 1 crowd together, and together they laid down the law—and they backed it up with guns!

"What about the people not tying up these pooches as per the council's orders?" Hemmer demanded gruffly.

"Make 'em tie 'em up! Make 'em tie 'em up!" several in the crowd demanded.

"No, sir," a recalcitrant dog owner protested. "I'm not tying my dog up. Snodgrass's hogs go through the camp tipping over garbage pails."

"We're talking about dogs, not hogs," Hemmer protested.

The meeting passed a motion to enforce the council's dog ordinance.

"Well, all right," Hemmer continued. "Pooches are supposed to be tied up by nine-thirty or ten o'clock. If they're not tied up, what'll you do about it?"

"Use your thirty-two's!" a grim pioneer shouted.

The crowd approved. But what about the new garbage law? How could garbage be disposed of?

"Let's get together in groups and dig holes for dumping garbage," Charlie Ruddell, of Duluth, offered.

"Yes, and then somebody won't dig and they'll come over and fill our hole with rubbish," pouted Ruddell's Minnesota buddy, Ted Giblin, of Brookston.

"You've got a shotgun, ain't you?" that same grim pioneer demanded.

Again his voice settled the problem, and the meeting resolved that garbage holes 12 by 12 by 10 feet deep be dug.

SOMETIMES the factional disputes in camp resulted in fisticuffs. In a silly argument over sawmills one day, Al Covert, of Cable, Wis., and John Bradley, of Douglas County, got into difficulties.

Covert and Bradley, holders of adjoining tracts and good neighbors, clashed. Covert went down, Bradley on top of him.

Just then Mrs. Covert, in tears, jumped on Bradley as he held her husband down and screamed, "Let him up, you brute!" Several pioneers pulled her away. Bradley was upset, and announced that he had never been known to hit a man while he was down, but he continued to pin Covert to the ground just the same. And at length Covert said, "Why doesn't somebody serve coffee and cake?" Everybody laughed and Bradley released his victim.

But all was not wrangling and confusion. Many men were forging ahead, hewing their timber, building good homes, log by log. Onions and radishes were sprouting in small improvised gardens. One young girl opened a beauty parlor—10 cents for a finger wave—where she made money while her father built a home and broke the soil.

Those who were not getting ahead complained louder and louder. Some of them wanted to go home. They had been promised jobs, not farms, they said. Some of the most incessant growlers were laborers sent up temporarily from Northwestern transient relief camps, one of whom on departing cried, "Good-by, old mosquito swamp. They told us when we came that we'd write a history book. One page is enough. You suckers finish it."

The "suckers" did not complain. They went on writing history, line upon line, with the plow. Already death is binding them very close to the soil—death and birth. Donald Henry Koenen, four years old, born in South Range, Wis., was the first to die. He was just recovering from the measles. His mother stood in the doorway of her tent telling Bill Bouwens that her lad was yammering to be out of bed. Then, on a sudden premonition, she ran to the child. He was dead. The doctor said it was heart disease.

Two pioneers worked all night in the colony warehouse to make a little coffin of firwood. Two women lined it with satin. And the little children of the valley went into the fields and forest and gathered flowers. The funeral service was conducted in a temporary hall of sprucewood.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," intoned Mr. Bingle, the wandering evangelist. "And there shall be no more death. . . ."

But there was. And it tied fathers and mothers deeply to the wilderness in the Matanuska Valley.

All was not sadness, though. There were nights of daylight, with the temperature 80 degrees above zero—it never gets higher than 89—when we all went to the dance at Matanuska. We were in rough boots and khaki and corduroy, the women in flowered house dresses or breeches. It wasn't a dance, exactly. It was a boisterous romp, until fatigue set in. Then the folks struck out for home.

But the things that make the Matanuska Valley a place of deep contentment are not recreational facilities, social life, or provisions on credit. It is, I think, just one thing—opportunity! A chance for economic freedom in a new world. And while the man who didn't get a team of horses has packed up and gone back to the States, the man willing to work to get a team of horses remains behind, preparing to work, not six days a week, but seven days, and twelve hours a day. He is building a new world for himself and his children. . . .

THERE has been government inefficiency in the valley, and all manner of factional strife among the colonists. But these things make no difference if, in the breasts of those adventurers from the States, there beat the stout hearts of pioneers. No matter what happens, the human element in the project is the key to success or failure. I think the venture will be a success, but only for men of superior courage.

Everything necessary to great agricultural development is in the valley—well water never warmer than 35 degrees, running streams, lakes, timber, and a virtually untouched soil.

The valley's first pioneer was J. J. Bugge, a bony Minnesota farmer who settled on a rolling, wooded plot twenty years ago. He said oats ran 50 bushels to the acre, and he had never had a wheat failure.

And I know, as a man experienced in agriculture, that the valley's climate will produce crops. I saw a man plant a hard little pea seed. In three and one-half days it had kicked its way through the soil. Oats seeds show a stem in four days.

Next summer the construction or formative phase of the project should be completed. Then will come production and marketing. The farmers will be competing for at least a part of a \$500,000 market—the agricultural market of the railroad belt from Seward on the coast to blustering Fairbanks in the interior. It'll take some business brains to form a co-operative necessary to market for the men of Matanuska. And unless crops can be marketed, the project is doomed eventually to failure. And as to the frequently voiced comments on the probable tremendous cost to American taxpayers of the establishment of the colony—well, that is another story. My only purpose here has been to offer a picture of the people engaged in building a new frontier.

I left the valley with regret, even though I was forced to live part of the time in a railroad car and forego a real bath for a month. I did not like the mosquito swarms and the bickering of comrades; I tired of political turmoil, intrigue, inefficiency. But in Matanuska I had felt surge through my veins the blood of freedom, felt a rich, sweet, unplowed soil beneath my feet.

I felt there the challenge of a new frontier. Yes, I learned what it was to be a free American in a new world!