
ALASKA'S MATANUSKA COLONY

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In keeping with our mission and programs, National Park Service staff prepared *Alaska's Matanuska Colony* to help share a nationally significant story with the public and to support local community historic preservation stewardship.

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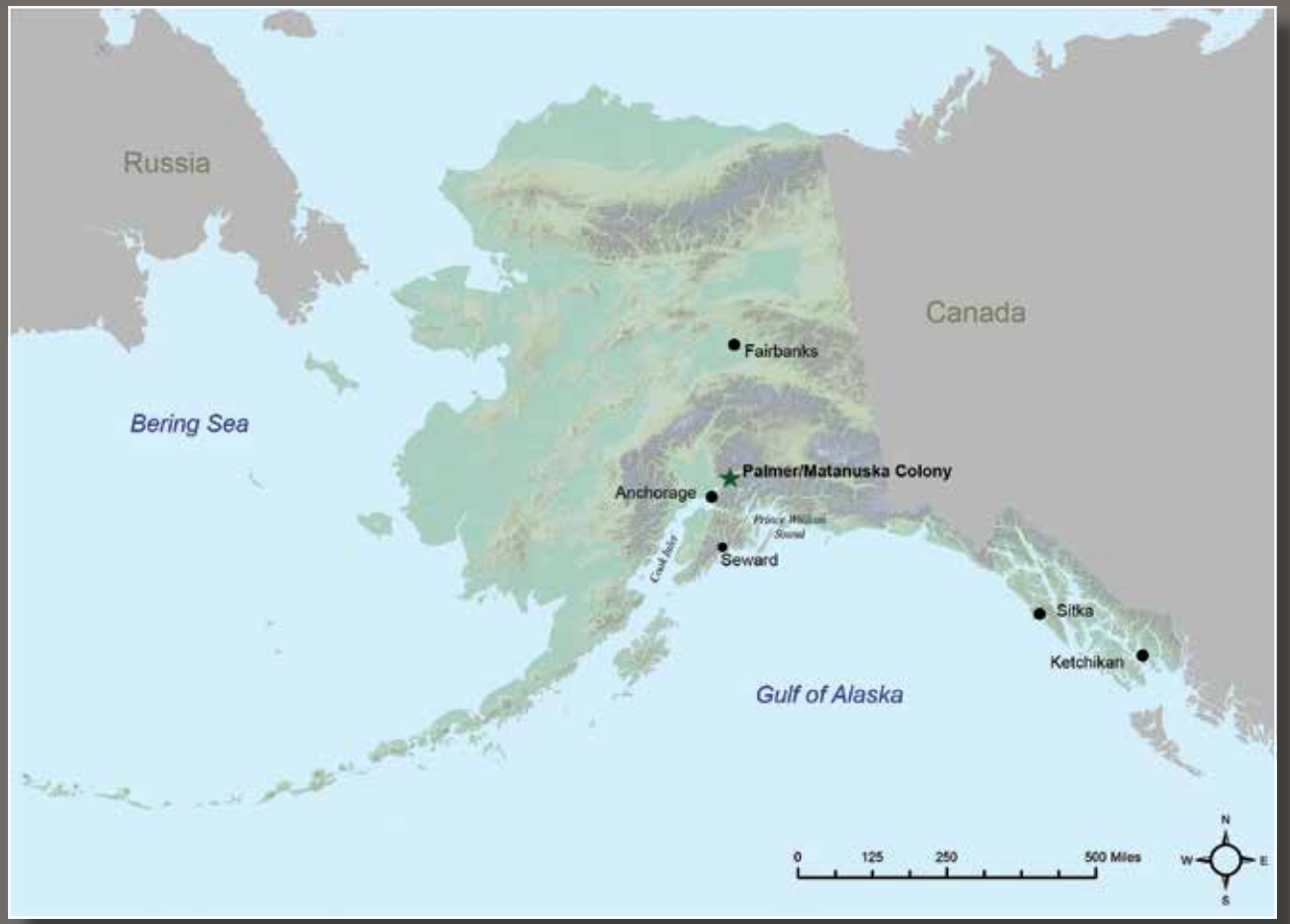
Front cover photograph: Matanuska colonists arriving at railroad station, Palmer, May 23, 1935. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library-Historical Collections, ASL-P270-224.

Back cover photograph: Colonist hauling logs for his cabin, 1935. Mary Nan Gamble.Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library – Historical Collections, ASL-P270-637.

ALASKA'S MATANUSKA COLONY



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INTRODUCTION

The story of the Matanuska Colony begins with the Great Depression. Following the stock market crash of October 29, 1929, thousands of banks and businesses failed, putting 25% of America's workforce, over 15 million people, out of work. In 1930, as the financial crisis gripped the nation, a severe drought swept across the Great Plains. Farmers that had been struggling with low prices caused by over production were powerless as their crops and soil dried up and blew away. Vast areas of farmland, as much as 100 million acres, were made unusable. With the drought, farmers faced great difficulties growing crops, and many lost their farms.

"The land just blew away. We had to go somewhere."

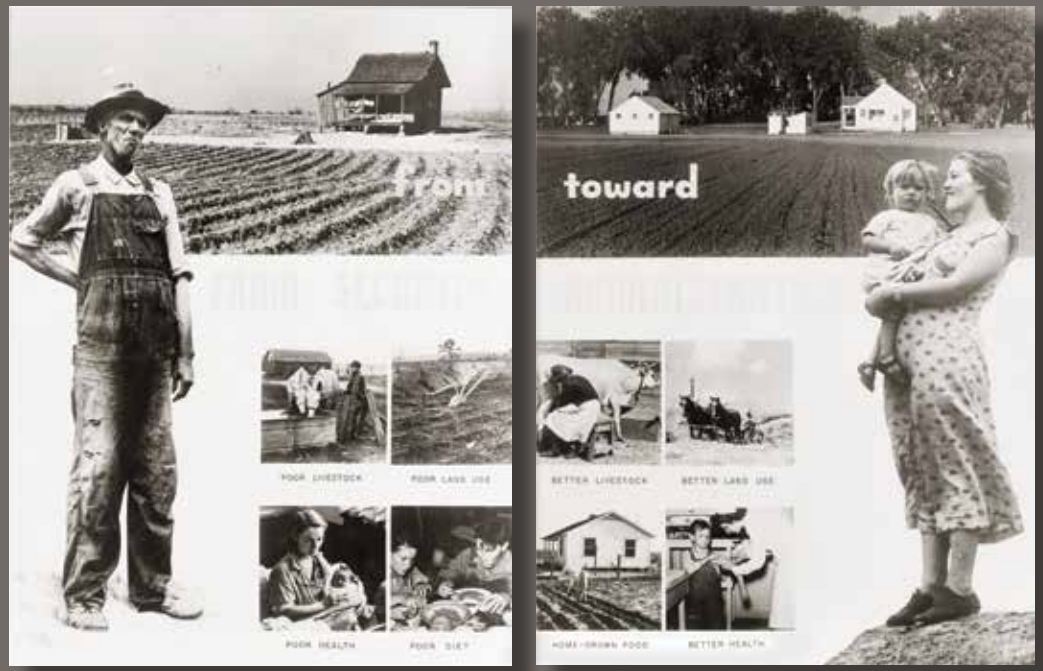
—Kansas minister on the road to California with his family, June 1936. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/dustbowl-great-depression/

Farmer and sons walking in the face of a dust storm. Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 1936. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Unemployed men lined up outside a depression soup kitchen opened in Chicago by Al Capone. ca. 1930 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Soup_kitchens#/media File: Unemployed_men_queued_outside_a_depression_soup_kitchen_opened_in_Chicago_by_Al_Capone,_02-1931_-_NARA_-_541927.jpg

Lines stretched for blocks at soup kitchens in cities across the nation and millions of people lost their homes. Hundreds of shanty towns sprung up in parks and vacant lots in cities across the nation. Many families were broken up as millions of men and boys went out in search of work. In the Great Plains huge dust storms darkened the skies. People caught in a dust storm compared it to having a shovel of fine sand thrown into their face. Over the next ten years about 3.5 million people migrated out of the Great Plains states to find work and better living conditions.

The double blow of financial collapse and extreme drought was more than any state could manage on its own. United States President Herbert Hoover's response was to focus on rescuing banks and industry. He believed that this would result in a trickle-down effect that would pull the nation out of the depression. This may have eventually worked but the dire circumstances of the American people could not wait. Franklin D. Roosevelt ran for president in 1932 promising relief; promising direct assistance to the people. He won nearly 60% of the vote, coming into office in 1933 with a mandate for action.

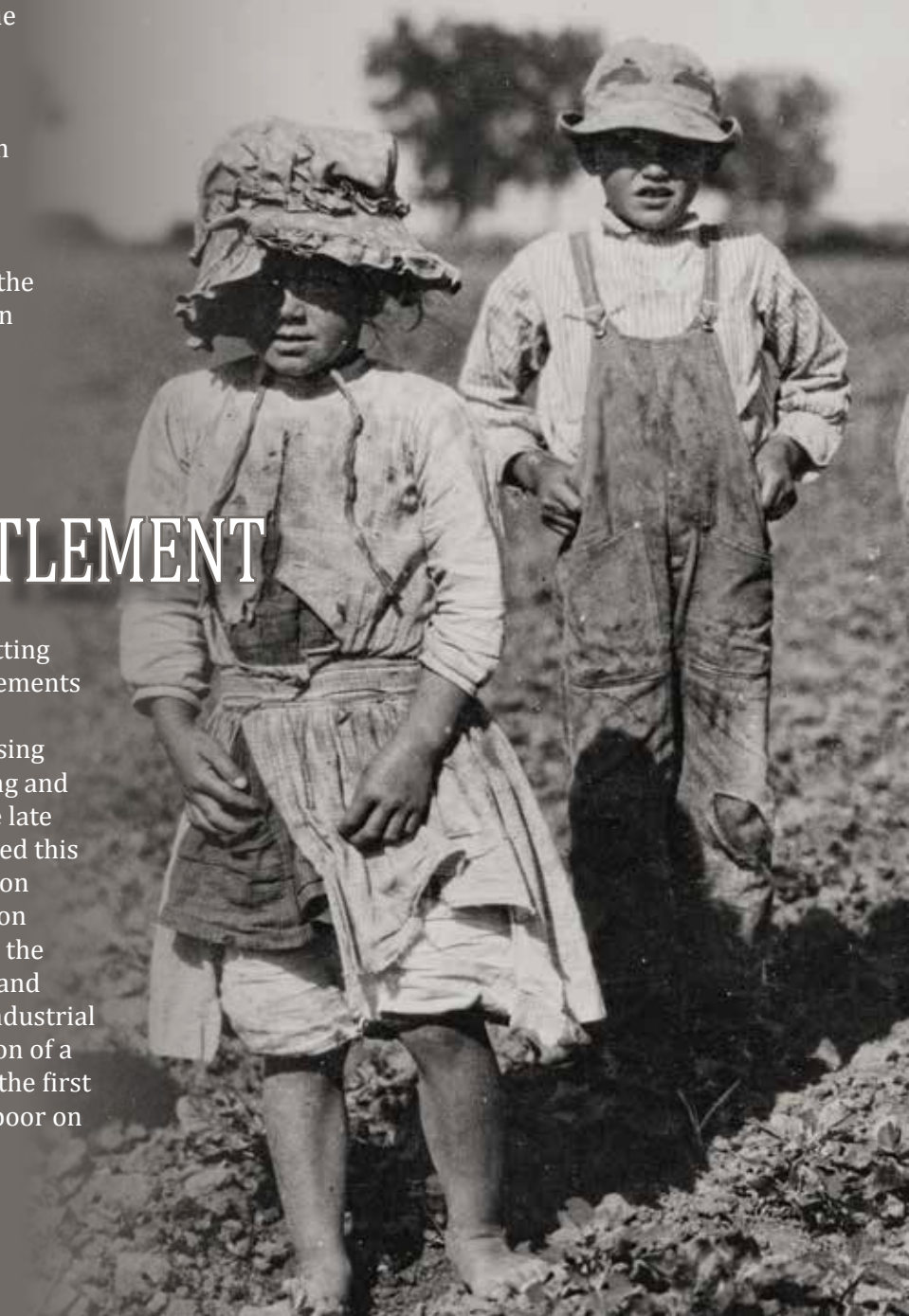


The Farm Security Administration's efforts in reaching out to help farm families impacted by the Depression included these exhibit posters titled "from" and "toward." 1939. Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress). Reproduction number LC-USZ62-122719.

To ease the country's economic problems President Roosevelt spearheaded a series of relief, recovery and reform programs that were called "The New Deal". The programs included the Resettlement Administration, Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and Farm Security Administration which were aimed at getting displaced families off government provided relief and into resettlement communities. Nearly 100 resettlement communities were established under these programs, including one in the Territory of Alaska called the Matanuska Colony. Today, much of the original Matanuska Colony remains that tells the story of the valley pioneers and the New Deal resettlement program.

THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH AMERICANS

President Roosevelt's New Deal relief, recovery, and reform programs changed the U.S. government's relationship with the American people in dramatic ways. For the first time the U.S. government took an active role in ensuring the welfare of the citizens. Through the creation of the social security program workers were guaranteed a pension for the first time and unemployment insurance provided an income when workers became unemployed. Bank reforms such as the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation protected people's bank deposits. Through relief programs such as the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps jobs were created for millions of out-of-work people. While the relief programs ended as the economy improved many of the reforms remained in place and have been expanded.



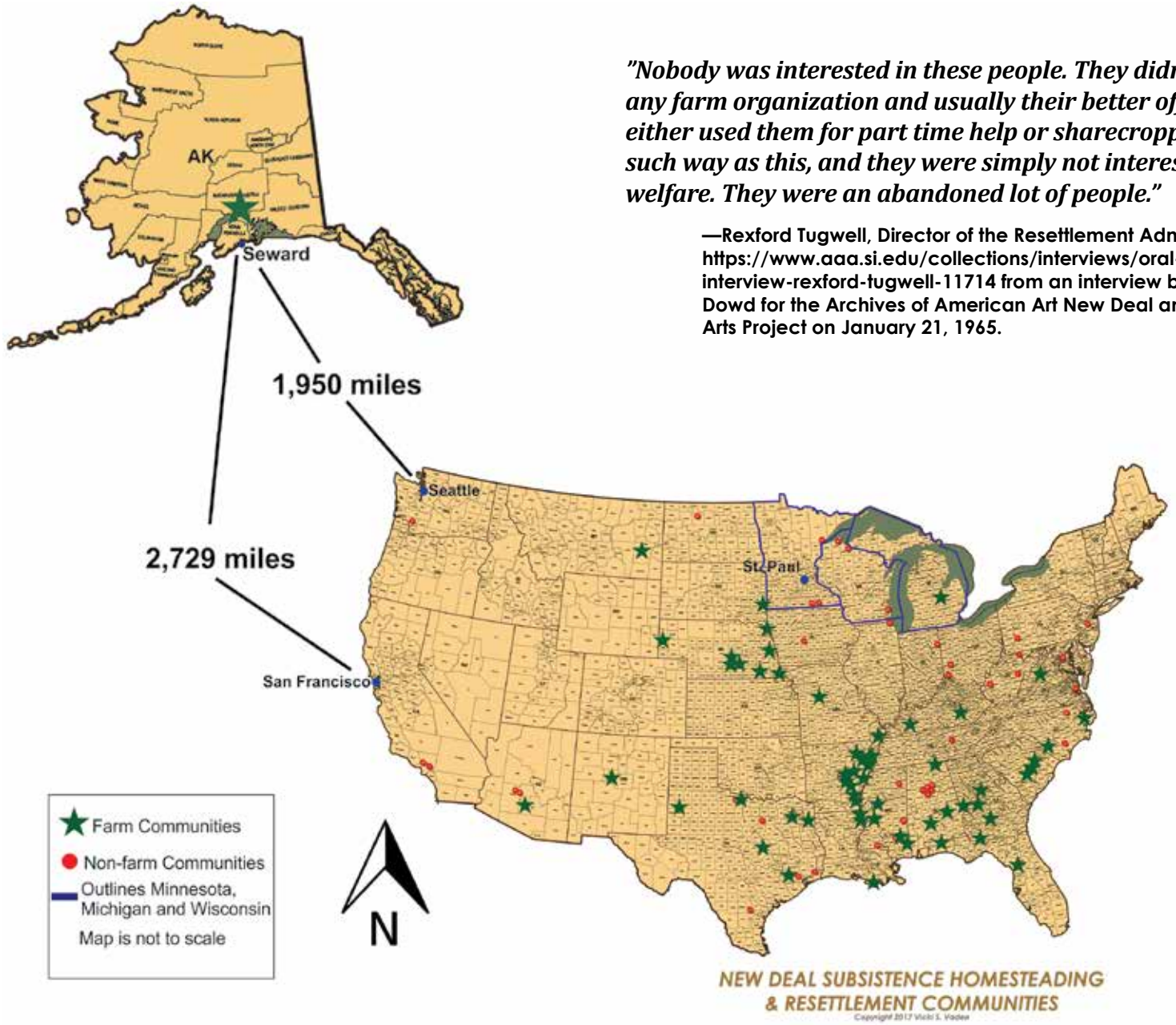
BACK-TO-LAND MOVEMENT: THE ROOTS OF NEW DEAL RESETTLEMENT

At the heart of the New Deal resettlement program was a growing support for getting back to America's agricultural roots, called a back-to-land movement. These movements are not unique to the United States and often follow periods of great change and unrest. This was the case after the Civil War when the nation experienced increasing industrialization and urbanization. The complexities and inequalities of a growing and changing economy led many people to seek a simpler way of life. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s a number of philanthropists and religious leaders embraced this agrarian philosophy, establishing a number of small farm colonies across the nation aimed at relieving poverty and promoting a simpler lifestyle. The Great Depression was a powerful catalyst in favor of these ideals. The desperation of the times and the progressive ideals of many in the Roosevelt Administration brought the back-to-land philosophy into mainstream thinking. President Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act into law in June 1933, which included a provision for implementation of a homestead program. Two months later the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the first New Deal resettlement agency, was formed to provide safe residences for urban poor on small plots of land that would allow them to grow their own food.

"Amid all our hopes of industrial greatness, the land is the only reality. And, in hard times—everybody can see it—can see that the man who owns the land, tills the land, lives by the land, is the only independent man."

—William E. Smythe, founder of the Little Landers movement, *San Diego Union*, July 29, 1908.

The Union Colony of Colorado in 1870 was part of America's early back-to-land movement. The Colony was known for its success with irrigation. Here eight children (ages seven to twelve years) that work in the fields pose for a photo on a sugar beet farm near Greeley, Colorado, July 1915. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



"Nobody was interested in these people. They didn't belong to any farm organization and usually their better off neighbors either used them for part time help or sharecroppers or some such way as this, and they were simply not interested in their welfare. They were an abandoned lot of people."

—Rexford Tugwell, Director of the Resettlement Administration https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-rexford-tugwell-11714 from an interview by Richard Dowd for the Archives of American Art New Deal and the Arts Project on January 21, 1965.

Nearly one-hundred New Deal Resettlement Communities were constructed from 1933 to 1940. Green dots represent farm communities and the red dots represent non-farm communities. The Matanuska colonists traveled a long distance from the Upper Midwest, across the country by train, and then by ship to Alaska and finally by train to the colony site in Palmer. Shown are the distances that Matanuska colonists had to travel from San Francisco and Seattle to Alaska, after travelling from St. Paul, Minnesota. Map created by Vicki S. Vaden, Cumberland Homesteads, Tennessee, 2017. Adapted, with author's permission, by Darrell Lewis, Historian, National Park Service.

RESETTLEMENT COMMUNITIES —TAILORED TO FIT

During it's nearly ten years in existence the New Deal resettlement program moved about 15,000 families into various types of planned communities. Most New Deal resettlement communities were established to assist farmers and workers displaced by the depression and drought, to move farmers to better farmland, as well as to give tenant farmers an opportunity to own land, to get low-income families into better housing, to provide laborers and factory workers with a home and some land to grow their own food. The communities varied widely in size, ranging from as small as ten homes to as large as nearly 900 homes. Some were little more than a collection of homesteads near a town, while others were complete communities. The government worked hard to bring assistance to those in need, without burdening them with having to move great distances. Most resettlement communities were established within ten miles of those they were intended to help. There were a few instances in which the families had to move across their state or to a neighboring state but these were rare.

Tupelo Homesteads in Mississippi, 1935. This settlement consisted of 35 three-acre subsistence homesteads. Note that each of the homes have the same design. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

In keeping with the back-to-land movement philosophy every resettlement community had some kind of farming or gardening element. Some communities were planned for large scale farming where farmers made their living growing and selling farm goods. Some were designed with small garden plots so that laborers could supplement their income by growing their own food, and others provided a few acres to each family for subsistence farming. They were often constructed near towns to take advantage of existing infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and stores. A few, like the Matanuska Colony, were complete towns that included schools, administration buildings, staff houses, hospitals, and factories or processing facilities. To get people off of government assistance and into new homes the government had to work quickly. To make planning and construction easier, building designs were often similar from one colony to the next. This planning included the expectation that each community member would work cooperatively for the benefit of the entire community.

Children at play in Greenhills, Ohio, 1939. Note the mixed duplex and apartment style homes in the background. Greenhills was a garden city consisting of 737 homes and farms. Garden cities provided housing for factory workers and were surrounded by a green belt that consisted of farms and open land. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Arthurdale, near Reedsville, West Virginia was the first resettlement community established. Completed in 1937, Arthurdale consisted of 165 homesteads, established to assist out-of-work coal miners in the area. Constructed around a community center that included a school, health center, general store, and other services, each homestead included a large garden intended to allow families to supplement their factory income with home grown food. Three factory buildings, a furniture factory, a forge, and a tractor assembly plant were established on the outskirts of Arthurdale. Another resettlement community was Dyess Colony, established in Mississippi County, Arkansas. It was similar to Arthurdale in that it was a complete community, however it was intended to provide tenant farmers and share croppers an opportunity to own land, and thus had no industrial focus. Because of the concentration on farming as the primary source of income, plots were larger, typically about 40 acres in size. Fairbury Farmsteads near Fairbury, Nebraska represented a more modest effort to assist struggling families. Consisting of ten eight-acre farmsteads and a 75-acre cooperative farming area, Fairbury Farmsteads was intended to provide families on government assistance with an opportunity to improve their standard of living through cooperative and individual farming.

Homesteader at work in the cooperative furniture factory in Arthurdale, 1937. Arthurdale was established to assist unemployed coal miners in West Virginia. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

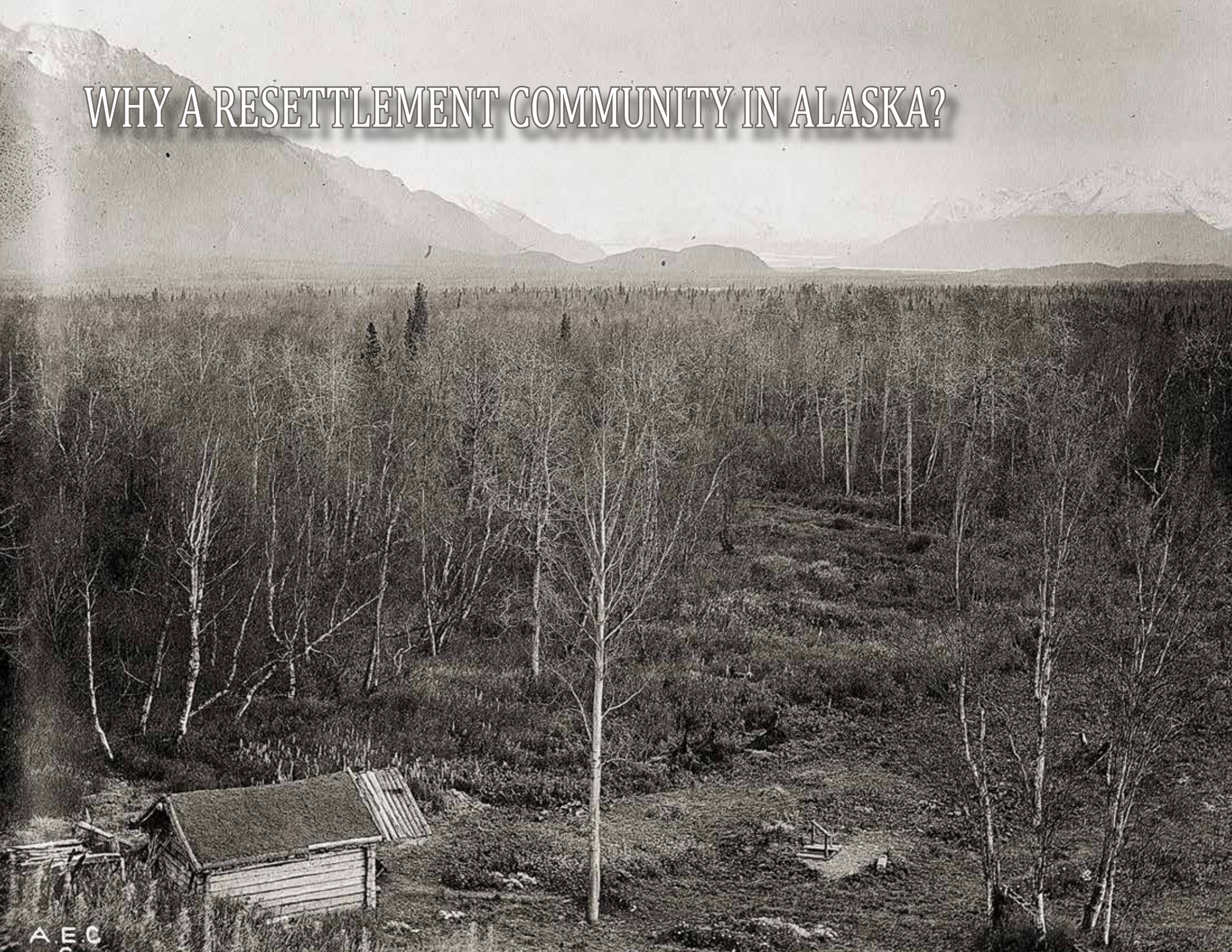
THE RESETTLENT PROGRAM AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

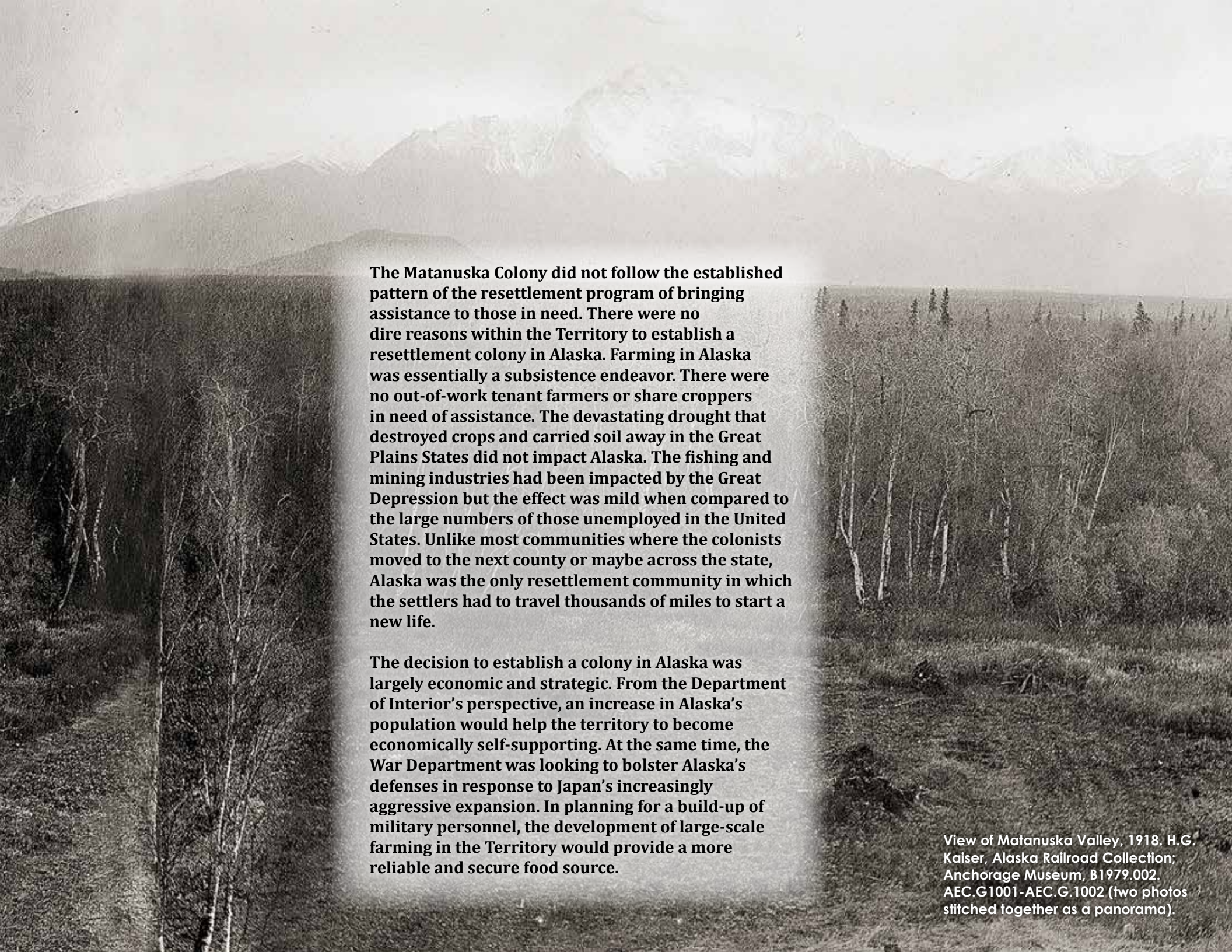
African-American colonists at work in a cooperative garden at Gee's Bend Farms in Alabama, 1939. Homes and farm buildings are visible in the background. Gee's Bend was one of 17 resettlement communities established to assist African-American families. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

In 1930, two-thirds of all African-American farmers were either sharecroppers or day laborers, and 77% did not own their land. Initially, the New Deal hurt African-American farmers. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration's policy of paying land owners to plow up cotton fields or leave them fallow caused about 200,000 African-American owners, sharecroppers, and workers to be displaced. When this became apparent, some of these policies were reversed and others implemented to help relieve poverty. The resettlement program established 17 communities providing relief for 2,000 African-American families living in the Southern U.S.

Students rehearsing the maypole dance for May Day, Gees Bend, Alabama, May 1939. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

WHY A RESETTLEMENT COMMUNITY IN ALASKA?





The Matanuska Colony did not follow the established pattern of the resettlement program of bringing assistance to those in need. There were no dire reasons within the Territory to establish a resettlement colony in Alaska. Farming in Alaska was essentially a subsistence endeavor. There were no out-of-work tenant farmers or share croppers in need of assistance. The devastating drought that destroyed crops and carried soil away in the Great Plains States did not impact Alaska. The fishing and mining industries had been impacted by the Great Depression but the effect was mild when compared to the large numbers of those unemployed in the United States. Unlike most communities where the colonists moved to the next county or maybe across the state, Alaska was the only resettlement community in which the settlers had to travel thousands of miles to start a new life.

The decision to establish a colony in Alaska was largely economic and strategic. From the Department of Interior's perspective, an increase in Alaska's population would help the territory to become economically self-supporting. At the same time, the War Department was looking to bolster Alaska's defenses in response to Japan's increasingly aggressive expansion. In planning for a build-up of military personnel, the development of large-scale farming in the Territory would provide a more reliable and secure food source.

View of Matanuska Valley, 1918. H.G. Kaiser, Alaska Railroad Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1979.002. AEC.G1001-AEC.G.1002 (two photos stitched together as a panorama).

THE DENA'INA —INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS

The mild climate and resources of the Matanuska Valley have long drawn people to the area. The Dena'ina Athabascans, the only coastal Athabascan group, displaced an earlier people in the area about 1,500 years ago.

The Dena'ina hunted, fished, and gathered food throughout Southcentral Alaska. By the late 1700s, approximately 5,000 Dena'ina lived in semi-permanent villages in the region.

The Russian colonists introduced diseases which had a devastating effect on the Dena'ina population. After the U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867, Euro-Americans began moving into the Territory. In 1880, the U.S. Census identified seven Dena'ina villages in the Matanuska Valley. Soon gold seekers moved into the Matanuska Valley, followed closely by traders and merchants, and then by homesteaders in the 1910s.

During the 1920s, with their populations greatly diminished by disease and loss of traditional hunting and fishing grounds, the Dena'ina abandoned many of their villages and moved into more permanent villages such as Tyonek and Eklutna to be closer to schools, hospitals, stores and churches.

Dena'ina Chief Stephan of Knik, serving from the 1890s to the 1910s. Shown wearing ground squirrel parka, ceremonial headdress, and dentalium shell bandolier, and standing in front of log building, circa 1907. C.B.M., Louis Weeks Collection; Anchorage Museum, B2003.019.149.

Today, opportunities to learn about the Dena'ina Athabascan in the Anchorage area include visiting the Eklutna Village, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center, and the outdoor sculpture of Grandma Olga Nicolai Ezi, located at a former fish camp site along Ship Creek.

Dena'ina boys at Knik showing off their catch, ca. 1900. Knik was a Dena'ina village and supply town for the Willow Creek Mining District, located about twenty miles west of the future site of the Matanuska Colony. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

AGRICULTURE —AN EARLY SUCCESS IN THE MATANUSKA VALLEY

The Matanuska Valley is located in southcentral Alaska about 40 miles north of Anchorage. In 1934, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to establish a resettlement community in Alaska, the Valley was considered to have good agricultural potential. Surrounded by mountains on three sides, the Valley is a broad basin drained by the Matanuska and Knik Rivers. The mountains help shelter the Valley from the severe winter temperatures of interior Alaska and from the storms that come up from the Gulf of Alaska. Good soil, long summer daylight hours, mild temperatures, and low precipitation make the Matanuska Valley one of the best places in Alaska for agriculture.

Men and child with horse drawn potato digger in use, Matanuska Valley, Alaska, October 1918. H.G. Kaiser, Alaska Railroad Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1979.002.AEC.G968.

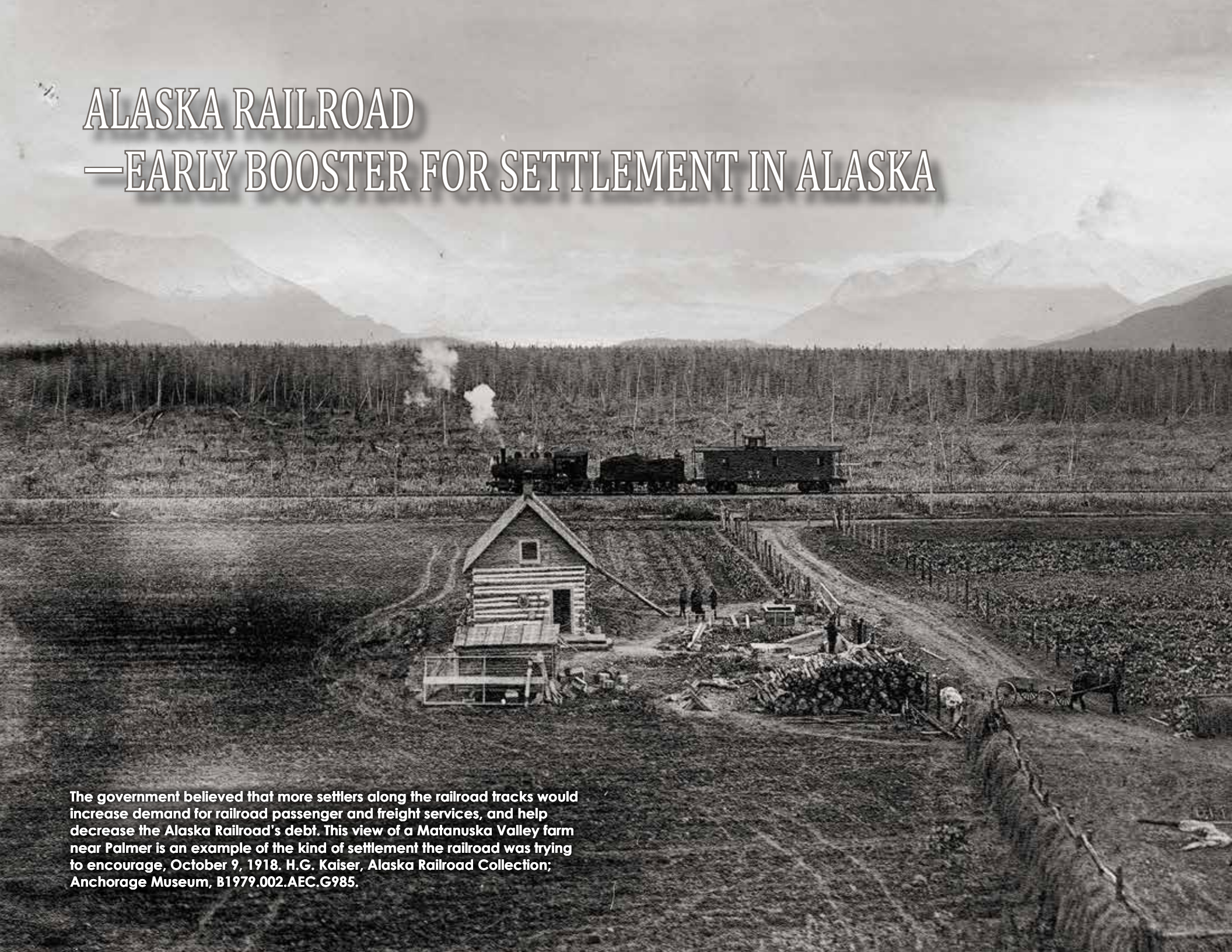
Following gold discoveries in the mountains north of the Matanuska Valley in 1896, Knik, a Dena'ina village about 20 miles from the future site of Palmer, became the supply town for the gold mines. In 1900, George Palmer, agent in charge of the Alaska Commercial Company store at Knik, planted a garden behind the store to see what he could grow. He had great success and within a short time other businessmen planted gardens. By 1906, two small farms were selling produce to miners and villagers in the area. Demand for vegetables continued to grow and by 1914 about 500 acres were under cultivation. Agriculture and coal fields in the mountains north of the future town site of Palmer prompted the government to select a route through the Matanuska Valley for the Alaska Railroad. As railroad construction progressed through the Valley from 1915-17 strong demand for vegetables led to a surge in farming. When a 38-mile spur line was constructed north from the main line of the railroad to the coal fields in 1916, Matanuska, a small town formed at the junction of the main line and the spur line, and Palmer, a railroad siding was established on the spur line about six miles north of Matanuska. Homesteaders quickly established farms along the railroad tracks between Matanuska and Palmer. In spring 1917, four-hundred settlers rushed to plant more potatoes and a record 1,300 tons of potatoes were produced that year.

As farming and mining evolved, a crude system of trails were cut across the Valley. By 1934, the Alaska Road Commission was maintaining about 100 miles of graded roads in the Matanuska Valley. Knik had long been abandoned, and Matanuska Junction and Wasilla with populations of about 50 and 100, respectively, were the only towns in the Valley.

It would be another two years before a road connected the Matanuska Valley and Anchorage. A freight train consisting of an engine, freight car, and passenger car ran between Anchorage and Palmer once a week. In emergencies an Alaska Railroad motorcar could transport a sick or injured person to Anchorage for care. Everything needed to build the colony would have to be carved from the land or brought in from outside the territory.

Except for ten miles of graveled roads most of the roads in the Matanuska Valley were graded dirt as pictured above in this 1934 image. View of horse drawn wagon coming down road, Matanuska Valley, Alaska. Oct. 1918. H.G. Kaiser, Alaska Railroad Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1979.002.AEC.G959.

ALASKA RAILROAD —EARLY BOOSTER FOR SETTLEMENT IN ALASKA



The government believed that more settlers along the railroad tracks would increase demand for railroad passenger and freight services, and help decrease the Alaska Railroad's debt. This view of a Matanuska Valley farm near Palmer is an example of the kind of settlement the railroad was trying to encourage, October 9, 1918. H.G. Kaiser, Alaska Railroad Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1979.002.AEC.G985.

The Alaska Railroad, completed in 1923, provided a major year-round link from the port town of Seward, north to Anchorage, Palmer, and the interior city of Fairbanks. The railroad, however, running a persistent debt, believed that increased settlement along the railroad corridor would provide a solution.

Alaska's population of 65,000 in 1916, had steadily decreased due to declines in the mining and fishing industries, followed by World War I as men left the Territory to join the military. Following the war, few men returned to Alaska, deciding instead to stay in the continental U.S. to enjoy the economic boom of the 1920s.

The Matanuska Agricultural Experiment Station (building in background) was established in 1915. The U.S. Department of Agriculture established several experiment stations in the Territory to determine agricultural potential and to encourage farming. Image taken ca. 1920. Jack H. Floyd Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1957.005.188.

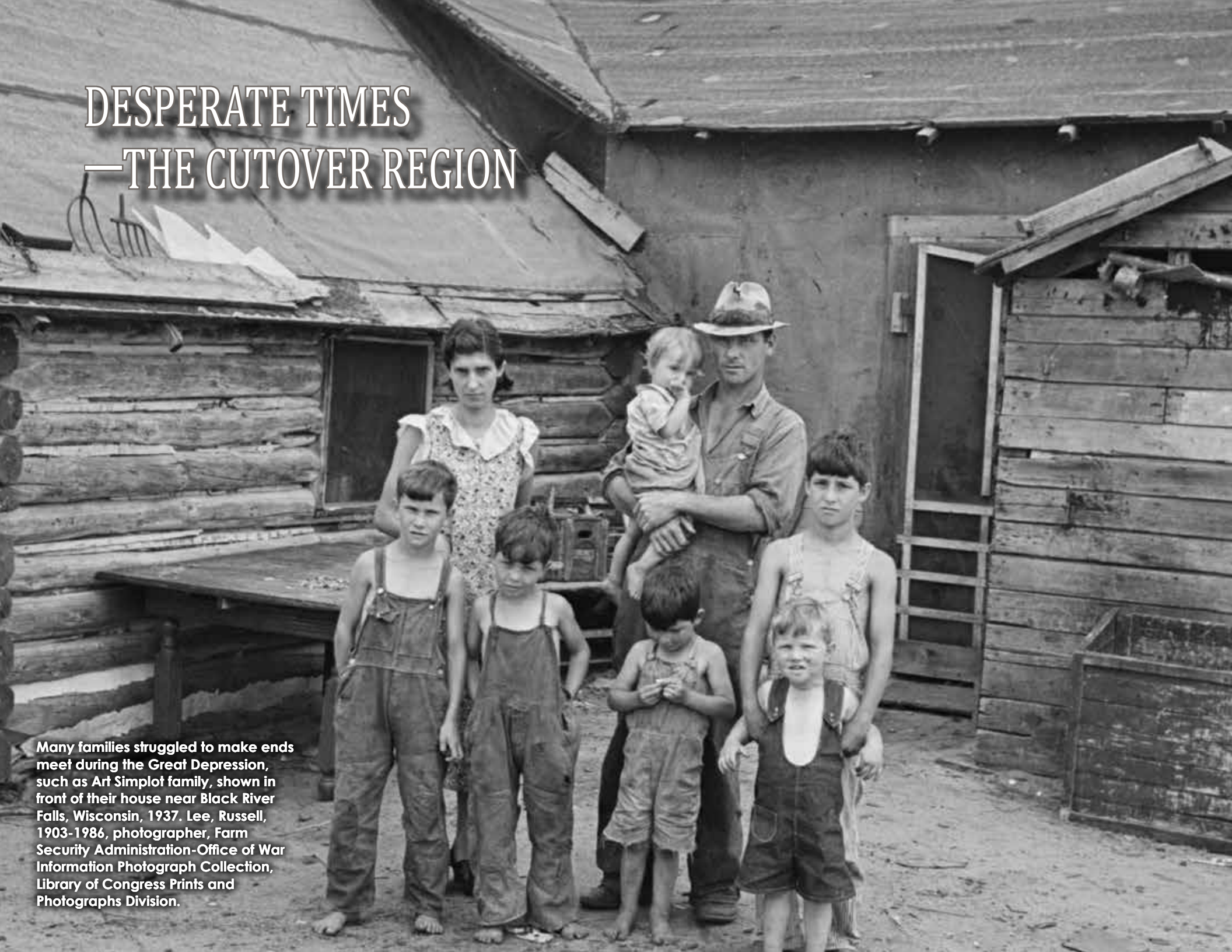
The railroad and its promoters considered various settlement ideas to encourage newcomers to Alaska. In 1922, Territorial Governor Scott Bone made the first public mention of a colonization plan in connection with the railroad. In 1928, Otto Ohlson, General Manager of the Alaska Railroad, initiated a campaign to attract Midwestern farmers to Alaska. He convinced M.D. Snodgrass, Matanuska Agricultural Experiment Station Manager and enthusiastic supporter of farming in Alaska, to lead the effort. By fall 1929, there were more than 2,000 inquiries received and the effort seemed to be working. When the Great Depression struck in October of that year, the interest in Alaska farming dried up. A few farmers did move to Alaska, but most were unable to sell their crops or farms at prices to make the move possible.

While the Great Depression initially had little effect on the Territory, soon Alaska was caught up with the nation's woes as well as with efforts in providing relief to struggling farmers.

"...each adult farmer [is] worth about $700.00 a year to the railroad. Enough of [that] kind of farmer would make this railroad pay."

—Captain Hughes, Alaska Railroad, 1924

DESPERATE TIMES —THE CUTOVER REGION



Many families struggled to make ends meet during the Great Depression, such as Art Simplot family, shown in front of their house near Black River Falls, Wisconsin, 1937. Lee, Russell, 1903-1986, photographer, Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

"The encouragement of people by the land promotors, representing railroad and logging companies and other large landholders...to settle the cutover lands heaped tragedy on tragedy."

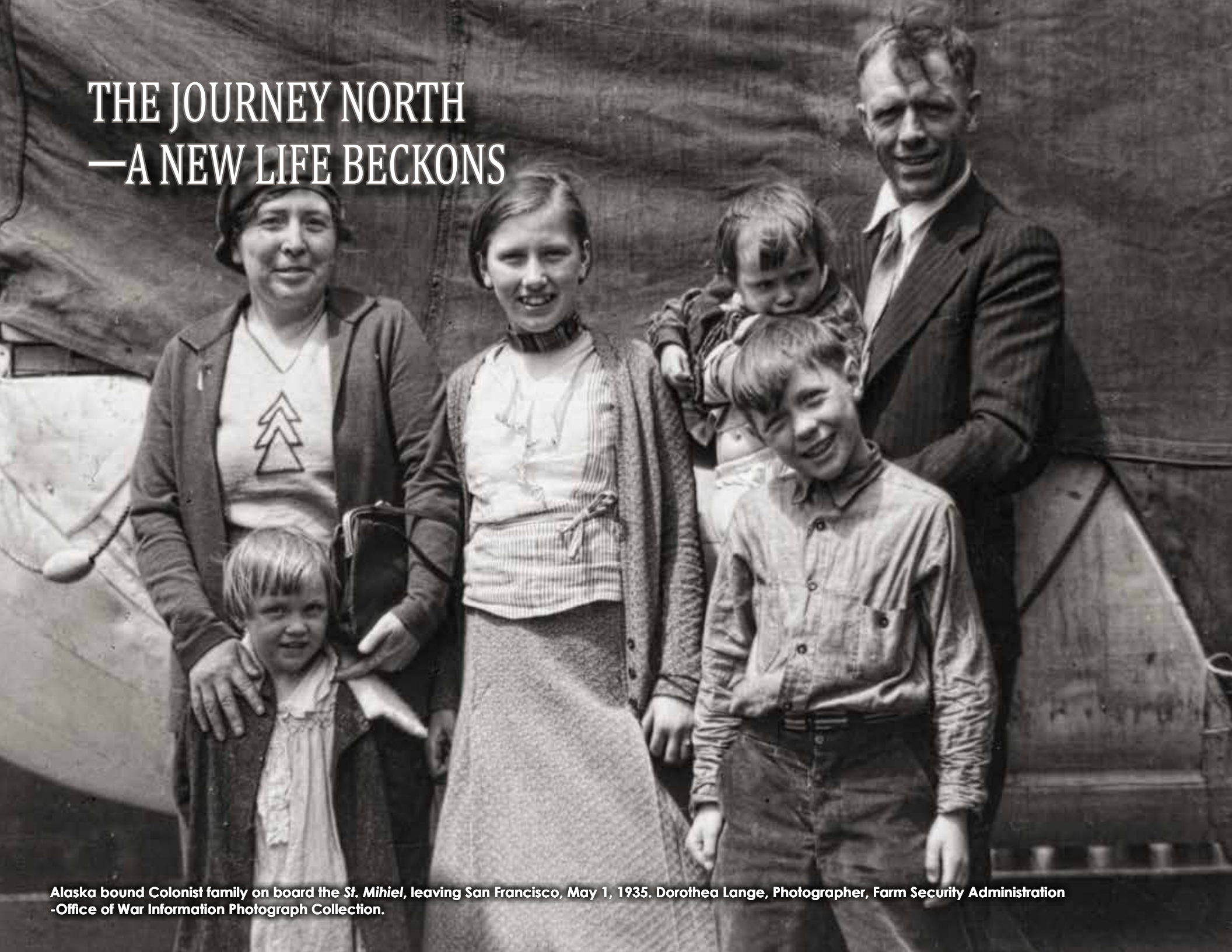
—Vernon Jenson, Professor, Cornell University, 1945

Clearing Cutover land required time and resources that many families did not have. Lon Allen and daughter sawing log on farm near Iron River, Michigan,1937. Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

The Matanuska colonists were selected from the relief rolls of the upper Midwestern states of Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Many of these people were already struggling when the Great Depression struck. From 1870 to 1920, logging and mining had been the mainstays of these states. Millions of acres were clear cut, leaving a treeless, brush covered landscape, dotted with tree stumps, called the Cutover Region. As logging ended timber companies and land speculators began marketing the land as farmland. It did not matter that much of the land, with its thin, sandy layer of topsoil was not well suited for farming. They misrepresented its farming potential and sold the land cheaply. Many European immigrants and migrant families bought Cutover Region land because it was cheap and discovered that establishing a farm was more difficult than they had been led to believe. Unable to make a living off their farms, many became stranded and dependent on government relief to survive. Drought compounded the problem, making the situation worse. In 1935, federal officials identified the area as "one of the nation's critical social and economic problems," observing that 70% of the population of Michigan's Upper Peninsula were receiving government assistance. The New Deal programs provided needed relief to these people.

In selecting the colonists for the Matanuska Colony, Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) officials drew comparisons between Alaska's climate and that of Scandinavia, noting that Scandinavians were very successful farmers. They observed that the climate, soil, and agricultural conditions of the Matanuska Valley were comparable to those of the northern Midwest and that many people from this region were of Scandinavian descent. FERA officials believed that because of these similarities Midwestern people would be best suited for the strenuous pioneer life and already have a knowledge of dairy and truck farming. In March 1935, county social workers were given the task of selecting a pool of possible applicants for the project.

THE JOURNEY NORTH —A NEW LIFE BECKONS



Alaska bound Colonist family on board the *St. Mihiel*, leaving San Francisco, May 1, 1935. Dorothea Lange, Photographer, Farm Security Administration -Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

In April and May 1935, two hundred families made the journey from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan to southcentral Alaska's Matanuska Valley to start their new lives. They traveled in two groups from St. Paul, Minnesota by train to San Francisco, California or Seattle, Washington. From San Francisco and Seattle they travelled north, aboard the *St. Mihiel*, an Army transport ship, through Alaska's Inside Passage to Seward where they boarded an Alaska Railroad train for the final leg of their journey to Palmer. Many had little time to prepare for the trip and most had never traveled so far from home. Nontheless the general mood was one of excitement and determination.

"Give us a chance at that Alaska! It will take hard work, but we'll be working for ourselves. And that makes the difference. This is a new lease on life for all of us."

—Waldo Fox, former Michigan farmer, trapper and fox raiser, Ironwood Daily Globe, May 17, 1935

St. Mihiel leaving San Francisco with first group of colonists on board, May 1, 1935. Dorothea Lange, Photographer, Farm Security Administration -Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

Colonist family on train in St. Paul, Minnesota getting ready to leave for San Francisco, April 26, 1935. Dorothea Lange, Photographer, Farm Security Administration -Office of War Information Photograph Collection.

POSITIVE PROPAGANDA

Scene from Broadway play "200 Were Chosen," November 1936. University of Iowa. Libraries. University Archives, Frederick W. Kent Collection, 1866-2000, bldgs166-0002.jpg.

The New Deal resettlement program was unpopular among many in Congress who saw it as wasteful, inefficient, and lacking a clearly defined mission. For some, communities like the Matanuska Colony were viewed as communistic and radical because of the collectivist nature of their governance. Resettlement program administrators needed positive news to help foster support for the program and the Matanuska Colony provided that opportunity. Photographers and cinematographers traveled with the colonists, filming many aspects of their experience. News of the colonists' voyage was reported widely in newspapers. Alaska's mystique and the long distance that the Matanuska colonists had to travel

captivated the nation. In 1935, Alaska was best known for the gold rushes at the turn of the century, and viewed with awe by many Americans. Unlike the settlers of other resettlement communities, the Matanuska colonists received much fanfare on their way to the colony site. They participated in parades, dinners, and other celebrations in their honor. Like the gold seekers of earlier years the colonists were perceived as pioneers on their way to a distant and mysterious land to carve a new life "out of the wilderness." Newspapers called the colonists "Alaskan Pioneers" and "America's 20th Century Pioneers," referring to the Matanuska Colony as the "pioneer colony" and to their journey north as the "new American pioneer pilgrimage." A Broadway play based on their experience, titled "200 Were Chosen," ran 35 performances in November and December of 1936. The story of the Matanuska colonists provided uplifting news for a struggling nation.

The Matanuska colonists received more media coverage than any other group of settlers. Here a cameraman films the colonists as they receive their tent assignments. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945; Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-129.

"Hope and anxiety reigned as this group of modern American pioneers, brought from impoverished Midwestern farms to carve new futures in Alaska's Matanuska Valley, excitedly awaited the drawing that would determine their future homes and farms."

***—Ironwood Daily Globe*, June 10, 1935**

THE JOURNEY ENDS AND THE ADVENTURE BEGINS!

"Our tents are 16x20—a floor made of rough lumber about 12 inches wide with cracks of half an inch or more between boards. The stoves look good, if you don't use them—they are not successful bakers...It is difficult to keep clean, as it is such a dusty country."

—Anonymous Matanuska Colony housewife, *Evening Star*, June 27, 1935

The first church services held in the colony on May 12,1935, a tent with crude bench seating. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945; Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-179.

The colonists arrived in Seward in two groups, the first on the evening of May 9, 1935, followed by the second group on May 23rd. After docking in Seward, the colonists boarded an Alaska Railroad train for the final leg of their journey, a 150 mile trip north through Anchorage to the colony site. Upon arrival of the first group of colonists, Anchorage declared the day a holiday and the colonists were greeted by a large crowd of well-wishers. There were flags, bands, reception committees and dinner at the community hall. Food included moose, salmon, caribou, dishes made from Alaska grown vegetables, and a number of sauces and preserves made from Alaskan berries. After the festivities the colonists boarded the train for the forty mile trip to the colony site in Palmer.

Transient workers from California constructed the tent city at Palmer almost overnight. 1935. J.J. Delaney Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1970.019.106.

When the first group arrived, four-hundred transient workers from California and Washington were busily constructing a tent city. The tents were lined up in neat rows across the railroad tracks from where the community center was to be constructed. Each tent had five-foot high walls, a stove, and cots and was considered livable for a family of five or less. A few larger families had to double up while more tents were constructed. Colonists spent the next few months in these tents while their homes were constructed. Tent living was a unique experience. The thin canvas walls provided little privacy and at night neighbors could be heard talking, arguing, or snoring. During the long summer days the tents became very hot and late in the fall as the daylight hours faded they were freezing. When it rained the streets turned to mud, and the wind blew so hard at times that colonists had to pile dirt around the base of their tents as a barrier against the elements.

BEGINNING A COLONY

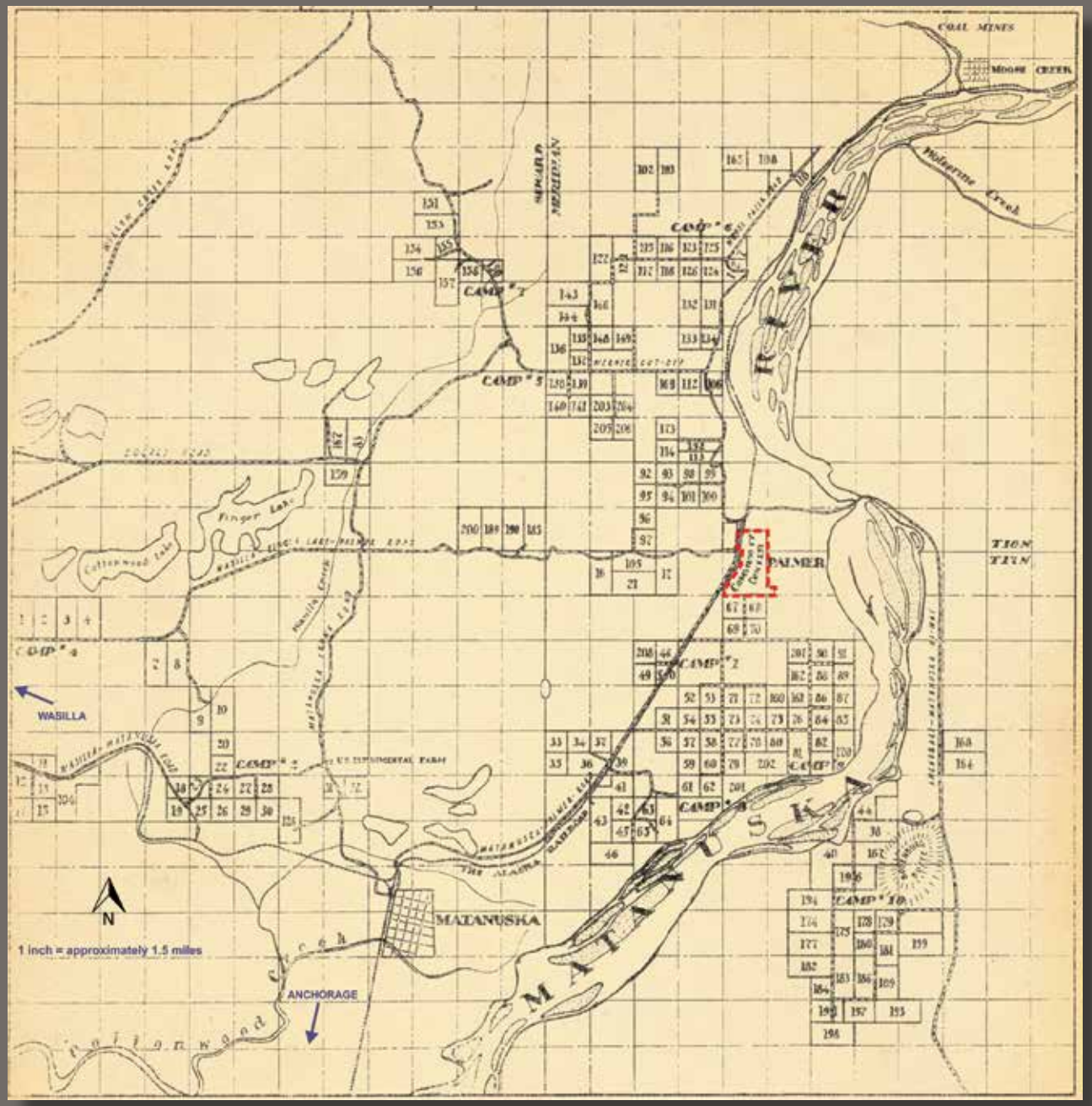
Mrs. Inga Erickson shown in her tent home at Camp 8, 1935. Mary Nan Gamble Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-646.

The colonists selected their farmland by drawing lots. There were a total of 208 tracts of land. These were divided into 144 tracts of 40-acres each; 52 tracts of 80-acres each; and twelve tracts were reserved for future use. Most of the farm tracts were located north and south of the community center, with a few to the west. For ease of access to community services all of the farm tracts were located within a ten mile radius of the community center. Taking place on May 23rd, 1935, the heads of each household came together at the tent city where some colonists were fortunate enough to draw lots for cleared land. Colonists paid $1.25 to $4.00 per acre, with cleared land costing more than raw land. They received loans at three per cent interest for a term of thirty years to buy the land, and were not required to begin repaying the loans for five years. The colonist families then moved to one of eight tent camps, set up around the Valley, to be closer to their land. Portable saw mills were set up at five locations to cut logs for homes and other buildings. Logs were precut and delivered to the homesteads for construction of houses, barns, and outbuildings.

A few colonists customized their house plans to enlarge their homes and add functionality. Ferber Baily, a carpenter from Wisconsin, redesigned the roof and dug a basement to make their house larger. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945; Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-430.

Arthur Hack from Minnesota draws the first number as Colonel Ohlsen holds the ballot box. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945; Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-216.

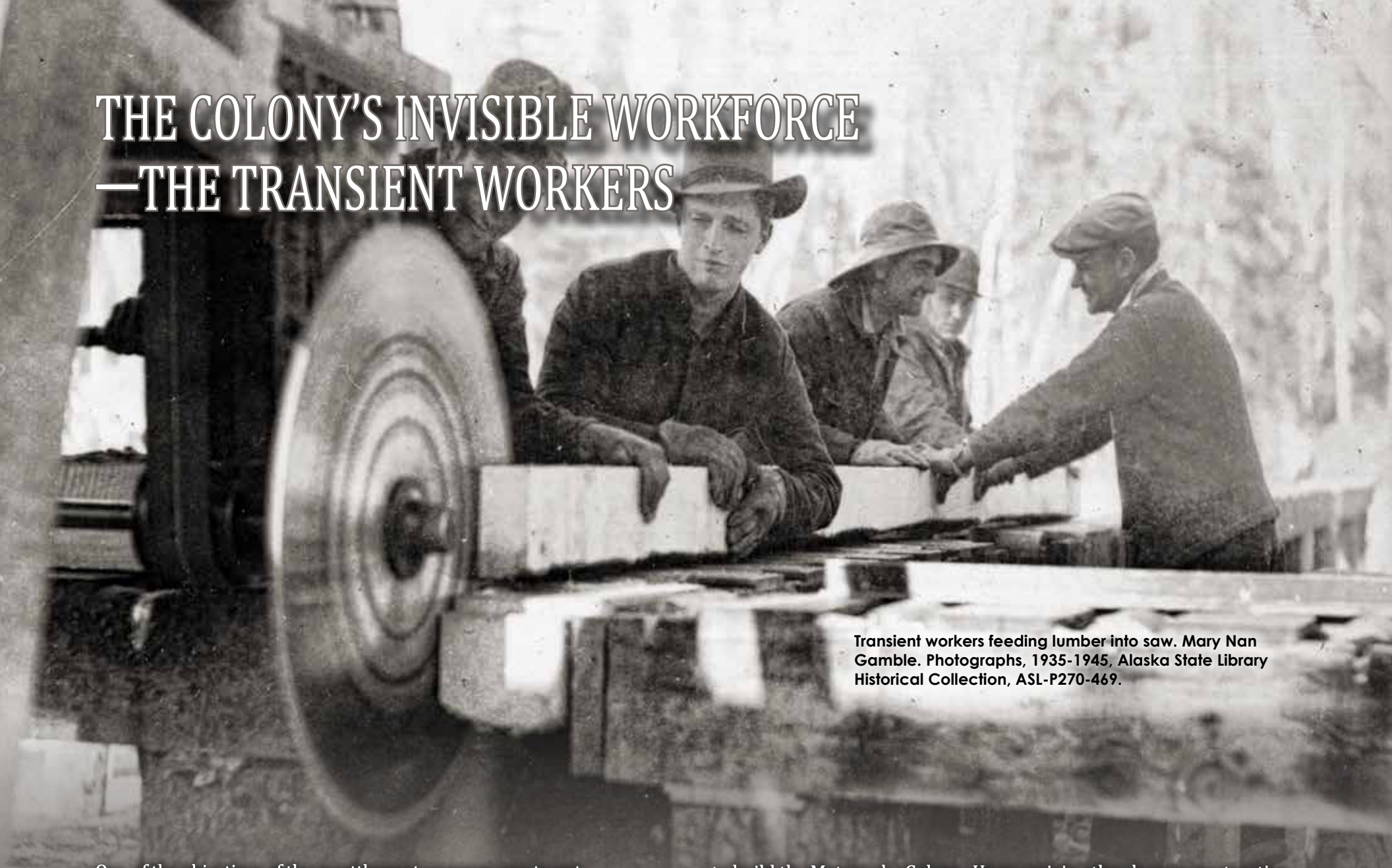
After the drawing each family chose their home design from one of five plans provided. "Rustic cottages," as the architects called them were constructed of imported lumber, local logs, or a combination of both. They were one or one and one-half stories with two or three bedrooms, and had small root cellars. In addition to a farmhouse each farm included a barn, chicken house, brooder coop, outhouse, well house, and shed. Many colonists were not satisfied with the house plans and wanted to make changes, including adding a full basement instead of a small cellar, changing the orientation of the house on the farm, and adding permanent foundations. Initially colony planners would not allow customization and this angered many colonists. Furthermore, colony administrators would not allow the colonists to work on their homes, despite the fact that many were experienced carpenters, plumbers and masons. Colony administrators finally relented, allowing some customization as long as the total cost of material used in their construction did not exceed the amount required by any of the five plans, and allowing experienced colonists to participate in the construction of their homes.



Original Matanuska Colony map from the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation circa 1935, adapted by the National Park Service. The Matanuska Colony community center is outlined in red. Numbered tracts are original homesteads of the Matanuska Colony.

Part of daily life in the tent camps was tending to the community garden. Colonists planted potatoes, carrots, rutabaga, lettuce and other vegetables at small plots near their tent camps to provide fresh produce. Here colonists tend to the garden at Camp 2 while workers prepare logs for building construction in the background. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collections, ASL-P270-679.

THE COLONY'S INVISIBLE WORKFORCE —THE TRANSIENT WORKERS



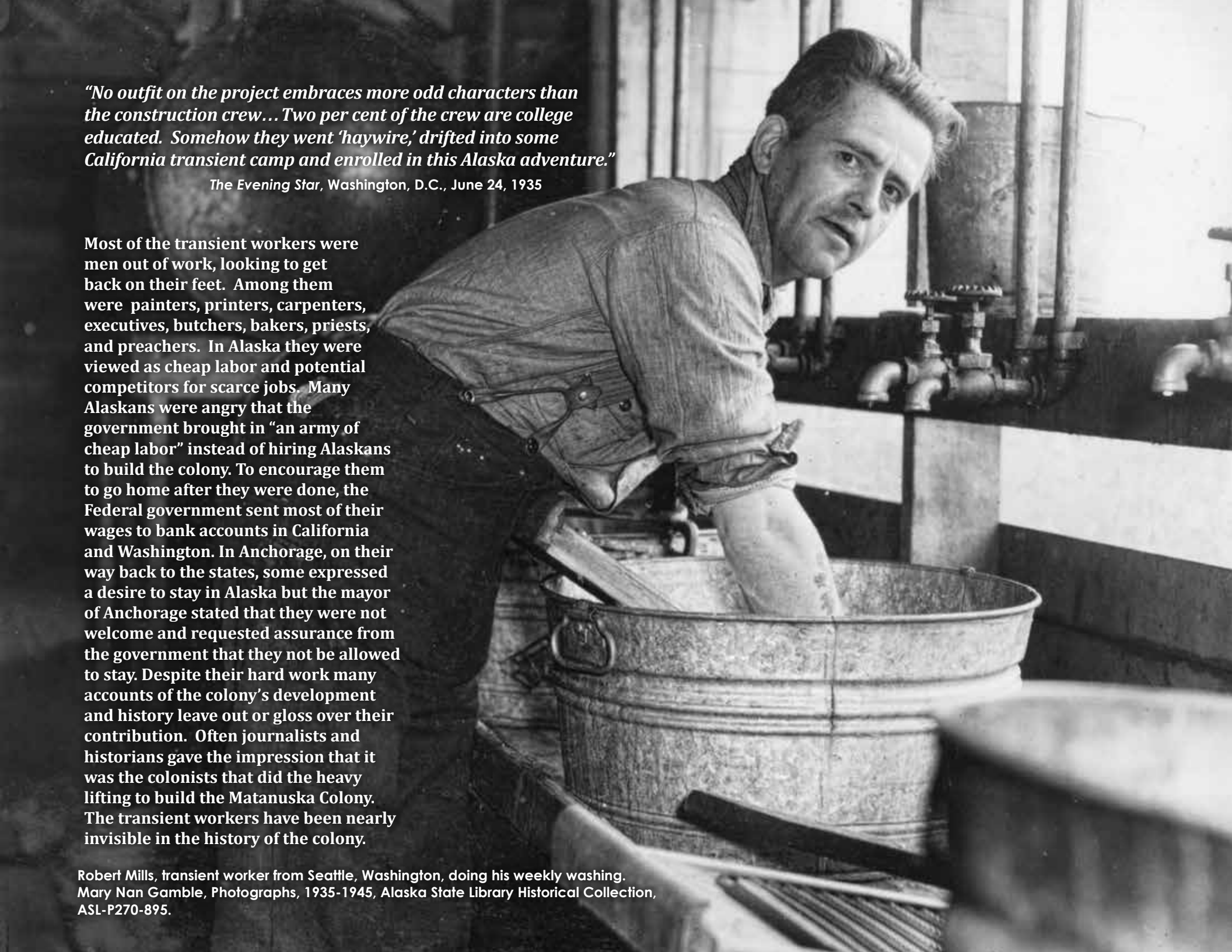
Transient workers feeding lumber into saw. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-469.

One of the objectives of the resettlement program was to put unemployed men to work. Thousands of men were put to work across the nation to build resettlement communities and their contribution to the program has gone largely unnoticed. However, more than 650 workers were hired from transient camps in California and Washington to build the Matanuska Colony. Upon arriving they began constructing tent camps for themselves and the colonists, and then went to work building the colony. In about five months they built and improved roads, set up saw mills, cut logs and lumber, and constructed most of the colony buildings.

"No outfit on the project embraces more odd characters than the construction crew… Two per cent of the crew are college educated. Somehow they went 'haywire,' drifted into some California transient camp and enrolled in this Alaska adventure."

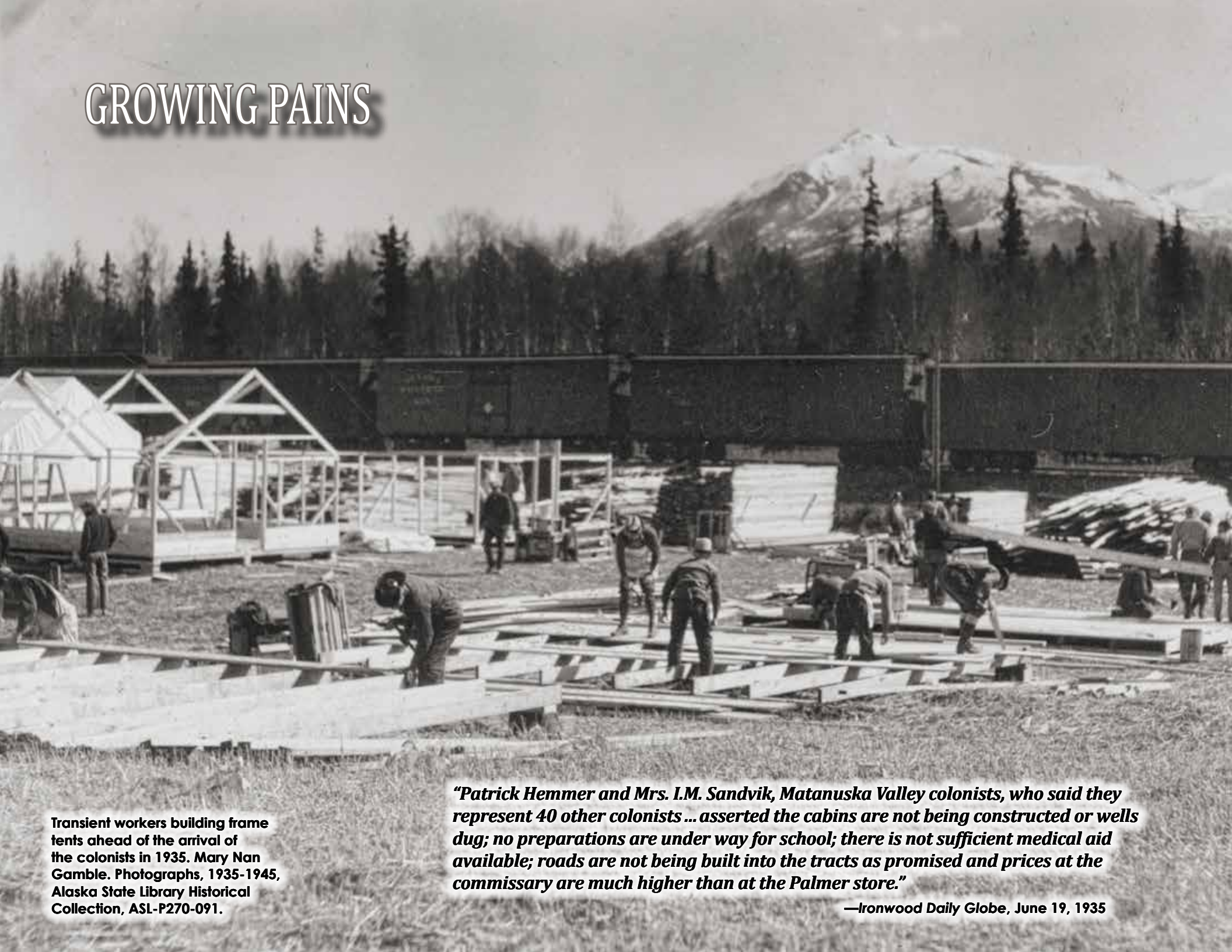
The Evening Star, Washington, D.C., June 24, 1935

Most of the transient workers were men out of work, looking to get back on their feet. Among them were painters, printers, carpenters, executives, butchers, bakers, priests, and preachers. In Alaska they were viewed as cheap labor and potential competitors for scarce jobs. Many Alaskans were angry that the government brought in "an army of cheap labor" instead of hiring Alaskans to build the colony. To encourage them to go home after they were done, the Federal government sent most of their wages to bank accounts in California and Washington. In Anchorage, on their way back to the states, some expressed a desire to stay in Alaska but the mayor of Anchorage stated that they were not welcome and requested assurance from the government that they not be allowed to stay. Despite their hard work many accounts of the colony's development and history leave out or gloss over their contribution. Often journalists and historians gave the impression that it was the colonists that did the heavy lifting to build the Matanuska Colony. The transient workers have been nearly invisible in the history of the colony.



Robert Mills, transient worker from Seattle, Washington, doing his weekly washing. Mary Nan Gamble, Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-895.

GROWING PAINS



Transient workers building frame tents ahead of the arrival of the colonists in 1935. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-091.

"Patrick Hemmer and Mrs. I.M. Sandvik, Matanuska Valley colonists, who said they represent 40 other colonists ... asserted the cabins are not being constructed or wells dug; no preparations are under way for school; there is not sufficient medical aid available; roads are not being built into the tracts as promised and prices at the commissary are much higher than at the Palmer store."

—*Ironwood Daily Globe*, June 19, 1935

A number of problems combined to make for a difficult beginning for the Matanuska Colony. Initially, the management of the colony project was divided between the California Emergency Relief Administration, the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corps in Juneau, and FERA administrators in Washington, D.C. Confusion between the three agencies about who was responsible for ordering tools and building materials, and supervising the workers at the site caused delays in home construction. Transient workers complained about receiving large amounts of varnish but no paint or the wrong size bits for drills. A shortage of trees suitable for construction and unauthorized changes to building plans by local officials required revising plans for wood frame instead of log construction. This meant that additional building materials had to be ordered and shipped, which added to the delay. The last of the colonists were not in their homes until late October, and low temperatures for the last ten days of October averaged 13 F degrees, with an average high of 29 F degrees.

Transient workers building one of the colonists houses in summer 1935. The interiors of some of the houses were not completed until the following year. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-266.

Some colonists became discouraged and left. Others were just not cutout for the Alaska experience. Distance from family and friends caused some to feel homesick. Coming from the plains of the Midwest to the mountainous region of southcentral Alaska required real adjustment. Some colonists expressed feelings of being hemmed in by the mountains. Despite instructions to social workers in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin to select families in good health with farm experience they found it difficult to separate those equipped for pioneering from the dreamers. A number of ill-prepared people made it through the selection process. Tuberculosis, heart disease, anemia, and asthma resulted in 21 families being sent back almost immediately. In addition to health concerns, nearly a third of the colonists had little or no farm experience. Thirty-seven families left or were asked to leave the colony within the first six months and by the end of the first year 124 families had left. Most families were replaced within a year, and it took a full five years to replace all of the original number of colonists.

A COMMUNITY TAKES SHAPE

By summer of 1936, the Matanuska Colony was nearly complete and the community was coming together. A complete town stood where a year earlier only a rail stop existed. Everything necessary to support the colonists, including a hospital, school, warehouse, chicken hatchery, creamery, railroad depot and trading post had been completed. A spur of the Alaska Railroad connected the warehouse and creamery so that supplies and equipment could be easily delivered to the colony, and so farm goods could be loaded onto rail cars and sent to market. In addition, 175 new farms in various stages of clearing and cropping were spread across the Valley. School buses took students to and from the new Central School in the community center.

Dances and holiday parties were held at the school gym, and baseball games were played in the field in front of the school. Social clubs such as the 4-H Club and the Grange were formed and held meetings in the community center. A University of Alaska instructor taught courses in weaving, canning, sewing, and other homemaking skills at the community center. A colony gift shop sold items made by the colonists. In September 1936, the Matanuska Valley's first annual fair was held in the community center. Four churches had been constructed in the community center by 1937. These included a Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Seventh Day Adventist church.

"The ... snow on the ground outside was glazed hard as the colonists made their way to the community building ... to join in Thanksgiving programs... The Matanuska Grange, the only branch of the group in Alaska, sponsored a dinner for its members ... Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Rundell, formerly in Duluth, Minn., had added reason to celebrate the day. A son was born to them on Thanksgiving eve."

***San Bernardino Daily Sun*, November 29, 1935**

Independence Day celebration at the community center, ca. 1936-37. Ward Collection, courtesy Palmer Historical Society.

Colony kids Buddy and Victor Yohn of Wisconsin playing in their new Alaska home. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-593.


SLOW

The community center was the heart of the Alaska Matanuska Colony. Completed in 1936, as seen from left to right, are the powerhouse and warehouses, behind the trees are the Trading Post and Cobbler Shops, in the center of the photo is the Central School, to the right of the school is the Nurses and Teachers Dormitory, and on the far right is Staff Housing. By 1937, several churches had been constructed in the area just beyond Staff Housing. Courtesy Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum, Waugaman-Benson Collection.

MODERN SCHOOL FOR THE COLONY KIDS

More than half of the colonists were children, which made providing adequate schooling a challenge. With the Matanuska Colony school still under construction in fall 1935, colony administrators had to be creative in accommodating the educational needs of the colony children. Schools in the Matanuska Valley in 1935 were located in Wasilla, in Fairview (about four miles south of Wasilla), and in Matanuska. To accommodate the huge influx of students while the colony school was being built, an Alaska Railroad car was converted into a classroom for first and second grade students. Depending on where they lived some students attended school at either Matanuska or in Wasilla. For students that lived too far from the schools, a traveling teacher held classes once a week at a centrally located barn. The Matanuska Colony School, located in the center of the community, was completed in spring of 1936. This large 20-room school had a laboratory, industrial-arts workshop, library, and gymnasium.

(top/clockwise) This converted rail car in Palmer provided classroom space for first and second grade students during the 1935-36 school year. Strouse Collection, courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.
Typing class at Matanuska Colony School, ca. 1936. Barry Collection, courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.
The Matanuska Colony School, completed in 1936. Courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.

ANCHORAGE —THE COLONY MARKET

One of the reasons for establishing a resettlement colony in Alaska was to decrease the Territory's reliance on imported food. Anchorage, located 40 miles south of the colony, was seen as the primary market for Matanuska Colony produce. Established as the construction camp for the Alaska Railroad in 1915, Anchorage was Alaska's fourth largest city in 1935, with about 3,000 people. After ballooning to a population of over 6,000 with the railroad construction boom, the Anchorage population dropped below 2,000 in 1920 as men left the Territory with the coming of World War I. Labor shortages slowed construction of the railroad during this time. Following the War the nation entered a nearly decade long economic boom that lasted throughout most of the 1920s. During this time Alaska's economy was generally stagnant. For this reason the Great Depression did not have a great impact on the Territory.

Main Street in Anchorage, Alaska. September 1938. Ray B. Dame, Ickes collection; Anchorage Museum, B1975.175.401.

In 1935, most of the Territory's food was shipped from Seattle aboard Alaska Steamship Company ships. Shipping over such a great distance was costly and made Alaska's food supply vulnerable. Adding to the cost was the fact that there was little freight for the company to haul back to Seattle after unloading in Alaska. Inadequate refrigeration facilities aboard the ships limited the availability and quality of fresh food. The bad smell and taste of eggs shipped aboard these ships earned them the nickname "boat eggs." A few small farms on the outskirts of town provided some dairy and vegetables, but they could not produce enough to meet the city's needs. Federal Emergency Relief Administration officials saw Anchorage as a market for Matanuska Colony products. Colony planners envisioned a farm community in the Matanuska Valley where farmers would grow and process farm goods to be then transported to Anchorage and other communtities by the Alaska Railroad.

S.S. *Alameda*, one of the Alaska Steamship Company's steamships, at Anchorage, Alaska, ca. 1916-1930. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.

FARMING TAKES ROOT

"Fort Richardson (Anchorage) was completed late in 1940 and the soldiers bought everything in sight from Matanuska."

—*Dunn County News*, July 11, 1945

As demand for dairy products increased so did the need for hay to feed the cows. September 1937. Dora M. Sweeney. Photographs, 1935 –1975, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P421-234.

Farms were initially challenging to develop. The Matanuska Valley was heavily forested, with pockets of muskeg and gravel. Delays in building construction and the grueling task of clearing land slowed farm development. Although building construction took priority over land clearing the first year some clearing did take place. Land clearing was a difficult task, done primarily with hand tools and horses initially. Bulldozers, brought in at first to help with tasks, were found to be too underpowered for the job. It took many years before the colonists completed clearing all the land. By spring of 1938 each farm had approximately ten acres of tillable land and by 1940, the hard work of the colony farmers began to pay off. With war raging in Europe and increasing Japanese aggression in the Pacific, the military began looking to bolster Alaska's defenses. With the establishment of Fort Richardson Army Base, adjacent to Anchorage in 1940, a new market opened up for the Matanuska Colony products.

Land clearing involved labor intensive hand axes, hand saws, block and tackle, and ground fire. Initially, bulldozers provided were too small for the hard ground breaking work, which slowed land clearing until bigger equipment arrived. Mary Nan Gamble. Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-271.

The expanding Anchorage market created a greater demand for poultry, eggs, and dairy products, with dairy becoming the most profitable colony product. To meet demand for dairy products thirty-seven tracts were enlarged in 1941, and by 1943 there were approximately 700 dairy cows in the Matanuska Valley. By 1940, there were nearly 30,000 chickens being raised. Fresh pork was also in high demand, and there were about 900 hogs in the Matanuska Valley in 1944. The amount of pork and pork products being produced was so much that it was being shipped to other areas of Alaska. The Matanuska Valley Farmers Cooperative Association, established in 1936, marketed these products for the colony farmers. Between 1943 and 1948, gross sales of all Matanuska Colony farm products nearly tripled from $370,000 to $1,120,500.

Farming evolved rapidly after colony construction was completed. FERA's vision of a colony of full-time farmers in the Matanuska Valley was interrupted by world events. Delays in building construction and land clearing slowed farming and limited farm income as the first loan payments were coming due in 1941. However, it was not until 1943 that the colony began to show a profit. This forced farmers to look for jobs, at a time when the military needed construction workers to build Fort Richardson, near Anchorage.

Increased demand for farm goods from a rapidly growing population also changed the nature of farming at the colony. Colony farmers moved quickly from general farming to specialized farming and from subsistence to commercial agriculture. While the Army bought up most of the dairy products, other customers for Matanuska Colony products included the Alaska Railroad, Civil Aviation Administration, Willow Creek mines, and businesses in Anchorage.

Reaping oats on a Matanuska Colony farm, 1935. Feed crops, such as hay and oats, quickly became one of the largest agricultural products as farmers responded to demand for dairy and poultry products. Mary Nan Gamble, Photographs, 1935-1945, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-766.

The United States emerged from World War II victorious and free from the grip of the Great Depression. Stagnation that had plagued Alaska before the War, ended. By 1950, the combined population of Anchorage and the military bases was more than 30,000. With the growing population demand for Matanuska colony produce increased. Agricultural production increased throughout the 1940s and into the early 1950s, with dairy products continuing to be the most profitable goods. By 1960, most of the original colony farmers had retired or passed away and only about a dozen original colony farmers were still engaged in farming. However, farming was firmly rooted in the Matanuska Valley and the Matanuska Valley Farmers Cooperative Association continued to operate into the 1980s as the produce marketing organization. Today most of the state's 500 farms are located in the Matanuska Valley and the total value of production in 2016 was nearly $60 million. Responding to a growing foodie culture, Matanuska Valley agriculture has become more varied with farmers now raising reindeer, elk, and bison, in addition to fruits and vegetables.

Peas were grown both as feed for livestock and for canning at the Matanuska Colony. Courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society.

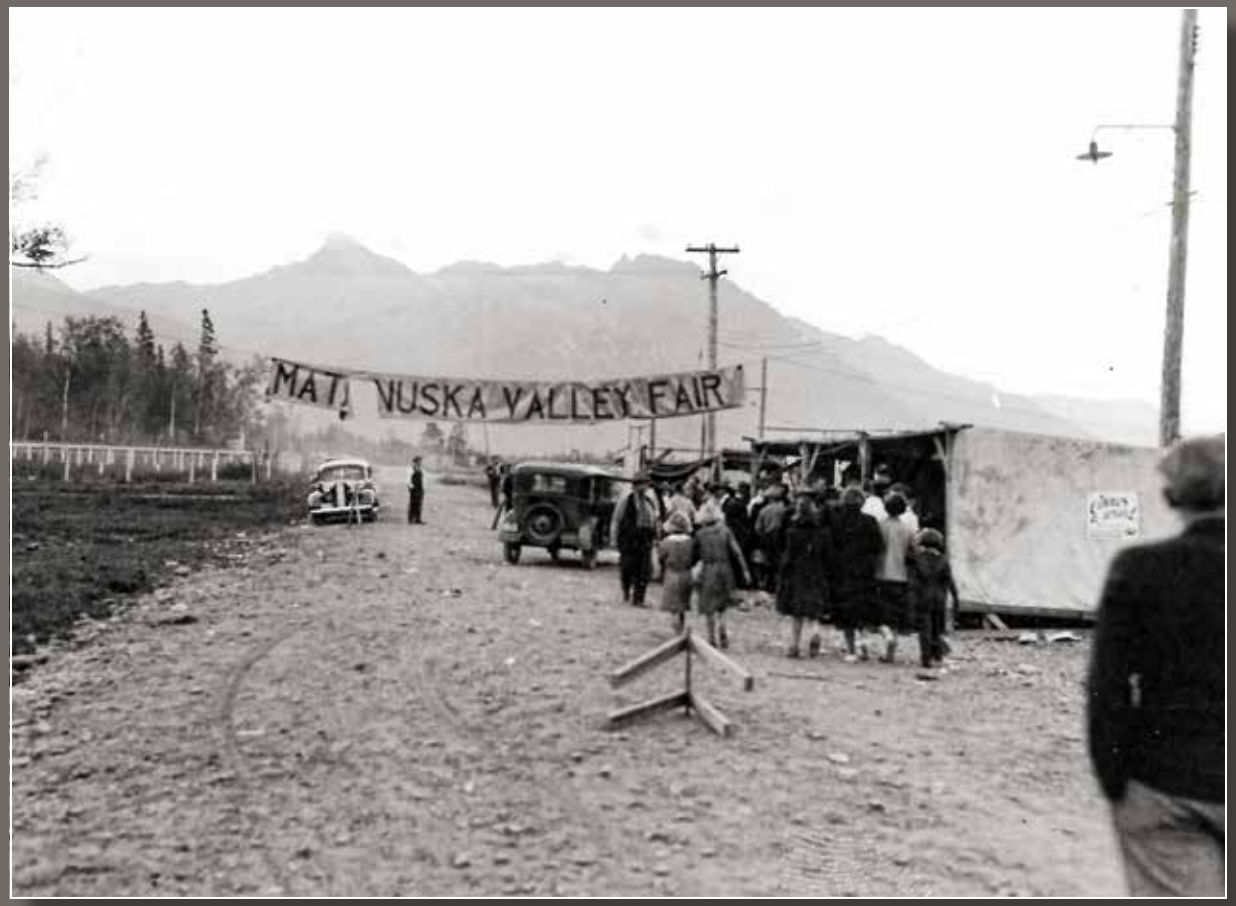
Matanuska Valley farm with cow grazing in the foreground. October 1943. Clinton H. Bentz Photograph Collection, 1943-1944, Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P448-77.

AN ENDURING LEGACY

By the summer of 1936, the colonists' homes were completed, their crops planted, and they were looking ahead to the first harvest.

In July, the Grange, led by M.D. Snodgrass, formed a committee to organize a "Harvest Fair" in the Matanuska Valley and many colonists joined the effort. The Matanuska Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair Association, Inc., as the committee was called was created to be independent of the Grange. With a $1000 Territorial grant and $1,200 in donations they organized the first Matanuska Valley Fair.

In September of 1936, the Matanuska Valley Fair was held in the newly completed colony community center. Agricultural exhibits were placed inside the gym and livestock exhibits were placed outside under tents. Activities and events included agricultural displays, art displays, baked goods, livestock displays, handcraft displays, amateur photography, baseball games, horse races, a rodeo, dances and a baby show. The Fair was a great success, drawing about 3,500 people and raising about $6,000.



Livestock exhibits at the first Matanuska Valley Fair in 1936 were located under tents in the Matanuska Colony community center, across from the chicken hatchery. John Long Collection, courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.

(left) Earlier agricultural fairs had taken place in Anchorage and Fairbanks with the assistance of Milton D. Snodgrass. As a former Matanuska Agricultural Experiment Station Manager and Territorial Senator, Snodgrass was a strong supporter of Alaska's agriculture potential, and saw fairs as venues for promoting farming. The 1917 Alaska Agricultural Fair in Anchorage highlighted the size and variety of Matanuska Valley vegetables. Jack H. Floyd Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1957.005.159.

(right) "Striking proof that virtually every variety of vegetable can be grown in Alaska is given here, in an exhibit at the Matanuska Valley Fair. M.D. Snodgrass, old settler in the valley and chairman of the fair, is shown with onions, carrots, cucumbers. Cabbage, lettuce, turnip, celery, potatoes, wheat, and clover raised by colonists."

—Landcaster *Eagle-Gazette*, Ohio, Sept. 30, 1936

"For four days, the Matanuska colonists gloated over the fat livestock housed in special barns, the bundles of vegetables, the golden sheaves of wheat, the bunches of clover that were the answer to those who said they couldn't grow anything in Alaska."

—*Sheboygan Press*, Wisconsin, October 1, 1936

The Alaska State Fair is famous for its showcasing huge vegetables. This world record cabbage weighing 138.25 pounds was grown by Scott Robb in 2012. Courtesy of the Alaska State Fair, Clark James Mishler, Photographer.

What began as an event for homesteaders and colonists in the Matanuska Valley now draws about 300,000 people annually to the fair. This 2,051 pounds pumpkin, grown by Dale Marshall, set a new record at the Alaska State Fair in 2019. Courtesy of Heather Feil.

With Snodgrass' leadership organizing the Matanuska Valley Fair was a unifying event for homesteaders and colonists in the Matanuska Valley.

In 1937, the Matanuska Valley Agricultural and Industrial Fair Association bought land about two blocks southeast of the Matanuska Colony community center and moved the fair to that location. After a five year hiatus during World War II the Fair returned in 1948. Attendance grew throughout the 1950s, hitting 30,000 in 1960.

In 1956, the Matanuska Valley Fair and the Tanana Valley Fair both petitioned the Alaska State Legislature to become Alaska's official State Fair. As a compromise the legislature decided to alternate between the two, with both sharing the title of Alaska State Fair. By 1966, the Fair had outgrown its location near the Matanuska Colony community center and bought 221 acres, including some Matanuska Colony farmland, about two miles south of the community center. This new location began hosting the Alaska State Fair in 1967 where it continues to operate today.

(right) Boys showing their horses at the first Matanuska Valley Fair. September 1936. Hemmer Collection, courtesy of the Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.

MATANUSKA COLONY HERITAGE

Many of the original colony buildings, a number of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are actively used and maintained, preserving their historic appearance and character. This includes several farms as well as the former Trading Post, School, Dormitory, Water Tower, and Staff Houses.

The Colony House Museum, located in an original Matanuska Colony farm house and operated by the Palmer Historical Society, invites visitors to imagine life as an early colonist.

Matanuska Colony mother and children working in the colony garden. 1935. Mary Nan Gamble Photographs, 1935-1945 Alaska State Library Historical Collection, ASL-P270-718.

Historic colony buildings in use today include the Trading Post (above) and the Colony House Museum, and Manager's House (below left to right). National Park Service, 2016.

(left) Located about three miles south of Palmer and a short distance from the fairgrounds, this picturesque privately owned farm overlooking the Matanuska River, with Pioneer Peak as its backdrop, continues to be farmed. National Park Service, 2017.

Alaska's Matanuska Colony is forever linked to the Great Depression and the New Deal programs that sought to help struggling rural Americans to get back on their feet.

This legacy, however, is felt much closer to home with enthusiastic community pride and enduring traditions celebrating Palmer's farming heritage.

The iconic Matanuska Colony Water Tower in Palmer, 2019. Courtesy Palmer Historical Society/Colony House Museum.

Today, historic buildings in the community center that continue to be in use include (from left to right) the Trading Post, School, and Teacher's Dormitory. National Park Service, 2016.

The Alaska State Fair grounds with Pioneer Peak in the background. 2017. There is a "Colony Village" in the upper left, showing some of the original buildings that were moved from the Matanuska Colony community center and farmsteads. Left to right is the Lutheran Church (brown with a green roof), a colony house (white with a green roof), a colony barn (white with a red roof), and near the upper center another colony house (brown with a white roof). Courtesy of the Alaska State Fair, Clark James Mishler, Photographer.

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Web-based Resources

The Matanuska Colony: Alaska's New Deal
This ten minute video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwbBkFp5ScQ) tells the story of the Matanuska Colony. It uses archival photographs, and was produced by Gabe Bailey, a teacher in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District.

The History House Museum (http://www.cct78.org/history-house.html), located in Tillery, North Carolina, is a former resettlement home of the Tillery Resettlement Farm.

Established in 1935, on former plantation land, Tillery Resettlement Farm was one of the largest resettlement projects in North Carolina and one of the 17 African American resettlement projects. At its peak Tillery Resettlement Farm provided homes to approximately 150 African American families.

Alabama Pioneers (https://www.alabamapioneers.com/) is a website dedicated to the history of the state of Alabama. The website has a number of pages dedicated to Gee's Bend (https://www.alabamapioneers.com/gees-bend-resettlement-program/), an African American resettlement community established in 1937.

Pictures: Remembering "Moving In" day on Nov. 1, 1937 at historic Aberdeen Gardens
Aberdeen Gardens was established near Newport News, Virginia in 1934 for 158 low income African American families. This pictorial article (http://www.dailypress.com/features/history/photos/dp-oldaberdeenpix-photogallery.html#) includes dozens of photos documenting the development of the community.

Community-Resources for Teachers and Students

"Alaska's Matanuska Colony" (https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/twhp-matanuska-colony.htm)
This lesson emphasizes the challenges of establishing a New Deal resettlement community in the Territory of Alaska in 1935, and looks at its successes and challenges. Historic places like the Matanuska Colony Community Center provide evidence of the New Deal resettlement program, a program designed to move farmers off of submarginal farmland and onto productive farmland. The materials here introduce students to these topics through examination of primary sources and skill-building activities.

"Comparing & Contrasting Communities: Cumberland Homesteads, TN & Skyline Farms, AL" (https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=43459381)
In this lesson plan, students compare and contrast the Resettlement Administration Communities of Cumberland Homesteads, TN and Skyline Farms, AL. Students analyze photographs taken by Farm Security Administration photographers of the communities in the 1930s in order to learn similarities and differences as well as understand how images can be used as propaganda.

“Exploring Skyline Farms, Alabama through Oral History” (https://library.mtsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=43459503)
This lesson activity explores the community of Skyline Farms, Alabama, formally known as Cumberland Mountain Farms, through photographs. Three Farm Security Administration photographers, Arthur Rothstein, Carl Mydans, and Ben Shahn, photographed Skyline Farms between 1935 and 1937.

“Arthurdale: A New Deal Community Experiment,” (https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/157arthurdale/157arthurdale.htm). Arthurdale was the first of one hundred homestead communities built from the ground-up by the federal government during the Great Depression. Due to Eleanor Roosevelt's lobbying and influence, this New Deal project provided spacious new homes with indoor plumbing, modern appliances, and furniture to a select, lucky few. The experiment faced many challenges, but Arthurdale remains. This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for the Arthurdale Historic District in Preston County, West Virginia.

The Great Depression and World War II, 1929 – 1945: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1933-1945
Created by the Library of Congress, especially for teachers, this website (http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/newdeal/) uses primary sources to help students learn about the New Deal.

TN History for Kids: Cumberland Homesteads (http://www.tnhistoryforkids.org/history/virtual-tours/virtual-tours/cumberland-homesteads.2450292). Established in 1934, the Cumberland Homesteads consisted of about 250 homes, a school, a park area (now known as Cumberland Mountain State Park), and a stone water tower and headquarters building. The Cumberland Homesteads Tower Association runs one of the original homestead houses as a museum.

The Matanuska Maid trademark was registered in November 1936, listing ice cream as one of its products. The creamery operated until 2012. Courtesy Palmer Historical Society.