

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Gamble, Mary Nan

Mary Nan Gamble Papers, 1935-1945

MS 94

[Concerning her work on the
Matanuska Valley Colonization Project
for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration]

1 Box - 1 ft.

Processed By: Staff
August 1986

ACQUISITION: The papers and photographs of Mary Nan Gamble were donated by her daughter, Keith Ann Duncan, to the Alaska State Museum and were later transferred to the Library.

Related Collections: PCA 270

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In 1934, Mrs. Mary Nan Gamble, an administrative assistant for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (F.E.R.A.), helped with the planning and criteria for selecting 200 farm families from the Midwest to participate in the Matanuska Colony project. The Matanuska Valley was selected for its favorable farming conditions and trade potential with Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad areas. Under the F.E.R.A. Act of 1933, the E.R.A. of each state could obtain grants for "rural rehabilitation relief" as a substitute for direct rural relief. Funding was provided to Midwest states and the Territory of Alaska for establishment of the agricultural colony near Palmer, Alaska. Before the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation - Corporation (A.R.R.C.) was incorporated, the first administrative

agency was the California Emergency Relief Administration (C.E.R.A.). High costs faced by the colonists caused a larger debt loan than they were told to expect. Within four years, about sixty percent of the original colonists had left.

Mrs. Gamble was one of three people who accompanied the contingent to Alaska, lived with them in tents until the forest was cleared and roads and cabins built on their forty acre tracts. Upon her return to Washington D.C., Mrs. Gamble maintained case records and a project history for two more years. She later made other trips to Alaska for the government as a census official.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

The papers (Ms 94) contain copies of official reports and memoranda on the colony development and problems. Conflicting orders from various agencies or boards connected with the colony caused difficulties for colonists and administrators. Mrs. Gamble also received personal letters from colony officials that describe their concerns and activities. There are a few letters from colonists and copies of various publications or writings on the colony from newspapers throughout the country. The photograph collection (PCA 270) of 976 views includes the official album of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation Matanuska Colonization Project, 1935. It is a pictorial record of the colonists, their travel to Alaska and the development of the colony, by photographer Willis T. Geisman.

INVENTORY

Folder

- 1 Biographical data and material about Mary Nan Gamble.
 1. Personal information prepared by Mrs. Gamble for her Plainville, Texas high school reunion in 1971.
 2. Letters dated April 1976 of C. W. McCall, Sequim, Washington, to Dorothy Walker, Washington D.C., expressing his feelings about Mrs. Gamble upon hearing of her death.
- 2 Correspondence and material regarding escort of colonists to Alaska for U.S. Federal Emergency Relief Administration. 1935. 21 items.
 1. Notes for Alaska Conference (original brief of Dept. of the Interior and F.E.R.A., February 1935).

2. Letters dated May 10-11, 1935 from Marjorie Case, Field Representative, State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission of Michigan, regarding Michigan families going with Mrs. Gamble on train; also list of Michigan families in the colony project.
- 3-5. List of colonist families and train schedules.
6. Information on family selection procedure.
7. Letters dated May 5, 1935 aboard U.S.A.T. Steamer ST. MIHIEL, to David Williams, Rural Rehabilitation Dept., Washington D.C., from John (Givens?); Daniel J. Sullivan; Leo B. Jacobs; Mary Nan Gamble.
Describes experiences with escorting colonists thus far and being generally impressed by the intelligence and abilities shown by the colonists; also problems to be faced upon arrival - lack of accommodations, etc.
8. Passenger List - U.S.A.T. Steamer ST. MIHIEL, Voyage 99, Seattle to Seward. May 18, 1935.
9. Mr. Carr Addresses Colonists. July 4, 1935, Palmer.
10. List of directors, A.R.R.C., Matanuska Valley Farmers' Cooperative, Settlers' Council Members.
11. Letter dated June 25, 1935 from Marie Louise Anthony.
12. Telegram dated May 11, 1935 from S. L. Foote, Director of Transportation, Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration.
13. Form letter dated May 8, 1935 from Arlie Mucks, Director, Wisconsin Emergency Relief Administration, on train accommodations.
14. Letter dated May 11, 1935 authorizing meals for Mary Nan Gamble on train.
15. Copy letter dated June 20, 1935, Washington D.C., to Mr. Carleton.
Probably written by Mrs. Gamble thanking Mr. Carleton for report, telling of meeting and decision to relieve Mr. Troast of his duties.
16. Memorandum dated June 14, 1935 with items to be reported on as suggested by Mrs. Gamble.
17. Overview on colonization project, facts on Matanuska Valley and comments on colonists quoted from letters of government officials. 6 p. (Note: copies of letters in full are located in Folder 8).

18. Congregational Song Sheet (songs sung on Rhinelander before train pulled out May 13).
 19. Welcome to Seattle. Time schedule for Matanuska Settlers' Entertainment.
 20. Welcome to Seattle. Bon Voyage Program. May 1935.
 21. Public voucher totalling \$190.45 to pay for travel and expenses, May 9-June 10, 1935.
- 3 Memos, reports on Matanuska colony. 1935-1937. 6 items.
1. [Summary of travel.]
Mrs. Gamble describes events as she escorted colonists by train from Wisconsin to Seattle and by boat to Seward. The men and older boys left for the Matanuska Valley as a group and the women and children joined them three days later. 4 p.
 2. Memorandum dated June 12, 1935 by Mrs. Gamble to Colonel Westbrook, with Report on Matanuska Valley Project. 3 p.
Selection of families very good but some are not farmers; commissary problems; delay in determining camp sites and inappropriate sites major problem - need a person with administrative ability to help Mr. Irwin; need to have authority and work delegated, lack of warehouse and other problems.
 3. [Report] dated July 7, 1935 of Charles S. Osborn, Anchorage. 3 p.
Report on his critical inspection of the nine camps in the colony. Many colonists had irresponsible promises made to them in their home states. Col. Frank Bliss with the Construction Division arrived only three days before the Minnesota colonists. In 50 days, tents with plank floors, wells and latrines were in place. There are four hospital tents and the medical unit has treated 2,000 persons including colonists, construction crews, people off the railroad. Measles accounted for 165 cases. Arrival of Capt. Carr will improve coordination of work and he also serves as U.S. Commissioner for the colony. Suggests colonists that are dissatisfied should be sent back at once and their previous situation restored as nearly as possible, as this would create a better atmosphere in colony.
 4. [List of campsites, tents and people.] 9 p.
 5. Memorandum dated January 16, 1936 of H. M. Colvin, Special Counsel, on Matanuska Valley Colonization Project. 4 p.

Briefly explains authority under which the colony was developed, executive order to set aside land in Alaska, and organization of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation under the non-profit corporation laws of the territory to administer funds, etc.

6. Memorandum dated March 9, 1937 by Mrs. Gamble to Col. Westbrook, sending a letter written by Mrs. Inez Huseby from the Matanuska Colony, dated January 14, 1937.
Describes colony doings and political matters.
- 4** Writings and notes regarding Alaska trip and Matanuska Colony Project.
1. Introductory comment dated May 21, 1980 by Keith Ann Duncan, daughter of Mrs. Gamble.
 2. [Journal, May 15-June 4, 1935.] 11 p.
Describes experiences and events on train and boat trip to Alaska.
 3. [Narrative of experiences escorting colonists to Alaska in 1935.] 33 p.
 4. [References to colonists and colony from letters written by . various people. 1935.] 3 p.
- 5** Letters sent (personal). 1935. 1 item.
1. Letter dated May 18, 1935 from Seattle to Mr. and Mrs. S. Mehary, Plainsview, Texas.
Addressed to "everybody," telling of train trip to Seattle, stay at Hotel Frye, Seattle reception.
- 6** Letters sent 1937-1938. 5 items.
- 1-2. Letters dated April 12, 1937 to Dr. Colvin.
Sent Alaska information, mention of land bill.
 - 3-5. Letters dated April 12, 1937; June 2 & September 6, 1938 to Leo B. Jacobs, Palmer.
Wrote of contacts she made for Mr. Jacobs; colony management with comments on Col. Ohlson and others on June 21 1938; transfer of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation from the Works Progress Administration to the Department of the Interior, mentions loss of exhibit material for use in the play, "200 Were Chosen."

- 7 Correspondence with Stuart Campbell (S. C.), Property Custodian, Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation at Palmer, 1937-1938 and Mary Nan Gamble (M. G.). 14 items.
1. Letter dated January 6, 1937 from S. C. to M. G., attaching preface to report on replacement families for the Matanuska Colony.
- 8 Alaska Colonization Project outline and Correspondence, May-December 1935. 192p.
- p. 1 History and progress of Alaska Colonization project (topical outline).
Several copies with varied notes.
 - p. 20 Personnel - background information.
 - p. 41 Alaska politics and personnel
Comments on A. A. Shonbeck (Anchorage merchant), Col. Ohlson (General Manager, Alaska Railroad), Governor Troy, Lester N. Troast (discharged architect).
Letters of Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation personnel. Original and carbon copies.
 - p. 46 Letter of Daniel J. Sullivan "Sully," Palmer, dated June 11, 1935 to David R. Williams.
Details high costs of lumber, shipping, various people out to make money on project forcing it way over estimates - asks for investigator.
 - p. 55 Letter of John [Givens?], Palmer, dated June 11, 1935 to Lyle and Dave [Williams?].
No tools have been received from outside and Anchorage cleaned out of saws, axes, etc. bought at high prices; notes concern for getting cabins built before snow comes, two portable sawmills in operation; road construction not underway to any extent; will try to contract out building of school; no warehouse so property under tarps; situation is such that can't keep promises to the colonists. Shonbeck who bought up land and sold to corporations now has a lumber yard and selling at \$50 a thousand, and has other businesses selling to colony; grocery costs and problems with work conditions, payments, etc.
 - p. 68 Letter of Leo B. Jacobs, Palmer, dated June 13, 1935 to David R. Williams.
Lumber is arriving and adjustments made to cabin plans, critical of Don Irwin, reviews problems and some progress, political situation.

- p. 79 Letter of Leo B. Jacobs, Seward, dated May 7, 1935 to David R. Williams, Supervising Architect.
Unofficial report on personal activities and activities in general on board the ST. MIHIEL.
- p. 85 Radiograms received or sent by Governor Troy in June 1935.
Discusses hiring Alaskan unemployed, wage considerations, project administration concerns. On June 17, Gov. Troy writes Lawrence Westbrook, Asst. Administrator, F.E.R.A., recommending that organization of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation be completed and project be under Alaska control.
- p. 104 Radiogram of Lawrence Westbrook dated June 16, 1935 to Don Irwin, Palmer.
- p. 107 Radiogram from Westbrook dated June 15, 1935 to A.R.R.C.
Writes that Eugene Carr is coming to Alaska for F.E.R.A. and will provide direction rather than California; Don Irwin should delegate construction responsibility to F. Bliss.
- p. 113 Radiogram from Gov. Troy, dated May 4, 1935 to Edward Griffin, Acting Governor.
Writes Don Irwin is general manager of the A.R.R.C.
- p. 116 Our power plant vs. Anchorage P & L Co. proposal.
Letters regarding.
- p. 129 Telegram from Givens/Sullivan/Campbell dated July 15, 1935 to David R. Williams.
Situation critical, project foundering.
- p. 135 Letter of Leo Jacobs, Palmer, dated June 25, 1935 to David Williams.

Five cabins under construction, F. Bliss now director of construction.
- p. 138 Letter of Dan Sullivan, Palmer, dated June 14, 1935 to David Williams (June 14, 1935).
Personnel problems, purchase irregularities.
- p. 142 Letter, undated, of complaint from colonists to Harry L. Hopkins, U.S. Relief Administration, Washington, D.C., signed by Patrick J. Hemmers and Mrs. J. M. Sandvik, colonists' representatives.

- p. 144 Letter of Edward W. Griffin, Juneau, dated May 1, 1935 to Gov. Troy, Washington, D.C.
Management of colony.
- p. 147 Letter of H. G. Watson, Juneau, dated May 1, 1935 to Gov. Troy.
Funds needed for general emergency relief program.
- p. 154 Memorandum of Mary Nan Gamble, dated June 12, 1935 to L. Westbrook.
- p. 158 Letter of John Givens, Palmer, dated May 20, 1935 to David Williams.
Givens is assistant property custodian, informal comments on management, first community gathering.
- p. 162 Letter of Mary Nan Gamble, dated May 13, 1935 to David Williams.
- p. 168 Letter of Daniel J. Sullivan, dated May 4, 1935 to David Williams.
- p. 169 Memorandum from Marjorie Case, dated April 16, 1935 to all administrators sending families to Alaska.
- p. 170 Letter of Robert E. Bondy, American Red Cross, Washington D.C., dated April 12, 1935 to Lawrence Westbrook.
Assistance of Red Cross to colonists.
- p. 172 Letter of administrator?, dated December 27, 1935 to Senator Vandenberg, Washington D.C.
Answers questions on colony.
- p. 178 Memo from Charles B. Forbes, dated May 14, 1935 to M. M. Milford.
On Alaska Colonization project.
- p. 181- Letter of H. A. R. Carleton (en route on NORTH STAR, Seward to
192 Seattle) to L. Westbrook.
Confidential report on Matanuska Valley Project - escorting colonists, organization and administration, warehousing, purchasing, employment.
- 9** Letters received: Mr. & Mrs. Otis Brown (former colonists), Wausau, Wisconsin. September 11, 1935 from Mr. Brown and September 16 from Mrs. Brown with their comments on the colony and present situation after Mr. Brown's health forced their return to Wisconsin.
- 10** Letters received: Arville Schaleben, Palmer (MILWAUKEE JOURNAL correspondent).

August 18, 1935 letter saying she will soon be leaving Matanuska. She is critical of the situation and Territorial politics, comments on various people and feels some malicious stories have been printed on the project.

- 11** Letters received: Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Palmer.
September 6, 1935 from Madeleine de Foras (nurse).
September 19, 1935 from Leo B. Jacobs.

July 6, 1937 from Dr. H. M. Colvin with a *July 29, 1937* reply of Mary Nan Gambl e.

March 9, 1938 from Leo B. Jacobs asking her opinion on his going to proper authorities to outline difficulties and possibly needing to resign to do so. Encloses a letter he wrote to Dr. H. M. Colvin on the same date.

- 12** Copies of letters written by Matanuska officials.
Correspondents: Leo B. Jacobs, Palmer to David R. Williams, Washington D.C., 1935-37; a letter from John Givens and Dan Sullivan with notes of Mary Nan Gamble?
- 13** Copies of letters/writings from various government officials regarding Matanuska Colony. 1934-35.

Correspondents: O. F. Ohlson (General Manager, Alaska Railroad) to Jacob Baker (F.E.R.A.); H. A. R. Carleton (Fiscal Agent, F.E.R.A.) to Col. Lawrence Westbrook (F.E.R.A.); Lawrence Westbrook to Gov. John Troy; Charles B. Forbes to M. M. Milford; David R. Williams to Col. Westbrook-- memos on Ed Doherty and Rex Beach articles; Charles S. Osborn letter on his inspection of the nine camps of the Matanuska colony; Eugene J. Carr speech in December 1935 on the colony to homesteaders in Florida.

- 14** Transcript of a telephone conversation June 5, 1935, between Col. Westbrook (F.E.R.A. administrator) and H. A. R. Carleton and Mr. Plunkert.
Colony matters are discussed and problems with Lester Troast (supervising architect) discharged from duties on June 1.
- 15** Newspaper clippings on Mary Nan Gamble's work as a census official, 1949.
From DAILY ALASKA EMPIRE (Juneau), July 20 and 22, 1949. File includes a pamphlet on 1948 census of business-WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT IT.
- 16** Publications and writings regarding the Matanuska Colony.

MATANUSKA; A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROGRESS OF THE
ALASKAN COLONISTS, by Dr. H. M. Colvin (6 p.)

THE TRUE STORY OF MATANUSKA (17 leaves typescript, unsigned with
pencil date, October 8, 1935).

MATANUSKA LODGE, PALMER ALASKA (brochure).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE MATANUSKA
COLONIZATION PROJECT IN ALASKA. 9 p.

"Pilgrims' Progress," by W. B. Courtney. From *COLLIERS' WEEKLY*, *May*
7, 1938, p. 12-13, 59-62.

"Behind Matanuska," by Arville Schleben. From *THE MILWAUKEE PRESS*
CLUB'S ONCE A YEAR FOR 1936, p. 16, 58.

Poetry: "A Colonist's Prayer," by J. G. Miller (Alaska Road Commission);
untitled poem by Mrs. Einer Huseby, colonist; untitled poem/song on
Alaska.

- 17** Miscellaneous: Writings of Constance and Harmon Helmericks spark controversy.
1946-47.

Editorial: "Not explorers but tourists," *THE FORTY-NINTH STAR*
(Anchorage), April 13, 1947.

Letter from Rusty? dated April 28, 1947 to Estelle Wolf, Juneau.

Comments on various incidents at Barrow, a public reading of the
Helmerick's diary, reaction and people's lack of respect for the
Helmericks.

- 18** Miscellaneous: Alaskan RCA trainees received by President Kennedy at the White
House, August 1962.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE RCA ELECTRONICS
TRAINING FOR ALASKANS

[List of Trainees.]

THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY PROGRAM OF
EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE.

U.S. Dept. of the Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs News Release, July 31,
1962. Pres. Kennedy to greet trainees August 2, and four photographs
of the meeting at the White House.

- 19** Publications: Alaska Railroad. 6 items.

THE ALASKA RAILROAD MT. MCKINLEY PARK ROUTE. 1934 ed., 1937
ed.

THE ALASKA RAILROAD; TRAVELOGUE. N.d.
 BIG GAME HUNTING ALONG THE ALASKA RAILROAD. 1932?
 Alaska Railroad [route]. 2 maps.

- 20** Publications: Alaska Development Board and Alaska Agricultural Experiment Station. 9 items.

INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE SETTLERS IN ALASKA. Circular
 no. 1.
 1937 ed., rev. 1948 ed.

LIVESTOCK IN ALASKA, by G. W. Gasser. Circular no. 4. 1946.
 NORTHWESTERN ALASKA; A REPORT.... by Ralph Browne, 1949.
 SEEING ALASKA (brochure).
 POSSIBILITIES FOR SMALL WOOD INDUSTRIES IN ALASKA, by George
 Frank. 1948.
 THE MATANUSKA VALLEY, by G. W. Gasser. Circular no. 3. 1946.
 FUR FARMING OPPORTUNITIES IN ALASKA, ed. by Richard B. Gorman.
 1947.

- 21** Publications: Alaska. 6 items.

THE JUNEAU AMUSEMENT GUIDE. 1949.
 ANCHORAGE, ALASKA (brochure).
 ALASKA TRAVELTRAILS. ALASKA WEEKLY annual. N.d.
 Airlines brochures.

- 22** Postcards with notes. 3 items.

- 23** Newspaper clippings:

Matanuska Colony clippings from the MILWAUKEE JOURNAL, 1935;
 RHINELANDER DAILY NEWS (Wisconsin), 1935; AMARILLO DAILY
 NEWS (Texas), December 20, 1946; CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 1965.

- 24** Newspaper clippings:

Matanuska Colony clippings from the ALASKA WEEKLY (Seattle), 1935;
 SEATTLE DAILY TIMES, 1935; SEATTLE P-I, 1935; NEW YORK HERALD
 TRIBUNE, 1935; NEW YORK TIMES, 1936; WASHINGTON POST, 1936;
 WASHINGTON DAILY NEWS, 1937, and others.

- 25** Newspaper clippings.:

Matanuska Colony. ANCHORAGE DAILY TIMES, 1935; DAILY ALASKA
 EMPIRE (Juneau), 1949; MATANUSKA VALLEY PIONEER (Palmer), v. 2,
 no. 1, October 26, 1936 (issue); SEWARD GATEWAY, v. 31, no. 61, May 23,
 1935 (issue).