



Who Lives in Alaska—and Why?

BY MARY LEE DAVIS

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OUR geographies call Alaska "the land of the Eskimo." This is a handy, simple generalization, picturesque and easy to plant in the youthful mind. Unfortunately, once planted there it stays planted, but, like most too-facile generalizations about this world we live in, the statement is neither accurate nor just.

The Eskimo does live in Alaska, but he lives in one sharply delimited section of Alaska only. And by far the major portion of this fascinating, Mongoloid, hyperborean sub-race lives elsewhere—in Siberia, along the Arctic slope of Canada, and in Greenland. To say, therefore, that Alaska is "the land of the Eskimo" is no more the truth than to say that Massachusetts is the land of the Irish!

At a luncheon recently, in one of our most cultured Eastern States, a lopsided Black Minorca little woman ruffled up to me with a most embarrassing remark. "I have read your story about our missions in Alaska with such pleasure," she fluttered, and preened her dark feathers. "I am *so* interested in the *dear* Eskimos!"

When I denied authorship of any Eskimo story and assured her that I had never, ever, presumed to add to the literature of our missions in Alaska, we found that she had been reading "What Does Alaska Want?" in SCRIBNER'S for June, 1927, an article in which the

word "Eskimo" and the word "mission" were not even mentioned, for it dealt exclusively with Alaska as a white man's land. But so ingrained was her long preconception of Alaska as the Eskimo land, she had simply taken for granted, as perhaps others have done, that in speaking of the people of Alaska one could only be speaking of "the dear Eskimos."

Now colonials must be understood, or colonies will be misunderstood, and Alaska is essentially a colony of the United States—the largest and far the most precious colony. Most Americans do not realize this, and undue emphasis upon the aboriginal elements in Alaska's population helps make these United States continue in their disregard concerning what happens to their own American colonists there—who they are and what they are thinking. If you had asked a Londoner of 1728 "Who lives in America—and why?" he would probably have answered, translated into eighteenth-century highfalutin terms, exactly what people say to-day when asked this question about Alaska: "Wild Indians mostly, of course, and a few rough traders, religious fanatics, and ex-criminals. It's not a white man's country."

If you care to face facts, here is bedrock about who lives in Alaska to-day, and why.

The total population of "The Great

Country," "The Continent," as the native word Alaska means, is fifty-five thousand; less than half are of the aboriginal Eskimo and Indian stocks and more than half are of our own white race. The Territory of Alaska to-day, in so far as it has political or social life, a commerce, or any potentiality as a future State of the Union, is a strayed colony of transplanted Americans, holding in thin and far-flung line a vast section of continental American soil that was bought and paid for honestly by American money. You may be amazed to hear it, for neither church nor school nor government apparently wishes to admit the fact, but Alaska is actually inhabited by Alaskans!

Who, then, are this strange race? I will tell you, though I admit at once that I write with prejudice, for the Alaskans are my own friends and neighbors, and, though perhaps I should blush to admit it (but do *not* so blush, for I am very proud of the fact!), I who am speaking to you—I too am an Alaskan.

We Alaskans should be a happy people, for there are ten square miles of elbow-room for each human being of us, white and brown alike, in the land we love to call "God's Pocket." Three-fifths of the unaboriginal stock are American-born, a large percentage being men whose fathers took the Oregon and Santa Fé trails back in the great days following '49. A full half of these American-born first saw the star-spangled light of dawn in the Mid-West States of the U. S. A., the maligned "Bible Belt," the home of 100-per-cent Americans. Of the Alaskans who are foreign-born, 41 per cent are, in round numbers, Scandinavian, 27 per cent are British, and 10 per cent Teutonic.

With no undue indulgence in the romantic sophistries of heredity, I ask any

cool-headed, unbiassed observer to look at these official figures and tell me frankly: If you were going shopping for an ideal combination of long-term-investment family stocks, could you find any conjunction of elements better suited for colonial building? There are no unassimilable blocs here; but to a wholesome majority leaven of true home-country stuff, raised in the most stable and temperate American sector, by an ideal process of natural selection many other ingredients of the finest settler type have been added here—including traits of dogged self-reliance and necessary ingenuity in meeting unaided the difficult situation, quite as vital to the pioneer in this new America as in a former new England.

Under the Scandinavian I have included those from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, realizing fully that, while the Finlander is of technically different ethnic stock, he must be grouped similarly as coming out from the same essential climatic home environment, and as bringing to us here the same high grade of citizenship, the same engrossment with the arts of peace, the same love of the adoptant soil. Two of my own very dearest friends in the North are sisters from Finland who, by their fine integrity and rich sense of craftsmanship, have taught, all unconsciously in our long years of close association, many a quiet lesson in loyalty, patience, and orderly, happy living in the midst of a disordered environment.

In addition to those actually born in Scandinavia, a large number of American-born Alaskans are also of Norse stock, but have come to us from Wisconsin or Minnesota. Many of those who were reared in Scandinavia proper became attracted here by the extensive

fisheries of the Alaska coast, where three-fourths have made a home. These men and women are ideal sub-Arctic colonists, inured to cold and exposure and the multitudinous hardships of both sea and mountain side, accustomed to the combined work of fishing, herding, and farming. They are racially toned down in psyche to withstand the electric atmosphere of our surcharged long winters, to which they have developed a natural resistance or a nerve-wrapped insulation. For there are many things which you, perhaps, might miss here and the Scandinavian does not. He is already at home in the High North.

Then, too, even the Scandinavian "first families" are always true democrats, with a wholesome regard not only for political liberties but with a rooted dignity and a truly pacific spirit which proves a sane balance in any civic body. In our North all Scandinavians are apt, without discrimination, to be termed "Swedes"—often, in some jealousy, "lucky Swedes"—for Swede luck has become proverbial within the Arctic. But it is no seductive god Loki which has brought these Norsemen their good fortune, but a something far deeper, a something which any close analysis of the careers of all our "Lucky Lindys" of the Nordland will show.

America's total debt to the Northmen is larger than we usually remember, until some Lindbergh incident recalls Leif Ericson. But in Rex Beach's day Nome had its own "Lucky Lindbergh," whom it was my own later good fortune to know—a "prospectin' fool" of the Arctic Sea, immortalized in "The Spoilers." Ben Eielson, of Northman stock engrafted in the Middle West, who last April piloted the Wilkins plane across an ice-blown polar sea, came first to Alaska as teacher in our

Fairbanks high school. He undertook the first Alaskan air-mail contract, several years ago, and his landing field then was the ball park just beyond our house. And we must not forget, in totting up the Scandinavian credit sheet, another fact which a thoughtful American historian has recently brought to my attention: the earliest undertakings of England toward the west started from Bristol, where many Norwegians had settled. Out of Scandinavia have come, like wind-blown pollen, not only a number of American emigrants, almost equal now, with their descendants, to the present home population of Scandinavia itself, but world-wide musical, literary, and cultural influences which have profound political significance. If we in Alaska can bring these dispositions, so forceful and effective in private life, into the service of the commonwealth, a forty-ninth State will in good time be safely and sanely established here, by citizens from the north end of the wide world's Main Street.

Canada supplies more than half of the British settlers in Alaska, but the Canadian contingent includes also very many of Scotch blood as well as a significant group who are descendants of the very earliest American colonists themselves, the Tories of New England who were dispossessed and ousted into New Brunswick and New Scotia by our own red Revolutionary forebears when on a rampage a sesquicentennial ago—an exodus which carried with it some of the most truly aristocratic American colonials. This fact was forced on my attention when I was assisting recently to organize an Alaskan chapter of the D. A. R. Many of the women I knew to be of "purest American stock" were born in the Bluenose Provinces of

Canada. Here is a reciprocity across old spiritual frontiers, of vital and untaxed values. Some of Alaska's best citizens to-day come from St. John, that most British Canadian colony; but, though their twice-great-grandfathers truly "fit" in the American Revolution, it was on the wrong side to entitle them to be "daughters"!

Our Canadian group includes also many who are of French blood, especially among the Catholic sisterhoods who teach and nurse here, as well as the fine old breed of French-Canadian prospector and trapper. It comprises too the generation of those Americans who went to Dawson in '98 during the Klondyke strike, became British citizens in "Y. T.," and when the Alaska gold-fields opened were later repatriated with us. While the number of these is unknown, I am personally acquainted with several Alaskans who bear this odd boundary-crossed escutcheon.

Of our strictly English-born, many are among the oldest timers of the early Yukon trading-camps of the Hudson's Bay Company and date back in Alaskan history and experience more than forty years, before even those stirring days of the Klondyke '98. Not a few of Alaska's most daring trail-breakers, most successful business and professional men, spring from that old bulldog breed—true to type here in the North as elsewhere—not always lovable but almost always making themselves respected. Nor will it surprise any one to learn that most of our English-born have come originally from Yorkshire, Devonshire, and Cornwall.

Although four-fifths of the total whites in Alaska live near the coast (and we cannot forget that Alaska has an enormous coast-line, longer than that of the entire United States), the

small Teutonic element is the one most evenly spread, while the Danes, the Irish, and the Scotch have shown a particular liking for the great interior, which is shut from the un-pacific sea by the highest mountains on our continent. It must be a psychologic reason that brings them here, for surely one would say offhand that these three near-sea peoples would remain close to the sea, and that the green and misty, bay-indented, island-strewn coast would most attract them. But no sooner do they strike Alaska, apparently, than they strike inland.

When I myself came first to Interior Alaska, it seemed to me that every other acquaintance I made was of Irish birth, a double score of colorful and picturesque personalities. There are more Irish in the far, vast, sparsely settled interior of Alaska than in any of its more populous sectors, not relatively but actually. This unnormal Celtic migration over the high, forbidding mountain chain must be due to the natural Celtic dislike of doing what the crowd is doing, a horror against belonging to the majority, however formed! I know no other way to account both for the cold fact of impersonal figures and the warmth of personal impressions. Ireland is unique as the one country which has sent more men to our difficult, austere, and to me most loved and lovely inland section, than to any other. It goes without saying that these Western-world sons of Erin are to a man deeply engaged in play-boy politics here.

The Russian element in Alaska, though numerically insignificant, is a subtle chemical trace because of historic association and geographic contiguity. Also it is much more truly pervasive than any mere census return will ever show, for in the early days of Alaska's

exploration period the Russian was for long the dominant factor here and he left his strain immingled with both French and native. While to the casual observer to-day there is but little residue of the Slav, a genetic, biographic, or psychoanalytic approach to Alaska would discover that Russian past, so hidden on the surface of events, moving ever from beneath. It is a yeasty bitter ferment, wholesome if not too little blent, too slightly baked. "In Russia," says Gorki, "even the fools are sometimes wonderful." Many of our Alaskan vagaries inherit that quality, back Asiaward.

They came here with less of geographical displacement, with more of historical continuity, than any of us Saxons. In a very real sense the land here was truly theirs. They pioneered it in the old, hard days, and they won it. At least they held a hand strong enough to bluff the empire-snatching British to a show-down! We Americans, so far, have merely paid our cash, have merely executed a legal real-estate transfer. We have not, to date, made the land spiritually ours.

For the elements of empire here are formless yet, but in ferment, and loyal Alaskans appreciate and favor all the diversity of this mixture. If we ourselves had cared overmuch for a homogeneous, a static world, we should not have wilfully become Alaskans; for to be an Alaskan to-day means as much implied non-conformity as being an American meant in the yesterday of two hundred years ago. We know now how very difficult it is to perfect a democracy, because it does demand just this freely acting, distinct contribution from each one of its component members. So we thank our lucky polaric star for all these our dissimilars, believing that a true force is the result of differing tensions

and that fresh psychic energy will be generated from them, here under the North, "looking to an indestructible nation composed of indestructible States."

A human and dramatic story of the ever-pushing-northward frontier is told by the distribution of population here, as well as by its make-up. Among the Indians and the Eskimos there are an even number of men and women, the normal natural balance of a people at home and adjusted to their chosen world. But we have only two thousand foreign-born white women to ten thousand foreign-born white men. Taking a long chance with fate, these men have come a very far journey in space and more or less recently in time. Many of them feel that they have not yet made for themselves a secure financial place here and so have not yet brought or sent for their kin.

But more than half of the American-born whites are women! This would seem to speak very well for the traditional American breed of foremother, as of old quite unafraid of the wilderness threat. Many of these women came to us first as teachers in white or Indian schools—and married, after perhaps one year of service, a good Norse or Scotch prospector. They have come as "missioners," as nurses, court stenographers, clerks to the various governmental agencies; and in all these professions the yearly turnover is tremendous, as any Alaskan bishop or school superintendent forcibly will tell you—not because these women return to the States in large numbers, but because they marry here and remain.

So the census figures tell a most romantic tale, if you will read in vision between their close-printed lines: a story of American women, with trained and intelligent minds, sailing up into the

High North each year on a *Mayflower* now named *S. S. Aleutian*, and finding here their new-old woman's place, taking up their always major pioneer burden in a voluntary archaism; a yet unwritten epic of others enlisting yearly to fill their empty professional places, fulfilling Revelation: "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place." Here the truly American-eagle-borne woman is coming again into her own, upon this new and true American frontier. And I do not hesitate to say that there is fresh hope for a more stable, more moral, more sanely grounded social fabric here, with such a renewed and courageous coming. For while our men still largely make our laws, our women still largely make our *mores*; and the woman to whom the wings of a great eagle have been given is no flapper.

There are several thousand white children in Alaska to-day who are of school age, and many of these are Alaska-born, the real Sons and Daughters of the Golden North. Also the cold figures reveal how normally and naturally a balanced population is now being carved out by the old census tools of birth and mating and death; for while, of the white people over forty years of age, more than ten thousand are men and less than two thousand are women, in the group between twenty and forty years there are seven thousand young men and three thousand young women—just a good healthy balance for a working competition, the eugenist would say. And of the whites *under twenty*, 2,595 are boys and 2,364 are girls, to share with equal shoulders the new burden of the North.

The old pioneer story is repeating itself here and producing a fresh stem

and graft of our common stock, real Alaskans born and bred in the Nordland, whose mind and character, for good or ill, are solely the product of this new frontier—the frontier where environment is ever too strong at first for heredity and will inevitably brand its mark upon them. Children of colonials and citizens to the soil—these are they who will in time truly master Alaska and make it theirs, in time united here possibly by some common antagonism, probably by a common tradition, but almost certainly by the pervasive infection of a great common undertaking—the settlement of the Great Country and its ultimate adaptation to the needs of men.

Among my own friends in the North are included a California college woman who came North to teach and later married a professional man who bears one of the finest old New England family names; a Philadelphia-reared Red Cross nurse who came as a missionary and married a Wales-born civil engineer of the new Alaska Railroad; a descendant of pre-Revolutionary loyalist family, born in New Brunswick, who married a Wyoming-bred attorney; their Alaska-born daughter, who in turn married a Swedish-named young scientist of the Middle West, come to our North with the Biological Survey; a clever Frenchwoman who pioneered as a physician in the early days of this camp and is now married to a German-born mining man; three Sisters of Providence and Mercy who nurse in the hospital across the river, but who were reared on the barren, wind-wrenched Laurentian banks of Lower Quebec; a negro from Georgia who is night watchman and also one of our very best neighbors; a Jesuit father of fine Old World tradition, a classmate of Mar-

shal Foch; an ancient Indian woman, in part Russian, who is one of the wisest, most sibylline persons I ever knew—perhaps because her mind has not clothed itself in any of the second-hand fripperies of thought which attract so many of those who can a little read, which she cannot. All these are of the people you would meet and know, if you should come with us to Alaska to-day. For it is a land of friendship, tried and durable against the sun and wind of hard-tested living.

As other companions we have had a most capable woman prospector of Bohemian extraction, born in the Middle West and living in Alaska for twenty-five years without a single trip outside; an old Scot from Aberdeen who has never lost his thick and purple-thistled burr; a giant Montenegrin whom Jack London put into a book; a Roman, once an artists' model, who with infinite kindness helped me nurse fifty men during the epidemic; a philosophical roving Englishman from Hull; a girl from Belfast and another from Dublin; a Russian miner who plays chess with my husband; and the little Eskimo woman who was so dear to me but was lost in the great flu. So, up and down my own short Main Street, our little village consensus helps make fast the big brass tacks of Uncle Sam's official figures; for all of these dear people are Alaskans, and Americans.

I have spoken here from my heart, as an Alaskan. It has been said that while we are not responsible for our relations we *are* responsible for our choice of friends. It is not of my own choosing that I happened to be born in one of England's revolted colonies (the one first pioneered by "lucky Swedes" and sober Dutch), of a paren-

tal plaid mixed Scotch and English and Irish. My chosen friend is the Alaska of my adoption, for I love its people, its space, its climate. Perhaps most of all I love the sense one has here of being an integer, a whole human unit, and not a cog. An Alaskan to-day is not a piece of something already manufactured. We ourselves are busy even now making that something, and we have the same feeling about it, I have no doubt, that the far-seen colonists in 1728 must have had. Certainly they possessed no very clear or prescient notion, then, of what the finished product was to look like; but, because they were fairly wide-awake individuals of a decent old stock, they enjoyed the job as they saw it, and dug in!

In writing of "who" lives in Alaska I find that I have also told you "why." Perhaps that is not surprising, for who is ever two-thirds of why. A thirst for the far-away, the old human land-hunger, the desire to be masterless, the wish to escape the crowding economic complex, a will set against regimentation, sheer and clear daredeviltry, a youthful love of new experience and adventure, "the urge that shot the first Norse prow beyond the home fiord"—all these and more have brought us here.

There remains but one question to be asked and for you, this time, to answer. Are you, by any chance, an Alaskan?

Since I wrote "God's Pocket" for SCRIBNER'S in 1924 I have received more than two hundred letters from its readers which have been serious, personal, searching inquiries for more information regarding Alaska as a place to migrate to, to live in. Doctors, lawyers, nurses, farmers, stenographers, teachers, have written with revealing and sometimes poignant frankness:

“Thus and so am I. Is there a place for me there, in your country?” These letters have been more difficult to answer than I can tell you, for even with full knowledge of a grown tree’s species and health, you cannot safely predict how it will stand the rough uprooting of transplantation, especially if that be into a partly frozen, though richly mineralized, new soil.

How could I know if you who wrote were of the stuff of pioneers? All I could do was phrase to you more fully and more accurately, *con amore*, what the conditions really are. “Everything you say to discourage me makes me more determined to go,” one woman answered me. She did go, and is now making good in the North in a most constructive and vital fashion. But, as I learned when I came to know her better, she is a very unusual and self-reliant person, with all the modern built-in conveniences for doing her own thinking. No woman should come to Alaska who has a narrow-gauge or single-track mind. It is a broad country, in more than one meaning.

And do not come here seeking virgin gold. The hectic day of the great stampedes is fortunately long past and with it went the flaming dance-hall of the north and the woman of the dance-hall type. Gold is here, in plenty, but only for hard winning; and the gold-producer to-day sells the cheapest commodity upon the world’s market, all else having increased in price and his product alone being fixed in standard value. Do not come here seeking the rainbow pot of fortune, but rather ask if there is in yourself the unrusting, enduring, ductile, and precious quality of that true golden mettle—to bear swift

hammer-blow forever, a foil to fate, without fear of any breaking. Are you willing to throw all that tests high of you into the fusion of the North, to submit yourself here to its acid, bitter, sometimes cruel and searching reagents?

O pioneers! If you are of that eagle’s breed who busy ever with affairs of the wind, if your eyes have the far-away look and care most to rest on infinite space and unbroken time, if you remember well that “far countries are best sought out by him who is strong within himself”—then come.

And if your racial memory includes fiord, moor, and fen, proud highland or gravid valley, endless spruce forest, roaring canyon, or nameless rivers, then you too will be at home here. If your ancestors learned long generations ago to scorn mere cold, then you too will see a glory and a strength in the tense grip of a mid-Alaskan winter. You will be mindful of sea-roving, moor-faring, distant Beowulf kinsmen, whose heart laughed at the exaggerated peril of a crowding dark and a deep cold. And you too will come to praise that general misunderstanding of our climate which best serves to keep out mollicoddles.

Why envy the Pilgrim Fathers their “chance”? If by good fortune you have fallen heir to something more precious than authentic *Mayflower* furniture, then take your own chance, now. The *Mayflower* sails to-day from many a northward-facing port. Cast in your lot and covenant with this new colony of your race overseas, claim here your ten square miles of masterless space, and learn for yourself far the best answer to that question: “Who lives in Alaska—and why?”



As I Like It

BY WILLIAM LYON PHELPS



WHY is it that so many foreigners who come to this country to lecture or to gather materials for a book or to find a southern winter climate or to live in hotels and houses where central heating actually heats, why is it they consider it to be their God-given duty to criticise everything unfavorably or to attempt to correct our manners or to change our habits or to improve our morals? Why don't they withhold their advice until we ask for it?

No, I am not saying this with the intention of stirring up strife. I am saying this for the benefit of our visitors. I am sorry for them and I want them to learn something. Learning should precede teaching.

And I am talking exclusively about cultivated and intelligent people. We do not need to waste any time on ignorant, boorish foreigners who come hither; we are ourselves ashamed of the boastful, brainless Americans who behave offensively in Europe.

The chief object of foreign travel, unless one is an invalid in search of health, should be to enlarge and elevate the mind, by the acquisition of new or fresh ideas; by the accumulation of interesting or useful information; by the observation of foreign customs and ways of doing things; so that if such methods are an improvement on what we have at home, we may borrow or imitate or transfer, to our lasting advantage. Now if the traveller merely

criticises unfavorably or condemns or lifts his eyebrows, it is evident he will learn nothing. He will return home a complacent and self-satisfied patriot with a mind hermetically sealed.

It is certain that a considerable number of Europeans still regard us as if it were the year 1829. They look upon us as a kind of unlicked "kid-brother," not yet house-broken; and they were born to set us right. There is, I think, a real difference here between the attitude of Americans in Europe and the attitude of Europeans in America. We show admiration and appreciation when we feel it; when we do not, we reserve comment. Too often the foreign visitor to America is either didactic or querulous.

This is perhaps to a certain extent the fault of American hosts and hostesses. We gather around the lecturer or the literary visitor like adoring penitents. When he tells us we are materialistic, a nation of money-lovers, ruled by machines, with no individuality and no spiritual life, we fawn upon him.

Personally I never ask a foreigner what he thinks of our country, and for two good reasons. First, he doesn't know, and second, I don't care. I always ask him about people and conditions in his own country, because I want to hear him talk about something of which he has actual knowledge, and because I want to learn.

On the whole, perhaps the wisest visitors to our shores are the Japanese,