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Homemaking at 60 Below...

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Homemaking at 60 Below . . .

By Martha Park, H. Ec. Ed.

H ow would you like to be a homemaker where it is so cold that you can frost a lung—where fresh foods are so expensive that if you lose your can opener you are quite likely to go hungry—where you can’t even feed the family on bread and milk very often, because milk, too, is outrageously expensive? These are some of the problems of a homemaker in Alaska.

The climate of Alaska makes the housewife’s problems there very different from those here in the midwest. The climate of the interior ranges from a temperature of 95 degrees above zero in summer to 55 or 69 degrees below zero in winter.

A Moon-drenched Alaskan Home

Since conditions vary so greatly with the section of the country or the location and size of the town, I will confine my talk to homemaking in Fairbanks, Alaska, which is sometimes called the “heart of Alaska.” It was in this part of the Territory that I spent four years.

The Interior is peopled mostly with the white race, a large percentage of which is Scandinavian. There are a few Indians and an occasional negro. There are miners, teachers, merchants, farmers, millers, trappers and government employees. Many of the homemakers are former Alaskan school teachers. Large mining companies send graduates of our best Universities to undertake the difficult problems of the far north, hence, the percentage of college-trained homemakers is very high.

The majority of homes are one-story log buildings. From the exterior they are quite unpretentious. The interiors, however, are quite surprising. In the better homes there are modern plumbing, furnace heat, electric lights and appliances, hardwood floors and comfortable furnishings. To many, the furnishings would seem luxurious. The homemakers of the north take great pride in appointments for the table, hence, in many homes there is the finest of sterling silver, pewter, pottery and imported glassware. Beautiful linens enhance rare and lovely dishes such as Wedgewood, Lenox and Haviland and Spode. Furnishings that are popular here are now popular in the North. Passenger trains carry the latest fashions direct from New York to Seattle, from where they reach the Interior within ten days. This is also true of clothing. One is able to purchase practically anything he wishes in the towns. There are drugstores, mercantile stores, men’s and women’s shops, variety stores, bakeries, meat markets, groceries, restaurants and garages.

Alaska Makes Her Bow

Dog Racing—the Passion of the North

For several reasons, meal planning in the north is more difficult than it is here in the states. During the winter, due to boat and train service, fresh foods arrive only once a week. When a boat is wrecked or there is a snow slide, it may be two or three weeks before fresh foods arrive, and often, then they are no longer fresh. Thus the problem of having salad, without the expected lettuce, celery, cabbage, or fruit is sometimes a difficult one.

Freight charges are approximately one-third the value of the goods. This is important in the economics of food. It seems foolish to pay freight on a poor quality of food when for a few cents more, one can have the best quality.

Perishables are very expensive. What might be a cheaper cut of meat in the states becomes quite high priced when freight is paid on fat and bones.

One can easily see why canned goods play a most important part in the Northerner’s diet. With apples “three for two-bits,” a number 2½ can of peaches at 45 cents is a bargain.

The food budget is reduced however, by the supplementing of game. In the
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Thursday, Feb. 26—“Afternoon Teas,” Ida M. Shilling, Foods and Nutrition Department.
Tuesday, March 3—“Home Project Achievement Days,” Mrs. N. May Larson, Assistant Home Demonstration Agent Leader.
“Fuel for the Farm and Urban Home,” H. A. Sayre, Household Equipment Department.
Thursday, March 5—“Responsibility,” Mary K. Kipinger, Home Management Department.
Tuesday, March 10—“Sea Weed and the Goiter Problem,” Sarah Field, Foods and Nutrition Department.
Thursday, March 12—“Your College Girls’ Physical Needs and How to Solve Them,” Winifred Tilden, Head, Physical Education Department.
Tuesday, March 17—“Problems of the Adolescent Girl,” Myrtle Hinderman, Physical Education Department.
Thursday, March 19—“Market Basket Wisdom,” Viola Meints, Home Management Department.

Homemaking at 60 Below
(Continued from page 1)
fall of the year, caribou are plentiful and quite easy to obtain. More ardent hunters also obtain moose and mountain sheep. Caribou and moose are used for steaks, pot roasts and stews, and are quite similar to beef.
Wild ducks and geese are plentiful. Pheasants, grouse and rabbit are plentiful in certain sections of the country, though rabbit is seldom eaten. The fish of the cold northern lakes and rivers are delicious. Along the coast shell fish is abundant.
Wild cranberries and blue berries grow profusely. Red raspberries are not so common, but are found wild. Cultivated rhubarb, carrots, cabbage, rutabagas, turnips, string beans, cauliflower, beets, swiss chard, peas, potatoes, lettuce and celery grow to immense proportions and are exceptionally sweet and tender. The long summer days make berries, vegetables and flowers grow rapidly.
Tomatoes and cucumbers are grown in

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hot houses. The season is too short for maturity when grown out of doors. The wild cranberries are of two common varieties. They are named high and low bush according to their manner of growing. The low-bush berries are superior for jelly making. They are extremely tart, and combine well with dried or canned apples for jelly.

The homemakers of the North are very capable. There is practically no domestic help. One will find that the wealthiest or most socially inclined woman is equally as capable of preparing a meal as she is of acting as hostess to a government official from Washington.

In the town of Fairbanks there is an airport, library, a very modern hospital, and a concrete theater which boasts a fine pipe organ and "talkies." The town is the terminus of 470 miles of government railroad from the coast. In addition to up-to-date public schools, the farthest north Land Grant College—the Alaska College and School of Mines—is located four miles from Fairbanks. Thus homemakers have the opportunity of taking homemaking courses.

During the extremely cold weather there are very few out-door sports, since rapid breathing would frost the lungs. But during the spring and fall there is skiing, snow shoeing, skating and dog racing. Dances and parties are popular. In the summer there is tennis, golf, boating and swimming.

Were I selecting a time to go north, it would be the first of August, for the mosquitoes and flies are about gone. Flowers are blooming, vegetables are mature, grains are being harvested, and the climate is ideal.

It is little wonder that people say, "Once an Alaskan, always an Alaskan." Although the winters are long and cold and the country inaccessible, life in Alaska is enjoyable.

It takes the finest type of homemakers to be pioneers—men and women of courage and vision, of loyalty, friendliness, and unselfishness. Thus you will find the homemakers of Alaska.