

Alaska Sends Insane to Oregon

To Morningside Hospital on Base Line Road Come Indians, Eskimos, Whites

By Shotwell Callvert

LIVING in a region where food is so scarce that idle, unproductive persons are a heavy burden, Alaskan natives have for centuries marooned insane members of their tribes on frozen, uninhabited islands. Starvation—so it is said—is the old-fashioned Alaskan cure for mental derangement.

Nowadays Uncle Sam conscientiously assumes responsibility for demented natives in the far north.

As you drive out of Portland on Base Line road you will see on the right, a mile or so past Montavilla, a sprawled-out group of low, gray-shingled buildings set among fruit and shade trees. This is Morningside hospital for the Alaskan insane, privately owned, but under contract to the United States department of the interior, division of territories and island possessions.

In nice weather you will see men in blue denim strolling on the well-kept grounds or cultivating the flower beds—patients from the "parole ward," whose mental condition is such that they will not run away and are not dangerous to themselves or to others.

Represent Many Racial Types

These men were once fishermen or sealers, cannery workers, prospectors or miners. The squat, swarthy fellows are Indians of mixed blood from southern Alaska, where Americans, Russians, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos and natives have intermarried to form a weird racial melting pot. The men with yellow Mongol features are Eskimos of pure stock whose home is among the ice floes on the Arctic ocean.

There is no mental institution of any kind in Alaska, and since 1904 Morningside hospital has been the insane asylum for the entire territory, including the strung-out Aleutian islands.

According to Dr. John L. Haskins, medical supervisor, mental cases are brought to Oregon probably because it is more economical to use existing facilities here than to build a new hospital in Alaska. Though originally not a consideration in locating the hospital in this state, the mild and even climate has proved beneficial, Dr. Haskins says, to the unstable sensibilities of mental defectives and psychotics.

More than a fourth of the patients in Morningside hospital are either Eskimos or Indians, few of whom can speak or read English with any fluency, and who have had to learn to eat their meals, not with their fingers, but in American cafeteria style, with knife and fork.

Group Among Most Primitive

Dr. Haskins believes that the group is very likely the most primitive to be found under one roof in the United States.

The ratio of insanity in Alaska is not higher than in other localities. Statistics for 1933 show 435,571 persons in mental institutions in the United States—incidentally, not so large a number, psychiatrists say, as should be under medical care. Alaska has a population of about 60,000, and Morningside houses from there only a little more than 300 patients.

Alaskan insanity, Dr. Haskins points out, is no different from insanity in more temperate climates. Natives in the frozen north suffer the same mental ailments as wreck the lives of New York business men.

"Camp madness," a psychosis supposedly peculiar to the far north and similar regions, resembles the mental disease which sometimes grips inmates of penitentiaries. Yet it is not actually a psychosis in its own right, but any sort of insanity brought on by the critical loneliness of camp life. An individual who cracks up mentally in an isolated camp or prison would doubtless go insane in any other severe situation.

Many Have 'Split Personality'

About 70 per cent of the patients at Morningside hospital are suffering from some form of schizophrenia, or "split personality"—familiarily, though incorrectly known as dementia praecox. Characteristics of schizophrenia are inability to distinguish between reality and fancy, regression to childish emotions and final deterioration of the mind to a vegetative state.

Bill Blank, an Alaskan prospector of Russian-Indian parentage, may believe, for instance, that he owns a range of mountains out of which vast quantities of platinum can be mined. He is convinced that he has been committed to Morningside through the machinations of enemies who



Above, ping pong helps while away the hours; left, samples of handiwork by inmates; right, patients are encouraged to engage in work about the hospital; below, one patient shaves another

wish to steal his platinum. Every day he communicates with these enemies by radio—he can hear their voices plainly. He abuses them violently and demands justice.

His emotions are also out of kilter. He displays no feelings whatever when informed of the death of his mother, but is hysterical with grief when a cat he has fondled dies.

Bill has the paranoid type of schizophrenia, and he will never again see Alaska.

Provides Problem For Psychiatrists

Schizophrenia is incurable in all but rare instances—one of the great unsolved problems of the medical profession. Cures for schizophrenia are constantly announced. Malaria has been tried, but proved a failure. There is current experimentation with insulin. Psychiatrists can only remain open-minded, awaiting discovery of an authentic cure.

Joe, a native Alaskan fisherman of elementary education, reads about the activities of G-men in the United States and gradually comes to believe that he himself is a G-man. He investigates suspicious-looking strangers, searches for communists. He reveals to the territorial authorities sensational information about a network of Japanese spies.

When committed to Morningside, Joe is found to have "real" paranoia, a separate type of insanity, from the paranoid type of schizophrenia. Both Bill and Joe have delusions, but Bill's thinking is bizarre, while Joe's is fairly logical.

"Real" paranoiacs—familiar to

the layman as those insane persons who believe themselves to be Rockefeller or Bismarck—are the "aristocrats" of any mental institution. Their delusions of grandeur are colored by education and environment. An Eskimo paranoiac, never having heard of Rockefeller, may perhaps believe that he is the richest Eskimo in the world—he owns many, many herds of reindeer, much ivory.

Many religious fanatics are harmless paranoiacs, and a high percentage of "real" paranoiacs

and paranoid schizophrenics are homosexual. If you are a Freudian you believe that some sort of sexual conflict is always to blame for nearly all kinds of insanity.

Sexual Disorders Usually Exist

About 12 to 15 per cent of the patients at Morningside have paresis—tertiary syphilis in which the infection has affected the brain. Ignorance of syphilis, its prevention and treatment, makes

the Alaskan primitive an easy victim. The native at Morningside who has paresis undergoes the same cure as the Caucasian sufferer—arsenicals and malaria treatment to induce fever. Paralytics do not ordinarily have open lesions, so are not isolated. But acute cases of syphilis are segregated in the "continuous treatment wards."

Mental defectives—idiots, imbeciles, morons—are usually placed in homes for the feeble-minded, but Alaska has only this one hospital. There are about 20

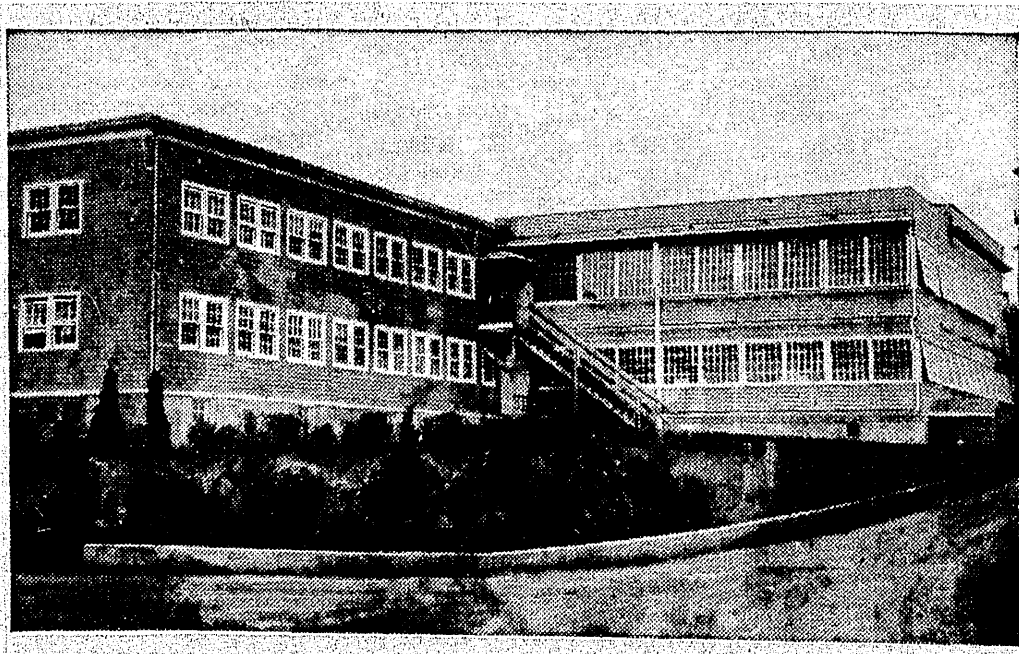
mental defectives at Morningside, half of them natives.

Indians and Eskimos have a weakness for alcohol. At Morningside there are a few natives who have halucinosia, a result of too much drink—they may see, for instance, a little gray-bearded Chinaman who sits on the window sill and talks and sings. (In delirium tremens, commonly known as the "D. T.s," the snakes and alligators are silent; in halucinosia the monsters talk.) Patients with halucinosia are made to abstain from alcohol, and effort is made to improve their physical condition.

Compare Closely With Whites

Other natives at Morningside are epileptics, manic-depressives, depressives, and some have the combined traits of several mental ailments. The white man, too, has all these psychoses. Dr. Haskins says there is no indication of more insanity among primitives than among civilized races. Regardless of race or culture, the human mind breaks down in approximately the same ratio and in the same ways.

Eskimos often undertake extreme hardship to place their insane in Morningside. In the frozen wastes on the edge of the Arctic ocean a terrified native family will bring a violent man hundreds of miles by dog sled to Point Barrow. Here the United States commissioner impels a jury, and a physician, if available, is called in. If the victim is judged insane, commitment papers are issued and the patient is transferred by plane to Fair-



Morningside hospital for the Alaskan insane
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banks, by rail to Seward, boat to Seattle, rail to Portland.

At Morningside hospital the Wasserman test is first given. Results of this test are vital. Important in the final diagnosis since in paresis a patient may display symptoms of any other type of insanity. A complete neurological examination follows and treatment is prescribed.

Primitive natives are somewhat bewildered at first, Dr. Haskins says, just as would be a resident of Portland, whether normal or insane, if he were suddenly removed to an Alaskan igloo or mud hut and told to adapt himself to native life. Very soon, though, the Alaskan adjusts to such peculiar modern conveniences as plumbing, electric lights and beds with springs and mattresses.

Routine Quiet And Regular

The routine of life at Morningside is quiet, regular. Up at breakfast at 7:30, with rest periods both mornings and afternoons, all patients except those in the "continuous treatment wards" follow prescribed occupations. The women attend sewing classes. Native women make baskets, which are placed on sale. The men tend the grounds, raise vegetables, run a dairy farm which has one of the highest credited herds in the state. Lights out at 8 P. M.—a strict rule. Those in bad mental condition go to bed earlier.

Dr. Haskins is particularly interested in the therapeutic value of entertainment. He has arranged for frequent vaudeville performances by the Oregon WPA federal theater. During the show the audience is surprisingly well behaved, although occasionally music or the antics of an actor produces gesticulatory mimicry of a juggler, imitation of a drum major.

Laughs come sometimes at the wrong times, spreading contagiously. A patient wanders up the stage, is gently led to his seat by attendants. A woman begins to cry and attendants comfort her. Yet, aside from occasional strange behavior, the audience seems fairly normal. The primitives intent on the performance, smiling broadly or curiously.

Day-to-day amusements at Morningside are volleyball, ping pong, horseshoes, books and magazines, radio, motion pictures and various ward activities.

Few Discharged Every Year

Every year between 20 and 30 patients are discharged from the hospital, and, though some are later committed again for further treatment, many are completely cured. The discharged natives never have had a chance to see a modern American city before his return to Alaska has taken through Portland on a tour of inspection.

On these tours some natives stare silently, amazed, and ask countless questions volubly.

Dr. Haskins says that psychiatry asks of laymen the same sympathy and tolerance one has for a man who has a pediculus. The insane person, matter if he is a blubbering native or a banker's son, is only a human being who is, possibly, psychiatry will cure him, so that he can be useful to himself and to society.

Spring Fever

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must have been looking into my room."

"I have," said Patsy, less. "Want to see my garden close up? Come on." "Very beautiful," he said. "ing at Patsy, standing in the midst of the apple blossoms, a star caught in the hair over her head. "You know, I made a lot of plans to place. I thought we might have some moon vines. And I should have some chairs."

"We?" asked Patsy. "Of course. Didn't you say we were going to marry a man? brought you baskets of flowers. "Yes, I am," said Patsy.

No Sale

A FULL-LENGTH coat, said to be one of a dozen of its kind in the world, was offered for sale here recently, but there was no sale. The reserve price was \$10,000, and the auctioneer suggested \$3000 as a starting point, but nobody was willing to even that.