



Jonah E. Evans and his huskies.

JONAH EPHRIAM EVANS . . . *A Modern Deaf Pioneer*

By Albert Berke

JONAH EPHRIAM EVANS is a deaf man whom we can really class as a kind of "pioneer." He was born in Sioux City, Iowa, 49 years ago. He lived there two years, then moved to North Wisconsin with his parents. When he was barely three years old, he lost his hearing from a vicious double attack of scarlet fever. For several years, his parents made no attempt to send him to a school for the deaf, but tried their best to teach him themselves. When he was 10 years old, it seems that they realized they would get nowhere trying to teach him themselves, so they sent him to the Wisconsin School for the Deaf at Delavan. He left in 1923, after completing only the first two years of high school. During his stay there, he gained a reputation as a good wrestler (175-pound class) and as a good basketball player.

Upon leaving school, he decided to become a farmer, and did his best toward becoming a prosperous one. He worked at farming from 1924 to 1936, but his income was pitifully small, so he finally became thoroughly fed up with farming. After hearing a neighbor discuss Alaska as "America's Last Frontier" and "a place to make money," he decided to test his standing with Lady Fortune and go to Alaska to see how he might make out.

It was a cold night when he arrived at Fairbanks, Alaska; bitterly cold, a biting chill wind howled and roared down the sloppy, mud-covered streets of the small town; whined and wailed between lopsided houses and unpainted horrors masquerading as living quarters. He had a bare three dollars in his pocket — the trip to Alaska had eaten up his paltry savings like a greedy monster. He had to eat, so he sludged through the sucking, clinging, freezing-cold mud of the street, looking around hopefully for a place to eat. And at last he found an eating-house, a small cafe

tucked away between groaning monstrosities posing as buildings.

One inside, he felt somewhat better. Warmth permeated his frozen skin, brought new life to his weary, cold frame. He sat on a stool in front of a bar, and looked desolately around himself. He ordered a sandwich and a cup of steaming coffee.

The price for the two items was a dollar. He took out three one-dollar bills, placed one on the counter, looked at the other two, and said to himself: "They're the last I have."

A man sat beside him. He asked, "Do you want a job?"

Evans was forced to reveal his deafness, but after some conversation, spoken and written, he agreed to the job the man proposed. He was to help a construction company make sidewalks and sewers.

The next day, he reported for work.

He didn't expect to make much — the highest wages he had earned for work back home had rarely exceeded 30c an hour. For the entire day, a good ten hours, he worked and sweated and still worked. When the sun rested low on the Alaskan horizon, casting shimmering webs of color across the sky, Evans got a tremendous surprise. For ten hours of work, he received eleven dollars. He had received \$1.10 an hour, a wage incredibly far above salaries at home. Feeling much better, he set about the business of making himself at home in Alaska.

As the years rolled by, he got a job with the Alaska Road Commission, helping biting clouds of icy snow and thundering road-making machines. He helped push back the Alaskan frontiers for civilized man in his gas-hungry cars. He opened much of Alaska for something which can only be termed as "Di-

Evans and his first moose.





The Evans cabin in Alaska.

rect civilization-to-wilderness colonization."

During the winters, when snows piled incredibly high and fierce gales howled and roared across the white land, driving biting clouds of icy snow and stinging sleet before them with appalling velocity, thundering and roaring through sturdy, white-cloaked groves of trees, Evans trudged across the bleak and barren land, tending a string of traps. Day after day after cold, dark day, he plodded along his trapping line, the bitter wind whipping past his face, the driving, stinging snow encrusting his beard and eye-brows, the chill air hitting his lungs with blasts of searing cold as he breathed, the shifting snow crunching treacherously under his snowshoes.

It was fun for him, however, and it was profitable. The snow-swept wilderness of the Alaskan winter was one of his elements, and in the average fur-trapping season, he made a good \$1,200.

And still the years passed. Summers, he worked for the Commission; winters he went out into the white wilderness which was hostile to all men, which would kill any man without mercy or compunction.

During the moose-hunting season, when the advancing winter snows lay in glaring patches on the ground, Evans rejoiced in taking a gun and going out into the wilderness. His first moose, which gave him a few unpleasant moments, had an antler-span of 54 inches, and weighed a staggering 960 pounds, a huge mass of tender venison which the snows of winter preserved, a mountain of meat which lasted him from October to early spring. Not too long ago, he got a giant of a moose with an antler-span of 66½ inches, a bare ten inches shorter than the world's record, 76 1/3 inches.

During one violent Alaskan winter, he traveled several miles across a bleak white, storm-lashed area with a sled

and seven Alaskan huskies in a terrible chill of fifty-eight degrees below zero. Mile after mile he left behind, and mile upon mile loomed ahead, appearing out of a whirling chaos of white, whipping snow to disappear into a brooding darkness squatting angrily on a distant horizon obscured by violently writhing, lashing snow clouds.

Today, he owns a huge hunting cabin, and it would be no exaggeration to call it one of the best in Alaska, not only because of it, itself, but because of its advantageous location, which happens to be so situated that a hunter can find a maximum number of many and varied species of game with a minimum amount of foraging from the cabin. Many times, Evans spends the long, dark Alaskan winter in the cabin, trapping animals for food (he gave up fur trapping in 1949 because the prices on fur had been plunging steadily and then were very low) and for decorative pelts every once in a while.

He also spends the moose hunting season up at his cabin, and sometimes, when he can find the freedom, he spends

the mountain sheep season at his cabin. Every once in a while, he stays a week or two at the cabin during summer, watching the Alaskan summer sun shining 24 hours a day, and never setting for three long months.

Evans had a particularly admirable trick which not many men can duplicate, a trick which he gleaned from years and years of hunting, many years of close contact with nature, many years of expert woodsmanship and hunting crafts. When he wants a moose, all he does it to sit beside his cabin, rifle across his knees. He cups his hands, puts them to his mouth, and gives an excellent imitation of a moose call. Many times, when he does this, a moose comes up to within fifty paces of him, and all he has to do is to raise his rifle and fire, not having to venture more than a hundred paces from his cabin. Still, he does not utilize this trick all the time, as some of the joys in hunting come from stalking your quarry; closing in for the kill.

He also owns a neat little home in Fairbanks which he built in his spare time. He owns a moderate-sized house in Big Delta, Alaska; and rents it to a tenant. He also has seven cabins, not too big — about the size of a small cottage — which he rents out during the summers.

He has been working for the Alaska Road Commission since 1939, and expects to retire soon. The income he gets from renting his cabins plus what he already has in the bank is more than enough to carry him through the rest of his life. He has completed 15 years of service; and when he retires, he will settle down and do some gold mining in several places, as he owns a few small mines.

Sketchy as this biography may be, it gives one an idea of what one deaf man has accomplished. We can truly say that he is a deaf pioneer living in modern times.

Mountain sheep killed by Evans.

