

Edmonton Journal

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City's 50 Cavemen Retain Their Independence, Build Bachelor Apartments in Banks of River

Colony of Fifty Men Living in "Homes" Made From Junk

LIKE INDEPENDENCE

Better Than Drawing Relief, They Say; Hope for Jobs Later

With none of the modern conveniences which contribute to the comfort of present-day homes included in their crude patch-work dwellings, Edmonton's "cave-dwellers" have survived a bitterly cold winter without complaint and are now eagerly anticipating the arrival of spring and its promise of sunshine and warmer days.

"Homes" built of cast-off materials picked up in various places have sheltered this group of approximately 50 men whose tiny village is on the north bank of the Saskatchewan river at the Grierson city dump.

No electric lights, running water or gas are included in the plans. Coaloil lamps and candles are burned sparingly during darkness. Water is carried from a single tap which serves the entire group, and hard work at digging yields coal out of the frozen ground on the hillside to keep some warmth in the nondescript shelters.

Like Independence

Yet these men derive a certain satisfaction from their life. They do not depend on relief for a livelihood. The life is not easy or even desirable but they do not seek charity. Thus, they argue, "they are better off than some."

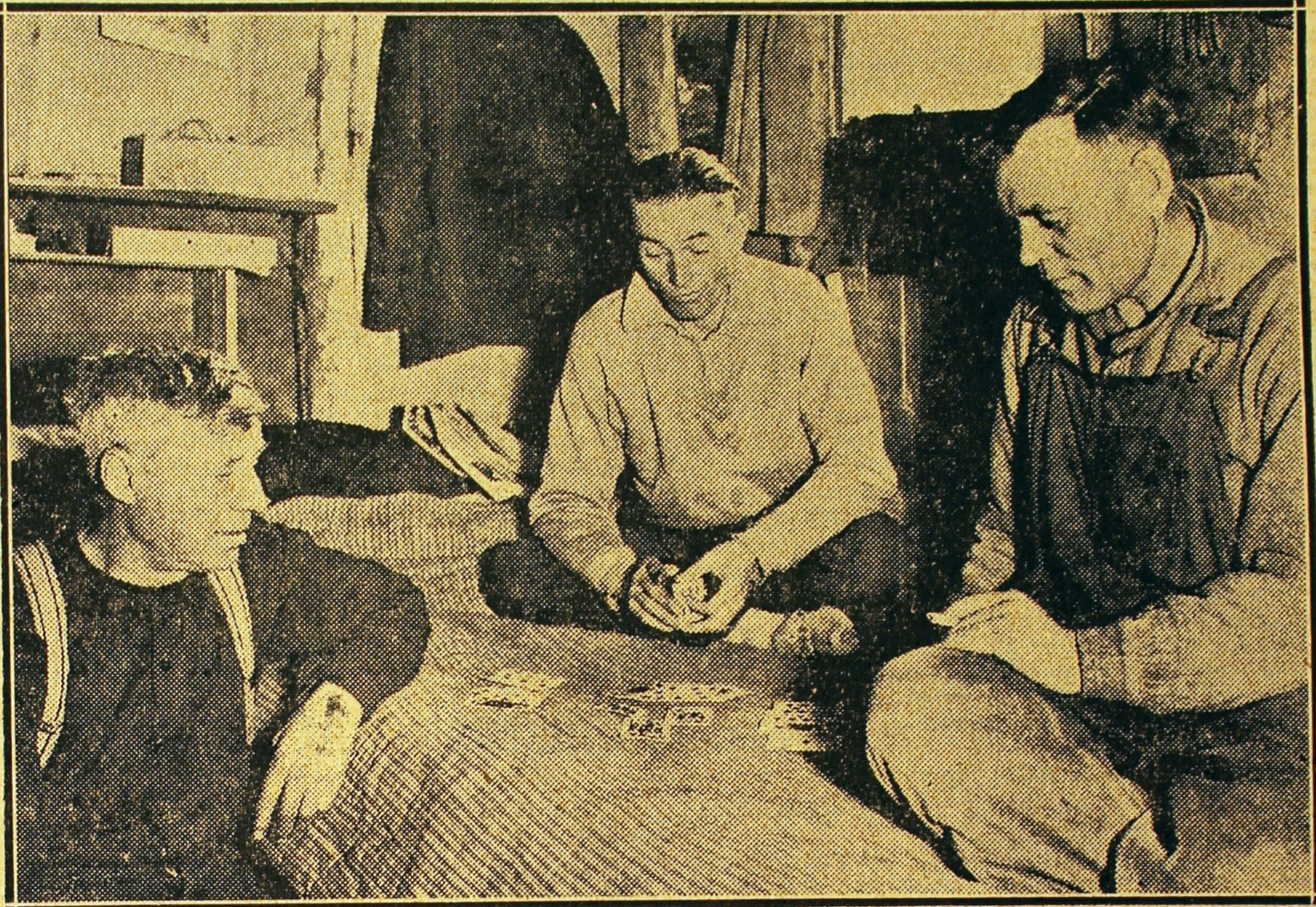
Many have lived in the community for more than three years. During that time they may have left for a few weeks at a time, worked in the harvest fields or district farms. But always when these brief spells of employment end they return to what they now consider home.

Paper, cardboard, wire, tin, sheet metal, boards and almost every variety of "junk" have been utilized in the establishment of the group of shacks. Most use the cold earth as a floor. Some even rely on the dirt banks to provide one or more walls for one-room shelters.

Occupy "Better 'Ole"

Other similar homes are built at intervals far down the river until the most westerly river residence on the south bank is reached about 132 st. This is the "Better 'Ole," occupied by three returned men, Joseph Rigby, Thomas Budge and William McArthur.

Recipients of small pensions, the



Scattered for several miles along the banks of the Saskatchewan river in Edmonton are numerous huts, shacks and dug-outs which house an extensive colony of "cave-dwellers" but furthest west on the south bank is the "Better 'Ole" located about 132 st. Occupying this 14 by 16 residence are three returned men who have named their home after the "ole" made famous during war times by Bruce Bairnsfather, the famous artist. While other city residents play bridge a scant few hundred yards distant across the river in some of Edmonton's finest homes, these fellows enjoy a game of cards in their own way. Left to right, they are Joseph Rigby, Thomas Budge and William McArthur.

three live simply in their dug-out overlooking the river. Right in the haunts of hikers and canoeists, they do not lack company and visitors are continually dropping in for a chat with the men.

Giving their address as "Seventh Tee, Mayfair golf links" these householders enjoy a monthly grocery delivery service right to the door. They go to the city only two or three times monthly, they reported, and during the summer wash gravel for gold.

Despite the colony's existence in poverty, a certain cheerfulness is found to prevail. Hope of better things "when times are not so tough," with belief that a steady job will one day be found, keeps the men from sinking into the depths of despair and hopelessness that might easily be their attitude under conditions in which they live.

Sell Handicraft

Winding paths, well beaten by tenants who spend much of their time visiting, connect the numerous buildings. Many of these were unoccupied during the Journal's visit there as the owners were reported to be "up town" for the afternoon. In others, occupants were

found reading, sleeping or working.

Paper novelties such as colored butterflies and multi-colored owls are fashioned of crepe paper by two residents of "Bachelorville." Cleverly decorated with gilt paint, the finished product is an attractive piece of handicraft and not the amateurish article that might be expected from the dismal surroundings.

"The city is pretty well blanketed with this type of merchandise and selling these things has become almost impossible," the "cave-dwellers" commented. Willow baskets manufactured with a jackknife as the only tool are turned out in great numbers. To extend sales over a wider area, one resident of the colony who owns a horse has served as sales agent for others who have something to distribute and he revealed that he has traveled as far as 75 miles from the city where these novelties bring higher prices.

One Has Windows

George Miwlisch, resident of the colony for three years, has one of the most impressive "estates" in the group. His home boasts glass windows, linoleum on the floor, and back porch. Well up on the river bank, he has his property fenced in. The end of an old white enamel

bedstead serves as the gate.

Since the fall of 1933, Andrew Hokinson has had a place in the community. With none of the frills seen in some of the more elaborate structures, this man's most prized possession is his "stove." Oil drums fashioned with an opening on top for fueling and a door below from which to draw out the ashes are found in each of the dwellings. They produce an alarming amount of heat when well stoked.

While several of the shacks are decrepit hovels, there are many well constructed buildings kept in good condition. Cots with several blankets are in each, and all other furniture is made of odds and ends found by the men themselves. Large quantities of wood float down the river in the spring, it was explained, and the men are on the alert at that time for new "finds."

Several "homes" on the west end of the colony will have to be moved in the near future. Huge piles of tin cans and other refuse in the dump are gradually pushing the colony eastward, but for the present the men have shelter and until conditions improve they intend to remain members of the hermit community.