

# St. Paul Language Movement

**FAIRBANKS** — A meeting is scheduled to be held in St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands later this month as the beginning of a language revival movement for the Eastern Aleut language.

Dr. Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, said the meeting would be held July 13-25. He said the Eastern Aleut dialect has fallen into disuse and there is a fear among the Aleut people and linguists that the language may die.

The language survival program is under the joint sponsorship of the Alaska State-Operated School System (SOS), the Aleut League and the Alaska Native Language Center.

Krauss says that near the turn of the century there was widespread literacy of the Aleut language. The Russians, the first whites to settle the Aleutians, devised a system in the early 1800's for writing down the language.

The Russians had even printed parts of the Bible in Aleut. Krauss says the Aleut people suffered greatly under Russian rule but that the language was left intact until the Americans took over the territory.

In 1912 the last Aleut school was closed and the Aleut children were forced to attend English language schools.

Krauss says, "Alaskan language and Aleut language literacy were wiped out — they (the

Americans) discouraged the use of the (Native) language." He said the Americans "did everything they could to wipe out the Native tongues, feeling one language — English — would be better."

Now, Krauss says, only a few children speak Eastern Aleut, especially at Belkofski and Nikolski. In most places only adults speak the language.

"They have come to realize that their language is doomed," Krauss says, "unless urgent measures are taken now."

There is one exception, and that is the village of Atka which has been so isolated over the years that children and adults have maintained the language.

He said it is the only place in the world where all children speak Aleut. Western Aleut is spoken there however, and is markedly different from Eastern Aleut.

It was a Norwegian linguist, Dr. Knut Bergsland, from the University of Oslo, who, in 1952, made his first trip to Atka and began his long service to the Aleut language.

Bergsland has written articles and books on the Aleut language

and in 1972 lead the training program for the first Aleut teachers in bilingual programs to use the Aleut language in the Atka school.

The population of Atka is 85 and Krauss says Bergsland and two Aleut teachers, Moses Dirks and Nadesta Golley, working with the SOS, have developed a fine curriculum of 18 books written in Aleut for the Atka school.

Krauss says the survival of Aleut at Atka "will be very important for the cultural survival of the Aleut nation as a whole."

This week's workshop at St. Paul is being coordinated by Iliodor Philemonof, a native of the Pribilof Islands.

Prospective teachers at the workshop will come from the communities of Unalaska, Belkofski, Nikolski, Akutan, St. George and St. Paul.

Staff will include Bergsland who will come from Norway for the gathering, Tupou Pulu, bilingual educator with the SOS, Krauss from the UA, and Dirks and Golley of Atka.

Cultural experts on the Aleut region will attend the workshop as resource people.