

# Authority Relates History of Pribilofs

PRIBILOVIAN, THE FORGOTTEN  
PEOPLE OF ALASKA

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

But, please do not misunderstand me. I have no intention to paint a rosy picture and to create an impression that all was sweetness and love on the Aleutian Chain and on the Pribilofs. Of course there were abuses, injustices, and outright brutalities. But those were exceptions, and not the rule, or the policy established by the Russian government, and it was done behind the government's back and not brazenly in front of it. Furthermore, with the arrival of Fr. Veniaminov, who lives in the history of Alaska as the "Enlightener of Alaska," the new era had arrived. Fr. Veniaminov came to Unalaska in 1824 and left Unalaska in 1834, when he was transferred to Sitka. During his stay in Unalaska he introduced to Aleuts in general, and to the Pribilovians in particular, Christianity, Christian democracy, and humanitarianism. Christianity and Christian democracy to the islanders, and humanitarianism to those who ruled the islanders. Aleuts, including the Pribilovians, are humanitarians by nature. In spite of all sensation seeking writers, who described Aleuts as people who had kings, slaves, and were constantly at war, no historian has found even a remote resemblance of this fiction to the truth. To the contrary, Aleuts, scattered on various islands, led a peaceful life. No kings, no slaves, and no wars. By their very nature they are unaggressive, friendly, trustworthy, and loyal people. Their devotion and loyalty to the Church of their forefathers is something to marvel at, and when they represent a free labor force they prove themselves dependable and hard working people. A former member of Alaska Legislature has told me that without Aleuts as his labor force he couldn't possibly run his sheep ranch in Nikolsky.

Said Teichmann in his book "A Journey in the Year 1868 . . .", p. 176: "The Aleutian are adaptable, good-natured and very contented . . . and showed no trace of that resistance to outside influence which characterizes the natives of the American mainland."

Alaska as far as the Pribilovians are concerned. Now we come to the lot that befell Pribilovians after the Purchase of Alaska. A sad lot it had been, and to a certain extent still is. Here I want to underscore that only in 20 years after the Purchase the profits from sealing paid for the Purchase. And who were the sealers? Pribilovians, of course!

From 1867 and to April 1910 private commercial companies leased the Pribilofs. For almost a half a century lasted the darkest period in the life of Pribilovians and in existence of fur seal. Seals were rapidly depleted, and as far as Pribilovians were concerned, they were regarded as totally expendable. Malnutrition, leg irons and handcuffs for a slightest fault, lack of proper medical care, and working hours from 12 to 17 and even 18, all these conditions caused poor health and high mortality rate among the Pribilovians.

During those darkest hours, seal and sealers had only one friend. Henry Wood Elliott, first as an agent of the U.S. Treasury, and later as the specialist, employed by the U.S. House of Representatives, Elliott dedicated all his life to preservation of fur seal and to Pribilovians' human rights.

In April 1910 the lease of private company has expired. Elliott thought that he won the battle. Congress promised to pay \$50,000 annually for support of Pribilovians, and permission to kill 2,500 seals, for fresh meat for them. Private lessees refused to support Pribilovians in case a holiday on sealing would have been declared.

For many years Pribilovians feared that fur seal extinction would force them to starve or to move off the islands. This provision of Congress was the first bright star on dark skies over the Pribilofs. When later on Congress recognized Pribilovians as the only ones who have right to kill fur seal. Pribilovians believed that their enslavement was over. Recognition of their ancient rights was rejoiced by every Pribilovian. Little did they know that this right to live and work on the islands would keep them in captivity for years to come.

Pribilovians under the Old Glory

So much for the Russian period in