

Third In a Series—

Authority Relates History of Pribilofs

**PRIILOVIAN, THE FORGOTTEN
PEOPLE OF ALASKA**

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

On April 21, 1910 Congressional bill to provide sealing holiday became a law. For nine days, full nine days seal was safe. Then the ax fell. The Commissioner of Fisheries declared that fur seals will be killed for commercial purposes. 12,920 of the remaining 130,000 seals were killed. Fight for preservation of seal started all over and continued until Henry Elliott won the final approval of fur seal conservation. Commissioner of Fisheries has lost. In 1917 sealing was resumed under what is known today as the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. An illustration or two will suffice.

For instance, only in the thirties did the Department of the Interior see fit to compile and publish Aleut dictionary and grammar in Roman alphabet. While almost every division of the Department of the Interior made a contribution to the fund for that publication, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries has not. They were not interested. Russians compiled and published similar works prior to 1840 using Cyrillic alphabet.

During World War II the Pribilovians were evacuated to Funter Bay, an Admiralty Island, near Juneau. It was for the first time in the life of the Pribilovians that they had a chance to observe how Free Americans, natives and non-natives, live in the United States.

For the first time they learned that their children had the right to go to school after the age of 16. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries forbade children on the Pribilof Islands to go to school after they reached age 16.

But the most astonishing news to Pribilovians was to discover that they were American citizens. This revelation came to them when they were called for military service. It

took them considerable time to realize that it was true.

The same news that Pribilovians are American citizens really shocked the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and the Department of the Interior. Big wigs in both places left no stone unturned in consultations with government solicitors and their own lawyers. Pribilovians—American citizens—impossible. But all their consultations, all their efforts were in vain. According to the Treaty of Cession that was the fact, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing that the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries could do about it. Just grin and bear it.

In 1949 the Secretary of the Department of the Interior designated a group to "examine living conditions among the natives on the Pribilof Islands and other communities of the Bering Sea area." This group visited St. Paul Island and flew over St. George Island. Here I have to ask how it is possible to investigate "living conditions" from the air?

At the time of this investigation there was a herd of cattle on St. Paul Island to provide milk, cream, cheese and fresh meat supposedly to all residents of the island. Here is an example of a conversation which took place between Dr. Nichols, a member of the investigating group and Mr. Olson, at that time the Director of the Pribilofs. Dr. Nichols: "... the charge has been made . . . that when one of the steers or one of the dry cows here is butchered none of the fresh meat is ever distributed to the natives, that is for the benefit of the white employees. Could you clear up that matter for us, please." Mr. Olson: "Fault can be still found with our statement that we are furnishing more than required number of calories." Mr. Olson continued to lecture on calories. Dr. Nichols: "How about a direct answer?" Dr. Nichols didn't receive a direct answer.