

Elderly Indian Asks Some Pertinent Questions

January 23, 1970

Dear Editor:

I am a full blooded Indian 84 years of age. I was raised in the Holy Cross Mission in the Yukon territory. In those days the missionaries had to live like the Natives because there were no white people and the Russians had left. During those days at the boarding school we boys had to work as soon as we were big enough to carry a stick of wood. If we didn't work we didn't eat!

I was born after Russia sold Alaska to the United States. I left school during the Gold Rush in 1898 when the white people began to come and with them came civilization of the Native people.

When I came from the Kusko-kwim I met an 80 year old Russian man by the name of Anderanof. He had one son and two daughters. He was a bookkeeper for a Russian company over here. He had a lot of records which he kept and he would read them often. One day he read them to me. I told him to hold on to the records and guard them as they would be valuable one day. He said when he died he would give them to his son to keep. This he did. When his son died I inquired about the records and was told that the son had sold them to a store keeper in the village of Sleetmute. (Where the quick silver mine used to be.) If the Indians could locate the records there might be some information

that would help in the settling of the Native Land Claims issue. The following is some of the things the old Russian told me:

He was present during the purchase of Alaska. He said that the Russians could not conquer the Indians and this is why they sold Alaska to the United States. There were few Russians here and their stations were far apart. (I saw some of them in my early days of travel.) I was told how the Russians would line the Indians up along the bank of the Kuskokwim River and see how many they could kill with one shot of a muzzle-loader gun.

The Russians had a small

round house with three or four brass cannons in it. This house had small slots in the walls to shoot through and behind it was a log house for the soldiers. There were about 74,000 Indians here then according to the old Russian. So the Russians would invite the Indians to the community halls in the villages and get parents of the children drunk on whiskey. They would then give the children tobacco leaves. They killed hundreds of children in this manner.

Now the Russians committed all these atrocities and many others because they were simply outnumbered and could not con-

quer the Indians. So even with all the Indians they killed outright and the ones they killed by the diseases they brought, the Russians knew they were fighting a losing battle. When they seen this they took advantage of the opportunity to sell Alaska. Then all but the very old Russians went back to Russia.

Now, if the Russians could not conquer the Indians where did they get legal title to the land? How could they sell land to the United States to which they had no legal title or even aboriginal rights such as we Indians have? What it amounts to is that the Russians stole the land and the United States bought stolen land! Russia was in a dire financial crises at this time and was one way the Russians had of helping their country financially.

Why didn't the Russians give the money from the purchase of Alaska to the Indians? Why didn't the United States check into the rightful ownership of the land? When Statehood came in 1959, why did Congress allow Statehood without checking into clear title of the land? That was the time for all titles to be cleared just as the title to personal property has to be cleared before transfer of ownership is executed.

If Alaska legally became a State why does Congress allow the Natives to freeze the land and tie up business negotiations? Who can answer these questions?

Ralph P. Dulak



POINTED QUESTIONS—An old Indian, Ralph P. Dulak, formerly of Holy Cross now of Soldotna, in a letter to Anchorage Daily News asked some pointed questions about the status of native lands in Alaska. Ralph Dulak is now living in a trailer near Soldotna.