Complete control of the Pribilof Islands was assumed by the U.S. Government in 1910, at the end of the twenty-year lease to the North American Commercial Company. The islanders were automatically classified as "Wards of the government." There was some silent hope by a few Aleuts of better times ahead, but the wiser and pessimistic majority were suspicious.

The suspicions of those islanders were correct; the "Guznah," or Government, was blind. It had after all refused to recognize not only the hard conditions of the Pribilof Aleut people under the days of the lessee, but also the fast disappearing fur seal herd. It had prostituted the Seal Islands to the world because of a weak and vulnerable Congress. In 1910, while the dangers of pelagic sealing and suspension of the Pribilof seal harvest were being debated in Washington, the fur seal population sank to the dangerously low level of 130,000 seals. Yet the Pribilof sealers were again ordered back into the rookeries to take as many seals as the harvest could allow.¹ That summer, nearly 13,000 seals were slaughtered. Even as the Bering Sea Controversy grew stronger, in 1911 approximately 12,000 more seals fell victim to the capitalistic sacrifice.² Finally, in 1911, the North Pacific Sealing Convention, better known as the International Fur Seal Treaty of 1911, was adopted to save the fur seal from the wanton and bloody practice of pelagic sealing in the North Pacific.

The land kill lasted for another year however. Finally, in 1912, Congress passed a law suspending the killing of fur seals on the Pribilof Islands "except such as were necessary for food for the natives," for a rive year period. As a result, only 2,298 seals were killed on the Islands for food between August, 1912 and August, 1913.³
The Pribilof people were, at least, fortunate that the killing of seals for food was not overlooked. The limited rations of food issued weekly were both colorless and provided less caloric intake per day than was the minimum requirement. The people would never have been able to survive the zapusk (holiday) without the allowed subsistence seal kills.

And so, the picture of a master of the plantation and slaves of the harvest was to sadly continue. The promise of a brighter future with Abe Lincoln's democratic government should have been there but never was. When the government stepped in with complete control of the Islands to manage the threatened fur seal herd, it also assumed complete control of the lives of the Pribilof people. In order to avoid obstacles in the management of the fur seal herd the government refused to allow the Pribilof communities to become self-governing and self-supporting.

The Aleut men were involved in the direct labor of sealing, fox-trapping, and any other labor ordered by the Fisheries. However, they were not considered "employees" of the government, and the Fisheries felt no obligation to consider them as such. On record they were "natives" or "wards of the government" requiring nothing much more than the bare essentials of life to keep them fueled for the necessary labor. The exclusive class of people on the Islands were the "white employees" who were given decent quarters, plentiful subsistence and generous home leaves. The "luxurious" living quarters of the "employees" at this time stood out in contrast to the undersized, worn, wooden structures that the village people lived in.

The housing situation on St. Paul and St. George after the departure of the North American Commercial Company was critical. The houses were small and inadequate, averaging about eleven feet by twenty feet in size, and consisting of two, and sometimes three, very small rooms. These old and worn dwellings were built by the North American Commercial Company probably in anticipation of strengthening their lease to the Islands. Behind each dwelling was a pit for the disposal of night soil and coal stove ashes. There were only seven outhouses on St. Paul Island for use by the fifty households of Aleuts in 1915.

**Law and Order**

Law and order on the Islands was handled directly by the agent and caretaker. However, the people, with a long history of law-abiding...
habits and an understandable fear of the "Guznah," never caused the boss any major problems. A jail was provided for the few troublemakers, and the jail sentences, which usually included a diet of nothing more than bread and water, were determined by the agent, who was the police, judge and jury, as it was in the days of the Russian control.

One of the laws strictly enforced on the Islands was the prohibition of the use or making of any intoxicating liquors by the "natives." It was, of course, permissible if one were "white." The U.S. government imposed a public law prohibiting the making of "peeva," or homemade beer, and also denied the people the right to purchase the legal brands. In order to discourage the making of peeva on the Islands, the issue of sugar was drastically cut for each household. The Fisheries would threaten to deport offenders from the Islands. However, the final sentence would usually not go beyond confiscation of the peeva, a possible jail sentence, or a cut from the sugar issue.

The Fisheries’ Analysis of the Pribilof Situation in 1913

The Report of the Commissioner of Fisheries in 1913 admits to the practice of a loathsome form of government on the Pribilof Islands. Walter I. Lembkey, in one section of his report submitted to the Commissioner of Fisheries, entitled "Support of Natives," wrote the following:

Problems in Communistic System

The instructions of the Bureau provide that the natives shall be supplied, so far as funds will permit, with the necessaries of life to an amount sufficient to maintain them in comfort, due regard being paid to economy and thrift. To this end, various supplies to be used by the natives, as fuel, food, clothing, etc., were purchased in San Francisco at the best wholesale rates obtainable and transported to the islands on the Bureau's chartered steamer Homer. These supplies upon arrival at the islands were placed in the two general stores (one on each island), where they were marked for issue or sale at a price one-third above wholesale cost, including all discounts except for cash.

They were then distributed after the methods hereafter detailed. The increase of one-third over the wholesale cost was made to cover cost of transportation and handling only.
The instructions of the Bureau further provided that from the supplies thus taken to the islands merchandise to the amount of $40 000 be furnished the native inhabitants for their support and maintenance during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1913. These supplies were not to be received by the natives as a gratuity but as a return for services rendered. Services such as might be performed in the taking of sealskins and in the management of the herd in general were considered the main labor for which the natives were to receive this support; but, as the killing of seals was to be greatly curtailed, the natives, in return for their support by the Government, were to be required to perform such other labor of a nature to benefit the community generally as might become necessary or desireable. Individual natives, however, who were willing to perform such labor of a skilled or unskilled nature as might be necessary to the upkeep of the Government property and the maintenance of the stations in general were to be compensated individually in cash from funds other than the $40,000 set apart for the community support at the rate of, for skilled labor 25 cents an hour, and for unskilled 15 cents an hour. The skilled labor embraced that of carpenters, engineers, painters, and ironworkers, etc.; the unskilled mere laboring work requiring no special aptitude.

The system involved in the foregoing arrangement for natives' support is one of almost pure communism. The main problem confronting those charged with its conduct was to support the people in such comfort and happiness as the resources would allow and at the same time minimize those admitted evils of communal existence which, in this case, could easily result in reducing the island inhabitants to a mental condition of stolid apathy, and a physical condition of virtual peonage, if not slavery. . . .

**System of Payment to the People**

Prior to July 1914, when the Aleut people did work for some cash, the salaries for the permanent workers were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Salary (per month)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Store assistant</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockman</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Waiter</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boatkeeper</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mess Waiter</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundress</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist. stockman</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Reindeer herder 2.50/mo.  keeper 2.50/mo.
Chief (forman) 5.00/mo.  Asst. herder 2.50/mo.
2nd Chief (2nd foreman) 2.50/mo.

The chief and second chief received an additional $50.00 at the end of each sealing season. Other individual Aleut workers received 15 to 25 cents per hour for seasonal work while men of the fox divisions received either extra supplies or credit at the store. The compensations listed above on the whole were not adequate and far below the needs of most families. The cash would be gone before the family cupboards were adequately filled.

In July, 1914, the U.S. Government changed its system of payment to the Aleut Islanders. Instead of receiving cash for their services as public servants, the people received government store credit. The allowances were set as follows:

- Male Aleut Worker  $4.50 per week
- Housewife  $1.00 per week
- Other women, each  $1.00 per week
- Widows as heads of households  $3.50 per week
- All minors, each  $0.50 per week

If the average family had four members, a man, wife, and two children, the household income would be $6.50 a week.

A night message of Agent Lembkey's to the Commissioner of Fisheries in 1912 mentioned the dissatisfaction that the laborers had with the salaries received from the government. His message stated that the salaries were lower than "those paid by the leasee," and "much smaller than paid white man in similar services… Natives will not service if further reduced." It would take the government nearly two years to respond. But the response was not favorable to the people. Although the new system of 1914 provided a slightly better share of food, the people strongly complained that their food issues were still insufficient to meet the needs of their families. Much of the necessary foods would be gone early in the week. Begging for advance credit at the store, however humiliating, was not uncommon.
The almost total absence of cash meant, for one thing, that the mail order house catalogs could not be used to obtain material and clothes needed by the people that could not be obtained at the government store. In addition, the lack of any money meant that they could not afford to seek employment elsewhere in Alaska, nor could they afford to visit close relatives in the Aleutian Chain. In order to travel on a government ship they had to have one dollar per day per person for the ship's meals.

The cheap brands of canned goods issued by the government added insult to injury. In 1915, the Aleut foreman of the work force at St. Paul reported to the agent that he had found a bathtub stopper in a can of fruit he had opened. Other people would also complain of unidentifiable objects found in their canned goods. According to the agent, many of these objects would turn out to be peelings of fruit that had disassembled from the mushed up cores. However, it was enough for the people to throw away the suspicious cans. As for the good cans, those had to be spiked with sugar as shown from an excerpt from a letter to the Commissioner of Fisheries from the St. Paul agent dated 4/25/16:

…The fact that the fruit is quite sour is not a fault, as the Bureau no doubt requested same put up in water. In fact, the more sour the fruit is, the more we would recommend it for Native use, as the more sugar they have to use on their fruit, the less they will have for the kvass barrel.7

The agent in his letter to the Commissioner of Fisheries of October 5, 1915, under pressure from the St. Paul leaders suggested that a better brand of fruits be provided in lieu of an increased weekly food allowance that was requested and needed by the people.

The credits at the store could be used by the people to buy shotguns and other hunting or fishing paraphernalia. But the men were dissatisfied that the Fisheries had complete control as to whom, how many, and when the hunters or fishermen could go hunting and fishing. The fishing season for halibut was June through September, which happened to also be the busiest work season of the year. The seal harvest was the primary concern of the Fisheries; the fishing and hunting of the Aleuts were a much lower priority. The Fisheries compromised by allowing a certain number of men to hunt or fish once a week, or whenever the Fisheries' work load permitted.

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SLAVES OF THE HARVEST
The halibut, a welcome and healthy addition to the people's diet, was not an easy catch, sometimes requiring a fisherman more than a day before the first fish was pulled aboard his small dory. The best fishing spots covered the southern shores, one to two miles from St. Paul Island, with one favorite spot being at an area to the southwest of Reef Point. The constantly foggy and changing weather, along with the strong restrictions of the government resulted in a less than satisfactory catch of halibut each season. However limited the catch was though, the proud fisherman and his family would always share the halibut with their less fortunate neighbors. After the halibut was thoroughly cleaned the wife would cut up the halibut for an immediate feast of raw fish spiced with nothing more than table salt. Various parts of the halibut were considered better eaten raw, while the rest of it was either pan-fried or used to make paroq, a fish pie.

The People's Protests

The absence of cash after July, 1914, was discouraging to the men who were kept working the year round. The main occupation, of course, was the seal harvest. In the years between 1913 and 1917, harvest work was minimal because of the "zapusk." However, the government felt that for the benefit of itself and the Aleut communities the people should be utilized the year around making improvements in the government and community dwellings in turn for the food, clothing, and fuel it was providing. Thus, the people were fully employed after 1914.

In 1916, the working force, which was growing more unhappy with the government, decided to make a strong move; they drew up a petition voicing their complaints against the U.S. Government. By August 11, 1916, the complaint was drawn up, signed, and entrusted to the St. Paul priest for delivery to the captain of the ship *McCulloch* to be mailed to the Commissioner of Fisheries, Washington, D.C. For some unknown reason, the petition was never delivered by the priest, and the men waited in vain for an answer from Washington.

On October 10, 1916, the men drew up another petition, and this time went to the Pribilof agent, Mr. H. Fassett, directly for action. The petition contained eight separate requests:
1. A raise in allowance up to $18.00 per week
2. The freedom to speak Aleut when they desired.
3. The hiring of Aleut men from the Aleutian Chain instead of “white people” for assisting future seal harvest.
4. The freedom to hunt and fish when they needed to most.
5. The freedom to re-open church school.
6. Recognition as hard and loyal workers.
7. That the agent also refrain from the drinking of intoxicating liquors if it must be prohibited to the Aleuts.
8. That the agent, Fassett, sign the petition.

The history of the submitted petition, which was forwarded to the Commissioner of Fisheries, Washington, D.C., would not be complete without reproduction of Agent Fassett’s letter that accompanied the petition:

St. Paul, Pribilof Islands, Alaska October 20, 1916

The Commissioner of Fisheries,
Washington.

Referring to a petition from the natives of St. Paul Island, a copy of which is enclosed herewith, and which was handed to Assistant Agent Christoffers on the evening of the 11th instant, the following remarks are submitted for the Bureau's consideration:

Reference is invited to the daily log notes of this station of August 11 and 12, 1916, which relate the circumstances leading up to the matter under present discussion.

From Asst. Agent Christoffers it was learned that the original petition was not forwarded by the priest, Mr. Hotovitsky, to whom it had been entrusted by the natives. Because of this fact and because the natives feel that they are not being properly rewarded for their labor, and because of the general dissatisfaction with present conditions, it was arranged by the writer, for Mr. Christoffers to meet the men and discuss such grievances as they might care to present.

The original petition being largely concerned with matters of religion, which there is no doubt were inspired by the priest, the men were urged by the grievances to their physical requirements, or to submit a separate petition relating to religious affairs if that should be regarded as of sufficient importance. They were told not to be afraid to speak up but to talk freely to Mr. Christoffers and to get all their troubles off their minds. The result is the petition, plus some
other matters which Mr. Christoffers noted down at the time but of which there is no record here.

The first section is the important part of the petition and is the only one worthy of serious consideration. Although they do not themselves fully appreciate it, the fact cannot be denied that the people of St. Paul (and of St. George as well) are living in actual slavery, and that this condition exists and is maintained under the immediate control and direction of the United States Government. Since July, 1914, heads of families have received one dollar in cash per year and their quota of the smallest and most restricted stock of supplies furnished in many years. Their children, in particular, are insufficiently nourished and clothed, and practically all the people are inadequately housed in old and dilapidated buildings now on the verge of collapse. Water for household purposes can only be secured at the expense of considerable effort and time, and the allowance of fuel, which should have been increased, has just been cut in half. During the past year a considerable proportion of the natives having small sums of money on deposit in the bank have drawn on these funds in order to purchase articles chiefly of wearing apparel and household comfort.

Their future is dark and they are asking for relief from a condition which is slowly but surely becoming unbearable to them. They say they cannot understand how it is that in the days of commercial leaseholds the Government contributed materially to their support, in addition to seeing that the lessees treated them well, while now that the same government is in sole control their condition is so very much worse by comparison.

They cannot leave the islands to seek work elsewhere. To get to Unalaska, the nearest port, they must have, in cash, one dollar per person per day ready in hand before they can go on board the Coast Guard cutter (this is to pay for their subsistence), and at least two days must be counted upon for the journey. On the other hand, except in summer when the salmon fishery may offer some brief employment, there is no market for their labor, and as the greater part of the people at Unalaska are themselves in a condition of even greater destitution, though free agents and citizens, indigents from these islands would undoubtedly be refused permission to land there.

The food supplies furnished this year are, with few exceptions, so limited in quantity that immediate reductions in the allowance, already pared down to what has been regarded as a minimum, must be made in order to string the issues out until June next, when it is presumed some measure of relief may be expected.
If there is anything in the time-worn adage that the laborer is worthy of his hire, certainly something can be done to remedy existing conditions on the Pribilof Islands. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that if the American public should become aware of the situation here there would be a cry raised against it that would be more than nation-wide. That this knowledge has thus far been kept from them seems scarcely short of miraculous; that ignorance of the situation can be maintained indefinitely is rather more than is to be expected. It is not believed that the Bureau itself appreciates the circumstances in their full and true light, and these remarks are therefore submitted in the hope that an effort will be made to ameliorate conditions at an early date. . .

Agent Fassett's cover letter presented strong documentation of the situation on the islands in 1916. It showed a people enslaved to a system they could not escape. It documented the government's practice of "actual slavery" and how explosive the situation was if the American public found out. Whether the St. Paul petition of 1916 and the forwarding letter of Agent Harry Fassett had any bearing on the turn of events in 1917 is open to speculation. What is known, however, is that there were increased appropriations authorized by Congress for the Pribilof Islands operations in 1917. Twenty thousand dollars was provided for "new building and other improvements." With this money, six houses would be built for the Pribilof people; four on St. Paul Island, and two on St. George. The rest of the funds went to material for the construction of a salt house on each island which was necessary in the processing of the furs prior to shipment, a new water supply system for St. George, and miscellaneous supplies for the repair of already existing structures on both islands.

The Government's Foxing Monopoly

The U.S. Government did not allow the people any practice of free enterprise on the Islands and therefore kept complete control of the foxing business for themselves. Fox trapping in 1916 produced 420 Pribilof blue fox pelts which sold for $20,242. The government received an average of $48.20 per pelt while giving the Aleut hunters $5.00 cash.
or store credit for the original fur. The government had profited handsomely with such an inexpensive operation.

In the winter of 1913-1914, payments for fox skins were paid in cash at the rate of $5.00 per blue fox and $1.00 per white fox to the hunters. The extra cash, however little, was welcome to the men and their families. After 1914, the fox receipts were not given in cash, but in government store credits. All fox credits, by order of the Fisheries were to be used before the end of the fiscal year (June 30). As a result, families could not save up store credits for the times they would need extra food or clothing the most. The old system of paying $5.00 in cash instead of in credit to the fox hunters for every blue fox pelt was reinstated in 1917, with one small improvement: the white fox skins were now also worth $5.00 to the hunter instead of only $1.00 per skin as in the past years.

In 1917, 567 blue fox pelts were shipped from St. Paul and St. George and sold by the Government for $34,653.50. The Government then paid the fox divisions of both islands a total of $2,835 for the blues, which meant that the average receipt in cash must have been less than $50.00 per hunter for that year. The government’s profit was almost $32,000.

Had the government taken heed of the recommendation of Agent Fassett in 1916 to turn the fox business over to the Aleuts of St. Paul and St. George to make them self-supporting communities, the people might have indeed succeeded. The business would have at least provided the opportunity for them to live comfortably between sealing seasons and perhaps experience some of the luxuries of life that they never had known in the entire history of the Islands.

However, the U.S. Government was doing extremely well with the fox revenues in the Pribilofs and was not about to release this profit-maker to any entity, let alone the slaves of the fur seal harvest, to whom, as Agent Fassett suggested, the business should have rightly belonged. Many years later when the Fisheries came under attack for having kept the Pribilof people in servitude, the government maintained that the people had always been free to leave. However, as one descendant of these "slaves" noted, "they failed to explain how a man with a family with only a few pennies and a sack of potatoes could start a new life in a completely different world."\(^{10}\) The Fisheries maintained an experienced labor force for the seal harvest by economic shackles.
The Post-World War I Era

By 1919, World War I had ended. All of the energies of the nation that had been spent on the war were redirected to domestic affairs. And for a decade the economy boomed with business investments and expansion. On the Pribilofs it was also a time of major new investments and planning for the future.

The Fisheries began the task of improving the run-down facilities on the Pribilof Islands that they had inherited from the private companies. Between 1919 and 1934, 51 new homes were built on St. Paul, in addition to ten new storage and service buildings and nine industrial and community buildings. The new houses were usually three-room houses, although some were made with large attics that could be converted into a bedroom. Fifty-eight miles of roads were constructed on St. Paul in 1929 and a new school and hospital were built in 1930.

This building boom on the Pribilofs, however, reached a virtual standstill by 1935 as the effects of the worldwide depression, which had begun with the 1929 crash on Wall Street, hit the Islands. In the 30's the U.S. Government was frantically coping with the collapsed American economy and in the process the construction on the Pribilofs was suspended. During the period from 1935 to 1939 there were only two new buildings built, and both were for the use of the government rather than for the people. Partly because of the extensive building program on the Islands in the 1920's and partly because of the worldwide depression in the 1930's, the U.S. government spent almost eight million dollars more on the Pribilof operation between 1920 and 1940 than it received in receipts from the fur seal harvest.

The three month fur seal harvest was the center of all the economic and business activity on the islands. It was the basis of the Pribilof life and it was hard work, as Aggey Galaktionoff remembered:

We used to seal all over from lake to road that cuts over to Reef to here. Everywhere. We'd leave carcasses where we did killing. We used to pack five skins from the ground... to help the mule team back from the grounds. You just have skin itself, with flippers off and we put four into one skin and put in on like jacket and pack it back. We used to walk to Northeast and come back same day.

From 1920 we start branding seals so no cows to be killed to build up herd. After sealing wed brand. We’d get two bits 50¢ a pup, they used to pay us. The seals was increasing and in 1930’s we started
making two to three thousands from big rookeries until 1940 we were coming up to five thousand from Reef, five thousand from Zapadny and five thousand from Northeast Point and one thousand from Halfway Point and eight to nine thousand from Lukanon and Tolstoi. After they started killing the cows, we could hardly get some.

We used to drive at night and have killing. The killing starts from way over by Zoltoi Hill there and gets over back of the lake here. And do killing as far over as the little house pump.

In addition to sealing the men also had to load and unload the ships that would arrive every few months on the islands. And that work was literally back-breaking, as Aggey described it:

We used to work in rough sea with bidars and motor boats to tow bidars in. We used to handle all the cargo. You know, the plank roads at Big Lake and the Point. We used to handle them all by hand—3 x 12's. They just wrapped them up and put them in the water and motor vessel tow them in and beach them up on beach and that's the way we unload cargo and when low tide comes we gotta sleep but we gotta work. We gotta carry them on our shoulders. Boy, they used to be heavy. We used to carry everything up on shoulder. And imagine, no cars. From the pontoon—that's half of it over on the other side of lagoon lake, there we put two together to make one big one. From that boat we used to line up on pontoon and boxes come and we snatch. Now today, if fellows work that way I betcha they would squawk. If the landing broke here we'd go over to Gorbach with bidars and mule teams and pack them up on the hill. From Lukanon we used to unload. From Marunich we'd unload—even passengers. I try to tell you fellows you are taking it easy.

During the 20's and 30's the Pribilof people were paid only a sealing bonus for the summer harvest and the rest of the year's work was paid for in goods and services such as housing, fuel, food, and clothing. By 1941 the sealing bonus for the entire community was calculated on the basis of 60¢ per skin on St. Paul, and 75¢ per skin on St. George. This differential compensated for the fact that the harvests were much smaller on St. George, resulting in considerably less income for the men who worked there. The bonus was then split among dye classes of men and one boys' class. Each laborer was assigned to a class depending on his working ability. In 1941 there were 81 laborers: 36 in
the first class, 16 in the second, 19 in the third, nine in the fourth, and one in the fifth. The first class workers received $754.20 for their work; the fifth class received $153.00. Two foremen were given added compensation as were the two mess attendants.\textsuperscript{14}

An example of the pettiness of not only the government wages, but also of the Fisheries policies was revealed in a note from the St. Paul physician in 1938. Nurses' aides at the clinic were paid 35¢ a day; therefore since Martha Krukoff had worked 31 days in August of 1938 she should have been paid $10.85 for the month. However, the Island agent, Mr. T. Benson, said the maximum number of days a person could be paid for each month was thirty, and therefore Martha Krukoff could only be paid $10.50. She had to work for nothing one day because the Fisheries budget had only thirty days in it, although August had 31 days.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite the fact that these meager wages were annual rather than seasonal, people were still able to save liberty bonds and gave a little money each season to the Island manager who would send the money to the Washington Loan and Trust Company in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{16}Banking 5,000 miles away took a great deal of faith for people who had usually never traveled beyond the Pribilofs. However, it is illustrative of the fact that the Pribilofs were oriented more towards the federal government seated in Washington, D.C. than the territory of Alaska where they belonged geographically. It wasn't until the late 1950's after Alaska became a state that this orientation shifted to the State.

**Education**

The educational system on the Islands was never adequate in the days of the lessees. When the Alaska Commercial Company (1870-1890) and the Northern Commercial Company (1890-1910) handled the program, they did so with reluctance. Their primary concern was the sealing industry, and the reason the Pribilofs had a school system at all was because the government required that the lessees of the Islands would "maintain a school on each island, suitable for the education of the natives of said islands, for a period of not less than eight months in each year." The curriculum was not set by law, and therefore the Company could run the school as loosely as they wanted And they did. The teachers were selected for their capability to fit in with the sealing
operations. These non-bona fide educators were sealing supervisors, storekeepers first- and then teachers.\textsuperscript{17}

The Russian Church School had always played an important cultural as well as religious, role on the Pribilofs. This school afforded the children an opportunity to learn the Russian language while studying the Old and New Testaments of the Orthodox Christian religion. The government soon after its assumption of direct control of the Islands, saw this church school as an obstacle in their operations. It began a strong campaign to encourage the speaking of English by all the Aleut people. Aside from ordering all the children to refrain from speaking Aleut at school, the government also completely shut down the Church school for a number of years. It was a direct attack on the basis of the community; but the faith of the people was too strong to be shaken by such tactics. The church continued to be the catalyst for many of the social and religious groups on the Islands. The closing of the Church school was the beginning of a series of battles the Fisheries initiated with the Russian Orthodox Church on the Pribilofs. Only in the 1960’s did they finally ask for a truce in their struggles.

In 1912, the government-owned schools had 43 students enrolled on St. Paul Island, and 23 at St. George, with both islands having only one teacher apiece. The curriculum was a simple one consisting of nothing more than reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling. There were only five grades, and as many old-timers can testify, even the best students would be kept in one grade many years. The main focus of education was the learning of the English language. The children were ordered not to speak Aleut in school or at home and the penalty for any lapses was a piece of tape over the mouth.

In the early 1920's many students had gone from the Pribilofs to the Bureau of Indian Affairs school at Chemawa, Oregon. Although Chemawa was not a paragon of academic excellence, it did provide the students an important experience in the outside world and certainly better schooling than was available on the Pribilofs. However, even the admission to Chemawa was not automatic, as Aggey Galaktionoffs experience attests:

I was 15 coming to 16 when I started working. I was in this grade school here. Mr. Proctor was superintendent here. Victor, Irish, John and other boys went to Chemawa. This was way after my father

\textit{Slaves of a Federal Harvest}
passed away and I wanted to go too and I went in the office and knock at door and he says come in. Mr. Proctor says come in, anything I can do for you, Aggie? And I said yes, I come to ask to go to school at Chemawa.

"Ummmmm. That very good idea—very good—but first I say you gotta have your mother's consent."

Well, that one word, I didn't know that one word.
And I said, "I'm ready to go." And he said, "No, Aggie, I told you you can't go without your mother's consent—I told you."
"No," I said, "I want to go."
I got kicked out of that office and I never getting to go.
Just about two months after in August or September I went to office again. I try. That same word held me down.
Boy was I dumb. I never ask anybody what that one word "consent" meant. That's where I got stuck. I never went.
In 1926, Chemawa said that it would not accept any new Alaskan students because of inadequate facilities. The last three Pribilof students returned in 1930—Marianna Merculief, Kleopatra Krukoff, and Abraham Merculief. All of the students who followed them had to settle for what was offered at the Pribilofs.  

During the 1930's there were two teachers assigned to St. Paul and two teachers on St. George. However, recruitment was always a problem and keeping the teachers was sometimes even more difficult. In 1932, the two teachers on St. Paul suddenly resigned on September 19, leaving the Island without anyone to run the school until new teachers could be brought up on January 7, 1938. In 1939, one teacher on St. George left because of illness, leaving only one teacher on the Island for the year.

The new school house, built on St. Paul in 1930, had two large rooms on the first floor: one for the lower grades and the other for the upper grades. THe basement was split into the girls' side, which had a kitchen and other home economics equipment, and the boys' side, where there was equipment for manual and industrial arts. There were also showers in the basement, and twice a week the students had to use them and be inspected for skin diseases.

Fisheries was in the business of harvesting seals, not running schools, and the education that was provided on the Pribilofs reflected the priorities of the Islands' management. The education guaranteed that there would be a continual supply of labor on the Islands to do the sealing jobs because the students were not given other options for their futures.
Political Developments

In 1924, the Citizen Act passed by the U.S. Congress collectively naturalized all of the Alaskan natives. Despite this Act, the Fisheries still considered the Pribilof people as "wards of the federal government" for whom they paternalistically provided the basic necessities. Before 1932, the community organization on the Pribilofs was centered on a "chief who was picked by the Fisheries to be their foreman and was generally, but not always, a leader in the community. Community meetings were called to help settle disputes or to obtain help for some individual problems; meetings were also held to plan social events, and church functions. The Brotherhood of the Church of St. Peter and Paul was also an important community organization since so much of the life of the community centered around the Church.

In 1932, Mr. Theodore Benson, one of the Fisheries agents, allowed the people to organize a more formal community group than they had had in the past. Two years later, in 1934, the Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) to help protect all native Americans from the disintegrating pressures they were subject to in the United States. In addition to many other provisions, the Act also provided for a constitution and by-laws for each native American group. In 1936 the Pribilof community was presented with an informal constitution and by-laws which complied with the letter, but not the spirit, of the law. Mr. Benson called a meeting in the old recreation hall where Gabe Stepetin, who had just returned after a ten year absence, read the by-laws to the people. The community voted to adopt them and then elected Mamant Emanoff, John Misikin, Peter Kochergin, and Elary Gromoff to the first community council. Gabe Stepetin was elected the President of the Council. The sphere of influence of the council was severely restricted by the Fisheries and therefore it could not perform the role envisioned by the IRA legislation. The most important area that the Council assumed responsibility for was the running of the canteen, which sold toilet articles, hardware tools, and dry goods. The community made enough money through the canteen to pay for the Russian Orthodox priest's salary and for a policeman on the Island. This 1936 Council was an important step in formalizing what had, until that time, been the informal leadership of the Pribilof community.

The size of the community on St. Paul steadily increased between the 1920's and the 1940's. In 1925 there were 182 people on St. Paul,
including people who had left the Island temporarily. By 1941, just before World War II, the population had increased over 56% to 285. Births outnumbered deaths more than two to one, despite the flu epidemic in 1932 in which twelve people died. The increase in births over deaths, a reversal of the 19th century trend, was undoubtedly due partly to the fact that the people had the availability of a full-time doctor on both Islands as well as decent housing for the first time.

By 1941, war had already broken out in Europe, and the Pacific region itself was uneasy because of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and China. On October 23, 1940, the Japanese gave formal notice that they were withdrawing from the Fur Seal Treaty of July 1911. The following summer a Japanese fishing fleet in the Bering Sea was reported by the Fisheries:

The fleet arrived off the northern coast of the Aleutian Islands in May, worked northward past the Pribilof Islands and spent the greater part of the season fishing in the waters between the Pribilofs and Nunivak Island and elsewhere. The fleet withdrew from the Alaska coast sometime in July. Apparently the catch consisted chiefly of halibut and cod.

In fact, the Japanese catch that summer consisted primarily of military intelligence camouflaged by the halibut and cod. Less then a year later the information gathered by that fishing fleet would be used to attack the Aleutians, dramatically changing the course of the people's lives on the Pribilofs.

SLAVES OF THE HARVEST
ABOVE: Natives Visiting the Oil Town, Kanatak, Alaska. Courtesy Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum. BELOW: St. Paul