



In June of 1944 an Army transport ship returned the people to their homes on the Pribilof Islands after two years of exile. However, the Pribilof people found it difficult to reassume their roles as wards of the government. In Funter Bay for the first time most of them had seen a world where men were paid wages instead of canned goods for their labors, a world where the people governed themselves instead of living under the Federal Government's paternalism. Now they demanded the same freedom for themselves that they had seen others enjoying as a natural right.

There were three stages in the struggle of independence on the Pribilofs. During the first stage in the late 1940's and 1950's the people concentrated on gaining economic equality with the rest of the federal civil servants, and educational equality with the rest of Alaska. Once the economic and educational equality had been achieved, true political independence in the form of self-government of the villages followed in the late 1960's. Finally in the early 1970's the people received the legal title to the land of their ancestors and began to develop this collective inheritance as an insurance for their future.

The Community Council

The St. Paul Community Council had become inactive in Funter Bay after some of the leaders had moved to Juneau. Therefore, when the people returned in 1944 there were new elections to reorganize the Council. Gabriel Stepetin was elected St. Paul Community Council President and was to be re-elected again and again until 1956. His

leadership provided the community the continuity it needed during the initial stages of their struggle. Elary Gromoff was elected vice-president and for many years was also an important leader of the Council.

From the beginning, the Council was hampered by restrictions placed on it by the Fisheries staff, especially by Daniel Benson, the Island manager. Mr. Benson had been the storekeeper in Funter Bay and had returned with the Pribilof people in 1944. As Island manager he insisted that the community Council concern itself with local community interests rather than the policies of the Federal Government; his permission to use space in the Rec Hall for Council meetings was given only if the Council agenda met his approval. Consequently, the Council met in public to discuss non-prohibited topics and in private to discuss the prohibited ones.

The most immediate goal of the community leaders was to improve both the quality and quantity of food that the Fisheries provided in lieu of wages. The food situation was abominable, as the doctor on St. George described in 1946:

The Islanders are almost without exception undersized and unable to do hard manual labor. This is attributable to the fact that they do not get enough to eat, nor of the right kind of food. The Islanders harvest the seals, and in return for millions of dollars of seal skins reaped each year by these experts the Government houses them, furnishes (?) them with cook stoves, and provides them with food and work clothes. The food schedule is one of the most archaic documents in existence. I quote:

"BEEF, Salt. Three pounds per issue for each husband and wife, or heads of households, over six years of age. (Not to be issued with canned meat, ham or salt salmon. TWELVE issues a year. For six issues during the season when seal meat is available, no canned meat, salt beef, ham or salt salmon is to be issued.) (The annual meat issue schedule is recapitulated as follows: canned meat 28 issues; salt beef six issues, salt cod twelve issues, seal meat six issues; total 52 issues.)

"SUGAR: one pound a week for husband and wife and heads of households; 1/4 pound for all other members of the family over four years of age. . . ."

As a matter of fact this schedule provides for nothing but canned milk for the children under four except they filch from their elders* table.... Healthy children cannot be raised on milk alone.

The rest of the food schedule runs in the same tenor.»V. This food schedule figures out a caloric value of about 1700 calories. Uncle (Sam) is giving the Germans 1900 calories. These Islanders ... are white people and can no longer receive the physical treatment that was accorded to the aborigines who were first brought from the Aleutian Islands. They need the same food privileges that are accorded to the white employees on the island based on a caloric daily intake of at least 2000 calories, up to 3500 when the seal crew is working

The Germans in the American zone are given 1900 caloric units a day; we should at least treat our own people as well. A family with fourteen in it finds itself occasionally with nothing in the larder the day before the issue is made. Remember that kids of four and under are issued nothing substantial in the way of food.¹

The Fisheries had no immediate response to either Dr. Wentz's letter or the Community Council's demands for more and better food.

Education was also a major concern of the Community Council. By law, education was provided on the Pribilofs through the eighth grade to any student under the age of sixteen, but the day after a male student turned sixteen he had to report to the Fisheries for work. The Fisheries had a continual problem recruiting staff for the Islands' schools, and therefore the schools were often seriously short-handed. For many years there were only two instructors for approximately 95 children on St. Paul and two instructors for 45 children on St. George. The staff was expected to do other jobs on the Islands in addition to teaching, and often they were hired for those jobs rather than for their teaching skills.

The education in other parts of Alaska provided by the territorial government was considerably better than the Fisheries' educational system. The Territorial Department of Education had basic standards for each grade and provided up-to-date materials to their instructors. Therefore, in the late 1940's the Community council began to put pressure on the Fisheries to transfer their educational system to the Territory of Alaska so that the children would be provided a better education than their parents had been. The people realized that the inadequate education on the Pribilofs left the people untrained for any work except manual labor. Therefore, the Community Council asked the Fisheries repeatedly for Job training to compensate for the lack of education in their schools. However, job training was virtually nonex-

istent and it was years before people were given skills with which to assume the major responsibilities of the fur seal harvest.

The working conditions on the Islands were also deplorable. During the months of June through September, men woke at 3 A.M. to begin the harvest and would work steadily until noon. They would then return to the village where they often had to work at their regular jobs until evening. However, these work conditions were never as onerous as the fact that the workers were not paid a regular wage for their work. The Fisheries paid for the labor of the Aleuts with a subsistence level of commodities and services, plus a sealing bonus at the end of the harvest. The sealing bonus was essentially the same kind of compensation that had been used since 1870. For years the community had been paid 40C per seal skin; it was then raised after World War II to 90C per skin.

This form of compensation discriminated against the Aleuts, who were federal employees but were not paid federal salaries. To the Aleuts this compensation insulted their dignity at the same time as it robbed them of their just payment for their labors. Their eighteen year struggle for civil service wages was ultimately a struggle for their rights to be treated as independent employees instead of as dependent wards.

The Fires of 1945 and 1950

On June 26, 1945, just a year after everyone had returned to the Islands, the people on St. Paul gathered upstairs in the old Rec Hall to watch a movie entitled "The Wild Goose Calls." The building had been built in 1932 and had quickly become the center of all the social activity in the village. It included a library, card room, barbershop, pool room, assembly room for the women, and an upper floor for dances, movies, and gym activities; the canteen was in the basement. That evening almost everyone in the village was at the show, since movies at that time were still a rare occurrence.

Suddenly in the darkness of the top floor someone cried out that there was fire in the building. Many people instinctively began to run for the only staircase leading to the first floor, while others stood on the chairs calling for calm and an orderly evacuation. The fire soon spread to four nearby houses and the church roof began to smoulder. Canisters of gas, stacked next to the Rec Hall, were anxiously rolled out of reach of the extending arms of the fire. There was no adequate fire fighting.

equipment to combat the blaze, although the Navy Sea-Bee's who were constructing the weather station brought what fire equipment they had to help save the nearby houses. Miraculously no one was hurt, but the fire had traumatized the community which had to live with its scars for several years.

By the next year the new foundation for a much larger hall had been laid, but the construction of the new Rec Hall took two years because materials were in short supply after the war. On St. George there was no Rec Hall yet to serve as a focus for social activities. Such clubs as the Ladies Sewing Club and the Hobby Club met in the school house and movies were shown in the upper room of the carpenters shop. In 1950, St. George suffered a disastrous fire of its own. The sealskin handling facilities burned to the ground, disrupting the harvesting process until new fireproof buildings were erected in 1951.

The Beginning of Changes

Before World War II, the Territory of Alaska had almost no relationship with the Pribilof Islands. The Islands were a federal reservation, covered by an international treaty, and controlled from a Seattle office. However, after World War II, people in Alaska became increasingly aware that the profit from the Islands was going directly to the federal treasury in Washington D.C. instead of being spent in Alaska where it was earned. Therefore, interest in the Pribilof Islands increased as Alaska's own sense of regional pride grew. In the fall of 1948 a voting precinct was established on the Pribilofs and the people on St. Paul were able to vote for the first time in a territorial election. St. George did not vote until the next election because of the delay in the mail. In 1948, the Territory of Alaska's Department of Health and Education also made a formal agreement with the Fisheries to provide technical guidance for the medical and educational services the Fisheries provided on the Pribilofs. In the same year a fourth class post office was established on St. Paul. Until that time all mail had to go through the Fisheries office, where there was always the potential that critical mail would be screened. The lack of privacy from their employer had annoyed the people for years, but until 1948 they had had no alternative but to use the mail service provided by the Fisheries. Regular commercial air flights by Reeve Aleutian Airways were also initiated, bringing the mail

and the outside world regularly to the Pribilofs in 1948. Reeve had been flying to St. Paul on an irregular basis since World War II when the runway had been bulldozed by the Army. However, as the activities of the Pribilof Islands increased, more regular flights to the Islands were instituted.

The most important event in 1948, however, came in response to the Community Council's demands for decent wages. The Fisheries proposed to increase the sealing bonus at the same time as providing fuel on a cost basis. The fuel costs for each household was approximately \$175.00 a year, which the increased bonus more than covered.² It was the beginning of the changes that would eventually transform St. Paul and St. George from an arctic plantation run by the Fisheries for the fur seal harvest into a town governed by its residents for their own benefit.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood

While Elary Gromoff was in Juneau during World War II he had learned about the Alaska Native Brotherhood through an Indian lawyer, William L. Paul. The Brotherhood was an organization for all Alaskan Natives that had been started by the Tlingit Indians in 1912. They had lawyers in Washington D.C. that had been fighting for Alaskan native rights for 36 years. In 1948, Mr. Gromoff persuaded the Pribilof people to join the Alaska Native Brotherhood, and Aggey Galaktionoff remembered how they got the first charter:

In the year of 40's we pulled up organization here—Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB). After we been in Southeast Alaska and see how they have been going. We learn more of this from Aleut-Tlingits at Juneau. We started to put up this ANB. Mr. Benson, he was agent here—and we asked him for a place to have meeting and he didn't want us to do this—to put up some organization.

We didn't know why.

Elary (Gromoff) told me—'Til fool that old man. Well get a place to have a meeting." I said "where" and he said "Well get the Rec Hall."

That Rec Hall he asked for—a club here among ourselves that well try to improve ourselves and Mr. Benson liked it All he hear no word will be off the island. Yah—I started running around gathering up young fellows. I met about 46 men for meeting So we put up meeting and Elary told them all about this ANB—about how its work

and well, we gonna start a little club here, an most of them got up and say we want o be ANB. So alright- \$12 a year original donation. We put it up. And the other fellows didn't know nothing so we started talking over this here- about how they handling us here. We started like in ourselves talking.

“We put up the petition. The first petition we put up we sent to Juneau. And they have lawyers and secretary. That petition we sent up was recopied and bettered and sent to us to have the president sign it, seal it up, send it. And just before St. Paul here know anything about this- from Washington they get wondering wha's going on on the Pribilof Islands.

The question they ask start coming in, you know. And Mr. Benson, he about bite his tongue off.

Elary Gromoff was elected the president of the St. Paul Chapter of the Brotherhood in 1948 and Gabe Stepetin was the vice-president. The lawyers of the Brotherhood in Washington (Curry, Cohen, and Bingham) became the first lawyers to represent the Pribilof people. Their fees were \$300 a month or more and the money had to be raised by the leaders going from house to house; what wasn't reaised in the community had to come out of their pockets. The lawyers were worth their precious fees, however, because for the first time the grievances of the Pribilof people were be voiced by Washington lawyers in a language the Department of Interior could hear.

Just one year after the lawyers for the Alaska Native Brotherhood were engaged for the benefit of the Pribilof people, the Secretary of the Interior designated a survey group to study the living conditions of native communities around the Bering Sea. The survey group included the Undersecretary of the Interior and Clarence L. Olson, who was at the time the general manager of the Pribilof Islands.

The Russian Orthodox priest on St. Paul, Father Baranof, described Mr. Olson in a letter years later as a “lord and master:”

“Mr. Olson belongs to the category of men who in American literature called ‘lords.’ Mr. Olson was the lord and master on St. Paul. He acted as if the island was his personal property and the Aleut were his slaves. His first act was to try to abolish days off for Aleuts on the most important holidays of our Church. That move created an uproar among the Aleuts. Mr. Olson was determined to

change everything on St. Paul. He had plans for everything. Nothing, absolutely nothing, would he take into consideration. History, Aleuts' customs, U.S. law, the Church rights, and plain common sense, nothing was worth Mr. Olsons consideration.

With the island manager of the Pribilofs on the Department of Interior survey group, a critical analysis of the government operations on the Islands could not be expected. Therefore, it was not surprising that the survey group found that the Pribilofs were exemplary communities, on a par with the highest income groups of any native people in Alaska. It was a meaningless comparison since to compare the Pribilof people with the most poverty-stricken group in the United States was to say nothing about their condition. The survey group was specifically impressed with the comparatively high standard of health on the Islands, especially the incidence of tuberculosis compared with other native peoples. This, however, was due to the fact that travel to and from the Pribilofs was regulated by government permit, obtainable only with a mandatory chest x-ray for all people entering the Islands. Enforced isolation had partly protected the people from contagious diseases, but at an incalculable loss to their freedom.

Despite the "whitewash" character of the survey group, it did recommend several changes in the operations of the Pribilofs which were important in the future development of the people. A cash compensation plan was recommended, which provided for an annual wage to be paid according to thirteen job classifications, supplemented by a sealing bonus paid to the community of 35¢ per sealskin. In addition, housing, food, clothing, health, education and recreation costs would continue to be paid by the Fisheries, which amounted to approximately \$917 per worker in 1949. This new wage plan, which was implemented in 1950, was still inadequate, but it was an important improvement in the lives of the people and promised more changes for the future.

In 1950 the people were also given, for the first time, the benefits of annual and sick leave, retirement, and disability insurance. Until this time, vacations were unheard of except at the risk of losing a job, and the community, not the government, had to support its aged and disabled workers. The new retirement and disability benefits were not calculated on the basis of work done before 1950; yet it was still a beginning of the recognition that the Pribilof workers were entitled to the same rights and benefits as other federal employees.

In return for accepting their wards as quasi-civil servants, the Fisheries insisted that the Pribilof people sign the standard federal civil service form stating that they would not strike against the federal government. The people were being paid only a fraction of the required federal pay for their jobs; yet they signed the form in hopes of improvements in the future. For the next several years, marginal increases in the Pribilof wages were made. In 1952, the wages were increased again and the food allowance amounting to approximately \$600 per household per year was stopped. Despite these increases, the wages the Pribilof people received in 1961 were still only approximately half what their civil servant counterparts were receiving at the time. However, the continuing marginal increases heightened the people's realization that things were, in fact, changing on the Pribilofs.

The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA)

The Department of Interior study group in 1949 also recommended that the St. Paul community receive a charter, constitution and by-laws in compliance with a federal law that had been passed in 1934 entitled the Indian Reorganization Act. Since the lawyers in Washington knew the law, the Department which had successfully avoided it for fifteen years on the Pribilofs could ignore it no longer. The IRA had an important effect on the Pribilofs, even if its implementation had been delayed.

The Act had been the result of a growing concern about the problems of native Americans after World War I. In 1928, the Federal Merriam Commission had investigated the conditions of native Americans and had revealed appalling conditions which demanded remedies. After the publication of the Commission's report a number of attempts were made to raise the standard of living for native Americans, culminating in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This Act helped native Americans retain their identity through the establishment of tribal self-government, preservation of religious and cultural freedom, and the prevention of economic exploitation. The full implementation of this Act was uneven in the continental U.S.; on the Pribilofs it was non-existent until 1950.

A new Community Council on St. Paul was formally elected on June 12, 1950 under the provisions of the IRA. Gabriel Stepetin was once again chosen as president. This new IRA Community Council had much

more power than any Council had ever had in the past. It could now deal with federal and territorial government on behalf of all the St. Paul Aleuts, hire legal counsel, manage all economic affairs of the community and safeguard peace, safety, and morals of the community.⁶ In 1951, the Community Council exerted its new powers by promptly filing a claim for native land rights and compensation for past injustices with the Indian Claims Commission in Washington D.C. The claim was filed by Iliodor Merculief f on behalf of the Aleut Tribe and the Aleut Community of St. Paul.

The Pribilofs filed their native land claims on behalf of not only themselves, but of all the Aleuts on the Chain. It was one of the few claims made in Alaska for full ownership of the land and the resources below it (fee simple title). This claim for land was answered by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, and the claim for compensation for past injustices was settled in 1976, 25 years after the claim had been filed.

Other changes began to take place on the Islands which reinforced the sense of transition for the people. In 1949 the Fisheries allowed the first tourists to come on the Islands and in 1951 there was the graduation of the first group of eighth grade students to receive a certificate from the Territorial Department of Education. Although the Territory of Alaska had not formally taken over the administration of the school, they had begun to establish educational standards on the Islands' schools. That same year Gabriel and Xena Stepetin opened the first coffee shop on St. Paul, after getting a license from Juneau.

Mail delivery was initiated in 1951 on St. George, bringing the outside world closer than the occasional ship had done in the past. However, the St. George mail deliver was unorthodox. Delivery consisted of dropping the mail in large bags from a low flying airplane. The mail bags would often bounce fifteen feet in the air after hitting the ground, shuffling the mail well before it was opened. Fragile packages were still deliver by ship.

The winter of 1952-53 was extremely severe, and the water reservoirs froze on St. Paul. No water was available in the village and therefore people had to bring in large blocks of snow, which they would melt into small quantities of drinking water. When this harsh winter was over the people renewed their demands for running water inside their homes; in the following year the fisheries acquiesced. However,

the people had to purchase their own supplies, dig their own ditches, and lay the pipes themselves. The water system, once installed, provided only cold water, but it was a luxury nonetheless.

Another dramatic improvement in the quality of life came with the installation of large electrical generators in the Islands in the 1950's. A small amount of electricity had been available on the Islands since the 1930s; each home had a few electric lights that would go out at 11 P.M. However, there wasn't enough electricity for other electrical appliances until these new generators were installed. With adequate electricity available it was only a matter of time before modern electrical appliances became household fixtures on the Pribilofs.

The introduction of the new conveniences came at the same time as a traditional convenience of fresh milk on the Pribilofs disappeared. The Fisheries had kept dairy herds on both islands for years to provide milk for their staffs and for the Aleuts who requested it. However, the maintenance costs for the proper sanitary procedures became too costly and in 1953 the St. George herd was killed. The 35 cows on St. Paul met the same fate in 1955.

The Impact of Statehood on the Pribilofs

In 1958, Alaska became the 49th state of the United States. During the Congressional hearings on statehood, the federal government argued strongly for the exclusion of the Pribilof Islands from the State of Alaska. The Pribilofs were a federal government reserve whose administration was controlled by an international treaty. Therefore the government felt the Islands should not be considered a part of a state that could not enter, by constitutional law, into any treaties with other countries. However, the historical arguments for keeping the Islands part of Alaska prevailed, and it was agreed that the State would receive 70% of the net profit that was made on the Pribilof sealing operation each year.⁷ This agreement, of course, drastically reduced the net federal profit from the Pribilof operation which had averaged \$1.5 million since 1946; the next year the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries announced that the Pribilofs would, over time, become a seasonal operation. The Aleuts on the Pribilofs would have to be retrained and relocated in other jobs and other lives.

The peoples reaction to this relocation plan was predictable. After their storm of protest, the Fisheries retreated from their announcement

and declared that the St. Paul people could stay in their homes, but that the St. George people would have to be moved to St. Paul. Their purpose was to, at least, consolidate the Pribilof operation to make it more economical. There was resistance again on both island to this forced move, but despite the protest the Fisheries built houses on St. Paul for the St. George people. When a Congressional committee came to the Island in 1965, Father Michael Lestenkof explained to the Congressmen why the St. George people did not want to move.

Senator Bartlett: Why do you think, Father, about moving the people from St. George over here?

Father Lestenkof: In a short way, I can tell you the most meaning of the people, trying to make a move from St. George to here; that is their own place, their birth place. Everyone else all over the world has their own birthplace, which they always feel like to go back or to return to when they retire, no matter where it is, if it is on top of the world or down in the South Pole or anywhere. These people here in St. Paul, now and maybe in the future, will have the right to say "this is my homeland; this is my birthplace." What about St. George?...The question came up to me not to long ago and I tell them I might be forty miles away from my home, but it doesn't make a difference whether I am 2,000 or 3,000 miles, I am just as bad as you, I am not in my home now. I told them, if they move the people from St. George or St. Louis, and that is you home, if everybody is moved from Minnesota or some on State, if you going to retire or want to go home, where could you go? You have no home because your place was long forgotten.

Senator Bartlett: Father, you have made a very interesting and constructive statement. We thank you.⁸

In order to hasten the transfer of the people, the Fisheries tore down homes of St. George people who left the Island even though they were in good condition and even though there was still a housing shortage on St. George. The government did not want people settling into the vacated houses. Senator Bartlett from Alaska was incredulous:

Senator Bartlett: You mean to the houses over there have been demolished?

Mrs. Susie Merculief: Yes.

Senator Bartlett: Were they in good condition?

Mrs. Merculief: Yes. Most of them were. Only two of them were pretty old that had to be destroyed. . .that is another reason too. They (the St. George people) don't like this moving over here. If they want to return to St. George, they don't have a house to return to, to live in. It is destroyed as soon as the person leaves. He doesn't come over and try to make up—you know, to find out whether he would like to stay here or go back to St. George again and be hired in the summertime over there.

Senator Bartlett: Let me interrupt you right there. Let's ask the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries if that is the fact. Who wants to answer that?

Mr. Baker: . . .The thought was, however, to hold constant the total number of housing units on the Pribilof Islands, feeling that from the standpoint of the fur seal industry this was adequate or more than adequate to provide housing for the industry people. That has been the policy, Mr. Chairman. . .⁹

After the senator's visit, the Fisheries quietly dropped their plans for the relocation of the Pribilof people.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Fisheries

Throughout the history of the Pribilofs, the Russian Orthodox Church has been a significant influence on the lives of the people, as described by Agafon Krukoff, Jr. in "Alaska Magazine:"

The people have known Christianity all their lives, as did their forefathers. During the hard years of dictatorial rule under the Russian flag and continuing under the American flag, the Orthodox Church gave them their only hope for freedom. And now, nearly 200 years later, the ugliest of hardships are gone; the Church to them has proved its strength. The Orthodox Church still stands—and with a full congregation that is still supported by the whole Aleut population of St. Paul¹⁰

Today the Church continues to play the same role for the present population as it had in the past for their ancestors. It is the central focus for the moral and spiritual lives of the people and has provided a consistent support for them in times of real hardships. It has also provided a source of self-esteem for their dignity when there was no other alternative, and an important sense of continuity to the Pribilof communities for almost 200 years.

One of the continual sources of tension that had existed between the Aleuts and the Fisheries management on the Pribilof Islands had revolved around the Russian Orthodox Church. During the time of the Russians, the Pribilof people secured land on the Islands on which to build their Russian Orthodox Churches themselves. The villages on both St. Paul and St. George were organized around their churches. Since the Russian Orthodox Church was an important part of the Russian administrators' own cultural and religious heritage, they actively encouraged the Aleuts to adopt their beliefs. However, when the Americans arrived on the Islands, they had less sympathy for the Church which was so foreign to them. In addition, the continuation of the service and the church school in Slavonic must have appeared to the Americans as a deliberate resistance to their "way of life."

What had been considered church land under the Russians was not completely honored by the American administrators, and in the 1920's the Fisheries built several houses on St. Paul for teachers on what was ancient church land. Father Baranof fought this appropriation of church property strenuously, but there was no definitive survey that the Church could use as evidence for its claims. The disagreement over church land lasted for years and finally in the early 1960's Rev. Michael Lestenkov, the deacon at St. George, and Rev. Smile Gromoff, the deacon on St. Paul, had surveys made to settle the land differences between the Church and the Fisheries. The St. George survey showed that the traditional Church land slithered between present government buildings and power lines in an unlikely design for a church plot. Nevertheless, in 1964-65, the Church and the government negotiated their differences after years of bitter quarreling.

Health on the Pribilof Islands after World War II

Medical services had been provided to the Pribilof people by law since the American purchase of Alaska. Funter Bay marked a low point

in medical care, with both disease and poor nutrition widespread. With the return to the Pribilofs, the people returned to a pattern of predictable and reasonably reliable medical care. A doctor was almost always available on either St. Paul or St. George, with a nurse staffing the alternate facility. Dentists visited at least once a year, and at one point, a dentist resided on St. Paul for several months. Occasionally, medical specialists would visit one or both islands to hold clinics. Beds for short-term hospitalization and outpatient facilities were maintained on both islands.

Up until 1955, the Department of Fisheries continued to be responsible for the medical care of the Islands. However, they had increasing difficulty recruiting doctors and nurses who would accept the isolated assignment, and so in 1955, the responsibility was turned over to the Public Health Service. Utilizing physicians under the doctor draft (who served two years on the Pribilofs in place of military service), adequate staffing was assured until the draft ended in the early 1970s.

Evacuation of seriously ill persons was, and continues to be, a problem for the Pribilofs. Up until World War II such persons were often taken to Tacoma and Seattle, Washington, by ship. When the Public Health Service assumed control, medical evacuations shifted to the Alaska Native Service Hospital (later known as the Alaska Native Medical Center) in Anchorage. The advent of air service on St. Paul helped the emergency medical situation considerably and has resulted in the saving of many lives. St. George, however, was still medically isolated for many years. During one emergency, a dismantled helicopter was actually flown to St. Paul, assembled, and flown to St. George to retrieve a critically ill patient. The building of an airstrip on St. George alleviated this problem immeasurably.

The general state of health on the Islands after the war was comparatively good; in 1946 the death rate on the Pribilofs was even below the U.S. national average.¹¹ Two reasons for this were the availability of medical services and also the tight control which the Fisheries kept over the Islands. Houses were inspected weekly on Wednesdays, by the Fisheries staff and the doctor or nurse to insure that conditions were sanitary and that government property was not being misused. Showers were also required of all school children every Friday; during this time they were examined by the doctor or nurse for skin

diseases. Both these practices were stopped when the Public Health Service assumed responsibility for the medical care.

The major disease of the post-war period was tuberculosis, not only on the Pribilofs but throughout the Alaskan native population. This was slowly brought under control in the 1960s by vigorous case finding and early treatment so that by 1970 there was virtually no tuberculosis remaining. Other infectious diseases hit the Islands in epidemics during these years, specifically infectious hepatitis in 1951-52, polio in 1954 (causing three deaths), influenza in 1957, measles and rubella in 1964, and mumps in 1967.

By 1970 it was becoming clear that infectious diseases were no longer the major threat to the health of the Pribilof people. The major health problems had become the chronic diseases common to the rest of the United States. Tooth decay had become an important problem,¹² hypertension was prevalent, and heart disease and cancer were no longer rare. The era of comparative affluence on the Pribilofs had brought with it the diseases which inevitably accompany the increase in the standard of living.

The Early 1960s

A number of changes were instituted on the Pribilofs in the 1960s, as a result of the continuing pressure from both the Community Council on the Fisheries staff in Seattle and from their Washington lawyers on the Department of Interior. In 1960, the Fisheries appointed a new director of the Pribilof Program, Mr. Howard Baltzo, who had a mandate to improve the living conditions of the Pribilof people

In 1962 the federal civil service wage scale was introduced on the Islands for all of the people who were working for the government; the in-kind compensations, such as free rent, which they had received for years, disappeared. The net effect of the changes was to increase the standard of living considerably since wages were essentially doubled and more than covered the costs of the in-kind compensation that the people had been receiving. However, an unexpected side effect of the instituting of the civil service wage scale was that many men who had worked full-time their whole lives suddenly found themselves in temporary, part-time jobs. The civil service wages had been accompanied with civil service job definitions and between 1962 and 1963 permanent jobs on St. Paul dropped from 96 to 53. By 1967 permanent jobs were

only 42, out of a total of 125 Aleut jobs on the Island.¹³ Therefore, people paid a price for their full wages. Nevertheless, the lack of permanency of the jobs after 1962 was preferable to the lack of dignity of not being paid a full wage.

The same year that the federal civil service came to the Pribilofs, the Islands' educational system was transferred to the State of Alaska. Then the administration of the schools was in the hands of professional educators instead of the Fisheries bureaucracy. The Fisheries still reimbursed the State for the costs of the education, but the State took over the responsibility of staffing the schools both with qualified teachers and proper teaching materials.

The third change on the Islands in 1962 was the instituting of the legal sale of beer on the Islands. All three of these changes had been the goals of the Community Council for over fifteen years and they were long overdue. The new economic equality and education transformation were, however, only the first stage in the drive for true independence. The Fisheries still ran all of the affairs of the villages, not trusting them to the villagers themselves. They determined the power requirements for the Islands, the capital improvements, which houses on St. George to tear down, and what the store would stock. The hotel and laundry were run by the Fisheries as was the nascent tourist industry. However, it was only a matter of time before the community would demand and take over the responsibility of governing their Islands. The economic liberalizations of the early 1960s led inexorably to the political liberalizations of the early 1970s.