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## LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS ON THE PRIBILOF ISLANDS, ALASKA

by

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The Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea are a Government reservation and the center of fur sealing activities under the administrative jurisdiction of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. There are two villages, one on St. George Island and the other on St. Paul, with 40 miles of open water between. These communities

are administered primarily by the Federal Government. During the summer all native Aleut men are hired to take seal skins, and through the winter some are employed to maintain the villages. The resident Aleuts buy and own a considerable amount of personal property, and their Government-owned homes are well-furnished.

## Population

St. Paul Island has an Aleut population of approximately 360, St. George 250. Permanent year-round employees of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, comprised of both Island residents and non-Aleut staff officials recruited elsewhere, number 58 on St. Paul and 42 on St. George. During the summer season, additional Island residents are employed in the fur seal harvest and for maintenance and construction work. Also during the summer season, about 50 supplemental employees are recruited from the Aleutian Islands.

## Personnel and Organization

An Island Manager is in charge on each Island. He has a small administrative staff and the necessary maintenance and operations personnel. Under contract with the Bureau the Alaska Department of Education supplies six school teachers on St. Paul and three on St. George. Medical and dental services are provided under contract with the U.S. Public Health Service. Physicians are usually in residence on each Island; dentists and nurses sometimes supplement the medical program. About 10 Bureau research biologists spend the summer on the Islands making scientific studies of the fur seals. These studies represent U.S. participation in the international conservation of this valuable resource.

## Climate

The weather is milder than in many of the northern States. Only in the severest winter weather does the temperature reach zero or remain for long at that point. On the other hand, the maximum official temperature on record is 64° F. Although many days are foggy and overcast, precipitation averages only 27 inches per year.

Employees and visitors should have rain coats and warm outdoor clothing because a fresh, damp breeze blows quite consistently, making normal street clothing inadequate for participation in outside activities. The frigid water of the surrounding Bering Sea quickly chills the air whenever the sun is not shining.

## Schools

School facilities are provided and maintained by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, but the State of Alaska Department of Education, under reimbursable contract with the Bureau, staffs, and operates the academic program as part of its statewide responsibility.

St. George has grades 1 through 8, and St. Paul has 1 through 10. Aleut children are encouraged to continue their schooling;



St. Paul Village, Pribilof Islands, Alaska.

free transportation, room, and board are provided for high school level training at the Mt. Edgecumbe School operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs near Sitka. Additional training in a wide variety of subjects is available for students who wish to continue studies beyond high school.

### Religion

The resident Aleuts maintain their traditional Russian Orthodox churches and support an ordained priest or deacon on each Island. No other church is available, but employees occasionally gather in someone's home for Bible study or services. Visitors are welcome at the Russian Orthodox services.

### Other Government Agencies

The U.S. Coast Guard operates and maintains a LORAN (navigational aid) transmitting station on St. Paul Island 3 miles from St. Paul village. The U.S. Weather Bureau maintains an observer station a short distance beyond this point and near the airstrip. Approximately 25 men are stationed at the Coast Guard site; four observers and a machinist are at the Weather Bureau station.

### Quarters for Employees

Permanent employees recruited away from the Pribilofs are rented housekeeping quarters for their families. These quarters are completely furnished and equipped with

modern plumbing and facilities, including oil-burning furnaces, gas stoves, electric refrigerators, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. Small appliances and radios are not furnished. Incidental and decorative personal household furnishings that employees wish to take with them may be transported to the Islands from Seattle on the Bureau's supply ship *Penguin*.

### Provisions and Supplies

Groceries and household supplies may be purchased at the Government stores on both Islands at approximately Seattle prices plus 25 percent. Some fresh vegetables are grown by employees in small community greenhouses, not only to supplement supplies received by vessel but also as a hobby. Tobacco, candy, photographic supplies, utility clothing, and sundries may be purchased at the community-operated canteens. Extensive use is made of mail-order houses for less routine purchases.

### Transportation and Communication

There are six scheduled deliveries of basic supplies to the Islands by Government vessel each year. Weekly service (passenger, mail, and air freight) is provided on Mondays by Reeve Aleutian Airways to St. Paul Island. There is no airstrip on St. George Island; mail is dropped there monthly by plane, but outgoing service is limited to ship. Commercial radio service is available, and the two communities are linked by radio telephone.



Fur seal killing and research operations, Pribilof Islands, Alaska.

## Recreation

Recreational activities include dances, weekly free movies in the community recreation hall, photography, hiking, beach-combing, and salt-water fishing for halibut. There are two commercially operated theaters which offer movies on St. Paul Island. The annual congregation of hundreds of thousands of fur seals on the beach rookeries presents a fascinating spectacle of never-ending variety from June until November. Other forms of wildlife include sea lions, hair seals, reindeer, foxes, and countless birds on the sea cliffs. There are no trees, but the Islands are resplendent with wild-flowers in July and August. The Islands are of volcanic origin.

Dogs are not allowed on the Islands, but cats and parakeets are popular as pets. Effective May 15, 1962, a long-standing ban on alcoholic beverages was removed. Beer is available locally and other beverages may be brought in from the Mainland.

## Employment Conditions

All Pribilof Island workers, except school teachers employed by the State of Alaska, are Federal employees, subject to the usual regulations and benefits of U.S. Government civil servants. The standard work week is 40 hours. Employees are entitled to annual leave with pay, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, as follows:

- 13 days per year for less than 3 years of total service
- 20 days per year for 3 to 15 years of service
- 26 days per year for 15 or more years of service

Compensation is paid every 2 weeks. A 25-percent differential is added to the basic Civil Service pay rate as a "cost of living" allowance for classified employees. From gross salary the following deductions are made:

- 1. Quarters charge including heat and utilities.

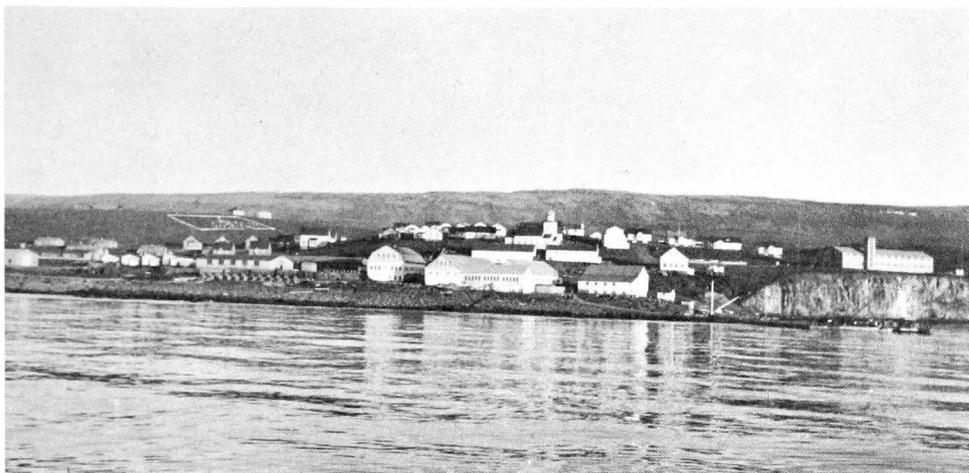
- 2. Subsistence and household supplies purchased locally.
- 3. Federal income tax (not on 25-percent differential).
- 4. State income tax (16 percent of the Federal tax, computed as including 25 percent differential).
- 5. Retirement benefits ( $6\frac{1}{2}$  percent of base pay).
- 6. Group life insurance and medical and hospitalization insurance (optional).

## Retirement

Employees subject to the Retirement Act who have at least 5 years of Federal service may receive, at age 62, an annuity based upon average earnings and length of service. A Federal employee who does not complete the minimum of 5 years service, or who upon separation from the service elects not to draw an annuity, is entitled to a refund of the amount accumulated to his credit as a result of the  $6\frac{1}{2}$  percent retirement deduction. Government retirement eligibility may be achieved also under various other formulae involving age, salary, and length of service.

## Travel to Post of Duty; Home Leave

Where a new employee residing in one of the contiguous States executes an agreement with the Government to accept a 2-year assignment on the Pribilof Islands or elsewhere in Alaska, the Bureau pays travel and transportation expenses for him and his family between his place of residence and post of duty. Upon completion of the 2-year duty, if the employee wants to remain in Alaska for another such period and executes another agreement to this effect, the Bureau will pay round-trip travel expenses for him and his family to his place of residence and back to his job (referred to as "home leave"). When an employee terminates employment after fulfilling his 2-year obligation, the Bureau will return him and his family to his place of residence.



St. George Village, Pribilof Islands, Alaska.

Additional information about living and working conditions on the Pribilof Islands may be obtained by writing to the Regional Director, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, 6116 Arcade Building, 1319 Second Avenue, Seattle 1, Washington.



A Typical Fur Seal Harem.

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, fish, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and Territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

