

The Demography of the Native Population of an Alaskan City

FREDERICK A. MILAN¹ and STELLA PAWSON²

ABSTRACT. Information from archival and census data shows that Alaskan natives, mainly Athapascans, started to move into Fairbanks over fifty years ago. During the Second World War, jobs available on construction projects attracted both Eskimos and Athapascans in family units. It appears from recent data that those now moving into the city are unmarried and younger than earlier migrants, that women outnumber men, and marriages between native and non-native Alaskans are becoming more common. Forty-four per cent of a sample of 1,029 persons lived in inter-racial households in 1972.

RÉSUMÉ. *La démographie de la population autochtone d'une ville d'Alaska.* Les renseignements tirés des archives et des statistiques de recensement démontrent que les autochtones de l'Alaska, principalement les Athapascans, ont commencé à déménager à Fairbanks il y a plus de cinquante ans. Pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, des ouvertures d'emploi sur des projets de construction ont attiré et les Esquimaux et les Athapascans par groupes familiaux. Selon des données récentes, il semble que ceux qui maintenant se déplacent vers la ville sont célibataires et plus jeunes que les migrants des périodes précédentes. De plus, les femmes seraient plus nombreuses que les hommes et les mariages mixtes entre autochtones et non-autochtones de l'Alaska deviennent plus courants. Sur un échantillonnage de 1,029 personnes en 1972, 44% vivaient dans des foyers mixtes.

РЕЗЮМЕ. *Демографическое описание коренного населения в городе на Аляске.* Информация, полученная из материалов по переписи населения и архивов, показывает, что коренные жители Аляски, в основном атапаски, начали переселяться в Фэрбенкс приблизительно 50 лет назад. Спрос в строительстве на рабочую силу во время второй мировой войны привлекал в город целые семьи как эскимосов, так и атапасков. По последним данным видно, что в настоящее время в город переселяется бесемейное и более молодое, чем прежде, население. При этом число женщин превышает число мужчин, а браки между коренными жителями и переселенцами становятся более обычными. Из 1,029 опрошенных жителей 44% состояло в 1972 году в смешанных браках.

INTRODUCTION

The native population of Alaska, found at its first enumeration in 1880 (U.S. Census) to be 32,977, declined due to epidemics of infectious diseases until 1910, and it was not until about 1947 that the 1880 figure was reattained (Milan, 1974/1975). In the U.S. Census of 1970 it was found to have reached 54,700.

It would appear, however, that the census figure of 1970 represented an undercount, since the Native Enrolment, as provided for under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 for the purposes of qualifications under

¹Formerly with Arctic Health Research Center, U.S. Public Health Service; now at University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

²Formerly with Arctic Research Center, U.S. Public Health Service; now at the George Williams Hooper Foundation, University of California, San Francisco, California.

that Act, amounted to 70,400 in 1973 (Native News 1973) and 76,500 in 1974 (*Tundra Times* 1974).

Life tables for the natives of Alaska for 1959-61 (Gurunanjappa 1969) and 1955-65 (West and Renninger 1972) indicate that there have been increases in life expectancy in recent years. Gurunanjappa has calculated life expectancy at birth for natives was 60.4 years in 1959 (9.3 years less than that for the U.S. population as a whole). Over the decade 1950-60 the increase in life expectancy of the native population exceeded that for the U.S. population over any other decade.

Of the native population of Alaska as enumerated in the U.S. Census of 1970, approximately 44.8% were Eskimo, 28.7% Tlingit-Haida, 23% Athapascan and 3.5% Aleut.

The combined native population has, as a result of heavy immigration into Alaska between 1940 and 1970 (over which period the non-native population increased sixfold), passed from a status of numerical equality to a minority one. Although the U.S. Census of 1970 revealed that the native population of Alaska had increased by some 10,000 since 1960, its average annual growth rate over the same period had increased substantially only in the south-central region of the state — particularly in the urban areas (see Briar *et al.* 1971; Rogers 1971).

Acculturation of the native Alaskans has been proceeding rapidly, as a result both of universal education for several generations and of increasing opportunities for travel and contact with non-villagers in rural areas. This acculturation and certain demographic changes have been interacting with changing economic circumstances: the depletion of game resources; the lack of time for young natives to learn the skills of hunting, because of being at school; and an upsurge in demand for goods and services which makes a supply of cash necessary. In short, the natives have moved from a full-time subsistence existence to one of part-time participation in the wage economy.

In the light of the foregoing, the present study of the historical demography of Fairbanks was undertaken, and its results are set out below.

THE STUDY: GENERAL

Fairbanks is situated in interior Alaska in the traditional homeland of the subarctic Athapascans. It is the terminal for road and rail transportation from the south, and the service centre for the northern part of the State.

Founded as a gold-mining camp in 1902, the city has grown rapidly, though its population has gone up and down cyclically in accordance with the state of the northern economy (Cooley 1954; Wolf and Haring 1967).

The subsistence economy of the Athapascans started to collapse about 50 years ago when some of them began to move into Fairbanks.

Events which were of importance in the attracting of Athapascan and Eskimo migrants to Fairbanks were: (a) the construction of the Alaska Railroad, which started in 1915 and was completed in 1923, (b) World War II and the construction of the Alaska Highway, (c) the reconstruction of the Alaska Railroad (a five-year project approved in 1948), (d) the "cold war" of the nineteen fifties and the defence-related construction projects it gave rise to.

In 1969, the average work force was, on an estimate, approximately 14,500. Of this, the largest economic base component was the military force stationed in the area (8,920). Civilian jobs (6,400) were: with the U.S. Federal Government (2,540), the State Government (1,020) and the University of Alaska (905); in construction (870), air transportation (465), communications (295), with the rest in tourism and the oil industry. Between 1961 and 1968, the rate of unemployment varied between 7.3% and 11.3% of the work force (Sullivan 1970).

THE NATIVE COMMUNITY, 1945-46

According to a census of the native community of Fairbanks taken by Alma A. Carlson, a U.S. field nurse, in 1945, there were 21 Eskimo and 16 Athapascan families in the city at that time; and of the total native population of 165, 82 were adults and the rest of school age or below. This information is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Fairbanks native Population in 1945

	Eskimo	Athapascan
Number of families	21	16
Adult males	24	12
Adult females	27	19
School children	41	11
Pre-school children	17	9
Babies	4	1
Total persons	113	52

An Alaska Native Service census taken in 1946 showed that the native community of Fairbanks numbered 208 people — 124 Eskimo and 84 Athapascan. The city's total population was slightly under 6,000 at the time. As shown in the population pyramid (Fig. 1), exactly half of the population was below the age of 16, and there was a proportionately large number of women aged 21-25. More detailed information follows.

There were ten complete Eskimo families from the north-coast villages of Wainwright and Barrow, of average six persons. Six of the male family heads worked for the Alaska Railroad, their families living at "Eskimo Village", a small settlement of about ten houses constructed by the Railroad in the freight yards on the outskirts of Fairbanks. In addition, five single men from Wainwright worked for the Railroad. Another two male family heads worked at the Ladd base of the U.S. Air Force, and one worked for Wien Airlines. Eight of the ten families were described as pure Eskimo in the census, while the other two were of mixed race from the whaling period at the turn of the century.

By the early nineteen seventies, all the families from Wainwright and Barrow, except for two male family heads and some descendents, had returned to their north-coast homes.

Also listed in the 1946 census were eleven families, two with female heads,

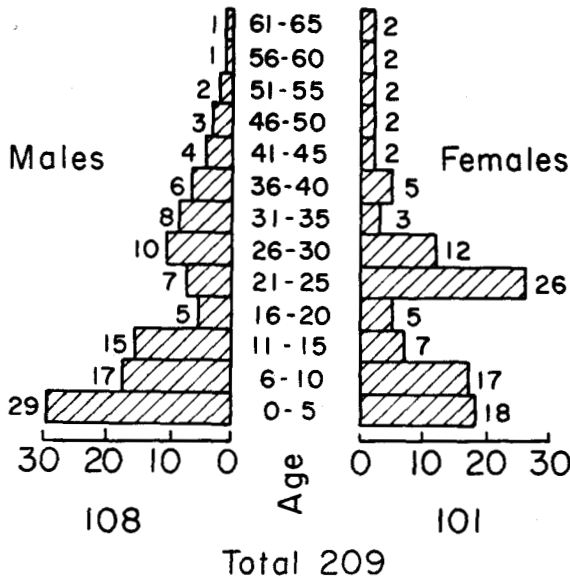


FIG. 1. Fairbanks Native community: Alaska Native Service survey, 1946.

from the old mining settlements of Candle, Council, Nome, Selawik, Deering and Kobuk. The average size of these families was five, most being classed as pure Eskimo; and in four of them there were children born in Fairbanks. Most of the families from the mining settlements were classed as pure Eskimo in the census. There were, in addition, two single women with children. Of the eleven families, two still remain in the area.

There were fourteen Athapascan families in Fairbanks in 1946. They came from the interior villages of Ruby (3), Rampart (3), Nenana (2), and Fort Yukon, plus about eleven single or separated women from Slana, Tanana, Nenana and Suntrana. The average family was five persons.

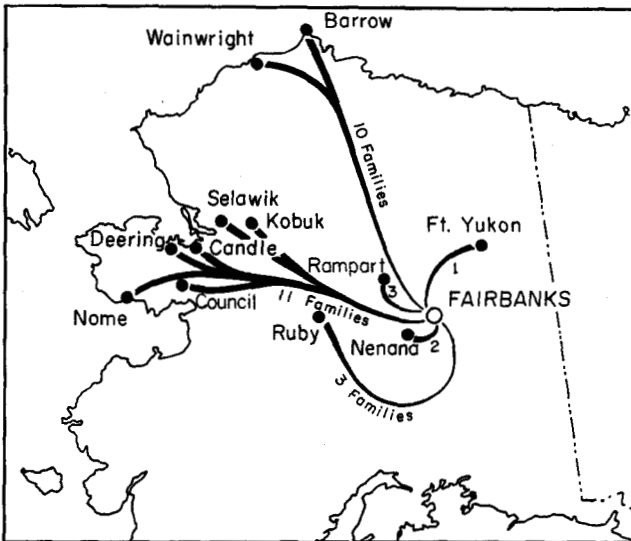


FIG. 2. Village origins of persons in Fairbanks: from Bureau of Indian Affairs census, 1946.

According to the ethnic categories used in the census, nine out of the fourteen family heads were described as non-native. Five of these families are represented in Fairbanks today.

The village origins of native persons living in Fairbanks in 1946 can be seen in Fig. 2.

THE NATIVE COMMUNITY 1968-72

Surveys undertaken by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.), earlier the Alaska Native Service, were examined and analysed for pertinent demographic information.

In 1970 there were about 970 known native persons in the city according to BIA records. This does not include any of the transient population or temporary visitors from outlying villages not permanently domiciled who may raise the total to 2,500 (League of Women Voters 1970).

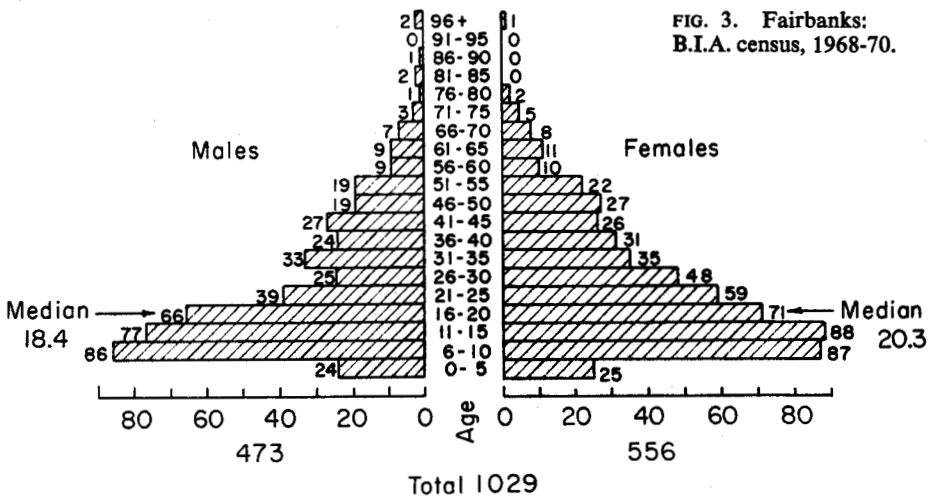


FIG. 3. Fairbanks: B.I.A. census, 1968-70.

A job survey conducted by the B.I.A. in 1968, and brought up to date through 1972 by the present authors, provided information on a sample size of 1,029 persons in the native community. (The term "community" is used since about 10% of this sample were ethnically not native Americans.) The population profile according to age and sex is shown in Fig. 3. The wide-bottomed appearance of this profile, and a noticeable reduction in numbers in the age category 0-5, shows the effect of the recent introduction of family planning, following upon a period of high fertility. The median age of 20.3 for females and 18.4 for males indicates the youthfulness of the population. In the age categories 21-25 and 26-30, it is of interest that women outnumbered men by 43, whereas in all other age categories, the sexes were essentially equal in numbers.

In Fig. 4, the native community profile is superimposed on the total Fairbanks population profile constructed according to the 1970 U.S. Census. The native community amounted to somewhat less than 7% of the total city population.

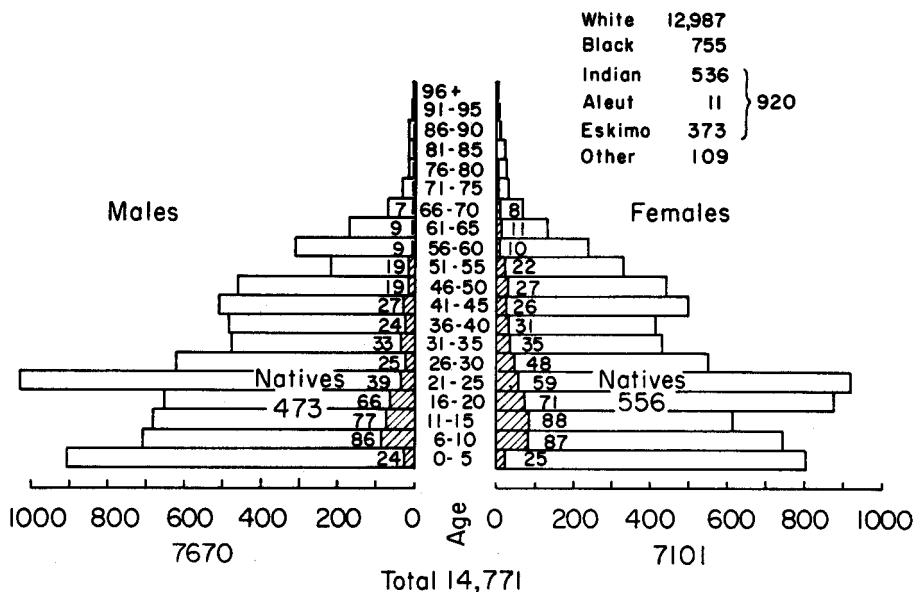


FIG. 4. Fairbanks: U.S. census, 1970. The numbers of Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos (total 920) were derived from the B.I.A. census.

The information on family, race and household status was analysed, yielding the results shown in Table 2. Athapascan women were almost twice as numerous as Eskimo in interracial households. Approximately 44% of the total community lived in such interracial households.

TABLE 2. Household status according to race

Interracial with non-native husband	77
Interracial with non-native wife	14
Eskimo with male head	22
Eskimo with female head	27
Athapascan with male head	27
Athapascan with female head	24
Total	191

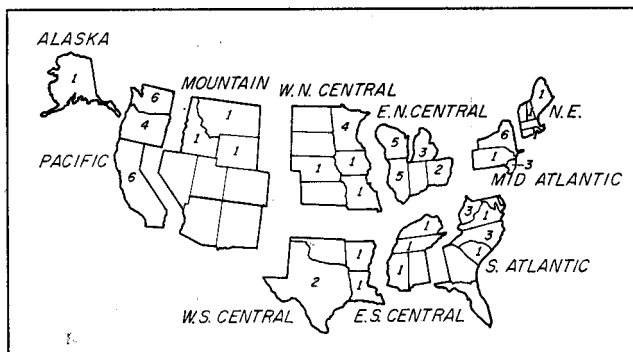


FIG. 5. Inter-racial households: birth places of husbands of Alaskan native wives residing in Fairbanks.

An examination of the data for birthplaces of non-native husbands shows that they were from 30 states of the U.S.A. and one foreign country. This information is presented in Fig. 5. It should be noted that only 19% of the total population of the Fairbanks area born in the U.S. (44,589) were born in the State of Alaska according to the 1970 Census.

The Alaskan birthplaces of the wives of the non-native husbands are shown in Fig. 6.

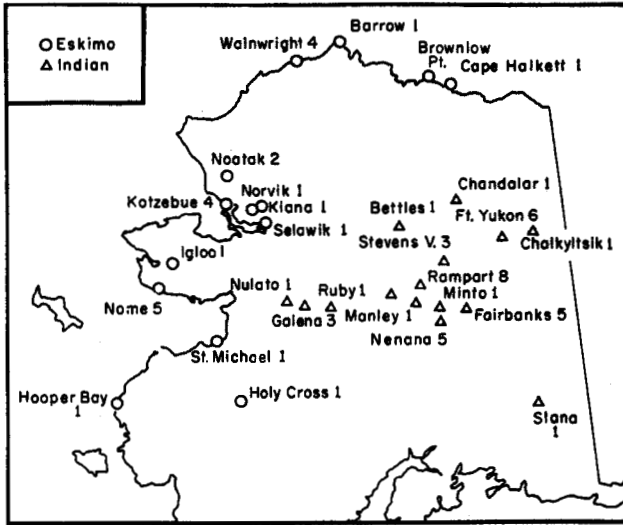


FIG. 6. Birth places of native wives of non-native husbands residing in Fairbanks.

Approximately one half of the native households have female heads due to divorce, separation or death of the husband.

In addition to the natives in married households, there were 18 single Athapascan men and 12 single Eskimo men.

An analysis was made of the birthplaces of the entire community. Approximately 40% listed Fairbanks, 8% Tanana, 4% Barrow, 3% Fort Yukon and 2% Nenana. Outside of Alaska, 16 persons were born in Alabama, 14 in Utah, and 11 in Georgia.

Only about 14.6% of the Fairbanks community analysed were racially pure Eskimo and 11.6% pure Athapascan. Over 22% were children of Athapascan-Caucasian marriages and 16% were children of Eskimo-Caucasian marriages.

As shown in Fig. 7, persons in the community lived in all parts of Fairbanks. The greater number (40) were found in a low-income housing unit where rent paid is adjusted to income level. Generally, however, the community was to be found all over the city.

DISCUSSION

Historically, indigenous peoples with a subsistence economy and culture have, upon coming into contact with more complex cultures, either become extinct or, after a culturally catastrophic period, (a) remained as genetic isolates in their native surroundings, (b) acquired a mixed culture in those same surroundings

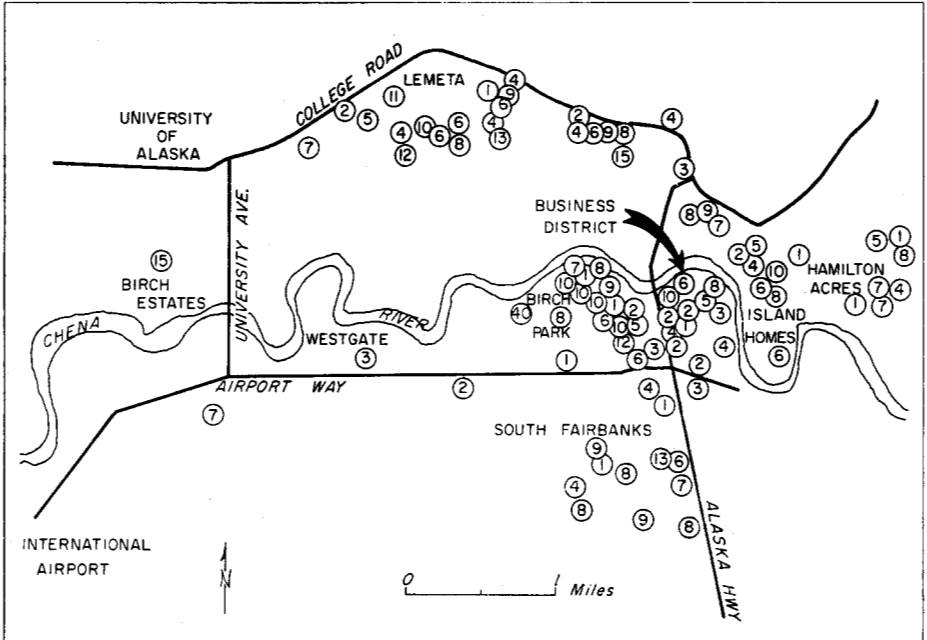


FIG. 7. Approximate locations of some members of the Fairbanks "native community," 1970.

or (c) migrated to urban areas and became adapted to them culturally to degrees depending upon a variety of influences. Both (b) and (c) are applicable to Alaska.

Internal migration is a form of adjustment of a group of people to social or economic change, or alterations in the support provided by local resources. Factors conducive to migration from a rural Alaskan village could include: decline in local resources, few opportunities for personal development locally, alienation from the community, lack of opportunities for local employment, or marriage to someone from outside of the village; while ones conducive toward movement into an urban area could include: better job chances, better housing or better opportunities for education or specialized training (Bogue 1969).

Migration is considered a selective process in that it generally involves young adults reaching their ages of greatest economic productivity and biological reproductivity, who are the healthier, the more able and the most daring member of their community (Lee 1966). The data of the present authors show that today's migrants are the younger community members, as compared to earlier migrants who tended to move in complete families.

Migration has biological consequences for it breaks down the long-term genetic isolation of small human populations, as has been seen in Alaska.

As pointed out by Ravenstein (1885), there is usually a predominance of females among migrants. The result of this was seen in the proportion of the sexes remaining in one arctic Eskimo village which had experienced considerable out migration in the past. Because of a shortage of marriage partners 41% of the men were unmarried; only 10% of the women were unmarried (Milan 1970, Puchtler 1973).

Despite social difficulties inherent in the urban-ward migration of Alaska natives, it is apparently proceeding at an accelerated rate (according to the 1970 U.S. Census) and is leading to ever-increasing inter-marriage with non-natives. With only personal observations to back this one might say that the interracial families in the present study area appear, for the most part, durable and to be producing a good proportion of the next generation of Alaska's urban dwellers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the information used in the preparation of the paper was derived from records of the Office of the Governor kept at the U.S. Federal Records Center in Seattle, Washington, and in the Tribal Affairs Office of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in Juneau, Alaska. The major part of the information on the recent situation came from records of the Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Fairbanks, and we are grateful to Mr. W. O. Craig, Area Director, for making them available. Information concerning the census of 1945 (as taken by Nurse Carlson) and that of 1946 was obtained from the U.S. National Archives.

REFERENCES

- BOGUE, D. J. 1969. *Principles of Demography*. New York: Wiley.
- BRIAN, S., ELLIS, J. A. N. and HUTCHINS, T. K. 1973. *Rural-Urban Migration in Alaska*. Seattle, Washington: Pacific Northwest Social Science Associates.
- COOLEY, K. A. 1954. *Fairbanks, Alaska: A Survey of Progress*. Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Development Board.
- GURUNANJAPPA, B. S. 1969. Life tables for Alaska natives. *U.S. Public Health Service Reports*, 21: 65.
- LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS. 1970. The Alaska native in Fairbanks (Mimeographed report, North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Alaska).
- LEE, E. S. 1966. A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3:47-57.
- MILAN, F. A. 1970. A demographic study of an Eskimo village on the North Slope of Alaska. *Arctic*, 28: 82-99.
- 1974/75. Historical demography of Alaska's native population. *Folk* (Danish Ethnographic Association), 16-17: 45.
- NATIVE NEWS. 1973. *B.I.A. Bulletin*, 10: 6. Juneau, Alaska.
- PUCHTLER, B. 1973. Social and economic implications of the Alaska village demonstration projects. (Mimeographed report, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, College, Alaska).
- RAVENSTEIN, E. G. 1885. The laws of migration. *Journal of Royal Statistical Society*, 48: 167-277.
- ROGERS, G. 1971. *Alaska Native Population Trends and Vital Statistics*. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska (I.S.E.G.R. Research Note).
- SULLIVAN, J. W. 1970. Fairbanks: an economic profile. *Review of Business and Economic Conditions* (University of Alaska), 7 (1):1-19.
- TUNDRA TIMES. 1974. Native population figures. *Tundra Times* (Fairbanks, Alaska), 7 August 1974.
- WEST, S. S. and RENNINGER, R. 1972. Life tables for Alaska (Mimeographed report, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Juneau, Alaska).
- WOLF, E. and HARING, R. C. 1967. *Natural Resource Base of the Fairbanks North Star Borough*. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska (I.S.E.G.R. Report 12).