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It was through the whalers that most of the Eskimos were introduced to the use of wooden whaleboats, firearms, foreign clothing, foods, tools and utensils, and tobacco. From these white men, they had their first glimpse of a system of hunting entirely different from their own.

When a vessel intended to operate in areas where there were no Eskimos, large numbers - men, women and children - would be picked up in the spring and returned again in the autumn if the vessel did not winter. If the vessel wintered, the Eskimos either stayed aboard or lived nearby until the following season. They received little payment for their services, but they were assured of meat when whaling was successful. Even in the worst times they were usually given enough food and other stores to tide them over. Some fell heir to whaleboats and most of the men acquired rifles, ammunition, clothing, and tools. The women obtained knives, cooking utensils, needles, and matches. All developed the habit of using tobacco. After a century of slaughter, the demand for whale bone declined and the whaling days came to an end, but the Eskimos emerged better equipped in many ways to make a living in their own country.

The only considerable groups of Eskimos who had not been affected by contact either with the whalers or the Hudson's Bay Company, up to the beginning of the present century, were those inhabiting the hinterlands of the Keewatin and Mackenzie Districts and the easterly coastal areas of the Western Arctic. These groups still remain relatively unaffected.

Although the Hudson's Bay Company had been trading throughout southern and western Canada for about two and a half centuries, and had ships passing through Hudson Strait every year during that time, it was not until 1909 that the possibility of extending operations into the land of the Eskimo began to be taken seriously in London. The first trading post in exclusively Eskimo territory was established at Wolstenholme on the south side of the Hudson Strait. As early as the nineteenth century the influence of Fort Chimo (1830) and Little Whale River (1854) had been felt along the whole coast between these two places, but these posts were set up to secure the Indian trade.

By 1923, a chain of trading posts had been built along both shores of Hudson Strait, down the east coast of Hudson Bay to Port Harrison, and up the west coast of Hudson Bay to Repulse Bay. A similar development took place in the western Arctic. By 1937, what was then considered adequate coverage was made of all the inhabited areas of the Canadian Arctic. The Company now has some thirty posts in Arctic regions.

The transition of the Eskimos from their primitive state, when they were entirely dependent on the resources of the country and their own enterprise for the fulfilment of their needs, down to the present day, when they have all come to rely, in varying degrees, on imported goods and outside services, has been a gradual one spread over a little more than a century.