



## REFERENCE PAPERS

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THE ESKIMOSHistory

Early accounts tell that the Canadian Eskimos ranged farther south than they do now, particularly on the Atlantic seaboard. Early in the seventeenth century they were reported as far south as the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and as occupying the whole coast of Labrador. In Hudson Bay they do not seem to have gone much south of Cape Jones on the east side, or Churchill on the west side. In the Western Arctic they did not settle far inland. The fact that the Eskimos have been confined almost entirely to the barren lands was attributed to the aggressiveness of the Indians, who were more numerous and usually better armed than the Eskimos.

In their primitive state, the Eskimos obtained their livelihood exclusively by hunting and fishing. Most of them lived along the shores of the Arctic seas and depended on marine resources for food, fuel and clothing. Their excursions inland were brief, primarily to obtain caribou hides and sinews. There is little in their meagre story to show that their life then was any easier than it is now.

The early explorers of the Canadian Arctic met these Eskimos from time to time over a period of some three hundred years, but they had few dealings with them. Development in Arctic Canada came at a much later date than in other Arctic lands. While their cousins in other countries were trading with white men, many Eskimos did not dream that any other men except themselves existed. They called themselves Innuit, meaning The People -- the only people.

It was not until the arrival of the whalers, early in the nineteenth century that any change began to take place. By the end of the century the Eskimo people through their dealings with the whalers had moved into a position of some dependence upon white man's goods and supplies. The old stone age wandering life was becoming less attractive to many of them.

In 1821, the first British ships ventured north into Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, and United States ships followed. Steam supplanted sail, and, in the 1860's, the hunt for whales spread into nearly all the navigable waters of the Eastern Arctic. In the next decade, the pressure on the whale population showed its effects and the United States whalers turned their attention to the west, thus coming in touch with the nomadic Eskimos of the western extremes of the Canadian Arctic.