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## THE ESKIMOS OF CANADA

According to early accounts, the Canadian Eskimos once 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 they occupied the whole coast of Labrador. In Hudson Bay they do not seem to have gone much farther south than Cape Jones on the east side or Churchill on the west.

The Eskimos are mainly a coastal people. They settled by the sea; seals, walrus, fish, polar bears and whales were their source of food, fuel and clothing. Centuries ago one group, however, broke away from the others to follow the caribou herds to the interior, where they formed a culture that was much different and more primitive. They lived on the caribou herds and fish from the inland lakes; they made fires from shrubs instead of blubber and rarely visited the sea.

The early explorers of the Canadian Arctic met these Eskimos from time to time over a period of some 300 years but 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 men except themselves existed. They called themselves Innuit, meaning "The People" -- the only people.

### Coming of the Whalers

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.

In 1821, British whaling ships ventured north into Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, and United States vessels followed. Steam supplanted sail, and, in the 1860s, 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.



It was through the whalers that most of the Eskimos were introduced to the use of wooden whale-boats, firearms, foreign clothing, foods, tools and utensils, and tobacco. From these white men they got 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 early summer and returned again in the autumn if the vessel did not winter. If it did winter, the Eskimos either stayed aboard or lived nearby until the following season. They received little payment for their services but 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 whale-boats, and most of the men acquired rifles, ammunition, clothing, and tools. The women obtained knives, cooking utensils, needles, and matches. After a century of slaughter, the demand for whalebone declined and the days of whaling 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.

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.

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 Hudson's Bay Company now has some 30 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.

Their introduction to the use of firearms was probably, of all the innovations, the one that had the greatest effect on their daily lives. Although the rifles and guns they received during the early years were generally of low power and obsolete design, they were infinitely more effective for hunting than the bow and arrow and other primitive weapons. Throughout



their association with the whalers, the Eskimos still remained hunters. Apart from the few small luxuries they obtained, they still depended almost entirely on the spoils of the hunt for their essential food and clothing.

The same was true of other Eskimos who had not come in direct contact with the whalers but whose lives had been influenced by the operations of the trading-posts to the south.

Throughout the whaling period, life had revolved round the resources of the sea; the whalers were not interested in furs. With the arrival of the traders, events took a different turn. Their primary interest was in furs and, since it was realized from the outset that the Eskimos could only trap during the winter if they were well fed and clothed, every encouragement was given them to continue to live off the country and to trade only the skins and blubber that were surplus to their real needs.

It took the Eskimos some time to change over from hunting to trapping. They were hunters by instinct and tradition, with the general idea that trapping was more fit for women and children than for men. The majority of the Eskimo men still remain essentially hunters and it is only when there is a good fur season or when they have some important object in view, such as a new rifle, that they take trapping really seriously.

#### Administration

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has general responsibility for the administration of Eskimo affairs. The Indian and Northern Health Services of the Department of National Health and Welfare has initiated vigorous programmes to bring medical care to every northern resident. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police provide police service and act as agents for other government departments in the more remote areas. The Arctic has always tested to the limit the resourcefulness and courage of those who live and work there, and it makes no exceptions of race. To keep contact - over some 900,000 square miles - with an Eskimo population that still often chooses to live the life of hunting camps, calls for the co-operation of all who share the high latitudes with them - northern administrators, police, teachers, doctors, nurses, missionaries, traders, radio operators, and weather men.

The Eskimo population in the Northwest Territories and Quebec numbers approximately 13,000 persons. They receive the same social benefits as other Canadian citizens, such as old-age assistance, blind persons allowances, disabled persons allowances, and the family allowance. The decline of the great caribou herds, the dwindling of other game resources and the instability of the fur market revealed the inadequacies of an economy based on the resources of land and water. To help the Eskimos adapt to modern civilization, develop other sources of livelihood and improve their standard of living, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has been carrying out a broad-based programme embracing the areas of education, health, welfare, and resource development.



## Living Conditions

Late in 1965, the Government approved a five-year rental-housing programme designed to provide suitable living accommodation to all Eskimo people in the Northwest Territories. By the summer "sea-lift", in 1966, the first 231 rental houses (all of them with three bedrooms) were sent to Baffin Island and erected on gravel pads. In 1967, an additional 260 houses were shipped to Baffin Island and the Keewatin settlements. Houses are supplied with basic furniture - an oil-burning stove, a space-heater, a table, beds and household equipment. Under the rental plan, tenants pay monthly amounts according to their family income and resources. Eskimo councils assist in administering the programme in home communities; home economists and adult-education officers help the Eskimo families to adapt to new accommodation. Over a five-year period the \$12-million programme will make available 1,600 three-bedroom houses for Eskimo families. These will be in addition to 1,000 houses already built under previous programmes for the Eskimo people.

In the summer months, the Eskimo people like to move into tents, either within the settlement or along the coastline, where hunting and fishing is good. Snow houses are only used on extended trips or in emergencies on the trail.

With the expanding building programme for housing and schools, electrical services are being standardized throughout the territories to make easier the maintenance, expansion and replacement of installations.

In many remote settlements, water is expensive and difficult to obtain. It must be hauled by truck or sled from building to building; in the winter, ice must be cut. These factors rule out the provision of normal plumbing facilities, owing to the high consumption of fresh water.

In most settlements, snowmobiles are beginning to replace the teams of husky dogs that the Eskimos have used over many generations.

## Health

The Eskimo people are steadily building up an immunity to disease; increased contact with people from "outside" will undoubtedly result in increased immunity. Health facilities range from the modern hospital at Frobisher Bay to lay dispensaries operated by a teacher, trader, policeman or missionary at remote settlements.

The main problem faced by the Northern Health Service of the Department of National Health and Welfare is to provide health care with a limited staff to comparatively small groups of people scattered over 900,000 square miles. It is impossible to assign a doctor to any one of the remote settlements (where Eskimo populations may vary between 70 and 400 people). The alternative is to assign doctors on a regional basis, make them as mobile as possible with the use of aircraft and provide two-way radios as a link with nurses or lay dispensaries in outlying settlements.



Nursing-stations operated by two or more registered nurses have been established in most settlements having more than 250 residents. The nurses provide preventative and routine care locally; complicated medical and surgical cases are removed to the larger centres by air.

The Northern Health Service carries out extensive health programmes, including pre-natal and post-natal care, immunization, school health programmes and the control of tuberculosis and other communicable disease. Home visiting and health education, dental care for all school children and other programmes designed to improve community sanitation are now in operation. Where facilities are not available, parties of doctors, nurses and X-ray technicians visit Arctic communities to carry out medical and X-ray surveys. Many communities in the Eastern Arctic are visited each summer by the medical patrol ship C.D. Howe; other remote settlements are visited by medical parties using aircraft.

The health of the Eskimo people has notably improved in recent years. In particular the death rate from tuberculosis, one of the greatest scourges of the Eskimo people, has been drastically lowered.

The infant mortality rate is still high (93.7 in 1,000 live births) but the trend is downward toward the national average. (In 1960 the infant mortality rate was 211 in 1,000 live births). To-day the leading causes of death in the north are accidents, poisoning and violence.

#### Employment

Eskimos are now employed at a large variety of jobs. They are translators and clerks for government departments and employees of the DEW Line and private companies. Eskimos work in many specialized fields as qualified miners, carpenters, mechanics, steam-fitters, diesel and tractor operators, tinsmiths and storemen. Women work as interpreters, waitresses, nursing assistants, clerks and airline stewardesses. Two Eskimo men are councillors on the Northwest Territories Council; others are announcers for the Northern Service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The first Eskimo minister of the Anglican Church was ordained in 1960.

Although more and more Eskimo families are settled in permanent homes in communities close to the store, nursing-station, administrative offices and the school where the children are in regular attendance, the men continue to hunt seal and trap foxes as part of their livelihood.

Probably one of the most significant changes in the economic life of Eskimo communities is the development of co-operatives. These offer maximum participation by the people themselves, give some control of the economy into their hands, and help them to benefit from their artistic talents and resource harvesting.

In 1967, there were 22 co-operatives in the north engaged in arts and crafts, the production of arctic char and specialty foods, boat-building, logging and saw-milling operations.



At the Fort Chimo Co-operative in Arctic Quebec, a handicraft programme is producing stuffed sealskin animals and birds with emphasis on the popular Ookpik (Arctic Owl) design.

The Eskimo Co-operative at Cape Dorset on Baffin Island is world famous for its stone-cut prints and stencils, for drapery design and soap-stone carvings.

In 1966, sales of Eskimo arts and crafts topped the \$1-million mark. Although the artistic output of the Eskimos is economically important, it is even more significant psychologically. Carvings of soapstone and ivory, stone-cut prints and sealskin stencils, drapery designs and the Keewatin Eskimo ceramics (introduced in 1967) have received world-wide acclaim. Here is a field in which Eskimos have proved not only their equality with non-Eskimos but, in many cases, their superiority.

### Education

Great emphasis is given to education and vocational training as the means to help the Eskimo people adjust to a changing way of life. In 1967, 3,036 Eskimo pupils were enrolled in school in the Northwest Territories and Arctic Quebec.

A long-range programme will provide a complete school system throughout the North by 1971 (including matriculation, diploma, vocational, high-school and occupational courses). Most needed are classrooms for children who will reach school age in the next six years, and for older students (in the 16 to 21 age group) who would remain in school if appropriate facilities were available.

For young adults who missed early academic training, continued emphasis is being placed on pre-vocational training. At Churchill, Manitoba, renovations to the vacated military complex provided classroom, shop and pupil residence facilities to 250 teen-age Eskimo pupils from the East Arctic. Classrooms are equipped to teach commercial courses, home economics and child care; courses in carpentry, metal work and the maintenance and repair of motors are held for Eskimo youths in a spacious hangar vacated by the Department of National Defence. Fifty-nine of the pupils enrolled at Churchill are taking straight academic courses.

In the Mackenzie, 151 students at the Sir John Franklin School are taking pre-vocational training courses in carpentry, building construction, arts and diesel mechanics, heavy-equipment operation and food service.

During 1966, 41 men held positions as trade apprentices. In some cases they had been working in trades for several years; their knowledge was tested - through Eskimo interpreters if required - to determine their level in the programme. On-the-job training was combined with part-time classes in mathematics, English and science. Positions for apprentice clerks are giving trainees the opportunity to gain on-the-job experience.



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