



## 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.



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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.



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 regime, life had revolved around 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 little time to change over the hunting to trapping. Hunters they were 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 really take trapping seriously.

#### Administration

The general responsibility for the care of the Eskimos was last transferred from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to the Department of Resources and Development by Order-in-Council P.C. 3153, June 27, 1950.

Although the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources is responsible for the general supervision of Eskimo affairs, a considerable part of this responsibility has been delegated to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Their detachments act as field officers both for Northern Affairs and National Development and for other Departments having interests in the Arctic. Their duties, besides the normal ones of enforcing law and order, include the supervision and control of issues of family allowances, relief, old age assistance, old age security, and pensions. They also act as registrars of vital statistics and take the decennial census, enforce fur and game regulations, collect fur royalties, and act as postmasters.

The only people of the Administration residing in the Arctic are eight teachers and a sub-district administrator at Aklavik, who has other duties besides those concerning Eskimos. Administrative officers make regular annual patrols by air and, when trouble strikes at some



community, a special flight is made. In addition, for more than thirty years the Eastern Arctic Patrol, which is described in the Booklet Transportation and Communications in the Northwest Territories, has taken care of the needs of the vast area of the Eastern Arctic. This is a major, mobile administrative part of the duties of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources in the active conduct of Eskimo affairs.

The Department of National Health and Welfare assumes general responsibility for the medical care of Eskimos. Nursing stations are maintained at Fort Chimo and Port Harrison in Quebec, and at Cape Dorset, Lake Harbour, Southampton Island, and Coppermine in the Northwest Territories. There are resident doctors at Pangnirtung, Chesterfield Inlet, and Aklavik, and the missions, under subsidies from the Department of National Health and Welfare, operate hospitals at these three places. Patients requiring prolonged treatment or surgery, particularly those suffering from tuberculosis, are taken to hospitals in the south.

At places where there are no hospitals or nursing stations, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, traders, missionaries, and others do what they can to care for the sick and injured, obtaining advice from the resident doctors by radio. Expenses entailed in treating such cases in the country, and the responsibility for the over-all rehabilitation of convalescent or incapacitated patients discharged from hospitals, are not assumed by the Department of National Health and Welfare. They are borne either by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources or, in some cases, by other organizations within the country.

The Department of Transport provides water transportation and radio communication, and operates radio and meteorological stations within the country. The Post Office arranges the mail services.

In addition to the various government departments, the Hudson Bay Company, a few small traders, Roman Catholic and Anglican missions, and United States and Canadian military personnel all play important parts in the Arctic and exercise a considerable influence over the Eskimo population.

With so many separate organizations interested in and dealing with Eskimos, differences of opinion on policy and procedure are bound to arise. In 1952, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources called a conference of representatives from all the varied groups with interest in the Eskimos. As a result of these deliberations, a permanent Eskimo Committee was set up, with a subcommittee on education. This provides the machinery for long-term planning for the Eskimos, who cannot be hurried, any more than anyone else, into making the most of their opportunities.

#### Family Allowances

Family Allowances were introduced among the Eskimo by 1948 and, although it is too early to tell what effect they are having, it is believed that they will be helpful in giving the children a good start in life.



Family allowances are paid to Eskimos in kind and may only be used for powdered milk, pabulum, clothing, and other items which will directly benefit the children. To a certain extent, use of family allowances is allowed to secure equipment which will enable the parents to provide a steady living for themselves and their families.

### Food Resources

From the little that is known of the life of the Eskimos before the influence of the white man made itself felt, it is apparent that cases of destitution and starvation were by no means rare. Food resources were subject to much the same fluctuations as they are now, and they faced death with a resignation so profound that it still influences the thinking of the modern Eskimo. He apparently cannot see the need of saving anything. When there is plenty of food he is inclined to eat it all at once. Saving for a day of scarcity is a concept quite outside the experience of most of them. The constant dread of death by starvation, which was the common lot of their ancestors, still leaves its imprint on a generation from whom the cause of fear has been removed.

With the exception of the caribou hunters in the interior of Keewatin and Mackenzie Districts, seals have always been the mainstay of the Eskimo economy, supplying food, clothing, fuel, light, shelter, and a considerable part of their equipment. Other animals, birds, white whales, walrus, sometimes narwhal, and fish all play a part, but it is on seals that these people most depend.

Of the non-migratory seals in Arctic waters, the jar or ringed seal is by far the most numerous and most widely distributed. It is found nearly everywhere and its flesh is the most prized by the Eskimos for food.

Walrus and white whales rank next in importance to seals as food resources for the Eskimos. Walrus are fairly well distributed in the Eastern Arctic. They are migratory and appear at certain places regularly, although individuals are found throughout the year anywhere in the Eastern Arctic and very occasionally in the West.

White whales are common throughout the Eastern Arctic during the season of open water. They migrate from the south early in the spring and spread throughout Eastern Arctic waters, returning south again in the late autumn. In the Western Arctic they are numerous during the season of open water and migrate eastward as far as Cape Bathurst.

The inland Eskimos west of Hudson's Bay, and these small groups south of Coronation Gulf, depend almost entirely on caribou which is their source of food, fuel, and clothing.

Apart from marine life and the caribou, the food resources of the Arctic are limited. Polar bears and Arctic hares are found occasionally in some regions but they do not contribute greatly. Small herds of muskox are found at various places in the Arctic, but they are fully protected under the game laws and few, if any, are killed by Eskimos. Migratory birds, and their eggs, and ptarmigans are also used during the seasons when they are available, but they are not major food items.



Fish are used to a much greater extent by the Eskimos of the Western Arctic and the interior than by the people of the East. Arctic char is the most widely distributed and is found in varying numbers everywhere.

The Eskimos, like the white man, have had to learn that natural resources are not inexhaustible. Studies in conservation and wise use of wildlife resources form an increasingly important part of Eskimo education; if they make full use of the wildlife resources available, they will be reasonably well fed and clothed.

### Shelter, Fuel, and Light

The majority of Eskimos still live in snow houses or igloos during the winter and in tents during the summer. Seal and whale blubber provide them with fuel and light. There are, however, interesting variations in the style of living in the various locations.

In the Eastern Arctic, in winter, most of the people live in snow houses and in summer the canvas tent has for the most part taken the place of the seal tent used in days gone by. Again, it is by projecting the variations that a true picture of the Eskimo world is screened. At Pangnirtung, where seals are plentiful, skin tents are numerous.

The snow house is not used in the main camps in the Western Arctic, but it is used for winter travel. Here, also, sealskin has largely given way to canvas, and tents are used in most places throughout the year, being banked up with snow in winter time. Driftwood is plentiful in the west, especially in the Mackenzie Delta, and many Eskimos have built wooden houses where they live most of the year. More wood is also available in the west for fuel than in the east.

In all areas, primus and other oil stoves have been bought when the people could afford them, but their use has been auxiliary. The blubber lamp or kudlik is still in general use practically everywhere where there are snow houses or tents.

In the more settled areas, there is a slowly growing inclination among the Eskimos to give up their nomadic life and settle permanently at places where wood and other materials are available. They build houses and endeavour to set themselves up in the manner of the white men. In such areas as the Mackenzie Delta and Fort Chimo, where wood is available both for building and fuel, their aspiration can lead to no great harm to themselves, but in other districts where the Eskimos do not grasp the need for cleanliness in permanent dwellings, and where the only fuel is seal or whale oil, this urge to settle is being discouraged.

Most Eskimos can still obtain a large part of their food, shelter, fuel, light, and clothing from local resources, but they have long since passed the stage when they were entirely self-sufficient. Fire arms and ammunition have taken the place of bow and arrow and other primitive weapons for hunting, and imported foods, clothing, boats, tools, and various other articles of equipment are generally



regarded by the present generation to be essentials, not luxuries. It has taken more than a hundred years for them to reach this stage. However much the passing of the primitive culture may be deplored, because of the independence it implied, the fact has to be accepted that the Eskimos of to-day could not survive without much of the equipment and supplies the white man has brought them. A few exceptional men might do so, but the majority would be lost.

### Clothing

Clothing is of the highest importance to the Eskimo. Properly clad, they can withstand the elements and find food by hunting. Poorly clad, they cannot go far afield nor stay out for any length of time.

The clothing of the early Eskimos was made principally of caribou and seal skins; caribou for winter and seal for summer wear. Bear and bird skins were used on occasion by some groups.

In most areas now, imported garments have taken the place of sealskin clothing for summer wear. With certain reservations, particularly as to styling, they are an improvement on the skin garments.

No satisfactory substitute has been found for caribou skins for winter clothing for the Eskimo. The people on the mainland of the Northwest Territories and the Western Arctic are usually able to get enough for their needs, but in the east, and in Quebec where the caribou have nearly all vanished, the people must buy imported material.

Eskimos living in areas where skins are plentiful are being encouraged to prepare more of them for shipment to areas where there is a shortage. Widows and old women are learning to make clothing which can be sold in other parts of the north.

Some of the more advanced Eskimos are studying methods of creating their own art forms in terms of textile patterns which can be used in sports clothing for white people.

### Fur Resources

Although white bear, ermine, foxes, marten, mink, muskrat, otter, and wolves are all found in some or all parts of Eskimo territory, white foxes and muskrat are the two fur-bearing animals of greatest importance.

The white fox has been the main source of revenue for the majority of Eskimos since trade with them was opened. The cyclic fluctuations in the number of animals and the rise and fall of pelt prices have been reflected in a not too stable native economy. Until recent years, the Eskimos obtained sufficient return from their hunting and trapping activities to meet their modest requirements and sometimes to prosper.

High levels were maintained during the three cycles following World War I, but during the economic depression of the thirties prices fell steadily. There was



a recovery during World War II, but, as soon as hostilities ceased, prices tumbled again. In 1950, an all-time low of less than \$3.50 per white fox pelt was reached. Since then the trend has again been slowly upwards.

The fur market, being international in character, is acutely sensitive to changes in general economic conditions, fashion trends, and the volume of supplies coming on world markets. Wide fluctuations in price may take place even from month to month. An important contributory cause for price decline would seem to have been the development of silver fox farming, first in Canada and later in the United States and other countries. The effect of placing large annual offerings of silver foxes on the markets was to depress prices of all varieties of foxes.

Although a few muskrats are taken by Eskimos in various southern areas, it is only in the Mackenzie Delta region that they are found in great numbers. There the Eskimos have registered trap-lines and they share the opportunities with Indians and whites. This is a development that has brought about a definite change in the Eskimo ways of life in that region. From being nomadic coastal hunters and white fox trappers, many have settled down, live like white men, depending largely on fish for food and muskrat for revenue.

The whole Eskimo economy is being studied by the Northern Administration in the light of the known resources of the Arctic, to determine how the economy can be diversified so that the Eskimos will never again have to depend upon a single source of income such as the white fox fur trade.

### Handicrafts

From the earliest times, the Eskimos made stone dolls and ivory toys for their children, and in the days of the first traders they began to sell them to the white man. The interest in their carvings grew, and the Hudson's Bay Company handled a considerable quantity, most of which was sold in the country. In 1950, the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, received the first of a series of grants from the Administration to assist the Eskimo in greater production. The Guild sent a qualified artist into the Eastern Arctic to encourage the Eskimos to create, in their own way, the particular forms which are most attractive to the white man. At the same time, teachers in the Government schools intensified their efforts in this subject.

The Eskimos now are learning that handicrafts can be another valuable source of income. As they see the advantages of branching out in this manner it is hoped that they will take up more of the work, which they could do, to attract money into their country from the outside world.

### Transportation

Arctic, in terms of its civilization to-day, refers to the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions inhabited by Eskimos. The division of the Northeast Territories into Eastern and Western Arctic is a concept based on water transportation routes. The east is serviced through Montreal, Moosonee, and Churchill, the West by the Mackenzie River route.



Apart from the freight carried to far northern posts by the Canadian Government Vessels "C.D. Howe", "d'Iberville" and N.B. McLean", all other supplies for trade with the Eskimos are carried by privately owned vessels. These vessels have been built and equipped specially for this trade and as such are not suitable for other work. This means that the whole cost of their operation for the year must be charged against the two or three months they can operate in Arctic waters. Freight rates, which are included in the landed cost of goods, are, consequently, high.

The Western Arctic was developed largely by traders coming through Bering Strait. This proved a hazardous route and today most supplies are shipped down the Mackenzie River to Tuktoyaktuk, for distribution from there by motor vessels along the Arctic coast. Navigation in these waters is dangerous in the extreme. The water is shallow in many areas and the Arctic ice never moves very far off the land. The navigation season does not exceed a month to six weeks and in that brief time all supplies must be distributed. Here, also, transportation costs are high. The rate from Waterways to Tuktoyaktuk is \$108 per ton to Spence Bay \$253 per ton.

#### Future Prospects

The world of the Eskimo is changing. Young Eskimo men are to be found in the Armed Forces and in the Government. There are some at school, planning careers as teachers, and others who are working towards technical posts in Canada's Arctic weather stations. As the years pass, more and more of them will develop as carpenters, wireless operators, and mechanics, so that they will be able to help build a new society in the Arctic.

The Administration is actively studying the Eskimo economy in the light of the known resources of the Arctic. The primary purpose of the educational program is by direction to help the Eskimo people diversify their efforts.

Every effort is being made to maintain the self-sufficiency for which the Eskimos are so justly famous. They will be encouraged in the development of local industries such as whaling, reindeer herding, fishing, boat building, manufacture of certain types of clothing, eiderdown collections, and arts and crafts. Eskimos in overpopulated areas will be helped to emigrate to areas where game is more plentiful, or where employment may be found. A loan fund has been established by the Administration from which loans may be made to assist Eskimos in projects that will better their standard of living.

There is every prospect that this assistance from the Government, plus the Eskimos pride in their own ability, will see them through both their present and future adaptation to an ever expanding civilized world.

March 1954.



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