SCOMM

#9:119

Inuit Conference

circumpolar peoples

Circumpolar Peoples

The lands surrounding the Arctic Ocean are among the most inhospitable in the world. The winters are long and cold, with temperatures in some places falling below −50°C. for days on end. On the Arctic Circle the sun does not rise above the horizon in mid-December, and at 75°N. the period of continuous darkness and twilight lasts for 100 days. Throughout most of the Arctic the lakes, rivers, and sea freeze to a depth of seven or more feet, and it is not until June or July that the ice breaks up and the sea becomes open for a few weeks.

The tree-line divides the true Arctic from the sub-Arctic and it is a very real boundary. To the south there is wood for houses and wood to burn, and the snow lies soft and deep in the boreal forests. To the north there is no shelter from the blizzards that pack the snow into hard drifts, and in which a man cannot face the bitter wind and all is white. Yet the human race has managed to adapt to these conditions, to survive, and to live happily up to and along the shores of the Arctic Ocean.

In this exhibition the circumpolar people have been grouped into those who live in five geographical areas — Greenland, and the northern parts of Scandinavia, the USSR, Alaska, and Canada. The exhibition is not concerned with recent immigrants from the south, who have come bearing with them their own culture, but with the native peoples who have been living in the north for centuries and whose culture has evolved there. These native peoples are very different in origin, but the similarity of the physical constraints under which they have lived and of the resources at their disposal has faced them with similar problems and sometimes resulted in similar solutions. Resemblances that appear to indicate a relationship may be a result of this cultural convergence.

The photographs have been selected to show something of the country of these peoples, how they live, and how they are adapting to the pressures from the south in this time of rapid change.

Northern Canada

The Canadian mainland extends beyond 70° North. East and north lie the many islands of the Arctic Archipelago. The tree line runs southeast from the Mackenzie across the Canadian Shield to James Bay and across New Quebec and Labrador. To the south the northern Indians live in the boreal forests. To the north lie the barren lands, the home of the Eskimos.

For at least 4,000 years Eskimos or their predecessors have been living in the Canadian Arctic. Archaeologists have identified three cultures and named them pre-Dorset, Dorset, and Thule. It is from the last of these that the present Canadian Eskimos are descended.

Norse saga describing the Vinland voyages mention encounters with Skraelings, who may have been Eskimos, but the first definite accounts of Eskimos are from the three voyages of Sir Martin Frobisher to Baffin Island in 1576, 1577, and 1578. Other explorers followed, gradually extending the map of northern Canada and finding it a vast area inhabited by small scattered groups of Eskimos who shared the same language and much the same way of life. Parry's second expedition spent the period 1821-23 in Foxe Basin and he and Lyon wrote detailed accounts of the people they met. Their descriptions of snow houses, kayaks, dog teams, methods of hunting, and customs aroused great interest and became accepted as typical of Eskimo life.

In the nineteenth century whaling ships followed the explorers, first into the Eastern Arctic, and later to the Beaufort Sea. The infectious diseases they introduced and the economic and social disruption resulting from their activities brought disaster to the Eskimos, whose numbers were drastically reduced. As the whaling industry declined, its place was taken by trading for white fox skins, and trapping became the most important source of wealth.

The Second World War and the defence measures that then became necessary in the north drew the attention of the Canadian government to a part of the country that had long been neglected. In the first post-war years health, education, and other social services were introduced, sometimes with bewildering speed.

The Canadian Eskimo population has been increasing rapidly for some years and their numbers are now approximately 20,000. Many of the people have moved from small hunting camps to larger settlements. Trapping and hunting have remained important, native art and handicrafts have been encouraged, and Eskimos are beginning to fill teaching, nursing, and other positions in the north. Politically, too, there have been significant developments and the Eskimos are now taking an increasing part in running their own affairs through village councils and a newly-established national organization. The Canadian Eskimos occupy a central position in northern North America. They are developing closer contacts with their neighbours in Greenland and Alaska and will be increasingly affected by the course of events there.

Northern Scandinavia

The northern shores of the Scandinavian peninsula are warmed by the Gulf Stream. This moderates the climate, and the sea rarely freezes even though elsewhere at the same time latitude it is free of ice for two or three months only each year. In contrast, the climate in the mountainous interior is truly arctic, and the winters are long and cold as well as dark. In the fiords along the coast and the valleys and plateaux inland live a people known to the world as Lapps, though Saams is the name they use themselves. Like the Eskimos their numbers are and always have been small and, again like the Eskimos, they live under four flags — in this case those of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the USSR.

Lapps are generally small in stature, with straight brown hair and brown or grey eyes, strong and with great stamina. Many different views are held about their origin but they have lived in their present area for at least 4,000 years, during which time the influence of neighbouring peoples has been strong. There is evidence the Lapps moved north into the Scandinavian peninsula from the Lake Ladoga region towards the end of the Neolithic period, but earlier than this the threads of their origin become increasingly difficult to trace. They share some characteristics with Mongolian people, especially with the Samoyeds. Genetically, however, they appear to be western rather than eastern. Their language, of which there are several very distinct and almost mutually unintelligible dialects, belongs to the Finno-Ugrian group and is closest to that of the Finns. It is difficult to reconcile the evidence which is often conflicting, but the theory of a European or Paleo-arctic origin for the Lapps seems to be gaining ground over the earlier view that they moved into the north from the Asiatic interior.

The population of Lapps has been fairly stable for many years at between 30,000 and 35,000. Of these, nearly two-thirds live in Norway, 7,000 to 8,000 in Sweden, and around 2,000 in each of Finland and the USSR. They are sometimes divided into four groups defined by the way they lived rather than by the nations of which they are citizens. More than half the Lapps are Sea Lapps living along the Norwegian coast, where they depend mainly on fish, seals, and whales. In the winter they move to the heads of the fiords for hunting and trapping and small reindeer herds. The Forest Lapps, inhabiting the wooded valleys, were hunters and trappers throughout the year, and also kept a few domesticated reindeer. The Mountain Lapps spent the winters at the heads of the valleys and the summers above the treeline. They had herds of several hundred reindeer. The Eastern Lapps in northern Finland and the Kola Peninsula lived inland farming, hunting, trapping, fishing in the lakes and rivers, and again keeping small herds of reindeer.

Though the Mountain Lapps were never very numerous it is they who are generally considered as characteristic of the people. They are more nomadic than the other groups, and their life revolves around their herds of reindeer, on whose well-being they depend. They have retained much of their distinctive culture, and much more has been written about them than about the other groups.

Forming such small minorities in each of the countries they inhabit, the Lapps have never been able to exert much political influence. Through the centuries they have been pushed back by the encroachment of farmers from the south, by competition with Norwegian fishermen, by the penetration of mining into the north, and by hydro-electric development. Some have adopted the occupations and practices of the newcomers. They have become increasingly involved with farming, secured employment in mining, railroading, or tourism, or spend their time producing handicrafts. The standard of education has improved although the Lapp population still lags considerably behind the main national populations.

The Lapps are becoming increasingly concerned about the survival of their language and culture as well as about any claims they might have to land. A Nordic-Saamic Council has been formed, composed of Lapps from Norway, Sweden, and Finland and with broad responsibilities for promoting all aspects of Saamic life and culture. It is being followed by the Nordic-Saamic Institute at Kautokeino, which is supported by the three national governments. Individually too, each government is becoming increasingly concerned with the needs and wishes of their Lapp citizens.

Northern USSR

The USSR has much more northern territory than any other country. The Soviet north stretches east from the rugged Kola Peninsula across the great plains of the European north, the lowlands of western Siberia, and the uplands of Yakutia to the mountain ranges of the Soviet Far East, spanning in all eleven time zones. The tree line, however, lies considerably farther north in Eurasia than in North America and the area of arctic tundra in the USSR is only half that in Canada.

In contrast to North America, the tundra of the USSR is inhabited by a variety of races who belong to several different language groups. In the west the languages of the Lapps, Khanty, Mansi and Komi are Finno-Ugric. To the east of them many small groups such as the Nentsy, Entsy, Nganasan, and Selkup speak Samoyedic languages. In the Lena Basin the languages of the Yahuty, the most numerous of the northern people, and the Dolgan are of Turkic origin, and those of the Even, Evenk, and Nanay are Tungus-Manchu. Farther still to the east the languages of the Chukchi, Itelmen, Ket, Koryak, Nivkhi, and Yukagir are classified as paleo-Asiatic and, finally, small groups of Yuit Eskimo around East Cape and Aleut in the Commander Islands speak Eskimo languages.

Over a million native people live north of 60° in the USSR. Out of this number those who inhabit the arctic regions, and are often referred to as the "minority peoples of the north", amount to about 140,000.

Both the geography and the history of Siberia are dominated by the great northward-flowing rivers, and it is to the south that the native people look for their origins. Most of the northern native people are essentially reindeer herders, but hunting, fishing, and trapping have also always been important occupations.

The Soviet north has long been known to be rich in resources. In recent years there have been many new discoveries of minerals and, within the last decade, very important petroleum reserves have been located. This has led to greatly improved transportation, major hydro-electric installations, and the growth of large cities. The Soviet emphasis on scientific research into northern problems has paid good dividends.

The native people have played some part in these developments, but the Soviet government has concurrently taken steps to apply modern technology to traditional occupations, and has succeeded in strengthening the sector of the economy based on renewable resources. At the same time health, education, and other services have steadily improved. The native people have benefited greatly from these measures, and the establishment of national areas where there was a large native population has allowed them their own voice in local matters. The government has also encouraged the use of native languages and supported indigenous cultural activities.

Greenland

The great island of Greenland still lies in the grip of an ice age. A sheet of ice up to two miles thick covers the interior. It is surrounded by mountains through which glaciers have cut deep valleys and fjords. Only one tenth of the island is free of ice.

The east coast is ice-bound almost all year with heavy pack-ice carried down from the Arctic Ocean. In the west conditions are very different. The Irminger Current, a branch of the Gulf Stream, enters Davis Strait and flows along the Greenland shore, giving year-round open water in the south. Even at Thule, only 1,000 miles from the North Pole, the sea approaches do not freeze until the end of December.

When the Vikings settled southwest of Greenland at the end of the tenth century, they met no Eskimos, but they saw signs of former inhabitants. In fact, man had reached Greenland at least three thousand years earlier, and the Eskimos appear to have inhabited all the ice-free area at some time or other.

During the Norse settlement of Greenland, Eskimos moved south along the west coast, and both Norse saga and Eskimo tradition tell of the meetings between the two people. Early in the 15th century contact between Europe and Greenland was broken. When it was restored, some 150 years later, no Norse settlements remained, and the fate of the colonists is still a mystery. The whole coast was in the possession of the Eskimos, who were subject to little further European influence until the end of the 17th century, when whaling ships penetrated into Davis Strait. This led Denmark to establish a colony at Godthaab in 1721, and to begin to extend sovereignty over the island. The policy of the Danish government was to protect the Eskimos from rapid change by making Greenland a closed country. Education and medical services were introduced, trade placed firmly in the hands of the government, and visits from other countries rigidly controlled. Under careful administration the population gradually increased from about 8,000 in 1840 to its present total of some 40,000 Greenlanders and 7,000 Danes.

The Second World War brought great changes to Greenland. Communications with Denmark were cut, and defence bases were built by the United States. At the same time a warming of the water in Davis Strait led to a retreat of the seals, upon which the hunting economy of the Eskimos depended, and the appearance of great numbers of cod. The post-war years have seen the growth of a substantial fishing industry, particularly for cod and shrimp. The population has become urbanized, with over 80% now living in small towns, — a move that has been encouraged by the government and has greatly simplified the provision of improved health, education, and other social services. These industrial and social developments have brought increased numbers of Danes to Greenland, which in 1953 became constitutionally a province of the Kingdom of Denmark. Economically and socially the island has been brought fully into the twentieth century with its opportunities and problems. For over a hundred years most of the population has been literate, providing a firm base for cultural activities. Politically the Greenlanders are seeking a stronger voice in managing their own affairs, and less dependence on Denmark.

Northern Alaska

The Arctic coast of Alaska is formed by a low, flat plain, on the shores of which live Eskimos who are closely related to the Canadian Eskimos. Many of the Eskimos now resident in the Mackenzie Delta have emigrated from Alaska within the past century. In the mountains separating the coastal plain from the rest of the state, the Nunamiut, a small group of inland Eskimos, depend on the caribou herds for food and clothing.

West and southwest Alaska consist of a series of peninsulas and islands pointing towards Siberia, including the great island arc formed by the Aleutian Islands, an area of great volcanic activity. Eskimos live along these coasts too and up the valleys of the Yukon, Koyukuk, and Kuskokwim rivers. Those north of Norton Sound, like the Eskimos of the Arctic coast, have a culture traditionally based on whale hunting, and their speech is Inupik, the division of the Eskimo language spoken also by the Canadian Eskimos and throughout Greenland. South of Norton Sound the Eskimos speak Yupik, a division of the language which includes several distinct dialects including that of the Siberian Eskimos. There are other cultural differences, with fish playing a much more important part in the economy of southwest Alaska, especially the salmon that run up the great rivers.

The Aleuts of the Aleutian Islands are also an Eskimo people, but their speech is so different from both Inupik and Yupik that it was long considered a separate language. Living on islands in ice-free waters, they depended on sea mammals and fish and were expert mariners.

In other areas the Eskimo culture is remarkable for its uniformity, but around the Bering Sea there is marked variety. This suggests the roots of Eskimo culture lie deep in this region. Archaeology has revealed many Eskimo sites in western Alaska. They indicate it was on one or the other side of the Bering Strait or in Beringia, the land between the two continents that was flooded as the melting ice sheets raised the sea level, that a people of Asiatic origin shaped the first Eskimo culture. This enabled them to live under Arctic conditions and on the resources of the north.

The Eskimos are not the only native people in Alaska. In the boreal forest there are several bands of Athapaskan Indians, some of which stretch across the border into Canada. The coast of southeast Alaska is the home of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian, three groups of Pacific Coast Indians, but this is too far south to be included in this exhibit.

In the middle of the 18th century, the Russians reached Alaska, attracted by the wealth of fur, especially that of the sea otter. They found a flourishing population, probably numbering nearly 20,000 Aleuts and 50,000 Eskimos in southwest Alaska, by far the greatest concentration of Eskimos then living. By the time of the Alaska Purchase in 1867 these numbers had been considerably reduced through a combination of exploitation, disease and demoralization.

In the middle of the 19th century American whalers were very active in the Bering Sea, and in 1852 the whaling fleet amounted to 278 ships. They soon penetrated Bering Strait and along the Arctic coast, again with disastrous results to the Eskimos. At the same time commercial fisheries were established in the Bristol Bay area of southwest Alaska.

In the early 20th century the discovery of placer gold in the valleys of the interior and on the beaches at Nome led to an influx of miners from the south. In the meantime the government was taking its first steps toward providing education and health services to the natives and giving them some measure of protection from exploitation, but it was not until the years following the First World War that the decline in the native population was arrested.

As in other parts of the north, the Second World War brought enormous changes. The emphasis passed from the exploitation of renewable to non-renewable resources. The immigrants from the south are not in such direct competition with the native peoples for these resources, nor are they dependent on them for their harvesting, but, there are conflicts of interest in the use of land and in the pollution of the environment. At the same time the native people are developing a political consciousness and skill that is giving them an increasing role in the government of the state, a more important part in its development, and a greater share in the benefits arising from its riches. Their numbers too are increasing and there are now some 30,000 Eskimos, 7,000 Aleuts, and 8,000 Athapascan Indians in Alaska.

Text by Graham Rowley

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PROPOSED AGENDA

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE
BARROW, ALASKA
JUNE 13 - 19, 1977

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, JUNE 11 AND 12, 1977:

Arrival of Delegates and Guests
Pre-Legislation - Billeting

MONDAY, JUNE 13, 1977:

9:00	Call to Order
	Roll Call and Introduction of Organizations
10:30	Break
11:00	Welcoming Address - Mayor Eben Hopson
12:00	Break for Lunch
2:00	Introduction of Draft Charter Document - Discussion
4:30	Recess

TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 1977:

9:00	Call to Order
	Introduction and Announcements
9:30	Resumption of Charter Document Discussions
11:00	Action of Charter Document
12:00	Break for Lunch
1:30	Election of Officers
4:30	Recess

WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY, JUNE 15 and 16, 1977: (See Attached Page 2 of 2).

FRIDAY, JUNE 17, 1977:

9:00 - 10:30	Reports of Committee Chairmen
11:00 - 12:30	Arctic Policy Declaration
12:30 - 2:00	Break for Lunch
2:00 - 4:00	Work Program Adoption
4:00 - 5:00	Final Remarks
	Adjournment

WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, JUNE 15, & 16, 1977

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE AGENDA

TIME	HEARINGS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	HEARINGS NATIONAL COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN	HEARINGS NATIONAL COMMITTEE VICE CHAIRMEN
9:00 - 10:30 A.M.	Administration; How should the Assembly be administered? How will it be financed? How should it be staffed? Where should it be headquartered? In the short term? In the long term? How should by-laws be written and adopted?	Land Claims: The Circumpolar Inupiat Land Claims Movement. Land claims jurisdiction and jurisprudence in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. The Northern Quebec Settlement. The Greenland home-rule negotiations. Land claims and Arctic resource development. Post-settlement responsibilities and problems.	Mutual Exchange: Cultural, educational and skills exchanged between circumpolar Arctic communities. An examination of mutual exchange agreements between the U.S., Canada, Denmark and the U.S.S.R., and their use in the Arctic.
10:30 - 12:00 Noon	Arctic Policy: The examination of the need for one law in the Arctic. National Arctic policies of Denmark, Canada, U.S. and U.S.S.R. The need for international circumpolar cooperative Arctic Coastal Zone Management agreements to defend Arctic and environmental security. Opportunities for international Arctic scientific cooperation. Sovereignty on the ice.	Arctic Conservation and Environmental Security: Arctic offshore applications of Circumpolar implications. Hydro-electric development in Northern Quebec. Greenlandic fisheries and the common market. Caribou, sea mammals, migratory birds and subsistence hunting. Aboriginal offshore jurisdiction.	Health: The status of Arctic family and community health. The village health aide as primary health care provider. Arctic community medical service in Canada, Greenland, Alaska. Community and family health problems compared. Opportunities for international cooperation.
1:00 - 2:30 P.M.		Government: Democratic self-determination in the Arctic. Home-rule in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. The relationship between home-rule and aboriginal land rights. Traditional local government norms in North American communities. A review of the Greenlandic Home-rule Movement. Nunavut. The North Slope Borough. Relationship between Arctic resource development and local government.	Education: The status of education in the Arctic. The politics of education in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and the U.S.S.R. Bi-lingual educational development. Local control of village schools. Secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities for circumpolar cooperation. Education as a function of local government.
3:00 - 4:30 P.M.	Executive Session	Economics and Trade: Development of east-west air transportation routes. Inupiat control of Arctic tourism. Joint venturing in Arctic energy and resource development. The Jay Treaty as an economic and trade advantage. Post-settlement economics. Greenland, the common market.	Village Technology: Village utilities: water, sanitation, electricity, communications. Management and maintenance. Fuel cell technology and the Arctic Village. Arctic village fuel supply problems.

Charney –
memo – report on travel

CSHB (fin)