

Robertson realized at once that no matter how much food was flown to remote camps, the continuing problem was housing. The Inuit were living on the land, in igloos in winter and skin tents in summer. Such dwellings were wonderfully ingenious and were satisfactory as long as the occupants were healthy, but crowd a big family together in a small, damp igloo, with plenty of germs around, and you literally produce a death trap. Better housing had to be provided and with it medical services to help those already sick and to prevent disease from spreading. That meant nursing stations. Schools were needed, along with police posts, missions, and quarters for the builders of the houses and the administrators who would attend to local needs on an ongoing basis.

From the very start, Ottawa understood the dilemma: leave the Inuit alone to their traditional ways and there would be starvation and widespread death from disease. Save their lives and you made yourself responsible for their future as well. Ottawa decided the Inuit had to be brought into the 20th century and be prepared to live in it. That meant schools that taught English and white men's skills so that the Inuit could cope with a wage economy.

The mandarins had no doubt that a wage economy would ultimately come to the North. They believed the fur trade could not sustain the Inuit for long and that the diminishing supply of land and sea mammals could not feed them. So it was decreed that schools would be built, as well as the support base needed to keep them going. The result was instant towns.

## Arctic Towns

Today, the Delta has four important communities: Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, and Fort McPherson. Originally, the most spectacular showpiece was Inuvik, which rose like Camelot on the permafrost of the Mackenzie Delta. But its creation has been clouded by misdirection and misinformation. The popular story is that Ottawa made one of its classic goofs, deciding in a panic that the residents of Aklavik were about to drown in a flood and moving them, helter skelter, to a new location eighty kilometres away. And then, the legend went, Ottawa spent millions on this useless white elephant, only to have the Aklavik people move back to their perfectly safe habitat on the banks of the Mackenzie's east channel.

The truth was rather more complex. During the reorganizational

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period from 1947 to 1951, it was decided that an administrative centre was needed for the western Arctic. Aklavik had a police post, missions, an airfield, and the HBC. It was next door to the Yukon, close to Alaska, and within easy range of the Beaufort Sea. Ben Sivertz, then an assistant to Major-General Hugh Young, deputy minister of resources and development, was sent north on a three-month orientation tour in 1950. Part of his job was to visit Aklavik and study major building projects. He found that Aklavik had been serving its administrative function quite well but could not be expanded to accommodate a much larger resident population. For one thing, the soft, spongy land of the Delta was not suitable for large-scale building. Also, in such a location, sanitary problems would be a nightmare.

Sivertz asked engineers and town planners to find a suitable site. The location they chose was on the east channel of the Mackenzie. Building at Inuvik began in 1955. It was conceived from the first as a showplace for the latest Arctic technology, as a scientific experimental station, as a military garrison post to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty, and as a regional capital. Residents of Aklavik were invited to move there and many did, especially after one of the periodic floods that plagued the older community. Aklavik continued its comfortable existence and even thrived as prosperity came to the area; it remained the centre of the muskrat trapping industry in the Delta.

Building Inuvik from the permafrost up was one of the most significant signs that Canada was determined to occupy the whole of the NWT. Planners envisaged a radically different community, using new techniques for Arctic survival. The town had to have the potential for almost infinite expansion, with land suitable for a major all-weather airport and runways long enough for the new long-range transports and bombers. It had to have an adequate supply of fresh water and land solid enough to bear large buildings such as schools, barracks, hospitals, community halls, skating arenas, and office complexes. Aklavik was nice but it didn't measure up.

Contractors placed the buildings on stilts that were anchored in the permafrost. They were laced together with the utilidor, a system of sewer and hot-water pipes and electrical cables housed in wooden tunnels on platforms above the ground. This meant that it was easy to dissipate heat without melting the permafrost. The electrical, fresh water, and sewage services, all above ground, could be serviced quickly and easily, even in the coldest months. The town was built well above the Mackenzie, out of reach of floods, while a nearby lake

supplied fresh water and the airport was a few kilometres away. By 1960 Inuvik was a going concern and a model (some called it a horrible example) for the building of other Arctic communities.

More than any other site in the NWT, Inuvik symbolized Canada's determination to make herself known as an Arctic power. The Russians had been active in their North since the 16th century, and the word Siberia conjured up visions of terrible living conditions and slave camps – under czar and commissar.

It is not surprising that Canada has tried to discover what has been happening in the Soviet Arctic – to learn from the good things and avoid the mistakes. This was one reason that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau visited Norilsk during his late 1960s visit to the USSR. He found a 19th-century-style city of old-fashioned, multi-storey brick buildings. The labour turnover was 200 percent a year despite high wages and various other perks. The air was full of pollution and the tundra was being seriously damaged. The USSR has been opening up the enormous mineral wealth of northern Siberia since the 1920s. Norilsk, at about the same latitude as Inuvik, today has a population of 180,000 and stands at the hub of a great open pit mining complex as well as oil and gas developments. Unfortunately, the impact of hundreds of thousands of industrial workers on the land north of the Arctic Circle has been disastrous.

In contrast, the U.S. did little with Arctic Alaska until the 1968 oil and gas discovery at Prudhoe Bay. There was an old scientific station at Point Barrow, more like a moon outpost than a working community. The town of Barrow called itself “the largest Eskimo town in the world,” but it was badly built and had very few modern facilities. The best model for Canada was Greenland, where Denmark has exercised an enlightened policy for generations. Like everyone else involved in the Arctic, the Danes made mistakes. Their settlements have undergone many changes, but today they appear to be well designed for the environment. Canada could (and did) learn a good deal from Greenland.

Inuvik was built over six years in a classic sequence: first came the machine shop, then a school with attached residence, then a nursing station, then a police post, then a power plant. The utilidor tied everything together. In the early days, the Inuvialuit, Indians, and Métis working on construction lived in wooden shacks called “512s” (because they covered 512 square feet), located on mud flats between the new town and the river. The indigenes were too poor to afford the

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heat, water, and sewage disposal of the utilidors: human waste was disposed of in the traditional way – in the notorious “honey bags” (ordinary green garbage bags).

Consequently, the flats became a slum, which included the low-rent apartment buildings thrown up in the area to house workers’ families. One of the most prestigious native leaders, Agnes Semmler, lived in a 512 because she couldn’t afford anything else; she was co-founder of the Committee for the Original People’s Entitlement (COPE) and later was deputy commissioner of the NWT.

Like most company and government towns, the planned community was hierarchical. Apartments and individual houses were colour-coded to show exactly what salary bracket the occupant was in.\*

The magnitude of Inuvik was impressive. Both the elementary and the high school had residences for students from outlying communities. The military base contained a garrison, and there were two large hotels, the Mackenzie and the Eskimo Inn. The Mad Trapper bar, named for Albert Johnson, the so-called Mad Trapper of Rat River in the 1930s, became a famous watering hole.

Almost from the first, Inuvik was a truly interracial community. One of the best musical groups was led by a young Inuvialuit vocalist and featured both whites and Indians.

As time went on, the early slums on the lower bench became a little less slum-like. In the 1960s the oil rush began, and Inuvik was host to hundreds of prospectors, geologists, riggers, roustabouts, and seismic technicians. The crews flew in from oil camps, then continued on by jetliner to Edmonton and points south. Sometimes the tiny airport was jammed shoulder-to-shoulder with oil crews, bureaucrats, soldiers, muskrat trappers, entertainers, promoters, and hippies.

Although Inuvik was an intended as a model, it was not duplicated, because northern planners found that they had to tailor every community to local climate and terrain, the availability of fresh water, and the size of the population. It was found, for instance, that while the utilidor worked fairly well in Inuvik, it was too expensive and unwieldy for places with a population of up to 1,000. Such settle-

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\*Bob Rhodes, the earthy and talented broadcast executive, was at one time manager of the CBC’s Inuvik radio station and as such one of the town’s leading citizens. He and his wife, Anne, kept a sled dog team chained outside and hundreds of pounds of fishheads were constantly simmering on the stove. The stench was remarkable, and Bob’s peers felt he was letting the side down. But he was brilliantly successful in Inuvik and several other northern posts.

ments came to be served by tank truck rather than sewage and water lines.

Inuvik was the most spectacular of the new Arctic towns, but it was only one of twenty-odd that stretched from Grise Fjord on Ellesmere Island to Eskimo Point in the Keewatin. While the all-weather airport and radio communication made the new towns possible, heavy gear and construction supplies came in by water. The HBC had been supplying its eastern Arctic posts through the annual voyage of the *Naskopie*. The sailing season was very short: along the Arctic coast it was only about six weeks long. Ships like the *Naskopie* and the *Arctic* brought in lumber, cement, hardware, and furniture, as well as trade goods and food, and took south the furs from the posts. When Ottawa went into the business, the water route was divided in two. Ships still sailed annually from Montreal or Quebec for the eastern Arctic, while in the west, Northern Transportation Company Limited (NTCL) had one barge terminus at Hay River and another at Tuktoyaktuk on the Beaufort Sea. As soon as the Great Slave and Mackenzie broke up, the barges would be towed down the river, supplying each community as they passed.

At Tuktoyaktuk, barges or ice-breaking ships would be loaded to supply true Arctic towns like Sachs Harbour, Holman, Paulatuk, Cambridge Bay, Coppermine, Spence Bay, Chimo, and Pelly Bay. Anything that didn't spoil was shipped by the sea lift, which was absolutely essential for bulk products like prefab houses, heavy machinery, fuel oil, and gasoline. The northern communities could be kept going on a week-to-week basis by plane, but the sea route was essential. With this combination of ocean and river routes, which were closed most of the year, and air service that was able to operate 90 percent of the time, the Arctic towns were built quickly.

In the eastern Arctic there was, from the first, heavy pressure on available housing. Prefab houses, or lumber to construct different types of buildings, came by the sea lift but never in sufficient quantities. As the Inuit moved in from the land, they were urged to buy houses from the local housing authorities established by Ottawa. There were some – never enough – rental units, and Eskimo families found themselves crowded together in two- or three-bedroom frame houses. When the children grew up and got married, there seldom were houses for the new couples, so they were forced to remain with their parents and in-laws.

Theoretically, the Inuit and Inuvialuit could still live outside town

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in igloos and tents while they sent their children to school, but Alvin Hamilton said, "Once you get a woman with a kitchen and a fridge you get a contented housewife." Bob MacQuarrie, longtime resident and member of the territorial legislature, recalls that he arrived at Baker Lake in 1966 as a school principal and "that was the last year the people lived outside town in igloos."

Houses and apartments were built by the federal government for the white southerners who served the communities – teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, bureaucrats, and some construction workers. The government also built schools, nursing stations, community halls, machine shops, garages, powerhouses, and office buildings for the myriad government employees who made it all work.

In a sense, every community needed two complete towns: one for the Inuit and one for the whites serving them. The government was often criticized for not teaching native languages, but Gordon Robertson has pointed out that none of the new teachers spoke Inuktitut or any of the Indian languages: they had to teach in English. Teachers, nurses, doctors, bookkeepers, mechanics, carpenters, electricians were given all kinds of inducements to bring them north: high salaries, hardship allowances, housing supplements. It usually wasn't enough. Most of them left after a year, or perhaps after a single school term.

The government had total power and the indigenes none. The mandarins decided on policy in Ottawa; the northern service officers carried it out with the authority of rajahs. They (or their underlings) decided who would be fired, who would get housing, who could travel – in actuality, who would be allowed to stay in a community or even in the Arctic as a whole. There were virtually no native leaders. Abe Okpik became a hero because he had one cause and one cause only: to get rid of the offensive numbered metal disks by which all Inuit were identified instead of by name.

## Aboriginal Employment

The school system was designed to make Inuit and Indians capable of earning their living in a white industrial society. Some 200 Inuit were employed in building the DEW Line, and they were adept at learning mechanical trades. But what next? The government thought of mining. It reasoned that the industry might be the very test the educational policies needed. After all, from 1902 till 1914 there had been a

mica mine at Lake Harbour, which employed Inuit as well as imported Scots. And a nickel mine was about to open at Rankin Inlet, close to the HBC's old trading post on Marble Island.

The mining company was not anxious to hire natives, but it bowed to pressure from Ottawa. A 1986 study of native employment by the Arctic Institute said that before the mine opened, no more than ten families lived in the Rankin area, but soon there was an HBC store, a hospital, homes for government workers, three churches, a school, and many individual homes. Sixty-five percent of the trainee miners came from Chesterfield Inlet, 25 percent from Eskimo Point, 7 percent from Repulse Bay, and 3 percent from Baker Lake. Northern Affairs built a second village, Itivia, about a kilometre from the mine, designed specifically for Inuit brought in from distressed areas. It had small houses, a school, a workshop, and quarters for white social workers. But Itivia failed because it never really got started, and most natives and whites settled in Rankin Inlet proper.

Although the mine only operated seven years, from 1955 to 1962, it did show that Inuit could adapt up to a point to industrial life. Within a year, 30 percent of the miners were Inuit, and in the last years the proportion was 72 percent. The Arctic Institute study said men were paid \$6 a day and women \$4. The report was sharply critical of the government's handling of the project, saying it was based on paternalism and segregation: "At Rankin Inlet, the Eskimo was being trained to be a laborer, not a citizen." Ottawa found that private industry was reluctant to participate in any broad-gauged training of aboriginal workers.\*

After the Rankin Inlet mine closed in 1963, the Consolidated Smelting gold mine in Yellowknife agreed to hire some of the laid-off Inuit. The Arctic Institute said Con expected them to pull up stakes immediately and leave for Yellowknife the day after they were interviewed, leaving their families behind. "Neither the company nor the government helped its Inuit workers provide for their families until they were able to relocate in Yellowknife," said the institute,

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\*Since those early days, some progress has been made. The base metals mines at Pine Point and Nanisivik hired natives from the start, and in 1978 mine bosses in Yellowknife and Thompson, Manitoba, told me that they would hire as many qualified natives as they could find. They claimed that they actually were employing natives then, though most held surface jobs because they didn't want to work below ground. The bosses took this as a racial characteristic, but a quick check of the white population showed that few whites wanted to work deep underground either.

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that the miners' families were left virtually destitute.

When Inuit miners were sent to the Sherritt-Gordon gold mine in Lynn Lake, Manitoba, "no housing was provided because the mine didn't want any separate native community." The Arctic Institute found that Sherritt-Gordon wanted Ottawa to provide two halfway houses where Inuit could stay until housing could be located, but the government refused and "suggested the Inuit should save \$500 and purchase a home with help from the Eskimo loan fund." The institute concluded with damning restraint: "The Inuit felt very ill-equipped to deal with home ownership, maintenance and finance and making sure the properties and payments were attended to."



Overall, the speed of change in the Territories was astonishing. In 1959, after only five years of existence, the Northern Administration and Lands Branch had burst through its bureaucratic framework and had to be reorganized. Its annual report said: "The rapid pace of northern development made desirable a complete reorganization ... to meet changing conditions. Through its emphasis on decentralization it gave much more administrative responsibility to the field." The magic word was "decentralization, which was to be the major drive of Ottawa in the North for the next fifteen years. For instance, the duties and powers of Fort Smith were expanded, and the Mackenzie District now included Coppermine, Tuktoyaktuk, and Cambridge Bay in the central Arctic, and Banks Island in the Beaufort Sea.

The Arctic Division was split into the Keewatin and Franklin divisions and had responsibility for Arctic Quebec. Ottawa remained the capital, though Frobisher Bay was becoming important. Area offices were located at Rankin Inlet, Coral Harbour, Eskimo Point, and Baker Lake, and they all reported to a regional headquarters at Churchill. Cape Dorset, Igloolik, and Hall Beach reported to Frobisher. Arctic Quebec offices were located at Fort Chimo, Sugluk, Port Harrison, and Great Whale River.

A year later came a change that was to have momentous impact. New mining regulations encouraged a much wider range of exploration. The most dramatic symbol of such progress was the drilling of the first oil and gas well in the Arctic Islands by Jack Gallagher of Dome Petroleum and Peter Bawden of Peter Bawden Drilling at Winter Harbour on Melville Island, about as far north as Resolute. The hole was a dry one, but it foreshadowed the age of petroleum



exploration in the Canadian Arctic. That exploration was to have a major effect on the political future of the NWT.

### **Free Whites and Tied Whites**

By 1960 the northern revolution had been under way for six years and was rapidly changing the lives of the Inuit. The impact was less visible in the Mackenzie Basin, where it had a different pace and a different direction. In other words, government policies, east and west, were so out of phase that drastic changes were needed to bring them together.

In the mid-fifties there were fewer than 10,000 Inuit scattered over more than a million square kilometres of tundra. A large majority did not speak English and lived a semi-nomadic life hunting and fishing. Because of the emergencies of starvation, disease, and economic chaos, they were being guided – without the slightest input on their part – into an entirely different world.

In the west, the Indians, while far from well-off, were in an infinitely better position than the Inuit and retained a good deal of cultural and economic stability. Well over half the population of the Mackenzie District was white and quite prosperous. Dr. A.W.R. Carrothers, who was to head the Carrothers Commission in 1965–66, called these settlers from the south the “free whites,” in contrast to the “tied whites,” who were missionaries, police, and HBC employees. Add to these the new administrators and northern service officers who were building the new towns.

The free whites lived principally in Yellowknife, but there were growing numbers in the expanding transportation centre of Hay River, the old administrative capital at Fort Smith, Inuvik, Norman Wells, and mining communities like Pine Point. Most of them arrived after the second gold boom of 1944–46. Like many frontiersmen and women, they were a vigorous lot, independent and self-reliant. They hated absentee government and itched to run their own affairs. As early as 1938, Yellowknifers had been asking for local government.

During the regime of Commissioner/Deputy Minister Charles Camsell the free whites got nowhere in their drive for self-government, and when war came in 1939 the issue was put on the back of the stove to simmer. From time to time, Prime Minister Mackenzie King expressed a little interest, but even when Ottawa began to contemplate progressive changes in 1946, the demands of the

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Yellowknife whites were ignored. Dr. Hugh Keenleyside became commissioner and deputy minister in 1947, and he was an outspoken reformer in some respects – he had impressive plans for improving the health and education of the indigenous population. But he was suspicious of what he felt was white prejudice toward the natives, and he was loath to give up any of Ottawa's powers of government. As late as 1948, Keenleyside wrote to Jock McMeekan, the Yellowknife editor and agitator for representative government:

The NWT are governed by the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner, and five Councillors appointed by the Governor General in Council. The Commissioner in Council has power to make the ordinances for the Government of the Territories under instruction from the Governor General in Council, or the Minister of Mines and Resources, subject to the Act of the Dominion of Parliament applying to the Territories. (H.L. Keenleyside, *Memoirs*, 1981–82)

It is relatively easy to strip away the meaningless parts of Keenleyside's careful bureaucratise. Because the NWT Council was only advisory and legislative in its powers, the commissioner was in reality the sole executive, directly responsible to the Department of Mines and Resources, which, in turn, was responsible to the federal cabinet. But as the commissioner was also deputy minister, he had a double clout.

Keenleyside seemed to have no intention of changing the power structure. Professor Shelagh D. Grant says in her *Sovereignty or Security?* that in 1948 the NWT Council investigated pleas for greater representation and “saw the problem as arising from unrealistic expectations of growth which had resulted in the initiation of projects far beyond the requirements of the community. Believing that Yellowknife would likely remain dependent on federal assistance, Council recommended that the request for a fully elected Trustee Board be denied.”

In 1950, under pressure from his new minister, Robert Winters, Keenleyside reluctantly recommended that the Mackenzie District be made a separate territory with a fully elected council. The commissioner told his council: “While there are many people in the Territories who would make excellent and responsible members of the NWT Council, there are many others who would behave in an irresponsible and partisan manner.”

Keenleyside said he admired the rugged white settlers, but Grant says he felt their attitudes ran counter to his approach to northern government: he thought of northern development in terms of the British tradition of “peace, order and good government,” and “his interpretation of democracy and liberty did not include the American right to local self-government and squatter sovereignty or the right of a Euro-Canadian white minority to rule a non-voting native majority.” Such arrogant elitism was what both the white settlers and the indigenes had to deal with when they sought some role in their own government.



In spite of, or because of, Ottawa’s neglect, Yellowknife flourished. When the young mining engineer John Havelock Parker arrived from Edmonton in 1954, there were 2,000 residents. The Con gold mine was in full operation, and Giant Yellowknife was reaching peak production. John Parker recalls that gold fever was subsiding in favor of uranium. He was hired as a uranium specialist because he had spent three summers around Beaver Lake and Uranium City in Saskatchewan.

When Parker arrived, Yellowknife’s Old Town on and around Latham and Jolliffe islands was being moved inland to more level and spacious quarters. Vic Ingraham’s new Yellowknife Inn was the centre of New Town, with shops, restaurants, and business premises rising around it. This was a different kind of place from Old Town, which was largely male and temporary, a collection of tents, log cabins, and galvanized-iron warehouses. New Town was actually planned as a proper city, with roads, cement sidewalks, a sewage system, and zoning. The new houses were occupied by families, and the young wives were demanding many amenities.

The prospectors, bush pilots, and hard-rock miners were joined by lawyers, doctors, teachers, pharmacists, nurses, storekeepers, movie projectionists, bricklayers, mechanics, editors, printers, real estate salespeople, and insurance agents – all the inhabitants of the modern world. These were not birds of passage but permanent settlers, looking to the North for their future. Why not? Their grandparents had created Saskatchewan and Alberta from the old North-West Territories; their parents had opened the silver camps in Cobalt and had broken virgin land in the Peace River area. “These people were active, progressive and forward-thinking,” John Parker recalls, remembering that he first slept in the back room of Norm Byrne’s mining registration office.

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The town was white, he remembers, and the Dog Ribs lived across Yellowknife Bay at Detah and spent most of their time in the bush, following game, fish, and furs. When new settlers began to build residential neighbourhoods in New Town, some Indians pitched their teepees among the rocks. There were arguments and talk of racial tensions, and the commissioner reluctantly acceded to white requests to build a new Indian village, Rainbow Valley, at the tip of Latham Island, miles from the centre of New Town. Officially, there was no such thing as a mixed-blood. Individuals of mixed race were either considered Indian – or integrated into the white community.

Yellowknifers were a busy lot, building schools and hospitals, laying sewers, opening new subdivisions, or coping with the eternal “dog problem” which still plagues northern communities. Residents were scarcely aware of the commissioner or his council, but Parker says the town “was a little island of democracy.” It was incorporated in 1954 and Jock McNiven was the first mayor. At that time, Yellowknife was the only incorporated community in the NWT, and Parker said he and his friends were aware that every other settlement in the Territories was “very much ruled at the whim of senior government.”

Don Stewart, another charter member of the free whites who settled in Hay River, said the territorial settlers didn’t even have the vote until 1950. David Searle, who became a prominent lawyer and the territorial legislature’s first Speaker, says the first real government was the judiciary. In 1956 Jack Sissons, an Alberta lawyer and politician, was appointed territorial judge and came to live in Yellowknife. “Jack Sissons led the way as far as government on the ground was concerned,” Searle says. A veteran Liberal politician from the northern Alberta bush, Sissons was familiar with the isolation and disdain for the city felt by people who lived in the outback.

Instead of setting up his court in Yellowknife and waiting for the Mounties to bring in malefactors, he returned to the ancient British tradition of the circuit judge who held court wherever a few settlers could be gathered. He rightly said he would “bring Justice to every man’s door.” Sissons’s court provided an example for the Carrothers Commission in its efforts to suggest a government suitable for all of the Territories.



In the 1930s, social life in largely male Yellowknife centred around the Old Stope beer parlour and the Wildcat Cafe, not to mention

“Glamour Alley” in Willow Flats, where the whores and bootleggers resided. By the 1950s, the new Yellowknife Inn had a cavernous miners’ bar, where a visitor could hear whispers of new strikes or overhear a merchant conspiring with a pilot to bring Eskimo carvings out of the Arctic illegally. There were no Indians until it became legal for them to drink in public in 1960. This – and the racist hiring practices of many bosses – made it popular for many mixed-bloods and Métis to choose the white side of their ancestry over the Indian side.

Many of the Mackenzie mixed-bloods – later commonly known simply as Métis – had worked for wages for generations, as rivermen, oil patch roughnecks, muckers in the mines, heavy equipment operators, and construction crew members. In Yellowknife they rubbed shoulders with European immigrants working underground and with southern Canadian whites who had drifted north.

Most people worked for wages and there were no fabulous gold strikes for them, but there was no unemployment and hourly rates for miners were getting better. The people with real money were the promoters and a very few prospectors able to peddle their claims to the big operators. One of the great legends of the Yellowknife Inn was a beautiful blonde European waitress. She was said to be a \$1,000-a-night hooker who only plied her trade occasionally – with “strike it rich” prospectors or lucky poker players. She thriftily saved her money, bought an interest in a hotel across the street, and finally retired to an orchard in the Okanagan. It was the kind of dream anyone could share.

While the NWT’s heroic northerners were not as flamboyant as the Klondike sourdoughs, the freetraders who challenged the HBC came close. Their trading methods differed sharply, though the Bay men were not all company drudges.

E.J. (“Scotty”) Gall served the HBC all over the NWT before taking over the company’s big department store in Yellowknife. He was a humane, thoughtful man, much given to reflection on the fate of the native peoples, but his philosophy was that of an old Arctic hand. He sincerely believed that the Indians had an acute sense of inferiority to whites because they saw the whites doing everything natives could do – and better. This, Scotty felt, led the Indians to despair, confusion, and alcoholism. “They see whites as dominant, even in their own severe environment, and they try to endure more than we can,” he said. “The white man, having no sense of inferiority, doesn’t try to endure the worst of the climate and takes steps to make survival easier. The sense of inferiority is destroying the Indian from within.”

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Gall had a deep compassion and liking for Indians: it was just that, like so many other white men from Sir John Franklin on, he felt everything would be fine if the Indians would only accept white moral and intellectual superiority and remain satisfied with their inferior position. Over and over again, this patronizing attitude was expressed by long-term Mounties, missionaries, and Bay men.

However, there were exceptions. Duncan Pryde, like Scotty Gall, was a native of Scotland and came out to the NWT as a young HBC apprentice. He joyously accepted the equality of the Eskimos and boasted of his sexual liaisons, running for territorial council on the slogan: "There's a little Pryde in the best of us." Pryde's conduct and his unembarrassed remarks about both Inuit and whites shocked the tied and free whites alike. At the height of his notoriety, he married an Indian girl who had been chosen princess of the Yellowknife Winter Carnival, though he had often said that he despised Indians. He quarrelled publicly with her and disappeared into the North Slope of Alaska, pursued by legal writs and invective.

Most colourful of the fur traders, Bay or independent, was Pete Baker, who called himself "the only Arab musher in the world." He was from Lebanon, the descendant of generations of pedlars, and worked his way north from Edmonton in the early 1920s. Instead of following the example of the Bay – setting up a post and waiting for the Indians to come to him – Baker loaded a sled with gewgaws and learned how to drive a dog team.

Baker was known in every Indian camp in the southern Mackenzie country. Once, he said gleefully, he bought a ton of oranges and loaded them on a river barge. At every stop along the Mackenzie, he sat on the stern selling oranges at a dollar apiece. NWT residents were enchanted. He opened a post at Fort Rae and was much admired by the Dog Ribs for his low prices, honesty, and supportive advice. In 1951 he was one of the first people elected to the NWT Council. (In 1954, the council was increased to nine, five appointed and four elected, all of them white independent traders from the Mackenzie District.)



Nothing illustrated the racial solitudes more graphically than the census. In 1955, when the total population was 26,000, school enrolment was listed as Inuit, 380; Indians, 618; "other," 1,020. Eight years later, after the school-building program in the east, Inuit enrolment was 2,494, compared with 1,187 Indians and 2,560 "other."

Educating the aboriginals would upset the political applecart in less than a generation. The 1955 census showed that the only residents capable of influencing their own destinies were the free whites. In Yellowknife they were levying property taxes, building their own schools, and running local affairs. And they were hollering louder than ever for a voice in the running of the entire Territories.

Another free white town beginning to expand was Hay River, for generations a Dehcho gathering place with an HBC post and a couple of missions. The man most associated with its rise was another flamboyant frontiersman, Don Stewart, who came to the NWT in 1940 as a radio operator for Grant McConachie's Yukon Southern Airline. Later, Stewart worked with a crew pumping out an abandoned radium mine on Great Bear Lake and in 1946 found himself in Hay River as agent for Peace River Northern Airways. His wife was the fifth white woman in the area. Only a few remnants were left of the U.S. Army's installations for the CANOL Project.

"Hay River had a bit of a commercial fishery, but anybody could see it would be an important transportation centre," Stewart says. "There was a winter ice road to High Level, Alberta, 200 miles south. It took eighteen hours to drive and after that it took fourteen to eighteen hours to drive to Edmonton. In 1948 we got a year-round road." Cree Métis from Manitoba and Saskatchewan built a fishing village at West Channel where the Hay River flowed into Great Slave Lake. Soon there were eight fish companies, and the lake was producing more than 3.6 million kilograms of fish a year.

As the only port on the lake's south shore, Hay River was a natural shipping terminal for supplies going to Yellowknife and down the Mackenzie. Settlers rebuilt the American wharfs and warehouses, and later Northern Transportation Company and Kap Transport from Edmonton brought in barges and tugs. Northern Transportation, a Crown corporation, served all the communities along the Mackenzie and many along the coast of the Beaufort Sea. Kap Transport specialized in moving petroleum gear and supplies for exploration companies.

By 1954 Hay River's population reached 1,200, half of it white. Stewart became the leading citizen, first mayor and then an elected member of the NWT Council. He had the distinction of being the first white to be defeated by a native – Nick Sibbeston, a Dehcho Métis from Fort Simpson who, in 1986, became the NWT's first aboriginal government leader. By then, Stewart was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

## 90 Revolution Under Way

“We came up here to get away from civilization,” Stewart said to me forty-six years after he first arrived. “We wanted to escape from the government and all the rules and regulations. There was no money to be made in those days but we had a lot of freedom. We didn’t even have a post office: you just handed your letters to a pilot and he put it in a bag and took it away with him. Incidentally, the mail always got there – faster than it does today. We didn’t really know what was going on in the eastern Arctic. We didn’t know what was happening in the west either. We weren’t part of Canada: we were owned by Canada.”

Stewart shared the views of many of the early free whites as far as the natives were concerned. He believed that there would be no “native problem” in the future because “within three generations the Indians will be assimilated.” Yet as the indigenous leadership increased and the territorial government changed, Stewart was able to grow with it. Ultimately, he believed, the NWT could and should be shared on an equal basis by the various resident races – “if only southerners and southern government will keep their noses out of our affairs!”



Stewart, Scotty Gall, John Parker, and a pilot named Lyle Trimble from the Delta led the ever more insistent cry for provincehood and/or the splitting of the NWT into two parts. To forward-looking whites in the Mackenzie District, Ottawa’s policies were paralysing. At the same time that the new Conservative prime minister, John Diefenbaker, was proclaiming his vision of the North and advocating “roads to resources,” the key mandarins were concentrating almost totally on the problems of the Inuit.

The resource boom was continuing. One of the biggest lead-zinc mines in the world was about to open at Pine Point, a few kilometres east of Hay River. The Great Slave Lake Railway to serve that mine and bring cheaper supplies to all of the western NWT was under construction and would be completed in 1964. The highway link was being extended from Hay River around the western tip of Great Slave Lake to Yellowknife on the North Arm. At the same time, the road to the south was being improved so that Yellowknife as well as Hay River would be directly linked with Edmonton most of the year. Still another branch of the Mackenzie Highway was extended in the 1960s to Fort Simpson, where it ultimately hooked up with another highway



up the Liard to Fort Nelson, B.C., on the Alaska Highway. The industrial boom was felt in the eastern Arctic when the Rankin Inlet nickel mine opened in 1955.

Out of this ferment, the movement to divide the Territories became urgent in 1959. It had no native input at all. As Dean Carrothers later said : "The Eskimos had no appreciation of what the issue was about and the Indians simply wanted their treaties to be carried out. After that, they wanted to be left alone."

The division plan was simple. The Mackenzie District would become a separate territory with its capital at Fort Smith. The eastern Arctic would be called Nunassiat in recognition of its overwhelmingly Inuit population. No capital was suggested because there were no real towns as yet: the only two with any facilities were Rankin Inlet, a purely industrial community, and Frobisher Bay, an American military base.

Commissioner Gordon Robertson proposed that the boundary should be an extension of the border between Manitoba and Saskatchewan, extending in a straight line to the Arctic Ocean. The Mackenzie Delta, Victoria Island, Banks Island, and some of the Queen Elizabeth archipelago would be in the Mackenzie territory. Because all of this land was populated by Copper Inuit of the central Arctic or Inuvialuit from the Delta and Beaufort Sea, there was bound to be some confusion.\*

By 1961 the idea of division had been accepted by many southern politicians, and two bills were before Parliament. However, Gene Rhéaume, the Conservative MP for the NWT, found the indigenous population had no input, and when he took his misgivings to other members of the House of Commons, there was enough concern to force the shelving of the bills.

At that stage, in 1963, the Diefenbaker government was replaced by Lester Pearson's Liberals. Arthur Laing became the new northern affairs minister and Gordon Robertson became clerk of the Privy Council, while Ben Sivertz was named commissioner. Policy changes were under way which would be as important as those launched ten years earlier by St. Laurent.

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\*The idea of a division following the tree line in a northwest/southeast direction came later. It had the advantage of separating the Indians from the Inuit, but there were difficulties in running a boundary line through hunting areas claimed by both groups. Also, the Inuvialuit and Copper Inuit were not comfortable with the Baffin Island Inuit.

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The first step was to make the commissionership a full-time job, separate from the deputy ministership. Sivertz's office remained in Ottawa, and that made little difference for him because he had been working continuously in the North for a long time. The council had been altered again in 1960. Three of the appointed members came from outside the government and from outside Ottawa as well. By 1964 the only federal civil servant on council was the deputy commissioner, and even that changed in 1967.

The council held its fall meeting in Frobisher Bay in 1964, and one of the newcomers, Air Marshal Hugh Campbell, suggested that it was time to study the political future of the Territories and come up with a practical plan that would look after the needs of the aboriginals as well as the whites. Council passed a unanimous resolution requesting a full-scale inquiry into the political future of the NWT.

No one in the North had yet heard the name Fred Carrothers, but he was about to become a prime mover and shaker of everybody and everything.