Sanirajak

Qikiqtani Truth Commission

Community Histories ***1950–1975***

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the Inuit of the Qikiqtani Region. May our history never be forgotten and our voices be forever strong.

About This Report (2024 Edition)

This report was originally produced by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) from reports drafted by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) in 2010 and published by QIA in 2013. In 2024, QIA updated the reports by reinstating footnotes, correcting official place names, making minor corrections to grammar and syntax, correcting maps, and changing some images. The Inuktitut versions also added footnotes.

Foreword and Introduction texts from the 2013 edition are found at the end of the 2024 report to provide context about the work of the QTC.

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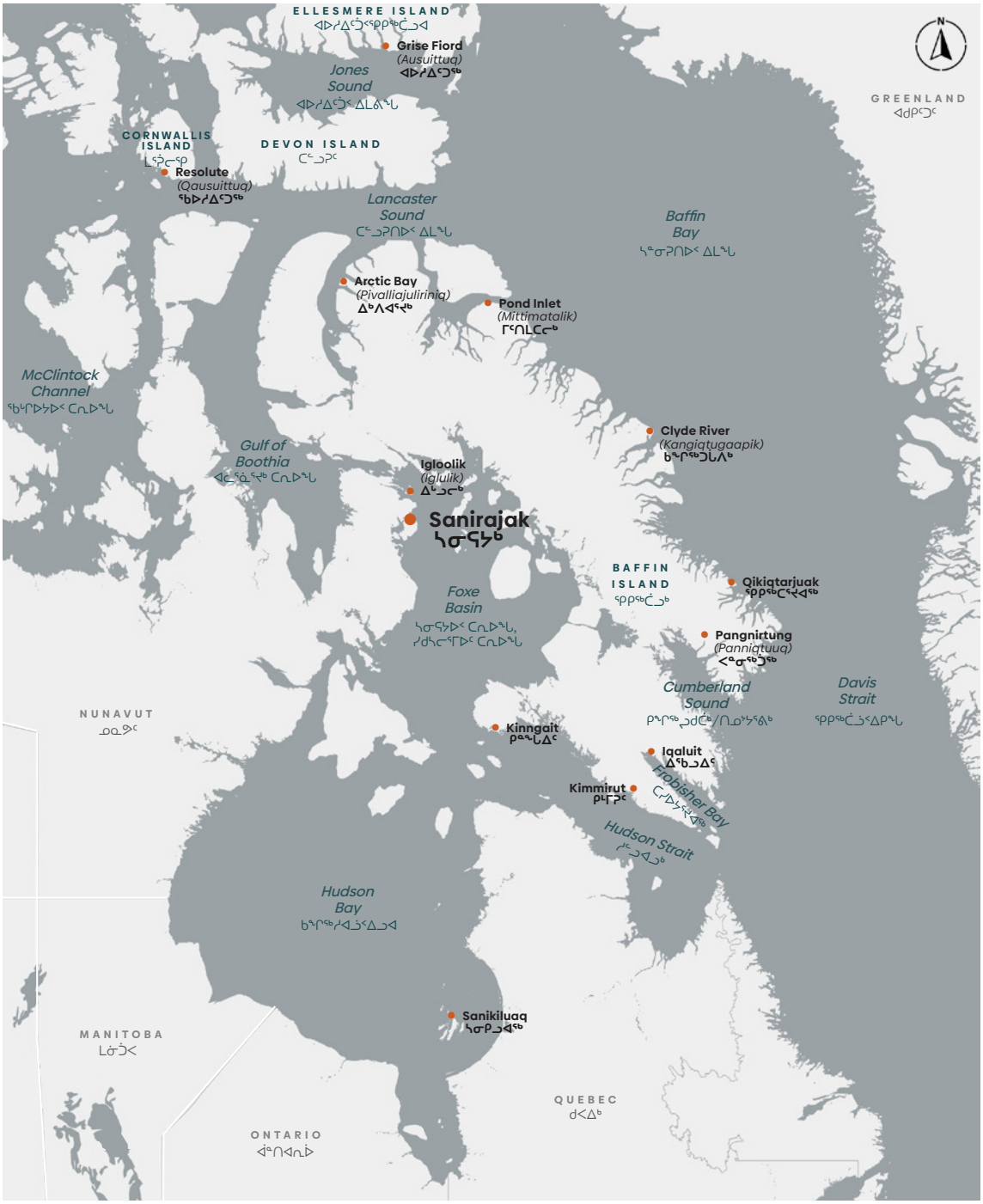

Introducing Sanirajak

The history of Sanirajak (formerly known as Hall Beach[i]) is a story of dramatic change in the lives of Inuit. The people in the area, which is centred on Foxe Basin, are known as Amitturmiut. For thousands of years, the region was home to numerous multi-family groups whose traditional territory had abundant marine mammals and other food resources. They lived in seasonal ilagiit nunagivaktangit,[ii] which allowed them to move to follow game. Towards the end of the 19th century, the lives and movements of Amitturmiut changed. They began to trade further north at Pond Inlet and south at Repulse Bay. In the 1930s, qallunaat (non-Inuit) established a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post and two Christian missions in the heart of the region on Igloolik Island. In 1955, the southern part of the region witnessed the building of a main Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line site 70 km south of Igloolik, at Sanirajak. In a short time, this transformed annual routines along that part of the coast.

By 1958, Inuit had gathered in two large new settlements near the DEW Line station. The federal government initially resisted providing services here to Inuit.[iii] The government reluctantly provided houses, a civilian nursing station, and a school in the settlement. By the time the school opened in 1967, the area's population was 237. This figure probably includes the combined population of the DEW Line station and the Sanirajak settlement.

Between 1950 and 1975, Sanirajak faced many hurdles in obtaining access to services that were a normal part of Canadian life, such as housing, economic opportunities, telecommunications, schools, and health care. The government generally viewed the settlement as a support unit for military and transportation installations, not as a community in the fullest sense of the word. In 1966, for instance, several years after stating that the site would hold no attraction for Inuit, the government entered into a debate about whether to move government offices to Sanirajak from other parts of the territory. The discussions likely delayed decision-making about other services even further.[1] The RCMP, for instance, only established a detachment in Sanirajak in 1987, despite repeated requests from the community for a police presence.

i This report uses current geographical place names, with Inuktitut place names added.

ii Missing footnote

iii This report uses the term "government" to include all the bodies that existed under Canadian federal legislation to serve and control people, mostly Inuit, in the Qikiqtani Region.

Taissumani Nunamiutautilluta

The Inuktut term *ilagiit nunagivaktangit* is a more accurate name for places called "camps" in the historical record created by ethnographers, bureaucrats and police. Ilagiit nunagivaktangit were places regularly used for hunting, harvesting and gathering. Inuit groups traditionally had several ilagiit nunagivaktangit, which allowed them to move to follow game.

ILAGIIT NUNAGIVAKTANGIT

Sanirajak sits on the shoreline of Melville Peninsula on a long, flat beach located on the western shore of Foxe Basin. The people of Foxe Basin, the Amitturmiut, are bound to the land, water, and ice of the region through seasonal migrations, kinship, and environmental understanding. Prior to centralization, Inuit in the region moved around the area, congregating at various points during the year. Into the 1970s, many Amitturmiut families still lived part of the year on the land, with the exception of those working full time. An RCMP game report from the 1970s describes this: "Many of the hunters who are not steadily employed move out to camps during the summer where the hunting and fishing is more favourable."[2]

It is difficult to separate the history of Sanirajak from the history of the island and community of Igloolik. The Amitturmiut territory is generally centred on the island of Igloolik and stretches around and across Foxe Basin as far south as Piling Bay. This territory also includes the southern and western shore of Foxe Basin to Cape Penryhn, across to the west coast of Melville Peninsula, and onto the main land shore of Baffin Island around Agu Bay on Prince Regent Inlet.

By water, the access points to Foxe Basin are Fury and Hecla Strait on the northwestern edge of the basin, and Foxe Channel on the southern edge of the basin. The importance of sea ice to the region's settlement and contact history is paramount. Two significant sea currents flow into Foxe Basin. This results in loose sea ice packing huge areas of the basin each year. Foxe Basin has both land-fast ice (ice that is "fastened" to the land) and drift ice (ice that floats in large chunks and is not attached to land). The land-fast ice extends from some shorelines as much as 10 km into the basin. The drift ice is characterized by its roughness and constant motion. New ice forms during October. By November, Foxe Basin is completely covered in ice. The ice starts melting in May or June, but it is not until August that the ice begins to rapidly disintegrate, with only small patches of loose ice remaining by September.[3]

The Amitturmiut followed a seasonal hunting cycle. In December and February, men hunted at ringed seal holes in thick sea ice. As the days became longer, hunting activity increased. Inuit moved onto the ice to hunt ringed seal and walrus; two large sea-ice villages were usually constructed, one near Igloolik Island and the other near Foster Bay. As spring arrived, the families moved to the shoreline, continued hunting ringed seal and walrus, and began travelling inland to hunt caribou.[4] In the summer months, July and August, the hunting of caribou inland intensified to find summer hides best suited for clothing. In September and October, the ice began to freeze over, and the days became shorter. People finished their preparations for winter and began moving into their winter dwellings.[5]

The Amitturmiut culture had adapted over centuries to the unique challenges of Foxe Basin. Their understanding of weather patterns, animal activities, and astronomy were integrated into everyday lives through stories, a rich cosmology, and spiritual beliefs. Interaction with nature was based on a great respect for and inherent understanding of the animals of the land and sea. Hubert Amarualik spoke eloquently of this to researchers in 1993:

> *A land could only be occupied for three years. No one can live on this land beyond the three years … That was the way they lived, always moving to another [place], never occupying one land beyond three winters. The land itself was prevented from "rotting" by this. Should one choose to occupy the land beyond three years, then they are bound to face peril, which might include death, therefore they had to follow this rule.*[6]

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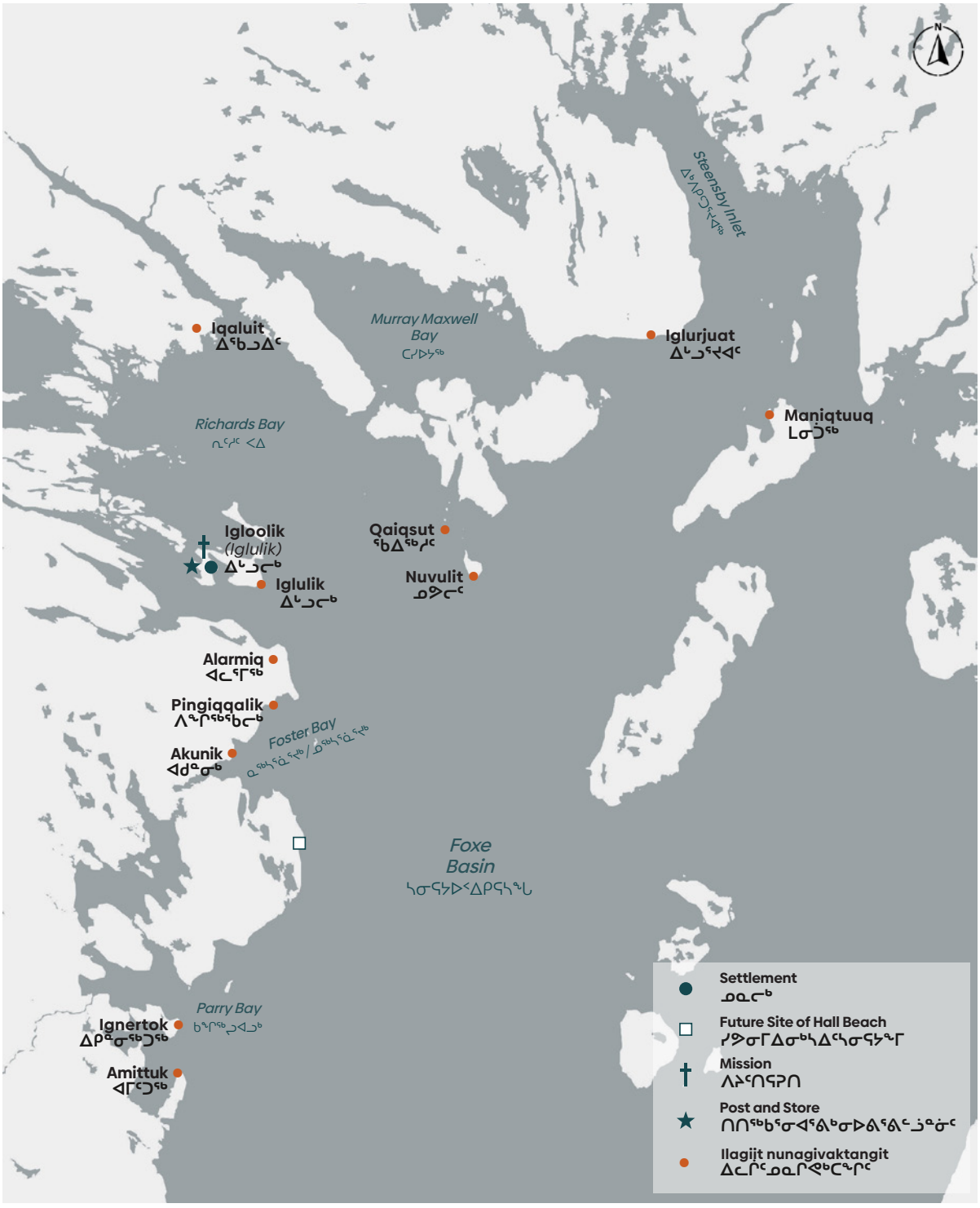

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This knowledge led Amitturmiut to move their winter ilagiit nunagivaktangit from time to time, to give the land time to recuperate. The main places within the region were named Usuarjuk, Alarniq, Igloolik, Iqaluit (also named, like the capital of Nunavut, for being a place of many fish), Qaiqsut, Iglurjuat, and Maniqtuuq. Iqaluit is located in the northwest of Foxe Basin.

EARLY CONTACTS

The first documented visit by Europeans to Foxe Basin was in 1822–23, when English captains Parry and Lyon sailed their Royal Navy vessels HMS Fury and HMS Hecla into the basin. Later, in 1867 and then in 1868, American explorer Charles Hall travelled to the area to investigate the fate of the missing Third Franklin Expedition.[7] Both times, Hall travelled by dogsled north through Repulse Bay along the coastline. Most other early visitors to the area reached northern Foxe Basin overland through Arctic Bay or Pond Inlet because the water route to the area was often dangerous, and at times impassable, due to thick pack ice. An early Canadian qallunaat encounter occurred in 1913 when Alfred Tremblay, a member of Captain Joseph Bernier's expedition, travelled to northern Foxe Basin by dog team during a survey of the economic mineral potential of the Baffin Region.[8] While these explorers demonstrate early points of contact between Inuit and qallunaat, the events also hold as memorable encounters integrated in Amitturmiut stories and histories.[9]

Unlike most Inuit in the Baffin Region, Amitturmiut had to travel great distances to have direct contact with the whaling ships working in the Eastern Arctic from 1820 until the early twentieth century. Despite this, trade goods and hunting implements introduced by whalers were obtained by the Amitturmiut through trade with the Tununirmiut of northern Baffin Island and the Aivilingmiut at Repulse Bay.

The next significant contact came about during the scientific explorations of the 1920s. In 1922, the Fifth Thule Expedition, a party of Danish and Greenlandic scientists, ethnographers, and a mineralogist, led by Knud Rasmussen, entered Foxe Basin from Repulse Bay. The expedition stayed in the region until 1923, collecting information on settlement patterns and seasonal activities.[10] The seventh volume of the series, titled Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos, included a printed set of Inuit stories, poems, and customs recorded for the first time.[11] Rasmussen's understanding of Inuit life provided a particularly sympathetic and richly nuanced interpretation of Inuit culture. The works of Mathiassen on material culture and Rasmussen on the intellectual culture of the Iglulingmiut are standard references for ethnographers interested in the life of Amitturmiut and Iglulingmiut before sustained contact with traders and missionaries.[12]

CHANGING PATTERNS OF LIFE

The arrival of the whalers and the widespread use of firearms in northern Foxe Basin during the first half of the twentieth century changed the hunting, settlement, and mobility patterns of the Amitturmiut. Firearms were acquired by Amitturmiut from whalers in the 1860s. Initially, the firearms were used as specialized tools for hunting particular species under specific conditions. For example, during the winter caribou hunt, when the white background and crunchy snow made stalking prey more difficult, firearms proved most useful. Until the 1930s, at least, the hunting of ringed seals and walrus involved both harpoons and firearms. The scarcity and high cost of ammunition made firearms less appealing, though.[13]

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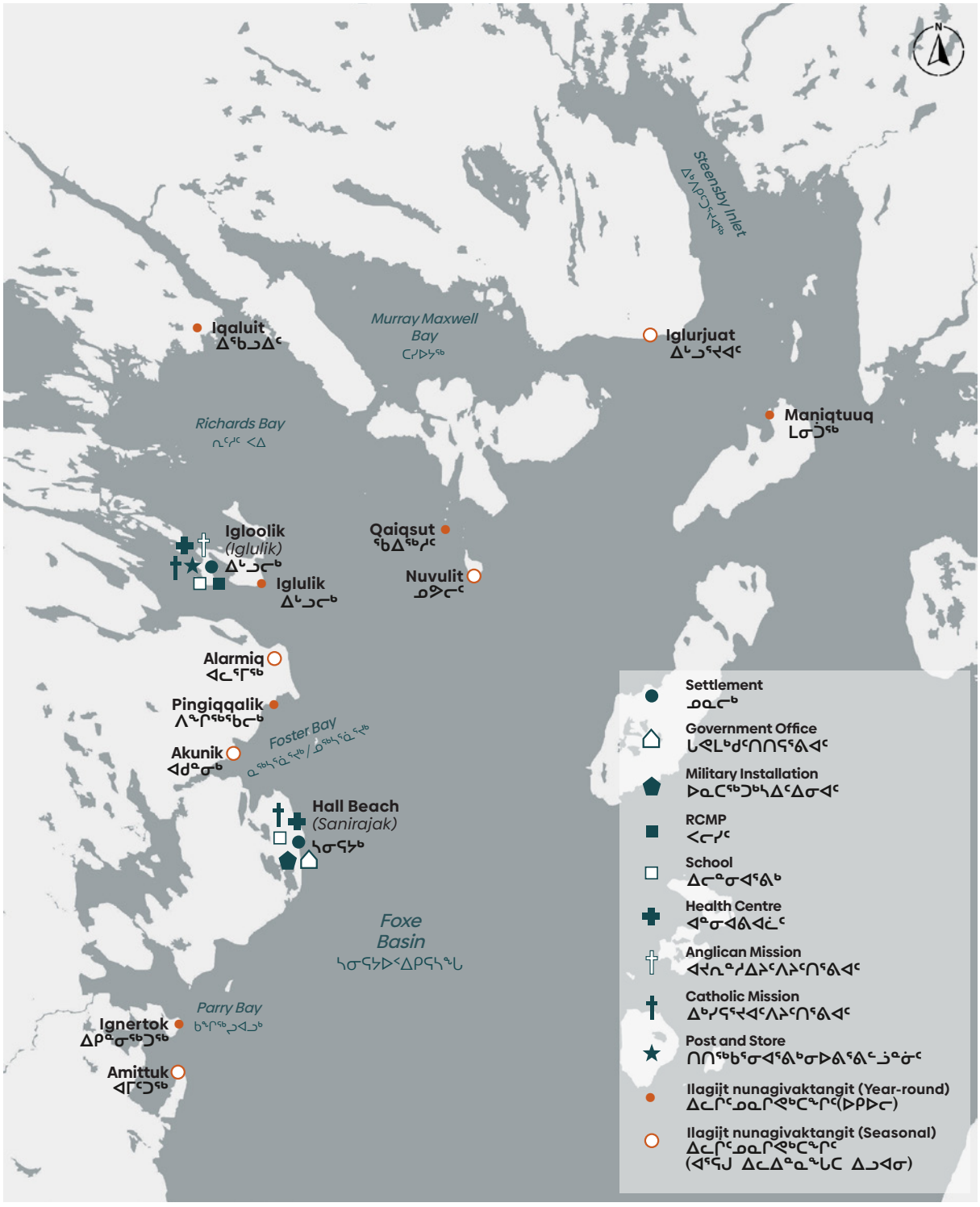
Fox Basin Ilagiit Nunagaivaktangit and Services, 1970



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Again, due to limited contact with whalers, Amitturmiut acquired whaleboats much later than Inuit in other regions, especially Repulse Bay. Amitturmiut used skin boats instead. Inuit explain:

> *People here did get wood to frame their boats. They would use it to tow a walrus, and they made it so that it could carry a number of people. They used skins to cover the frames. They used bearded seal skins for covering and walrus hide when it was torn. That is how it was when they began to use boats.*[14]

The introduction of sturdier wooden whaleboats had a significant impact on Amitturmiut. The whaleboat "was a great convenience to [them] compared with the skin boats, right to the time when it got flexible because of long use. It was able to haul in two walrus carcasses … Because [they] needed a lot of meat to survive, boats were important in the walrus-hunt."[15] The whaleboats eventually led to the abandonment of qajait (kayaks), as the whaleboats were more stable and allowed for greater visibility when hunting and travelling. They also could carry more hunters and heavier loads. The whaleboats increased both the hunting capacity and mobility of Amitturmiut.

In 1919, the HBC opened a post at Repulse Bay, and in 1921, another at Pond Inlet. The establishment of these permanent trading posts reinforced existing patterns of trade and travel that were providing the Amitturmiut with manufactured goods during the last decades of the whaling era. Inuit wanting to acquire boats, guns, ammunition, foodstuffs, or other staples were required to incorporate trapping into their traditional seasonal harvesting cycle and to visit the posts.[16]

The 1920s were important years in the history of Amitturmiut. The introduction of new hunting and transportation technologies and the rise of fur trading affected seasonal patterns. People cached more food from the summer walrus hunt and were able to live off these caches well into the winter. Anthropologist David Damas states that with the introduction of the whaleboat and firearms, the region went through the "stage of their greatest economic wellbeing from the stand point of meat production."[17] The rich resources of Foxe Basin attracted people from Pond Inlet and Repulse Bay during the 1920s and 1930s. Some estimates indicate that the population of Foxe Basin doubled during this period.[18]

During the 1920s, Amitturmiut also encountered the RCMP. The force had established itself on Baffin Island in the early 1920s at Pond Inlet and Pangnirtung. The first recorded patrol to Foxe Basin came in 1923 when the police arrived to retrieve witnesses for the Robert Janes murder trial held in Pond Inlet.[19] After this, RCMP attempted to patrol the Foxe Basin region annually, thereby maintaining intermittent contact with Amitturmiut.[20]

Western religion arrived in the Foxe Basin in the early 1920s through Umik, an Inuk from Pond Inlet. He came to northern Foxe Basin preaching a blend of Anglicanism and Inuit spirituality.[21] A Roman Catholic mission was built in 1931 at Avajuk, a site northeast of Igloolik Island. In 1937, the church sent the ship the St. Thérèse to Igloolik Island, carrying the building materials for a new mission station, which also became the first permanent qallunaat settlement in northern Foxe Basin.[22] Overall, the establishment of a mission on Igloolik Island had little impact on the hunting and migration patterns of Amitturmiut, although some disabled and Elders chose to stay near the mission.[23] Over time, however, many Christian ideas were absorbed into Inuit culture, with shamanism continuing in parallel. With the overlay of Canadian law on top of Christian ideas, many Inuit practices related to marriage and kinship, including spouse exchange, disappeared.[24] Additionally, the rivalry between Roman Catholic and Anglican leaders created social divisions.[25]

The HBC opened its first trading post in Foxe Basin at Igloolik in 1939. The store closed in 1943 because it could not be resupplied for two years, but then reopened in 1947. The establishment of a store in the region meant that people could visit the post more often, no longer having to make the long sled patrols to either Pond Inlet or Repulse Bay.

The period when fur traders were most active in the area, from the 1930s to 1950s, was a period of growing acculturation with little direct

government involvement. Inuit continued to hunt, but the introduction of new technologies affected traditional patterns of mobility and harvesting. The government relied on traders and missionaries to address the welfare of Inuit, while providing minimal interference in the direction of Inuit lives. Not until the establishment of DEW Line sites in Foxe Basin in the 1950s, would the government begin to play a more sustained role in the region.

Sangussaqtauliqtilluta, 1955–1960

The term "Sangussaqtauliqtilluta" means "the time when we started to be actively persuaded, or made to, detour or switch modes." Combinations of both externally driven and local pressures detached individuals, families and kin groups from life on the land and moved them towards government-directed settlements.

Image is grainy

Sanirajak, [1960]. Cluster of radio towers, two radio dishes, buildings, and a radar dome.
Credit: *Northwest Territories Archives, Douglas Wilkinson Fonds.*

The DEW Line was a joint Canada-US project. It consisted of a series of radar sites across Alaska, Canada, and Greenland to provide advance warning of an incoming air attack launched by the Soviet Union over the polar region. At the time, it was considered the largest construction project ever attempted anywhere.

The United States was responsible for the construction and operation of the DEW Line. Canada played a support role in the selection of sites and was responsible for operating them. Three types of sites were erected: main, auxiliary, and intermediate. They were set approximately 80 km apart. Intermediate sites quickly became obsolete and closed in 1963.

Sanirajak was selected as the location of a main site (known as Fox-Main or Fox-M) due to its favourable geographical location. It had flat terrain close to fresh water. A stated drawback to developing Sanirajak was the influence a station might have on the local population. Canadian officials worried that a sudden influx of a large number of qallunaat might be disastrous to the health of local Inuit, as well as to their economy and social organization. Amitturmiut were perhaps in the greatest danger, according to a letter prepared by staff and signed off on by Deputy Minister Gordon Robertson. "These sites will undoubtedly interfere considerably with the Eskimos and with game resources … The site which is likely to have the most serious effects is the main station at Hall Lake." However, since no other locations in the area met military objectives, no further objections were raised to the selection of Hall Lake for development.[26]

Construction of Fox-Main began in the spring of 1955. Approximately three hundred people and thousands of tons of supplies and equipment were flown to Sanirajak.[27] The amount of material needed to construct the sites and provide ongoing service at the sites was staggering. Ground was levelled for a 1,500-metre airstrip. Towers, radar domes, warehouses, hangars, garages, maintenance shops, a tank farm, housing, a recreation centre, and a dining hall were constructed using new materials and designs created by the most prominent architectural firms in the United States. Even from southern perspectives, the DEW Line stations were seen as futuristic, fantastic, and even excessive.

David Kanatsiak remembers when the people first came to build the DEW Line:

> *Hall Beach had no people then, the settlement was not formed yet. My grandfather and I were traveling by dog team, going to Igloolik and that time we saw only one tent. Sometime around May we moved here and there were a whole bunch of tents. They had made an airstrip on the sea ice in that little bay behind the site. Sometime in May or June, they started making an airstrip on the land. The planes started coming non-stop, day and night. The places were bringing supplies for the site. Whenever we passed through or visited we noticed the growth every time and the big dome was built using a helicopter and the modules were built, but they really started to grow after all the ships brought in the supplies. They built the modules first, then after the sealift they built the radar system. One time, there were 16 ships in front of Hall Beach, bringing in supplies.*[28]

The project's massive scale did not lead to a high rate of Inuit employment. Government policy strongly encouraged contractors to use single Inuit from outside regions.[29] In Foxe Basin, contractors and base personnel were forbidden to have contact with Inuit. Documents refer to the risk of disease, but officials also had legitimate concerns about contractors and military men having sexual relations with Inuit women.[30] The section of the Canada-US agreement relating to contact with Inuit read:

> *All contact with Eskimos, other than those whose employment on any aspect of the project is approved, is to be avoided except in cases of emergency. If, in the opinion of [AANDC], more specific provision in this connection is necessary in any particular area, the Department may, after consultation with the United States, prescribe geographical limits surrounding a station beyond which personnel associated with the project other than those locally engaged, may not go or may prohibit the entry of such personnel into any defined area.*[31]

Some officials also expressed concern that local Inuit employed on a DEW Line site might attract friends and families—loiterers was the common phrase—to the area. R. D. Van Norman, an RCMP constable then working for the AANDC, explained that few Inuit wanted employment:

> *They are happy and well fed now, game is plentiful and so forth. They live a completely good native life, not without its discomforts, but at least without the many problems which association will bring. It will come in a few years, but I feel that we should just wait a little for these people. Discourage them from visiting the sites and forbid the white from having any contact with them.*[32]

Nevertheless, some local Inuit were happy to find temporary work at Fox Main and to use the station as a potential source of revenue for their products. Joe Piallaq told Commissioner Igloliorte about working at the DEW Line site, "We were mostly working on the barrels; putting fuels into their tents, as they did not have any houses back then ... If there was a plane coming in, we would put everything on the plane and get everything ready for the place. We did mostly labour work. We did not work very long."[33] The money earned by Piallaq went towards purchasing a new tent and motor. Other Inuit sold carvings and furs to base personnel or others passing through Fox-Main.

Through employment, sales, and health care services provided by DEW Line personnel, more Inuit from Foxe Basin came into close contact with qallunaat. A publication produced by one of the contracting companies had a very optimistic view of the impact of the DEW Line on Inuit:

> *Those who worked on it learned a good deal, both by observation and through the help of sympathetic white men. They began to learn a bit of the language and they absorbed something of the life of the white man through being with him and watching his movies, or leafing through his magazines. Sometimes they could adapt what they learned to improve homes or way of life. Sometimes they undoubtedly felt a moral superiority. At other times they were still puzzled. There were other influences of the DEW Line. Some came to know that with the growing network of northern airfields, medical help could come more easily in an emergency. They were more in touch with the rest of Canada. They came to know new kinds of food and clothing—a different kind of living for themselves and their families. But above all, the DEW Line, like the other industries of the Arctic, has broadened the Eskimo's horizon.*[34]

The introduction of health services into the region, and the final location chosen for the settlement, was a direct result of the DEW Line. Originally, a nursing station was set up to provide health services to DEW Line employees, and, for two years, the site provided medical treatment to Amitturmiut too.[35] With access to a fully equipped military airfield, the nursing station at Fox-Main became an important point of evacuation for Inuit from all over Foxe Basin travelling to and from the site. An Indian and Northern Health Service (INHS) centre was constructed in 1957 or 1958 but burned down before it ever opened.[36] By 1959, the health centre had been rebuilt about 5 km from the radar station.[37] This location would eventually become the hamlet of Sanirajak.

One of the most significant impacts of the DEW Line on the material conditions of Amitturmiut came from the volume of material shipped to the site. Excess goods, food, fuel, wood, clothing, building materials, and crating thrown out by the base were retrieved by resourceful Amitturmiut. People hauled materials to distant ilagiit nunagivaktangit, including Igloolik, to construct shelters. Discarded food, or food left purposely for Inuit by kitchen staff, was consumed by people and qimmiit,[iv] depending on its quality. John Alorot remembered, "The DEW Line used to throw lots of stuff that was still usable. Even frozen food that never been thawed out. They were really helpful to us. Eskimos were eating most everything. A lot of it was used for dog meat."[38] When Commissioner Igloliorte asked Joe Piallaq about this apparent wastefulness, he replied, "Yes, they threw out quite a few things, like lumber. They threw out very useful stuff like some tarps and stuff like that. Maybe they had expiry dates and this is why they threw it out. The things they threw out were better than they are today."[39]

Inuit foraging at the base dump became a concern for administrators. Amitturmiut, anxious to take advantage of useful materials, saw no harm in allowing qimmiit to forage through the dump, just as qimmiit foraged along the shoreline at low tide in the summer. As early as 1957, base personnel complained to the RCMP about loose qimmiit at the dump. As had happened at military stations across the Eastern Arctic, foraging loose qimmiit were killed. Julia Amaroalik told Commissioner Igloliorte that when she and her husband were being treated at the Sanirajak nursing station, their qimmiit got loose and went to the DEW Line site searching for food. There, they were shot and killed.[40]

The construction of Fox-Main certainly had an impact on the mobility patterns of Inuit in Foxe Basin. A 1957 RCMP patrol to the Foster Bay region

iv Qimmiit means Inuit sled dogs (singular qimmiq).

discovered that two ilagiit nunagivaktangit had been established short distances from the DEW Line site. Noksanardjuk, located about 25 km away, had a population of thirty-five, while two families occupied Kemiktorvik just 10 km away. They found food, building materials, and useful discarded goods at the dump. One RCMP officer on patrol described the residents as "bums and useless,"[41] when others might have been more likely to describe them as "resourceful." In response, all discarded food (but not scrap wood or other building materials) was burned.[42] This strategy failed, however, to break up the ilagiit nunagivaktangat in the vicinity.

The state of affairs in one ilagiit nunagivaktangat in 1957 provides insight into the minds of government agents during this important period of contact, while Amitturmiut understand the events very differently. Government agents reported:

> *The roof of this dwelling was made from a large tarpaulin which had been found at the dump at Site 30, in fact almost everything in the camp had been brought over from the dump at Site 30. An old oil stove was set up in the shack for burning wood and a two burner gas stove was burning anti-freeze. No Seal oil lamps were evident nor was any seal meat or walrus meat to be seen. Two young boys were wearing old "Oxford" type leather shoes. On the second nite [sic] of the patrol's stay at this camp a group of men returned from a trip to the floe edge … with two seals which they had killed. These two seals caused a great deal of excitement. An old woman said she was glad to eat some seal meat again because it was a long time since she had eaten any. It appeared these natives had taken the easier way and were making their living by scrounging off the dump at Site 30. No need of hunting when there was food to be had without effort. In 1956, the writer had visited this same camp, there was walrus meat in the porches, last winter there was nothing but empty boxes.*[43]

Abraham Kaunak explained to researcher Maxime Bégin, however, that the DEW Line came at a time when changes in the ice in Foxe Basin had greatly affected hunting. Terry Irqittuq remembered, "That year, that time there was no open water because the wind coming from the south. That really affected our hunting. We could see no seals or walruses. And that year, I think that a lot of the campers were going hungry because they had rain and it was freezing up the land … [And there were few animals]."[44] Furthermore, it has been argued that the resource depletion in Foxe Basin was a direct result of the increased qallunaat activity in the region. A large walrus herd that had resided in the Foster Bay region moved to areas that were more isolated as a direct result of the increased motor traffic around Sanirajak.[45] With a large part of the area's natural resources scared away, the dump provided residents with an alternate form of nutrition.

The DEW Line also introduced a more permanent government presence in the area. This initially came in the form of Northern Service Officers (NSOs). Mandated to improve the economy of the area and to ensure the welfare of Inuit, the NSOs exercised a great deal of power locally. A NSO from the Central Arctic, for instance, dictated which employees from that area would be sent to Sanirajak. In a letter written

by Chief of the Arctic Division R. A. J. Philips to Bishop of the Arctic Donald Marsh, Philips complained about the autocratic attitude of the NSO Jameson Bond:

> *This attitude with regard to the Eskimo has quickly crystallized itself into a feeling that the NSO's word is law. With regard to employment, for instance, Eskimos have told me that "Mr. Bond say I to go to so-and-so." Sometimes it has been obvious that the man did not want to go—for perfectly good reason, but when I've told them that is up to them to decide they just shrug their shoulders and say "It's up to Etemak (Mr. Bond)." I have tackled Mr. Bond once or twice on some of these points but he is adamant. The man is needed, therefore he MUST go. I do not like this ordering about of Eskimos. Many have been sent over to Foxe.*[46]

This permanent government presence prominently featured a definite, but not new, hierarchy of power. The relationship between Inuit and administrators, in Sanirajak and elsewhere, would be governed by this relationship throughout the following years.

Nunalinnguqti-tauliqtilluta, 1960–1975

The term "Nunalinnguqtitauliqtilluta" means "the time when we were actively (by outside force) formed into communities." Nunalinnguqtitauliqtilluta conforms to the period when the population the Qikiqtani Region was overwhelmingly concentrated in 13 communities where people worked with little or no continuous time living on the land.

AGENDAS AND PROMISES

In 1959, the federal government moved quickly towards a policy of modernization and centralization. The policy shift occurred when the Canadian government took over the operation of the DEW Line from the Americans. Prior to 1960, almost all year-round DEW Line labour had come from southern Canada, the United States, or the western Arctic. After 1960, several people from Southampton Island and Repulse Bay moved to the area to work for the DEW Line.[47]

The development of Sanirajak as a civilian community in the first half of the 1960s did not follow a straight trajectory, but the nursing station started it. Two Amitturmiut were employed there in 1961. With a third Inuk employee, they established a small ilagiit nunagivaktangat near the nursing station.[48] The provision of health services at the site encouraged others to move to the settlement. In 1961, a large family group from Kapuivik moved to Sanirajak because of sickness in the family. Afterwards, the head of the family found employment with the AANDC.

The government struggled over the decision to promote the development of Sanirajak, despite the fact that it had become an Arctic transportation hub.[49] Sanirajak was never intended to be a site of significant development in the region.[50] Instead, Igloolik, 70 km to the north, was slated for development. Sanirajak, in the words of C. M. Bolger, Acting Chief of the Arctic Division, would only develop if "the community is deliberately (and artificially) developed by the Federal Government."[51]

Due to the nursing station and the well-equipped airfield, Sanirajak became an important stopover point for Inuit travelling to and from southern medical and educational facilities. As early as 1959, the government recognized the need for facilities to temporarily house and care for Inuit moving through Sanirajak either on their way home, or on their way to southern facilities.[52] By 1963, approximately seventy Inuit were staying at Sanirajak

and 150 qallunaat employees were living at the radar site, with 150 additional personnel in the summer.[53] The previous year four Inuit died from trichinosis and another six people from a measles epidemic in the area.[54] Further evidence of the disjointed government development of Sanirajak was the delivery of a school hostel to the community in 1963–64, even though there was no school.[55]

One of the greatest booms to development of Sanirajak occurred with the large influx of housing. Various federal government schemes for housing in the north failed, but the Eskimo Housing Program, which was introduced in 1964, ambitiously aimed to send 1,600 homes to the Arctic. By 1966, the community had 14 three-bedroom and 11 smaller houses. The provision of housing prompted the move of people from the Napakoot (an ilagiit nunagivaktangat) to Sanirajak.[56] By the end of 1967, the settlement had 16 three-bedroom homes and 11 smaller ones. Its population jumped dramatically in two years, from 142 in 1965 to 237 in 1967.[57] By the end of 1968, all ilagiit nunagivaktangit south of Foster Bay were abandoned, even as far away as Usuarjuk, 160 km south of Sanirajak.[58] In spite of the number of houses, however, housing conditions still proved inadequate for the population.

By 1966, an Anglican church had been constructed at Sanirajak, and the next year saw the establishment of a federal day school and an HBC post.[59]

Governor General Vincent Massey and Father Pierre Lessard chat with Isaacke Sapkajuk at Hall Lake, Northwest Territories, [1978 or 1979].
Credit: *Gar Lunney / National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque / Library and Archives Canada / e002265653.*

By March 1968, more than sixty buildings were to be found along a kilometre of beachfront. The first government administrator was assigned to Sanirajak in April of 1968.[60]

This rapid in-gathering of people from the land occurred for a variety of reasons. In an important research project in Foxe Basin in 1968–69, cultural geographer Jennifer Vestey analyzed the reasons for migration into the settlement. She concluded that groups with weaker kinship connections to other Foxe Basin families came to Sanirajak to take advantage of government housing and other services. The "core" groups, with longstanding and close kinship ties to each other, migrated to Sanirajak later. Vestey further postulates that the core groups had longer ties in the region and were often the groups in authority who controlled the capital equipment.

Several factors influenced later arrivals to Sanirajak. Some ilagiit nunagivaktangit had been reduced in size by the departure of children for schooling or because individuals required medical services in the settlement. Another major challenge was the rising costs of living. By the mid-1960s, snowmobiles and qimmiit were used together, in both ilagiit nunagivaktangit and in settlements. As people began to rely on motorized transportation, they struggled to afford the associated costs, especially those still on the land without wage employment. The cost of gasoline to visit the settlement for trade, to bring children into school, or to see the nurse used a significant portion of the small income families received through social transfers and trapping proceeds. In turn, as the cost of living increased, the transition to settlement living accelerated.

It was in this time of rapid transition that one of the community's most painful events occurred. When the town site began expanding in the late 1960s, the area previously designated as the cemetery had to be used for houses. Four men, Mossessie Ulluapak, Moses Allianaq, Isaac Namalik, and Simeonie Kaernerk, were told to move the graves. Kaernerk spoke to Commissioner Igloliorte about the grave relocations:

> *It was kind of difficult and hard to dig out bodies because we never thought of doing that. Different things come into your mind when you start digging*

> *graves. Some parts of the bodies were frozen, especially the Elders. They were stuck to the ground, even though they were inside wooden boxes. The children were not put into boxes; they were wrapped up in material. Some were covered in papers. They had decomposed. There were skeletons. This is how we took them out. We were careful not to disturb the body [sic].*[61]

Eunice, Allianaq's wife, told the Commissioner that her husband was made to help with the relocation of the graves. His sister was buried there. Allianaq used to come home "saturated with the smell of the dead bodies, even his mitts were saturated with the smell."[62]

SHAPING COMMUNITY LIFE

The people who settled in Sanirajak in the 1960s faced enormous challenges in a period of rapid change. They moved from an independent life on the land into a settlement organized according to the expectations of the government. In Sanirajak, Inuit families found themselves living next to strangers for the first time in their lives. In 1970, one-third of Sanirajak's Inuit were from areas outside of Foxe Basin.[63] Without access to a dog team or financial means to maintain a snowmobile, they were confined to an area not much larger than a summer ilagiit nunagivaktangat.

During QTC testimonies, some men spoke about the difficulties they faced in moving to the settlement. Some hunters expressed a feeling of "loss of identity and pride."[64] They saw advantages to settlement life, but they found fewer opportunities to hunt due to both a lack of time and a lack of the transportation required to travel the long distances from Sanirajak to hunting grounds.

Within the settlement, a small but powerful qallunaat population, consisting largely of young officials and police officers from the south, provided a limited set of services (nursing station, school, federal government representation, and RCMP), while enforcing a long list of ever-changing and poorly communicated rules. Qallunaat controlled many economic exchanges and inserted themselves into almost all aspects of life that were previously the exclusive domain of families. On top of this, the prospects for employment remained limited for the entire period.

From the outset, Inuit were expected to follow qallunaat rules about qimmiit. An amendment to the Ordinance Respecting Dogs in 1955 extended rules to DEW Line stations, including Fox-Main. Several people told the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) and QTC that they were aware that qimmiit were not to go to the DEW Line site, but qimmiit went there on their own foraging for food and were killed, a pattern familiar at other DEW Line sites.[65]

Other qimmiit were killed in the settlement itself. People who moved to Sanirajak to find work or for schooling of children found it difficult to maintain qimmiit. Moses Allianaq testified that this was the problem that he faced when Celestino Uttuigak, working on behalf of the government, shot all eight of Allianaq's qimmiit one summer. The loss of qimmiit added to the difficulty of feeding families, especially when supplies at the store could not meet nutritional needs. In stark terms, Inuit lived in the centre of a plentiful, nutritious food supply, but with no means to access it. Orders to kill the qimmiit, according to Jake Ikeperiar, often came from the area administrator.[66]

Employment was another problem experienced by the people of Sanirajak. Documents reveal that into the 1970s, there were very few employment opportunities for Inuit, including individuals transferred to the community for recovery at the transient centre. The housing construction boom had passed and the DEW Line was curtailing its operation in Foxe Basin by the end of the 1960s. In 1968, only eight Inuit were employed at the DEW Line site; the number was cut by half in 1969.[67] The co-op in Sanirajak was operational in 1973. Attempts to develop a carving industry do not seem to have flourished. Later a fishery was begun in nearby Hall Lake, but it only employed a few Inuit as fisherman, glazers, and packers.[68]

The loss of opportunities to hunt, the social divisions in the community, and low employment prospects were likely contributing factors to the rising levels of alcohol abuse that were reported in Sanirajak

in the 1970s. Reports of Inuit drinking with base employees at the DEW Line station in the 1950s appear in archival records, but they rarely warrant more than a simple comment. In 1967, however, the RCMP noted its concern about the amount of liquor consumed by Inuit, especially at the transient centre. The situation is described as "deteriorating at an alarming rate." Whereas Elders often managed similar problems in Igloolik, the RCMP believed that "outsiders" over whom the Elders had little influence, exacerbated the problems at Sanirajak.[69] The "outsiders" were likely qallunaat and Inuit from other places. On a daily basis, the RCMP did little to control alcohol because there was no detachment in the settlement. The community responded over time in the only way it could, through a ban. On May 20, 1977, it became illegal to transport, purchase, sell, or possess any alcohol within a 20-kilometre radius of the community, except on the DEW Line base. Anyone was allowed to drink at the base.[70]

The community's actions demonstrated not only a concern for the health of the community, but also an attempt to strengthen local control over the settlement. Indeed, the community welcomed the opportunity to direct Sanirajak's development. In a 1973 local election, 82% of eligible voters cast a ballot.[71] However, the community's struggles with governance were not yet over. In 1975, the Settlement Council tried to operate without a manager, intending to take on the responsibilities themselves. By March 1976, the settlement manager's duties proved too difficult for people with no training in administration, as members of the Council told the visiting Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.[72] Sanirajak residents spoke at length about their desires for the development of Sanirajak. Economic development was needed, as well as recreation facilities and improved housing. They explained that they welcomed the implements of modern society and requested fuller access to them. They also asked that an RCMP detachment be established in the community, and that they receive telephone and public radio services.[73] The community was equipped with electricity soon thereafter, with local telephone service in 1976, and with an RCMP detachment in 1987.

Conclusion

While Amitturmiut inhabited the Melville Peninsula for centuries, it was the creation of a main DEW Line station (Fox-Main) in 1955–57 that set the location and tone of the Sanirajak settlement. While the DEW Line made Sanirajak the most accessible place in Foxe Basin by air and provided good employment to a small number of Inuit residents, few commercial development opportunities emerged in the community. Since its establishment, the Sanirajak residents have been particularly vulnerable to external economic conditions. Hunting has therefore continued to be vitally important to the region, before and since establishment of the community. Hunting not only contributes to the food security of all community members but also reaffirms Inuit culture as being intricately connected to the land.

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Foreword (2013)

As President of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, I am pleased to present the long-awaited set of reports of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission.

The *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Community Histories 1950–1975* and *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies* represent the Inuit experience during this colonial period, as told by Inuit. These reports offer a deeper understanding of the motivations driving government decisions and the effects of those decisions on the lives of Inuit, effects which are still felt today.

This period of recent history is very much alive to Qikiqtaalungmiut, and through testifying at the Commission, Inuit spoke of our experience of that time. These reports and supporting documents are for us. This work builds upon the oral history and foundation Inuit come from as told by Inuit, for Inuit, to Inuit.

On a personal level this is for the grandmother I never knew, because she died in a sanatorium in Hamilton; this is for my grandchildren, so that they can understand what our family has experienced; and it is also for the young people of Canada, so that they will also understand our story.

As it is in my family, so it is with many others in our region.

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission is a legacy project for the people of our region and QIA is proud to have been the steward of this work.

Aingai,

E7-1865

J. Okalik Eegeesiak, President, Qikiqtani Inuit Association

Introduction to the Work of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission

This work began with the breaking of a long silence. In the 1990s, Inuit made great strides in taking charge of their own affairs through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the creation of Nunavut. They were then ready to examine the past, including the harm done during the period of greatest change, from 1950 to 1975. They wanted to understand more about their own lives and those lived by their parents, grandparents, and siblings in an era that was profoundly marked by game laws, residential schools, medical evacuations, substantial population movements, and broken promises about housing and jobs. One especially sensitive source of anguish and disturbing memories was the government's campaign to eliminate qimmiit (Inuit sled dogs) from the settlements. Qimmiit were often shot without warning by the RCMP and others, leaving many people without any means of winter transportation. In a culture where qimmiit were vital to hunting and travel, and valued as companions, this campaign struck very close to the well-being of every Inuit family. The history is still a painful wound for many Inuit in the Qikiqtani Region.

For a long time, many Inuit grieved in silence. Others spoke out in anger, aware that their experiences seemed to follow a pattern that was hard to decipher, but was important for understanding the problems in communities today. These feelings led the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) to interview Elders in 2004 about various issues related to moving into settlements. In 2007, the QIA created the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC), a forum where Inuit could speak openly about difficult events in the decades after the Second World War and understand more about how communities took shape and the true costs of the changes. The QTC's investigation had two closely related activities. The first was to gather testimonies about events between 1950 and 1975 from Inuit who had lived through this difficult period, as well as from their children who continue to remember the suffering of their parents and other relatives. Commissioner Igloliorte and QTC staff travelled to all thirteen communities in the Qikiqtani Region between January 2008 and May 2009, and invited all interested residents to share their memories and feelings about how their lives had changed. They also held hearings for the Inuit community in Ottawa, and paid return visits to all communities in early 2010 to report on findings and ask for comments on proposed recommendations. Including interviews that the QIA had already conducted in 2004, the QTC had testimonies from approximately 350 individuals. Hearings were conducted with more flexibility than normal legal proceedings, but to emphasize the seriousness of the task, Commissioner Igloliorte asked all witnesses to affirm that they would tell the truth to the best of their knowledge. He also respected the decision made by a few individuals to keep their experiences private.

In addition to learning about events and impacts through testimonies, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission also completed an extensive archival research program and interviewed Qallunaat who worked in the region during this period. Among the people interviewed were several retired RCMP officers, government officials, and academic researchers.

The Evidence

THE WITNESSES

The QTC is indebted to the many men and women who attended meetings and opened their homes to give their testimonies. People welcomed the commission warmly into their communities and spoke freely and honestly about their lives. Without their testimonies, the commission would not have been able to fully appreciate what happened to Inuit during this period of immense transition. They also provided very thoughtful and constructive feedback and suggestions regarding the kind of recommendations that would promote reconciliation between Inuit and government. A full list of individuals is included in the List of Witnesses on the QTC website.

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

The QTC's research team collected and reviewed accessible archival and secondary sources for the period in focus, 1950 to 1975. This included examinations of relevant records from Library and Archives Canada, as well as the Archives of the Northwest Territories, the RCMP, the Hudson's Bay Company, and Anglican and Roman Catholic bodies. Thousands of documents were digitized for the QTC's research database.

MAPS

Maps provide important details about how Inuit lived and used the territories surrounding their present-day communities. These maps reject a common idea in the south that the Arctic is "empty." In addition to showing the sites of ilagiit nunagivaktangit, details on twentieth-century maps include place names indicating how Inuit knew and utilized the land, along with their travel routes, and the best places for hunting. This kind of information began to be set down on paper before 1840. However, some of the most thorough maps are those created by Inuit for the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project (1976) and the Nunavut Atlas (1992).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (2024 EDITION)

The reports drafted in 2010 for the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) were prepared under the direction of James Igloliorte, Commissioner, and Madeleine Redfern, Executive Director, QTC. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) project managers in 2013 were Bethany Scott, Navarana Beveridge, and Sandra Kownak.

The primary authors of most reports were Julie Harris, Contentworks Inc. and Philip P. Goldring, Ph.D. Writing and research support was provided by Joan Bard Miller, Francis Levésque, Ryan Shackleton, Frank J. Tester, Anna Gilmer, Alice Glaze, Teresa Iacobelli, Natascha Morrison, Linda Radford, Dr. Yvonne Boyer, and Brian Cameron.

The translation team for the reports produced in 2013 included Jay Arnakak, Mali Curley, Julia Demcheson, Veronica Dewar, Elisapee Ikkidluak, Emily Illnik, David Joanasie, Leonie Kappi, Pujjuut Kusugak, Nina Tootoo, and Blandina Tulugarjuk. Additional translation for the 2024 editions was provided by Ruth Kadlutsiak.

The work of the QTC would not have been possible without the financial support of the following organizations: Qikiqtani Inuit Association; Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated; Makivik Corporation; Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation; First Air; Air Inuit; Unaalik Aviation; Kenn Borek Air Ltd.

The 2024 editions of the QTC reports were prepared by Julie Harris, Augatnaaq Eccles, Zarina Laalo and Anne Brazeau of Contentworks Inc. under the direction of Inukshuk Aksalnik, Jennifer Ipirq, and Simon Cuerrier of QIA.

For many years, Inuit Elders in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) Region have been haunted by a deep sense of loss as they remember how their lives changed in the decades after 1950. The thematic reports and special studies in this collection explore themes that emerged during the work of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. What started as an inquiry into the slaughter of sled dogs quickly grew to include other experiences of profound colonial change.

Commissioner James Igloliorte's Final Report, titled *Achieving Saimaqatigiingniq*, and 22 companion thematic and historical reports published by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association in Inuktitut and English weave together evidence from testimonies and documents collected during the Qikiqtani Truth Commission about the consequential 1950–1975 period.

QTC Report Collection

Aaniajurliriniq: Health Care in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

Achieving Saimaqatiqiingniq: Final Report of the Commissioner of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission

Analysis of the RCMP Sled Dog Report

Iglulirinig: Housing in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

Illinniarniq: Schooling in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

Nuutauniq: Moves in Inuit Life in the Qikiqtani Region to 1975

Paliisikkut: Policing in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

Pivalliajuliriniq: Economic Development in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

Qimmiliriniq: Inuit Sled Dogs in the Qikiqtani Region, 1950–1975

The Official Mind of Canadian Colonialism

Arctic Bay (Ikpiarjuk) Community History, 1950–1975

Clyde River (Kangiqtugaapik) Community History, 1950–1975

Grise Fiord (Ausuittuq) Community History, 1950–1975

Igloolik Community History, 1950–1975

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Kinngait Community History, 1950–1975

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Qikiqtarjuaq Community History, 1950–1975

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Sanirajak Community History, 1950–1975

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