Sanikiluaq

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 Sanikiluaq

Sanikiluaq, named North Camp until 1975, is located on Hudson's Bay, north of James Bay. The hamlet, with a population of over eight hundred, sits on Eskimo Harbour at the northern end of Flaherty Island, the largest of the Belcher Islands. It is the southernmost community in Nunavut and is located only 150 km from the west coast of Nunavik. The Belcher Islands consist of a set of about 1,500 rocky islands that rarely reach above 125 metres in elevation. They stretch approximately 90 km north to south and 75 km east to west, with Flaherty Island winding through the core of the area. The community is named after a renowned, local leader.

The people call themselves Sanikiluarmiut, meaning "people of the islands." They have had a relatively short history of direct Qallunaat (non-Inuit) involvement in their affairs and share a long history with Nunavimmiut (Quebec Inuit). Until the early 20th century, Sanikiluarmiut travelled great distances to the Ungava region of Quebec to trade at the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) post and socialize. This pattern became less prevalent when the HBC set up a post on the Belcher Islands. Anthropologists have also documented that some Quebec Inuit likely retreated to the Belcher Islands at various times in earlier periods to avoid conflicts with the Cree population.

For most of the 20th century, the people of the Belcher Islands numbered less than two hundred. Following the disappearance of the islands' caribou herd during a particularly difficult winter, Sanikiluarmiut learned to use eider ducks, which live year-round on the islands, as a source of food, clothing, and materials. Ringed seals, walrus, and beluga whales continued to be of importance.

Sanikiluarmiut lived independent lives with few contacts with explorers or whalers until the early 20th century when the HBC sent representatives to the islands to investigate trade and economic mineral possibilities. In 1928, the HBC opened a seasonal post on Flaherty Island, and four years later the RCMP began to patrol the islands from Quebec. The introduction of government services happened in a haphazard way, as officials considered whether everyone in the area should be forced or enticed to move off the islands, or if a townsite should be constructed somewhere on the islands. In the meantime, with no opportunities for meaningful input into the decisions, Sanikiluarmiut continued to navigate through a bewildering set of changing rules concerning housing, health services, and education. In 1970, the government consolidated all services and moved everyone to Sanikiluaq, at the north end of the islands. Throughout the study period—1950 to 1975—many Sanikiluarmiut also spent part of their lives in Quebec for schooling or work, or to be near relatives.

Today, the population of this Inuit community depends on an economy based on subsistence hunting, fishing, soapstone carving, basket making, and tourism. Individuals are also employed or involved in ecological research to study how the marine environment changed after major rivers near the Quebec coast were dammed in the 1970s.

Aerial view of Sanikiluaq, 2012.
Credit: *Tim Kalusha.*

Taissumani Nunamiutautilluta (On the Land)

The term "Taissumani nunamiutautilluta" means "when we lived on the land." It reaches back thousands of years. The end date depends on the community, but it is generally in the 1950s to early 1960s when most Inuit were living in government-chosen settlements and participating in the cash economy. During this time, the Inuktut term *ilagiit nunagivaktangit* is a more accurate expression for the places Inuit called home and qallunaat (non-Inuit) named "camps." 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

The archipelago of the Belcher Islands consists of numerous long, thin peninsulas and almost 1,500 islands divided by narrow straits of saltwater and speckled with countless freshwater lakes.

The islands occupy about 5,000 square km of sea. The uneven folding of layers of hard and soft rocks caused the rock formations that make up the islands. The softer rocks eroded away, while the hard ones formed ribbons of land that reach as high as 125 metres above sea level. Geologists who have studied these islands note that there is nothing else like it in Canada.[1] The sparse vegetation found on the islands includes lyme grass, which is used locally for handcrafted baskets sold across Canada.

Two economic minerals have been found on the islands—iron ore and soapstone. Iron ore attracted the attention of the government and private companies from 1914 to the 1950s but was never successfully mined on a commercial basis. Soapstone (technically a soft-talc serpentine) is quarried on Tukarak Island and is the basis of a successful local carving industry.

In winter, strong winds and temperatures typically range from -23 to -10 degrees Celsius. Summer temperatures average around 10 degrees Celsius, but wind, rain, fog, and overcast skies are common. These meteorological conditions influence subsistence activities; wind alone can often keep people from travelling by boat.

Sea ice is an essential part of the environment for several months each year. In late winter, the ice provides a firm platform for Sanikiluarmiut to travel up to 50 km west of the islands, and north, towards the King George and Sleeper Islands. Extensive land-fast ice also forms to the south and southeast. This ice enabled people in the past to travel to trading posts on the mainland in Quebec and to hunt ringed seals for many months over a wide area. It also facilitated specialized activities, such as hunting beluga whales in ice cracks during the spring. Since the 1980s, Sanikiluarmiut have observed that the currents in the southern part of Hudson Bay are not as strong as they were before the rivers were modified on the Quebec side. Spring weather is also cooler and the ice lasts longer.[2]

The Belcher Islands abound with wildlife, with some species staying on the islands through the winter. The relatively southern latitude and large number of freshwater ponds and lakes provides an excellent habitat for geese and ducks. Foxes are found across the island. Arctic char breed in the numerous

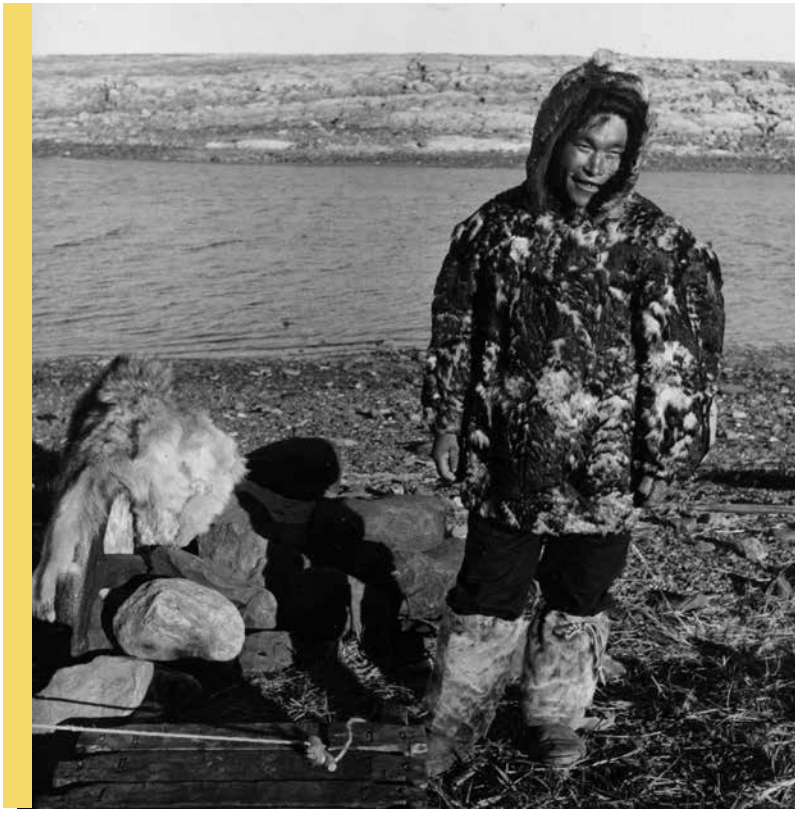
freshwater lakes, where they are fished through the ice or after break-up in nets. Whitefish are also harvested in freshwater, and Arctic cod are caught in saltwater. Kasegalik Lake, the largest freshwater lake on the islands, is of particular importance. It is roughly U-shaped and nearly 113 km in length from tip to tip. This lake shelters the rare freshwater black seal, after which it is named.[3] The abundance of country food from marine sources was an important reason why the federal government decided to continue providing services to people on the Belcher Islands, and at times even considered relocating Inuit from Quebec and other areas to the islands.[4]

Until the late 19th century, a herd of caribou lived on the Belcher Islands. Around 1880, these animals disappeared during a single winter when ice covered their feeding grounds. As a result, Sanikiluarmiut are unique among Inuit because they learned to live completely without caribou by taking full advantage of eider ducks for clothing, food, and some tools. A parka requiring up to twenty-five bird skins is as warm as caribou skin, but twice as heavy, and requires sinew, which was usually traded on the mainland in the winter.[5] Ringed seals and eider ducks continue to be a staple for Sanikiluarmiut.

EARLY CONTACTS

Sanikiluarmiut have inhabited the Belcher Islands for centuries, and archaeological sites show evidence of use by the Dorset and Thule cultures as well. English navigator Henry Hudson first spotted the islands in 1610. About one hundred years later, European mapmakers likely named the islands after James Belcher, the captain of an HBC supply ship. Beginning around 1749, many Sanikiluarmiut would make yearly visits to the HBC post on the Quebec mainland at Kuujjuarapik to trade and socialize, using qimmiit and qamutiit to cross the winter ice. Sanikiluarmiut also travelled across the dangerous waters by qajaq (kayak) in the summer. Sealskins were normally their primary trading good, as they were not fully engaged in trapping. Since trade usually occurred only once a year, Sanikiluarmiut were also careful not to become too dependent on rifles and the ammunition they required.

Prolonged visits to the Belchers by Qallunaat before the second half of the 20th century were relatively rare. This was likely because it was difficult to approach or land safely on the islands using sailing vessels. Permanent Anglican missions established on the Quebec side of Hudson Bay provided instruction in Christianity. From 1847 to 1849, the HBC surveyed the islands, but determined that a trading post was not profitable. Nevertheless, HBC prospector Robert Flaherty (the creator of the film *Nanook of the North)* visited the islands via the ship *Laddie* in 1914 and wintered over in 1915. During his visit, he spent many hours filming Sanikiluarmiut. Sadly, most of the film footage was lost. The RCMP spent some time in the Belcher Islands during 1921 while investigating reported murders, but only included the area in regular annual patrols after 1932. It was not until 1928 that the HBC opened a seasonal outpost at the south end of Flaherty Island. In 1933, this post was moved to Tukarak Island and kept open year-round until 1943, when it was closed. During this decade, some families moved their ilagiit nunagivaktangit to be closer to the post.



Samwillie Iqakul wears bird-skin clothing, [1949]. Sanikiluarmiut used bird skins when caribou were no longer found on or near the Belcher Islands
Credit: *S.J. Bailey / Library and Archives Canada / e002213337.*

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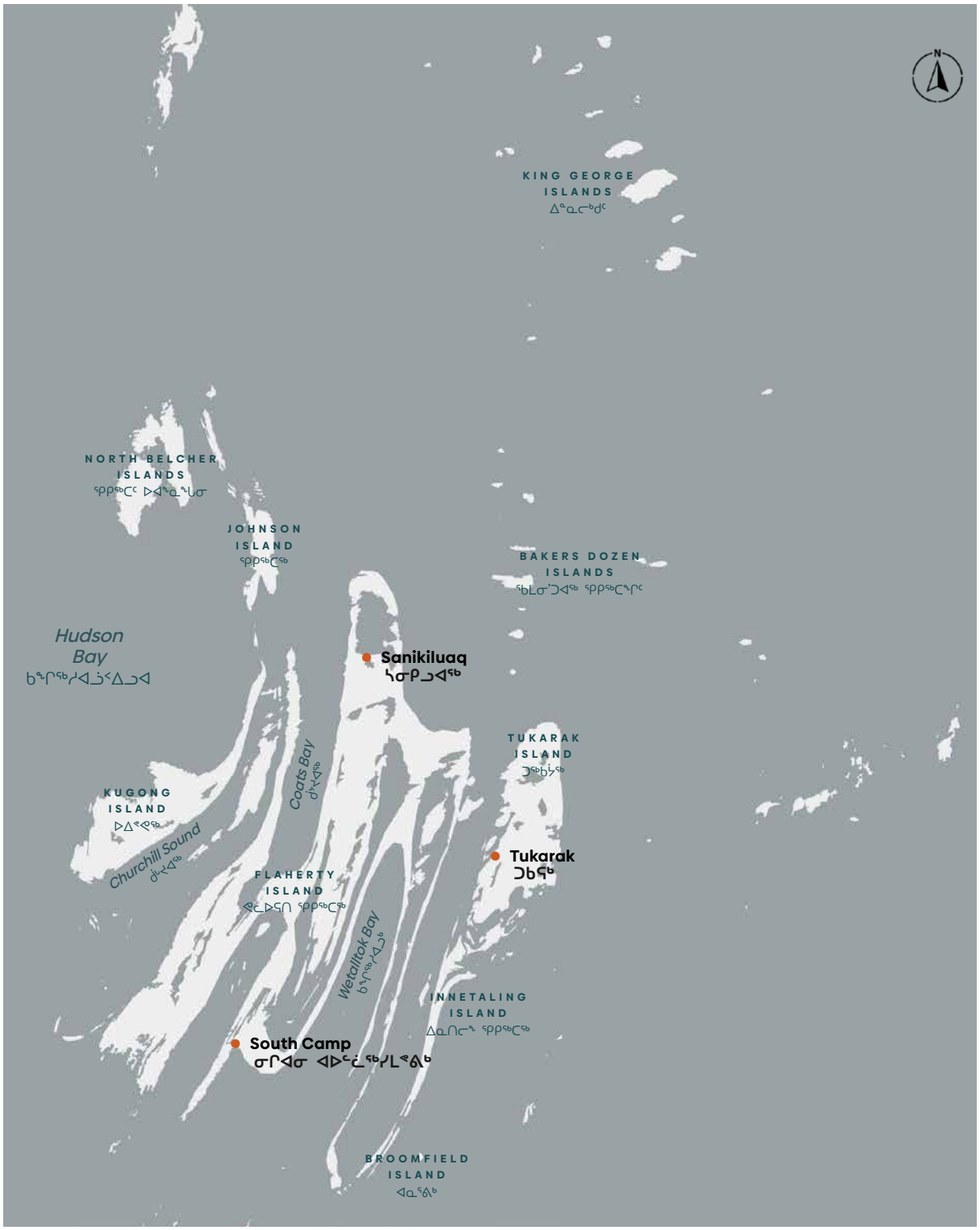

Unfortunately, hunting around the post was poor, so life was often difficult. Instead, game was particularly plentiful in the northern part of the islands.

In 1941, the islands were in the national press. That year, violence killed nine members of an extended family group. At the time, their actions were explained as being the result of religious delusions and temporary insanity, but it also appears that the affected families were suffering through a particularly difficult winter and poor hunting conditions. The murders occurred on two different days. One of the people involved in the first incident, Peter Sala, was so upset by his actions that he spoke to others about what he had done. The HBC trader informed the RCMP, who dispatched officers and a coroner to the islands. Unfortunately, by the time they arrived, another set of murders had occurred involving some of the same people.

In the end, five men and two women were accused. A trial was held in the Belcher Islands, rather than in Moose Factory or another southern location, because the government believed that it would help demonstrate the importance of Canadian laws to the local residents. A tent was set up near the HBC post on Tukarak Island, and two newspaper reporters and the HBC trader were appointed as jurors. During the trial, people watching and some of the accused became very sick with influenza which was brought back to the Belcher Islands from prisoners from Moose Factory. One of the five men found guilty was ordered to use his hunting skills to provide for the families of those who were sent to prison. None of those convicted stayed in prison for more than a year. One man died of tuberculosis and others were sent to live in Nunavik under the watch of the RCMP in Kuujjuarapik.[6]

Sala's family accompanied him to Nunavik following his release from prison. In the following years, the RCMP in Kuujjuarapik reported that he was a good hunter, and they even used his services as a boat pilot for some charters. Despite this, Sala's banishment to Nunavik had a profound effect on his children. In 2010, his son, Markossie Sala Sr., explained in his testimony to the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) some of the social difficulties experienced by his family's isolation.

> *As I was growing up as a child, we didn't have neighbours. We lived mostly alone as a camp with our parents. That is what I remember … Since we mostly kept to ourselves and because I didn't grow up with other people around me I am bothered by other people around. That is why I am affected by a lot of people. I don't want to be like that.*[7]

Markossie went on to explain how the killing of his qimmiit in 1965 further affected his life and the lives of his children.

> *Because of these things, my children have been affected. They are mostly into drugs and alcohol because of these hurts that happened in the past. That is all they do nowadays because what they have heard from the past has affected them.*[8]

Eventually, near the end of his life, Peter Sala and some members of his family returned to Sanikiluaq.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF LIFE

A special government patrol of the eastern Arctic by aircraft in August 1949 provides a snapshot of conditions in the Belcher Islands, albeit from a Qallunaaq perspective without a clear indication of who provided the information. The total population of the islands was only 165, with families distributed among six main ilagiit nunagivaktangit. One community, made up of five qarmait, was on the west side of Tukarak Island. Three others were located on the northern rim of the islands—Eskimo Harbour (near present-day Sanikiluaq), Howard Point, and Lillico Point. Some smaller groups lived farther south at O'Leary Island and French Island. The patrol found people in good health after a good year of fox trapping and reported that trade goods supplemented the usual abundant country food.

During the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, when it was difficult to find or hunt animals, Sanikiluarmiut sometimes experienced hunger, as testimonies to the QTC confirm. However, people also understood how to find other sources of nourishment. Johnny Tookalook explained this to the QTC in 2008.

> *I remember a lot of things from living in the camp because I experienced hunger. When the routes we would usually take were not good, then everything we could get we couldn't get. We would try to look for other things that had washed up to the beach, looking for food. When plants grew on the land then that is what we would eat and live on. Plants aren't red meat. We would also eat seafood, mussels, sculpin, [and] seaweed. That is what we lived on in the past … it was more difficult in the wintertime when there was no food, when there wasn't anything available … no seals, no heat … We used to eat dog meat … One dog would be used to try to feed the whole camp. That is what we experienced. That was our way of life and we were not afraid to live it.*[9]

In 1947, during a period when there was no trading post in the area, scientific parties were rare, and Anglican clergy seldom visited. As a result, the government gave a Peterhead sailboat to Sanikiluarmiut living on the south end of the islands to help them commute to the mainland.[10] In 1950, the HBC post resumed seasonal operations at Tukarak Island. That same year, the Department of Health and Welfare (now Health Canada) sent a doctor, dentist, and X-ray technician to conduct a health survey. They visited Tukarak Island, Eskimo Harbour, and the ilagiit nunagivaktangat in Omarolluk Sound.

Unfortunately, in 1951 the Peterhead boat was lost in the ice. This loss led to a lengthy discussion among officials about its replacement.[11] Sanikiluarmiut were otherwise reliant on qajait (kayaks) to reach the mainland, unless they waited until winter to make the long journey with qimmiit. The discussion focused on whether it would be better to provide the area with two powered boats, one each for the northern and southern groups. This debate was revealing about government perceptions of daily life on the islands. Some felt that the absence of a year-round HBC post, and the staffing of the seasonal post by an Inuk trader, were reasons why Sanikiluarmiut had been slow to adopt new technologies, such as motorboats and high-powered rifles. However, it is also likely that the costs of acquiring these technologies through the HBC were just too high for a population that was not firmly rooted in the trapping and trading economy.[12]

After considerable debate about the need for motorized boats, the government delivered one small boat with an inboard motor to both the south and north ends of the islands. This decision illustrates the tendency on the part of government officials to speak of occupied areas as being divided in a north-south direction—a division that was, in reality, far from obvious on maps produced at the time. Rather, maps showed four concentrations of people, including large ones on the eastern and western parts of the islands.[13]

Additionally, families would group together to form seasonal hunting parties that often included mainland Inuit from Quebec who crossed to the area with powered boats to hunt. Sometimes Inuit from the mainland would winter for a year or two, usually in the outlying northerly Sleeper and King George Islands. The government and HBC did not count these people among the Sanikiluarmiut, although there were strong kinship ties among them. In reality, the two boats provided by the government were not enough.

Along with the loss of the first Peterhead boat in 1951, Sanikiluarmiut experienced a string of upsets and tragedies during the 1950s.[14] From 1952 to 1953, there was a great shortfall in the seal hunt, possibly as

much as a thousand seals, or about 40% of a typical year's hunt.[15] The lack of boats likely added to any weather difficulties faced by the hunters. In the spring of 1954, an influenza epidemic killed ten people, which further hindered hunting and led to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) dropping 2 tons of food and medicine to the islanders.[16] In the following year, two Inuit assistants tragically drowned while assisting ethnographer and archaeologist Claude Dégoffe from the Université de Montréal. All of this would have had a tremendous impact on Sanikiluarmiut.

In other parts of the Qikiqtani Region, the HBC post might have been able to reduce the impact of epidemics, such as the 1954 influenza outbreak, by providing medical services and relief as per its agreement with the federal government. In the Belcher Islands, however, the HBC post operated only between August and February. On top of this, the trader, a local Inuk named Lucassee Nuvelingah (also spelled Novalinga), did not have the same experience in handling medical emergencies as other Qallunaat HBC traders at the time. It was also difficult for outsiders to react quickly to events. News from the islands was generally sent out only twice a year, either when the residents visited Kuujjuarapik or when the HBC resupply vessel arrived each summer.[17] A plan to provide the area with a radio and to set up weekly scheduled reports was put forward in 1950, but was halted because Nuvelingah only spoke Inuktitut, while the people within range in Moose Factory only spoke English and Cree.[18]

In the mid-1950s, the HBC calculated that trade on the island was not enough that they could afford to run a year-round post and provide services on behalf of the federal government. In good years, the islands' entire fox trade was worth only about $1,500. Other items, such as sealskin boots sold to the Cree around Moose Factory, might net another $1,000. Even with family-allowance entitlements of $4,500 a year, an annual total cash economy of $7,000 for the entire population of the Belcher Islands was not enough to make a year-round post profitable.[19] The bedrock of the Sanikiluarmiut economy lay with the sea mammals and birds whose value must have greatly exceeded the small returns from trapping, trade, and social transfers. Country food, however, did not generate the cash needed to acquire and maintain new hunting equipment, generally obtained through trade with the HBC.[20] As a result, by the 1950s, Sanikiluarmiut were not yet on the brink of a period of externally driven social or technological change. They still relied very heavily on locally available resources.

If the HBC was barely present on the Belcher Islands during the 1950s, the Anglican Church and the RCMP were even less so. Although the people were nominally Anglican, there was no place of worship closer than Kuujjuarapik in Quebec, and the missionaries did not always manage to accompany the supply vessel that visited each year. While RCMP patrols from Moose Factory visited about once a year, it was usually only as a side trip from their patrols to Kuujjuarapik.

The limited Qallunaat presence on the Belcher Islands often resulted in bureaucrats perceiving them as isolated and potentially vulnerable to privation. While food could at times be harder to find, this was often part of normal seasonal and migration patterns. For Sanikiluarmiut, sea mammals and eider ducks provided them with access to materials for garments, hats, and footwear year-round. Ilagiit nunagivaktangit were small, and their membership and location fluctuated depending on the seasons and year-to-year choices reflecting either environmental or social reasons.

In 1950, a health survey of the Belcher Islands conducted by the federal government noted that, "native food [was] plentiful and the islanders were by far the healthiest group visited."[21] This assessment likely played a role in the decision to temporarily move Inuit from Quebec to the King George and Sleeper Islands at the northern tip of the Belcher archipelago during the early 1950s. Inuit hunters from Inukjuak were persuaded to move to the islands during the fall months in order to diminish pressure on local game in Quebec. Although no reliable reports at the time could confirm how well the relocated families were doing, Alexander Stevenson, the federal administrator of the Arctic for the northern administration branch, declared the "experiment" to be "a success" in 1953. He said that third-party information confirmed that people were "doing fairly well" and added that problems in other parts of the islands were likely due to "poor organizing and a lack of leadership."[22]

It is difficult to understand how Stevenson and others were able to blame problems on Inuit. Other cases make it clear that Inuit were enticed to make moves that turned out badly due to poor planning on the part of the government or the HBC. Margery Hinds, one of the original federal teachers providing local schooling to Inuit in Quebec and the Qikiqtani Region, interviewed Jimmy Koodlooalook, who lived in the Belcher Islands, in August 1953. Koodlooalook described the difficulties families faced due to poor hunting conditions. They had moved their winter ilagiit nunagivaktangat to a place near the HBC post on Tukarak Island because they were told by the trader that supplies would be coming in by plane with mining prospectors. It also appears that people reasonably expected to find work supplying or guiding the miners. Koodlooalook explained, "No planes came and ever so many people were there."[23] Eventually the miners arrived, but they only brought four bags of flour with them and almost no other food. By the spring of 1953, everyone, including the miners, were eating qimmiit and anything else they could find. In fact, as Koodlooalook revealed:

> *The white people would have starved if the Eskimos hadn't look [sic] after them when they ran out of food. Whenever Eskimos killed a seal, they shared it with the white people just the way they share among themselves. The Eskimos often talked among themselves wondering why white people were there without food.*[24]

Hunting around the HBC post had always been poorer than areas further to the north. Koodlooalook regretted taking the advice to set up a winter camp at Tukarak Island and noted that only one Inuk was hired to work with the miners.

Until the middle of the 1950s, almost everyone, other than the traders on Tukarak Island, were living in ilagiit nunagivaktangit spread around the islands to take advantage of good hunting conditions.

SANGUSSAQTAULIQTILLUTA (1954–1968)

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.

Before 1954, few outsiders had visited the Belcher Islands other than annual RCMP patrols, the occasional scientific or prospecting parties, and annual visitors accompanying the supply and medical ships. In 1954, prospectors arrived to investigate iron ore bodies that were initially reported by the HBC prospector and filmmaker Robert Flaherty in 1915/1916. Sanikiluarmiut living near the HBC post on Tukarak Island assisted with the prospecting, which led to a short-lived jump in income and spending when Consolidated Halliwell opened the iron mine about 20 km south of Sanikiluaq at Haig Inlet.[25] Even with the arrival of the mining group, no effective Qallunaat institutions were established on the Belcher Islands during most of the 1950s.

In late 1954, the federal government explained.

> *The construction of the Mid-Canada Line in northern Quebec and the interest being taken in iron ore deposits on the Belcher Islands would probably create new problems in these areas. It had therefore been decided to have a representative of the department placed at Great Whale River [Kuujjuarapik] to supervise the employment of natives and to assist them in adapting themselves to the changes that these developments will bring about.*[26]

The almost complete lack of government services in the islands stemmed, in part, from uncertainty about the intentions and respective roles of the HBC and the federal government, as well as debates about the types of services that should be provided.[27] At times, the federal government considered resettling people from Nunavik to the Belcher Islands, while at other times it even considered withdrawing the requirement for an annual supply ship to the islands altogether.

During the decade that the Mid-Canada Line station operated at Kuujjuarapik, some Sanikiluarmiut were employed directly by the station or found seasonal work there. The base attracted many families, which then led to the expansion of schooling. By the mid-1950s, schooling had become an extremely high priority for southern administrators and, to varying degrees, for Inuit parents. Planning for a school in the area began around 1956, and as was often the case in the history of the Qikiqtani Region, the government used the placement of the school as a means of setting an agenda to concentrate services in a place of its own choosing. In the case of Sanikiluaq, archival records show a dizzying number of decisions, half-decisions, and discussions around potentially offering education services to the Belcher Islands. Some officials were convinced that all Sanikiluarmiut could be enticed to move to Quebec, or other areas along the west coast of Hudson Bay, rather than provide services to the area.

In the end, a prefabricated building was set up in the southern part of the islands at South Camp in 1960 to be used as a school.[28] The site was chosen because the government did not want the school to be near the HBC post on Tukarak Island, due to a fear that the area would not be able to support the number of families who would want to live near their children. Obtaining school supplies was a constant problem for the teachers, and fresh water had to be brought by hand and yoke from a nearby lake. Apart from these issues, and the tendency for the windows to leak in the winter, the school was used for about a decade. In 1962, the government began constructing a hostel for students at South Camp, but it was never used,[29] possibly because parents from other parts of the Belcher Islands were more likely to be travelling back and forth from Quebec than moving within the islands themselves.

The lack of a solid educational strategy (location, type of school, and curriculum) affected all Inuit, including Sanikiluarmiut. Generally, parents were told that attendance at school was mandatory. Others were told that benefits would be cut if children did not attend school. Some children learned to read and write while being treated for tuberculosis in Moose Factory or in other southern hospitals. Others went to school in Quebec, usually in Kuujjuarapik. Even when the school opened at South Camp in 1960, parents were still struggling with where to send their children to school. Their decisions often depended on their current situation. Economic or health hardships could lead parents to choose hostel schooling as an option, while other parents may have found it too hard to send their children as far away as Kuujjuarapik. For some, what they had been told by other parents or Qallunaat may have played a role. In 1967, for example, some parents reported that the hostel mother in Kuujjuarapik was spanking children and had even tied one to a chair.[30] Stories like this would have raised many concerns among parents who currently had children away attending school. However, after a certain grade, children who wanted to continue their education had to go elsewhere to continue their education.

Some former students were fond of school itself, but they were very aware of the losses they suffered and the heartbreak their absence caused for their parents. Carolyn Niviaxie, in telling her story about her experiences at the school hostel in Kuujjuarapik to the Legacy of Hope Foundation, imagined that parents of the children sent away were always asking, "Where is my daughter? What is happening with her?" Looking back, she said, "They needed us." Niviaxie's own story, which covers mistreatment at the hostel, demonstrates the validity of those concerns.[31]

The establishment of the iron ore mine also affected the health of Sanikiluarmiut. During the short time it was open, the mine employed around a dozen local men from three families that moved to Haig Inlet from Tukarak Island. In 1956, an epidemic of whooping cough, which may have been spread by exposure to the miners, afflicted 80% of Inuit living nearby.[32] During this time, about half the qimmiit were killed for food because men were too sick or

unable to hunt. The miners gave whatever help they could and the federal government rushed in a nurse from Moose Factory. The nurse reported that all but a dozen Inuit in the area were suffering from malnutrition, and that the deaths were mainly occurring among the very young.[33] The nurse arranged a massive evacuation to the hospital at Moose Factory. Mary Iqaluk, who was only in her early teens at the time of the evacuation, recalled being sent to Moose Factory and that there were many other people from the Belcher Islands there at the same time.[34]

Iqaluk was certainly not alone in being evacuated to the south for health treatment, especially for tuberculosis (TB). In 1957 alone, more than a quarter of the population was being treated at the Moose Factory Indian Hospital.[35] For many Sanikiluarmiut, the heartbreak of seeing a relative sent south for medical reasons, including TB and complications from the flu, was compounded by the lack of news about their condition. In 1967, archival records show that the parents of Winnie Emikotialuk were appealing for any information they could find about their daughter who had been sent south six years earlier.[36] During the QTC hearings, Winnie's sister, Annie Appaqaq Arragutainaq, explained that Winnie had become very ill and had to be evacuated south due to multiple complications from her illness.[37] The family was eventually given news about her, but it came through their own efforts.

By the end of the 1960s, the school, an Anglican chapel, a small co-op, and a power plant served as a focus for settlement at South Camp. In her testimony to the QTC in 2008, Lottie Arragutainaq recalled that South Camp was becoming a true community.[38] At the other end of the Belcher Islands, however, Sanikiluaq had become the site of a permanent HBC post,[39] a larger co-op with a trained manager, and the home of the Resident Resource Development Officer and various prospecting activities.[40] All of these existing services and businesses created pressure on Inuit living elsewhere in the islands, especially near South Camp, to move to Sanikiluaq.

The growing number of people in both communities, South Camp and Sanikiluaq, provides a context for understanding the killing of qimmiit in accordance with the Ordinance Respecting Dogs. QTC testimonies, most often by people who witnessed events as children or were told stories by their parents or grandparents, describe the killing of qimmiit by RCMP and others because qimmiit were loose in contravention of rules or because someone believed they were dangerous. Davidee Uppik recalled that authorities in South Camp killed his father's qimmiit in 1969. It deeply affected his father and other members of his family. They had no other means of transportation.[41] Jacob Uppik explained that his father was a member of the town council in Sanikiluaq and was expected to follow all rules. His father found himself shooting his own qimmiit in 1968 or 1969, even though he needed qimmiit for hunting.[42]

Many Inuit were unaware of all the conditions of the Ordinance. Even authorities charged with carrying out its provisions often ignored the finer details. Jobie Crow explained that RCMP in Sanikiluaq shot his father's qimmiit without any warning in 1967 because they were running loose.[43] His father was completely unaware of the Ordinance at the time. Just as in other parts of the Qikiqtani Region, the Ordinance was rarely and sometimes never explained properly in Inuktitut, and authorities often did not follow its rules concerning the penning of qimmiit or what constituted dangerous qimmiit.

Some Sanikiluarmiut also gave clear accounts of qimmiit dying from inoculations. Johnny Tookalook explained that his father's qimmiit died in 1953 after receiving a vaccine. The government sent the RCMP to settlements to vaccinate against rabies and other diseases. The rabies vaccine appears to have led to serious side effects, such as paralysis of the limbs. Some qimmiit may have recovered, but others died or were killed to relieve their suffering.

When looking back on the 1950s and '60s, Sanikiluarmiut who spoke to the QTC described numerous events related to illness, schooling, and killing of qimmiit that made it very difficult for families to set out a clear chronology of their lives. Various family members—parents, children, grandparents, and siblings—were often going or coming back from southern hospitals. Others were away at schools in Quebec, Manitoba, or Ontario, prior to returning to a community where they had not lived before. Other challenges were articulated in a report sent to the federal government by Milton Freeman, which cited cynicism and hostility towards

government representatives by Inuit and many examples of poor administration and irregularities in accounting by bureaucrats and the HBC. The report also highlighted language problems around medical evacuations, and children neglected while living in foster homes or hostels to attend school.[44] The government would attempt to address some of these problems during the late 1960s, but decided it required the consolidation of all services in Sanikiluaq, effectively closing the small community at South Camp.

Nunalinnguqti-tauliqtilluta (1969–1975)

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. The Belcher Islands was one of the last places in Nunavut to be centralized, in this case to Sanikiluaq.

AGENDAS AND PROMISES

The population of the Belcher Islands increased in the late 1960s, likely due to improvements in preventive healthcare, such as inoculations, and treatment of conditions with antibiotics. At the same time, people were increasingly likely to be living near South Camp or Sanikiluaq. Despite the growth, however, housing programs, schools, nurses, and the RCMP came slowly to the area because officials did not recognize an Inuit ilagiit nunagivaktangit, even a large one with many families, to be a permanent settlement. In their minds, they were only temporary hunting camps. This label was enough for the government to apply or withhold rules and services as they saw fit.

Housing was a long-standing concern in the area for both the government and residents, as evidenced in the QTC hearings but also in numerous archival documents from the period. Housing rose to the top of government issues in 1969 after the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories visited the Belcher Islands. He immediately wrote to Ottawa about the problems he saw firsthand. So did his travelling companion, Simonie Michael, the eastern Arctic member of the NWT Council. Michael urged the federal government to provide twenty permanent houses at once. Under this pressure, senior officials in Ottawa admitted that the housing situation on the Belcher Islands was among the worst in the north, partly because all populated places in the Belcher Islands had been classified as hunting camps and were therefore ineligible for rental housing. A study of housing in the area quickly followed. It concluded that "all available houses are seriously overcrowded," and that an "interim solution [was] needed for the housing shortage."[45]

The decision to centralize people and services in Sanikiluaq only made it easier for the government to plan housing for the Belcher Islands. In response to the 1969 study, the federal administrator for the Arctic, Alexander Stevenson, proposed sending in materials for small emergency houses that could be converted into storage and shops once permanent houses arrived.[46]

The stage for the consolidation of services in Sanikiluaq had been set a couple of years earlier. In 1967, the newly arrived area administrator had discussed local governance, including the controversial issue of centralizing services in one community-Sanikiluaq. In 1968, the administrator reported that Inuit unanimously agreed that the "creation of one larger community from the present two would solve many problems and hasten progress."[47] Records about who reported and how they made wishes known are inconsistent. In the same year, the area survey officer, reported to the government that South Camp, the current location of the school, lacked the abundance of marine mammals that a more populated settlement would need.[48] Government officials met in Ottawa in March 1969 to determine where a government-supported settlement should be located in the Belcher Islands and to identify the priorities for development. Without further explanation or consultation, the meeting concluded in a memo that, "All future expansion of facilities would be carried out in [Sanikiluaq]."[49]

People in Sanikiluaq spoke to Commissioner Igloliorte of the QTC about their recollections of the meetings and a "vote" held to determine which community

would be developed. Sanikiluaq was known to be the preference of the government, and families already living there outnumbered the population around South Camp. People at South Camp were likely reconciled to moving to Sanikiluaq because they knew the government would not want to spend money to duplicate schools, airstrips, co-ops, and other types of infrastructure for such a small population.

By 1969–70, Sanikiluarmiut living near South Camp were under enormous pressure to move to Sanikiluaq as soon as possible. Mina Eyaituq told the QTC about how her family was pressured to relocate.

> *The government officials came to us, social worker came to us. We were living in a tent. Every time I think about it, I shiver. He told us that we were being relocated to North Camp and that if we didn't the government was not going to assist us in any way.*[50]

People also recalled that the government provided no assistance for the relocations. Families moved on their own by boat, snowmobile, and dog team. Some groups became separated, while others became stuck in the ice or had to carry a boat over land. With no radios, limited rations, and crowded boats, the moves were dangerous. In addition, when the families arrived in Sanikiluaq there was nowhere for them to live, as the promised housing had not arrived. Many of the relocatees had left what little possessions they had behind, expecting the necessities of life to be provided for them in Sanikiluaq. Lottie Arragutainaq told the Commission about her experience.

> *I was almost the last one in South Camp. Everybody had moved here [Sanikiluaq] but I refused to move. On the way here we ran out of supplies because of the fog during the day we tried to move here … We left our houses with only our clothes that we were wearing, we left everything else behind … thinking that we were coming back. When we moved here there was no assistance of any kind. We just walked out of our houses. It was a very sad event for me.*[51]

Emily Takatak experienced great uncertainty and confusion about the details of her move.

> *We didn't even know we were relocating here, we just thought we were coming here for a short time. We didn't take any belongings. Even my babies didn't have anything—nothing to comfort them. During the night, my children were cold. We thought we were going to go home right away and then we realized we were moving here. They didn't give us any sort of transportation to pick up our belongings. We were put in a homemade shack. In the evening, in that house, we didn't even have a pillow to sleep on, we didn't carry anything. All our belongings we left behind. We took only necessary clothing, changes for the children. We thought we were going back home right away, we didn't know how long we were going to be here, nobody informed us how long we were coming here or why. I felt very poor here. In the evening, when they realized we didn't have anything to sleep on, people gave us stuff to sleep on.*[52]

Sanikiluarmiut testified to the QTC about the inappropriate and insufficient number of houses in Sanikiluaq. Once they arrived, many people had to spend the winter in tents or in shacks made from leftover building materials.

For others, the trauma of the move cannot be forgotten. Annie Appaqaq Arragutainaq, who had already lived through a very difficult period when her family was moved to South Camp, recalled that her move in the fall of 1969 was very difficult[53], but it was also hard seeing what happened to the families who arrived in the spring of 1970. Children were very hungry; one mother who was breastfeeding her own child also had to provide milk for other children on the journey.

Witnesses who testified before the QTC felt they were tricked or pressured into moving quickly. They believe that the government failed to assist them or to explain that South Camp would be closed permanently in order to concentrate the entire population at Sanikiluaq. They also blame the government for forcing them to move in dangerous conditions. In some cases, hunters were compelled to shoot their qimmiit prior to the move because there was no room for them in the canoes. Lottie Cookie told the QTC that when she was fifteen years she watched her father kill his qimmiit himself "because he didn't want to leave them there."[54]

SHAPING COMMUNITY LIFE

Few other sources of income, other than social benefits and casual labour, were available in Sanikiluaq for the families that settled in the community. With the creation of the Mitiq Co-op in 1968, a structure was put in place to find markets for, and organize the production of, handicrafts. Sanikiluaq is famous for its carvings, especially the jadelike soapstone carvings representing the sea mammals, birds, and fish that are an essential part of the food supply. People here have earned income by carving for over sixty years, beginning in the late 1940s with walrus ivory imported by the HBC.[55] Although both the HBC and visitors paid low prices for carvings on the islands, and carvers hesitated about investing too much time for small rewards, quality improved and prices boomed after the Mitiq Co-op was formed. The co-op staked a mineral claim to protect the island's principal soapstone deposit for its members and developed a warehouse and handling facility. Aside from carvings, the co-op also managed a retail store, a hotel and restaurant, and cable television services.

With the strong support that Sanikiluarmiut showed for their community, facilities rapidly improved. In 1969, Bell Canada agreed to install a radio telephone near the HBC post at Eskimo Harbour. In 1973, a radio station, CKSN, began broadcasting with its well-known and only presenter, Charlie Crow.[56] In 1974, Sanikiluaq received an upgraded local and long-distance telephone service. By that same year, visitors to the community could observe many of the facilities of a typical Arctic settlement: an airstrip, nursing station, primary school, church, community hall, telephone service, bimonthly postal service, and two general stores. Other changes after 1970 rounded out the typical infrastructure of an Arctic settlement, such as upgrades to the airport.[57] During this time, game management by the government was mainly a passive process of discouraging people from settling too densely in places where they might exhaust resources. Otherwise, Qallunaat tended to believe that game was abundant enough to support a larger population, if there was some other source of income to supplement it. However, by the mid-1970s, tensions between Sanikiluarmiut and Quebec Inuit over hunting in the Belcher Islands and on the Hudson Bay had increased to the extent that the federal and territorial governments set up meetings to hear grievances. Sanikiluarmiut were concerned that Quebec Inuit were taking too many polar bears. Government officials offered various explanations for the source of conflict, including the lack of interest on the part of Quebec to enforce game laws and a lack of understanding or respect for administrative boundaries on the part of all groups. The issue came into stark perspective in 1974 when a hunter from Kuujjuarapik was investigated for capturing a live polar bear cub for a Quebec provincial government minister who intended to give it to a zoo. The government was unable to determine whether they were legally able to charge an Inuk from Quebec with infractions under territorial game laws.[58]

Conclusion

Environmental issues continue to be an important part of life in Sanikiluaq. The community has invested a great deal of effort in documenting environmental change through traditional environmental knowledge (TEK). Rather than dwelling on individual species, the approach developed by the Environmental Committee of Sanikiluaq is used to complement scientifically collected data and amplify the importance of cultural impacts. The project Voices from the Bay: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Inuit and Cree in the Hudson Bay Bioregion set a new standard for documenting ecological change, including changes that are the result of the James Bay hydroelectric projects.[59]

Sanikiluaq's history in the mid-20th century does not follow the more common trajectory seen elsewhere in Nunavut of increased involvement in the fur trade followed by gradual in-gathering towards an HBC enclave or a government-chosen settlement. At the beginning of the 20th century, Sanikiluarmiut were living in small groups across the islands. On a yearly basis, they travelled to the Quebec mainland to trade and socialize, but very few families were fully engaged in the fur trade. After that, the biographies of Sanikiluarmiut are very fragmented, especially in the critical period from 1950 to 1970. During this time, parents were separated from their children by residential schooling and illness; families were divided by various moves, including to a mining camp, to South Camp and to Sanikiluaq; and nobody was certain about what the government would require from them once they moved to a new place.

In other parts of the Qikiqtani Region, the Second World War and the subsequent building of facilities during the Cold War propelled the government's involvement in the daily life of Inuit. Without sustained pressure from mining, military bases or transportation projects, however, the government avoided spending money or even time in the area until the 1950s. At that point, the government was determined to provide Inuit with schooling, health services and housing, but it remained cautious with respect to the Belcher Islands. It set up a school and related infrastructure (power, water and a handful of houses) in South Camp and it enforced the Dog Ordinance and other regulations, but the settlement was not deemed to be permanent. Some people moved there, out of choice or pressure, but many other families remained in ilagiit nunagivaktangit near present-day Sanikiluaq. Once the government finally decided in the late 1960s that it would not send families to Quebec and that it would provide services in the Belcher Islands, it chose Sanikiluaq as the location. This meant families who had already moved to South Camp from other parts of the island under pressure from officials and with the promise of services suddenly found themselves moving again in the fall of 1969 and spring of 1970. It was a difficult and dangerous move for many people, made even more traumatic by the lack of housing and services upon their arrival.

Sanikiluaq became a hamlet in 1976 with a population of 295; today more than 800 people call Sanikiluaq home. Predictions made by government officials in the 1960s that Sanikiluarmiut would prefer to live elsewhere has proved to be untrue. They have found various ways to build lives and businesses on the islands, while also sharing their vast knowledge of a remarkable environment with the world.

ENDNOTES

1 J. L. Kirwan, "Belcher Islands, NWT," *Canadian Geographical Journal* (1954), 84–89; Milton M. R. Freeman, "An Ecological Study of Mobility and Settlement Patterns among the Belcher Island Eskimo," *Arctic,* Vol. 20, No. 3 (1967). 154–75.

2 Miriam Anne McDonald, Arragutainaq and Novalinga, *Voices from the Bay: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Inuit and Cree in the Hudson Bay Bioregion* (Ottawa: Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, Environmental Committee of Municipality of Sanikiluaq, 1997).

3 Kirwan, "Belcher Islands, NWT," 84–89; Freeman, "An Ecological Study of Mobility and Settlement Patterns," 154–75.

4 For an example see Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes); Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic 1939–63* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994), 39. Similar statements occur throughout the government records cited in this study, particularly in the general correspondence files on Belcher Islands; see Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Accession D-1-A, Volume 1269, File 1000/304, Parts 1 through 8.

5 Fred Bruemmer, "The Belcher Islands," *The Beaver*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Summer 1971), 4–13.

6 Various sources provide information about the 1941 incident. Richard Foot, "When 'God' and 'Satan' battled in a barren land," *CanWest News Service*, 7 February 2004. The widely published article consists of facts and opinions based on the author's reading of hundreds of archival documents related to the trial; and Margery Hinds, "Mina," *The Beaver* (Winter, 1976), 20–24, the story of one of the women found guilty at the trial who was well-known in Kuujjuarapik when Hinds taught there. In 1998, Ida Watt, an author from Kuujjuak, published a book for youth in Inuktitut about the incident, but it was not located for this report.

7 Markossie Sr. Sala, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 13 April 2010.

8 Markossie Sr. Sala, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 13 April 2010.

9 Johnny Tookalook, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 5 March 2008.

10 Canadian government actions and observations in the Belchers are recorded in a small number of files of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Northern Administration Branch. See LAC, RG 18, Volume 3152, File 558; Volume 3276, File HQ-681-G-1; and Volume 3277, File HQ-681-G-2. Also LAC, RG 85, Volume 1269, File 1000/304, parts 1A-3; LAC, RG 85, Volume 1353, File 1000/304, Parts 6-8; RG 85, Accession. 1997-98/076, Volume 145, File 1000/304 part 9, Port Harrison Area—General File (Incl. Povungnituk, Cape Smith, Ivuyivik, Richmond Gulf, Belcher Island & Wakeham Bay), Parts 4–5 and parts later than 1969 have not been located.

11 A file was devoted to the lengthy debate over giving the Belcher Islanders boats, and how they would pay; See LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 870, File 8638.

12 Freeman, "An Ecological Study of Mobility and Settlement Patterns", 159.

13 Freeman, "An Ecological Study of Mobility and Settlement Patterns", 166.

14 LAC, RG 85, Volume 870, File 8638, Letter from RCMP to the Northern Administration and Lands Branch, 1 March 1951.

15 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1269, File 1000/304, 23 March 1954.

16 LAC, RG 85, Volume 1269 27, File 1000/304, April 1954, 15 May 1954.

17 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1005, File 16938, "J. H. Davies to Supt. Commanding G Division, Ottawa", 12 December 1946.

18 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 107, File 253-2/304 (vol. 2K), "Dr. McKone, Moose Factory, to Director IHS Ottawa", 12 June 1952.

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23 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Accession D-1-A, Volume 1068, File 163-1, Part 5, Family Allowances - General and Policy, "Interview by E. M. Hinds with Jimmy Koodlooalook of Belcher Islands with assistance of an interpreter", 20 August 1953.

24 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Accession D-1-A, Volume 1068, File 163-1, Part 5, Family Allowances - General and Policy, "Interview by E. M. Hinds with Jimmy Koodlooalook of Belcher Islands with assistance of an interpreter", 20 August 1953.

25 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1353, File 1000/304, Sivertz to LeCapellain, 5 October 1956.

26 LAC, RG 22, Indian and Northern Affairs, Series A-1-a, Volume 270, File 40-8-1, Part 6, Eskimo Affairs—Eskimo General, Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Committee on Eskimo Affairs", 29 November 1954.

27 Anthropologist Milton Freeman returned south from fieldwork in the Belcher Islands and voiced many of the complaints and suspicions of the Inuit in a meeting with departmental officials in Ottawa; see LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1353, File 1000/304, Part 8, Rudnicki to Director, Welfare Division, 29 May 1961.

28 Date that school was installed (1960) provided by Sanikiluaq Community Director, Peter Kattuk.

29 Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, *Government Activities in the North, 1962* (Ottawa: ACND, 1963), 151.

30 Letter from David Omar Born, Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University, 15 August 1967 reproduced in: *Community of Sanikiluaq and Najuqsivik, Sanikiluaq Community Historical Yearbook, 2007–2008* (Sankiluaq: n.p. [2008]), 239.

31 Heather Igloliorte, *We were so far away: the Inuit experience in residential schools* (Ottawa: Legacy of Hope Foundation = Fondation autochtone de l'espoir, 2008), 120.

32 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1353, File 1000/304, Part 6; "Stone Age Just North of Moosonee", *Globe and Mail* (16 August 1956), 25.

33 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1353, File 1000/304, Part 6, "E. G. Caygill RN, Moose Factory, to Medical Superintendent Moose Factory", 6 August 1956.

34 Mary Iqaluk, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 4 March 2008. No one has conducted detailed research on the outcome of the evacuations and whether people were returned to their homes.

35 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 1353, File 1000- 304; LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Accession 97-98/076, Box 145.

36 Letter from David Omar Born, Department of Anthropology, Southern Illinois University, 15 August 1967 reproduced in: *Sanikiluaq Community Historical Yearbook*, 239. It is unknown if Winnie was found by her parents.

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38 Lottie Arragutainaq, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, March 4, 2008.

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42 Jacob Uppik, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 6 March 2008; and Jacob Uppik, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 20 January 2009.

43 Jobie Crow, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 4 March 2008.

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50 Mina Eyaituq, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 4 March 2008.

51 Lottie Arragutainaq, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 4 March 2008.

52 Emily Takatak, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 5 March 2008.

53 Annie Appaqaq-Arragutainaq, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 5 March 2008.

54 Lottie Cookie, Testimony, Qikiqtani Truth Commission, 5 March 2008.

55 LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 107, File 253- 2/304; LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Volume 870; and Kirwan, "Belcher Islands, NWT", 84–89.

56 Gabriella Goliger, "Charlie Crow, of CKSN Sanikiluak", *Nunatsiaq News* (November 24, 1976), 3, 12.

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58 NWTA, Collection 301, Northwest Territories, Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Accession G-2004- 014, Box 6, File 60-008-901, Belcher Islands, "Infringement of Polar Bear Regulations in the Belcher Islands, NWT", 23 September 1974.

59 McDonald et al, Voices from the Bay.

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.

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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

Igluliriniq: 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

Iqaluit Community History, 1950–1975

Kimmirut Community History, 1950–1975

Kinngait Community History, 1950–1975

Pangnirtung Community History, 1950–1975

Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik) Community History, 1950–1975

Qikiqtarjuaq Community History, 1950–1975

Resolute Community History, 1950–1975

Sanikiluaq Community History, 1950–1975

Sanirajak Community History, 1950–1975

Qikiqtani Inuit Association

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QIKIQTANI TRUTH COMMISSION