

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INNU SETTLEMENT: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SHESHATSHIT

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

This paper documents the circumstances surrounding the comparatively recent settlement of the nomadic Innu of Labrador in a central community. State and health officials and agents of the church at the time initiated programs that focused on economic rehabilitation, formal education and health concerns which they felt would assist in integrating Innu into Canadian industrial society. Ultimately Innu had little choice but to comply with the wishes of these officials and settle when confronted with the difficulties of pursuing traditional practices.

Cet article étudie les circonstances qui entourent l'établissement comparativement récent des Innu nomades du Labrador dans une communauté centrale. Lors de l'établissement les représentants de l'Etat et de la santé et les représentants de l'Église avaient commencé des programmes ayant pour but la réhabilitation économique, l'éducation scolaire et les problèmes de santé qu'ils avaient jugés susceptibles d'aider à intégrer les Innu dans la société canadienne industrielle. Enfin les Innu n'avaient d'autre choix qu'à se conformer aux désirs de ces représentants et se mettre d'accord avec eux lorsqu'on les avait fait voir les difficultés que présentait la continuation des pratiques traditionnelles.

Many Native people throughout Canada have long since abandoned their traditional living patterns. Even though some groups still retain elements of this life style, the radically different context within which these activities take place today has transformed many of the practices associated with this way of life. Those who take up some form of traditional pursuit usually do so for designated periods of time before returning to permanently established residences in long standing communities. For the majority of Native people in Canada today, life revolves around these fixed communities.

The act of settlement for Canada's nomadic peoples signalled a distinct and radical break with the past. Those people who had formerly depended exclusively on the migratory habits of game animals and who maintained a transient life style to take advantage of these patterns, had to adjust to life in fixed communities and make their way within conventions exclusively dictated to them by non-Native individuals and groups. The change in life posture has not been kind to these people. Statistics on various social indicators, such as life expectancy, suicide, social assistance and housing, reflect the inability of many Native people to cope with the complex demands placed upon them within these settings.¹ Pain and anguish, turmoil and turbulence are the norm rather than the exception in many Native Canadian communities.

What prompted these nomadic peoples to abandon their time-tested living patterns in favour of permanent residency? The decline of game animals provides the most obvious answer. On the prairies, for example, the introduction of the rifle and the influx of non-Natives combined to decimate what was once thought to be an almost infinite number of buffalo. Further, as Frideres (1983) argues, the transformation of the prairies into farmland, epidemics, and widespread famine completed the disruption of traditional life styles. Government bureaucrats also played a part in the settlement. Frideres (1983) notes that as early as 1830 these officials realized that nomadic hunting patterns failed to complement development and recommended that Native people take up agriculture. Eventually government agents would formulate treaties that confined Native people to designated areas. The government was not above using more heavy-handed tactics. The North-West Mounted Police played a significant part in encouraging roving bands to settle on reserves after the demise of the buffalo. Faced with a multitude of unfavourable conditions many of the Native people, who for hundreds of years had roamed the prairies, settled in permanent communities as the 20th century approached.

A common theme transcends the settlement of various Native peoples, from the Cree of the 19th century prairies to the Innu of northeastern Canada in the 1960's. This motif invariably involved the influx of non-Native people into the region, which in turn accelerated the diminution of game animals upon which the Native people

depended. This event often coincided with a drive for economic development that was contrary to the traditional mode of production. This pattern surfaced as late as the mid-20th century in Labrador and eventually brought about the permanent settlement of the Innut of the area, a people who continued to maintain their nomadic living patterns until well into the 1960's. State officials, church leaders and health agents associated with the Labrador at that time championed the cause of development. These people believed that the Innut had to forsake their traditional habits and be integrated into the Canadian industrial society if they were to survive in modern times. Towards these ends various agencies initiated vigorous programs that focused on economic rehabilitation, the delivery of formal education and the improvement of health conditions. The active intervention of these non-Innut agencies took on a potent quality as the animal resources in the area steadily dwindled. The numbers of game animals in the area, however, began to diminish long before these officials had made their presence felt. As early as the latter end of the 19th century, settlers in the area encroached trapping areas that were traditionally used by Innut. The appropriation of these areas increased as the 20th century wore on (Tanner, 1977; Zimmerly, 1975; and Tanner, 1944). The correspondence of Monsignor O'Brien (O'Brien, 1930; Parsons, 1931) indicates that by the 1930's many Innut could not sustain themselves on game animals alone. The establishment of an air base in the area in 1942 triggered a large scale influx of people and many more competed with the Innut for game. The difficulties of living in traditional patterns increased when the provincial government subsequently introduced wildlife regulations to protect what they felt were threatened species. Unlike most Native people in Canada, the Innut of Labrador did not enjoy special privileges with respect to the hunting of wildlife. Government officials bound Innut and non-Innut alike to these standards.² Faced with a dramatic decrease in traditional life-sustaining resources and the encouragement and inducement of non-Innut individuals and groups, these people eventually abandoned their nomadic patterns to settle in a permanent community.

My purpose in this paper is to trace the establishment of the community of Sheshatshit, an Innu community in Labrador. In doing so, I propose to document the role of non-Innut establishments and individuals, their commitment to economic development, and their application of inducements to entice the nomadic Innut to settle. The paper is divided into three sections. The first briefly recounts the Innut's attachment of Sheshatshit before 1949. The second part outlines the attitude of government, health and church officials toward economic development and settlement after Newfoundland entered Confederation in 1949. Finally, the last section documents the measures taken by these people and traces the settlement of the Innut up to the 1970's.³

Before Confederation (1949)

For centuries Innut inhabited and travelled over an extensive territory that comprised virtually all of Labrador and major portions of northern and eastern Quebec above the St. Lawrence River. Innut organized their lives around those activities that enabled them to take advantage of those natural resources that would guarantee survival. Innut in the area of what would eventually become the community of Sheshatshit depended heavily on the migratory caribou herds in the vicinity, and moved frequently to intercept these animals. The Jesuits of the 17th century were among the first to recognize these nomadic living patterns.

It is a wandering life of people scattered here and there according as hunting and fishing lead them, now upon the rocks or in the islands in the midst of some great lakes, now upon the banks or rivers, without shelter, without houses, without any fixed abode, without collecting anything from the land except what it gives in an unfruitful country to those who never cultivated it (Vimont, cited in Speck, 1935:32).

Fitzhugh (1972) contends that in pre-contact times the Innut followed a migratory cycle that consisted of five phases, a summer fishing and gathering time, a fall caribou hunt, winter trapping camps, a winter caribou hunt, and a spring gathering. The latter phase signalled the onset of a time of abundance and celebrations often took place at this time. Such gatherings usually involved from fifty to one hundred people and were often held in the area of Lake Michakamau, approximately one hundred and fifty miles northwest of Sheshatshit. Innut eventually abandoned this practice to travel to Sheshatshit to trade with fur companies which had set up operations at this site as early as the 18th century. In time, most Innut would meet for short periods at Sheshatshit before dispersing to their summer fishing camps. By 1866 the annual visit of the missionary provided yet another incentive for people to congregate in the area. Many would come to Sheshatshit in the summer until 1896 when the Oblate missionaries terminated their annual visits (McGee, 1961). Settlers saw very little of the Innut for the next few years (Wallace, 1983). The Innut returned some years later, and their old attachments to this site were strengthened when missionaries from Newfoundland resumed summer visits some twenty-five years after the Oblates had left. Around this time the growing number of settlers who had made their homes at this site made it known that they didn't care to have the Innut camp near the Hudson's Bay Company, a practice the Native people had adhered to since the coming of the traders. "In order to avoid trouble" with the settlers the missionary persuaded the people to move to the south side of the river (McGee,

1961:29).

By 1940, according to Mailhot and Michand (1965), the Innut met with the missionary before dispersing to their summer fishing camps in the Lake Melville area. They customarily set up their camps near secondary trading posts where they could obtain goods in exchange for furs and as relief. After the Hudson's Bay Company withdrew its smaller posts in the area in 1942 to concentrate their trade at Sheshatshit, the Innut spent longer periods of time at this location. Eventually they discontinued their practice of establishing summer fishing camps.

State Policy, Economic Development and Settlement

Confederation of Newfoundland with Canada brought on a number of changes that were to have a direct impact on the Innut and their migratory habits. The reorganization and active intervention of government agencies at this time accelerated the demise of traditional Innu living patterns and would eventually play an important part in the establishment of Sheshatshit. The basis for the policies that guided both civil servants and others associated with Labrador may be better understood when examined within the context of development programs initiated by the new provincial government. Newfoundland was in dire straits in the 1940's. Matthews (1976:1) paints a picture of conditions in 1949:

Centuries of British Colonial mismanagement followed by decades of local political corruption had drained her of more resources than her one commodity, the fishery could provide...A small local elite had become rich, but most Newfoundlanders in 1949 were living in rural fishing villages where they were totally dependent on the precarious fortunes of the erratic inshore fishery and the good graces of the village merchant. With the exception of two paper mills and some small mines, there were virtually no industries in the island province. Standards of living were low. Educational facilities were poor. Roads were almost non-existent. Hospitals were widely scattered. Social assistance in time of need was meager. Most Newfoundlanders were living a peasant's existence as their fathers had done for generations.

Matthews (1976) goes on to say that Confederation with Canada was a union of necessity. The first premier of the fledgling province looked to wide scale industrial development as the means that would deliver his people from their destitution. He used Confederation as a springboard to launch a campaign to develop Newfoundland's resources. The following speech, which he (Smallwood, 1973:343) subsequently entitled "Ahead or Astern" captures the mood of the

times:

The policy of the Liberal party is to make Newfoundland one of the prosperous, progressive provinces of Canada: a province able to hold its head up and proud to look the rest of Canada squarely in the eyes. A province willing and able to help its people to a higher standard of living than they have ever enjoyed before. Our first great undertaking as a government will be the development of our country, both Newfoundland and Labrador. We will push vigorously ahead with a policy of searching for natural resources, measuring them developing them; day and night we will work for this great purpose. We will strain every effort and use all our ability to open up our country and to increase our country's wealth and prosperity. Newfoundland cannot stand still — we must go ahead or go astern.

In pursuit of these ends, the premier of this government solicited foreign capital to broaden and stimulate the economic base of the province. He also looked to improve health and educational services, a move which he saw as an integral component of the master plan and a necessary condition to sustain a healthy economy. A speech given by the premier (Smallwood, 1971) some years after he took office reflects such an attitude:

These then are but two broad parts of development, public services and our economic. But, you see, these two parts overlap, they intertwine. They depend on each other; they are inseparable. Good health, good education, good technical training, surely these are necessary, enough for their own sake alone, go for that of course, not for their own sake alone, but for the sake of sound and enduring economic development.

Both health and education facilities expanded rapidly after Confederation. The education budget, for example, mushroomed from four million in 1950 to eighty million in 1967 (Newfoundland and Labrador, 1967).

Newfoundland's resettlement plan comprised but another element of the master plan. In order to take advantage of the new health services, have their children educated in new, larger schools and to populate the new industrial complexes, Newfoundlanders had to abandon their settlements and move to central locations.⁴ Rather than providing facilities and letting residents take advantage of them as they saw fit, the provincial government initiated an extensive centralization program to relocate many of these communities. The government provided assistance to those communities in which

every resident expressed a willingness to move. Between 1953 and 1965 the provincially sponsored program evacuated 115 communities along with 7,500 people. Officials stepped up the schedule with the infusion of federal money in 1965 and when the program was terminated, the government had moved 600 communities and 70,000 people to selected "growth centres" (Matthews, 1976).

State, health and church agencies responsible for Labrador operated under similar assumptions. Officials of these institutions believed that industrial society was poised to sweep over the land and that their task was to prepare the Native people of the area to take their place within this system.

Civilization is on the northward march, and for the Eskimo and the Indian there is no escape. The last bridges of isolation were destroyed by the coming of the airplane and the radio. The only course now open, for there can be no turning back, is to fit them as soon as may be to take their places as fully fledged citizens in our Society. There is no time to lose.

Government officials looked upon the Innut of the region as a problem. Unlike the Beothucks, who posed little difficulty for state agencies by dying out in the previous century, the director of one government department believed that the propensity of the Innut to live on forced the government to deal with them.

For the Indians, and many of the Eskimos, there is no easy short term solution, unless it be the solution found for the Aborigines of Newfoundland more than a century ago. They, the Beothucks, have been no bother since June 7, 1829. The writer does not advocate this solution for the Labrador Indians, but it would almost be kinder than to allow them to live off garbage dumps, and become a prey to unscrupulous persons. The Montagnais and the Grenfell Mission, have given up their propensity to die out (Rockwood, 1959a:4).⁵

In order to deal with such "problems" the Newfoundland government established a new division within the Department of Welfare in September of 1951. Known as the Division of Labrador Affairs (DNIA), it assumed responsibility for all matters concerning northern Labrador, and eventually took control of the Innut of Sheshatshit as a report at the time indicates.⁶ "The government has decided that the Indians living at North West River shall be placed under the supervision and control of the Division" (Newfoundland and Labrador, Division of Northern Labrador Affairs, 1957:113).⁷ Kennedy (1977:282) argues that by virtue of its capacity to distribute funds from federal-provincial agreements the Division assumed an integral

role in directing the affairs of all people in the region.⁸ “The effect of this was to make the Division the most pervasive institutional force Labrador has ever seen, an agency which after 1951, increasingly came to effect most facets of life.”

The Division, like many others in government, believed that Labrador's Native people had to be integrated, or more accurately assimilated by, the dominant society: “The ultimate aim should be full and complete integration into our society” (Newfoundland and Labrador, 1956:18). The director of the Division, however, felt that such a task would not be an easy one. He maintained that “As with the Indians elsewhere there are deeply rooted psychological attitudes to be overcome before the process of integration is complete” (DNLA, 1960:115). Nevertheless, he believed that complete integration could best be attained through a slate of welfare (economic), health and education programs.

The Eskimos and the Indians cannot continue to exist as isolated minorities but must ultimately be integrated into the general body of our Society. A vigorous program in Welfare and Education, particularly the latter is required to match the Health programme already underway, and to prepare these minorities for the Society of the Future (DNLA, 1956:75).

The economic realm remained a central focus for many of DNLA's activities. The director (Rockwood, 1955:3) believed that “the main problem and that most difficult of solution [was] the attainment of a solid economic base.” Once an economic base was established “whether it be mining, lumber or others, the other pieces of the puzzle [would] fall into place” (Rockwood, 1955:5). The “economic rehabilitation” of the area's Native people took priority. Kennedy (1977) contends that the Division based this policy on the belief that Native people would rather “work” than hunt or fish. Consequently DNLA undertook to replace the subsistent hunting economy with one based on wage labour.

Like Newfoundland politicians of the time, the various agencies responsible for Labrador believed that education was integral to the economic development of the territory. DNLA was no exception. The director (Rockwood, 1959a) felt that in order to prepare Native people for their inevitable assimilation, the proper authorities had to educate the children. Education as a key element in the process of integration would provide Native people with the tools to master the market economy just as it had enabled so many in Euro-Canadian society to do so.

Infinitely important, is the process of integration, which, although going on for generations, may be expected to continue for many years to come... Education is the key

and there is ample evidence that given the proper training, Eskimos and Indians can undertake any of the occupations and professions in our present society (DNLA, 1957:79).

Other prominent individuals and agencies also promoted formal education for the same reasons. The director of the hospital in North West River at that time, an individual who had considerable impact not only on health matters but upon educational Eskimo and Indian children [was] to see that they [were] racially integrated" (Paddon, 1973:13). He concluded that Innu children could learn a great deal from non-Innu classmates and recommended that they be schooled alongside these children.

If the Indian could be integrated with the general school system instead of being educated in the Indian school he would learn much from his white and Eskimo classmates and could put the new language to work and become fluent in it and he would probably raise his sights and prepare himself for a career, or at least make a reasonable adjustment to Canadian life (Paddon, 1973:16).

The Hunting and fishing economies of the Native people, and in particular, the nomadic tendencies of the Innut proved to be inconsistent with a development scheme centred around central and stationary industries and formal schooling. The director of DNLA (Rockwood, 1955:5) stated that "the hunting and fishing economies of the past, necessitating as it did frequent moves from place to place [has not] been conducive to this kind of development." The Division assumed that people would eventually gravitate to those places which offered the best chance of raising living standards (Rockwood, 1955). But instead of waiting for people to move on their own, it took the initiative to move two communities. In 1956 officials closed the store at Nutack, an Inuit community in northern Labrador, and told residents that houses would be available when they moved south. Two years later, with the collaboration of the Moravian missionaries, officials duplicated these tactics at Hebron, another northern Inuit community, amid protests. The state also had designs on the Innut who lived part of the year at Davis inlet. The idea of moving these people first surfaced at the Labrador Conference (Government of Newfoundland, 1956:18).

It seems likely that the future of the Davis Inlet (Naskaupi) band with their close relatives, the Montagnais at North West River, lies with the development of the resources mentioned [beaver trapping, fishery, forest industries]. This view of the situation will involve the transfer of the Davis Inlet to the Lake Melville area.

DNLA abandoned the plan amid protests. This was not the first time, however, that the state considered establishing new living quarters for these people. In 1948 Newfoundland government officials demonstrated their ignorance of the Innut's transient life style by attempting to relocate the Davis Inlet group by transporting them of Okak Bay to cut wood. The Innut bewildered these officials when they vanished into thin air, only to reappear some five months later at Davis Inlet (Henrikson, 1973; Brice-Bennett, 1986).

Health officials also had reasons other than those motivated by health concerns for discouraging the transient habits of the Innut. As far back as the 1930's, Dr. Harry Paddon, in line with the International Grenfell Association's (IGA) policy of promoting self-sufficiency, formulated a plan to centralize the residents of the coast. Hayward Parsons (1933) reveals the essence of the plan in a letter to Monsignor O'Brien. He writes:

I think Dr. Paddon's plan is to centralize the residents who are scattered along the coast, hoping to make them more productive and self-sufficient. He also hopes of interesting them in farming.

Missionaries have historically expressed an interest in locating Innut in permanent communities. The Jesuits of the 17th century were the first to inaugurate such plans. Le Jeuene (Thwaites, 1902:145) elaborates on the reasons for their desire to centralize the Innut in 1634.

The second means of commending ourselves to the Savages, to induce them to receive our holy faith, would be to send men to clear and cultivate the land, who, joining themselves with others who know the language, would work for the Savages, on condition that they would settle down, and themselves put their hands to the work, living in houses that would be built for their use; by this means becoming located, and seeing this miracle of charity in their behalf, they could be more easily be instructed and won.

Permanent settlement would allow for chronic instruction in religious teaching, a task made difficult by the nomadic life style of the Innut. The desire on the part of missionaries to have these people within teaching distance prevailed even on into the 1960's. The priest stationed at Sheshatshit during this time displayed a similar attitude toward religious instruction. He responded to a questionnaire circulated by L'institute Missiologie de L'Universitie d'Ottawa (1963) by stating that unlike children who he was able to instruct at regular intervals, the adults did not have the advantage of adequate religious instruction because of their nomadic habits.

L'instruction religieuse: Il faut distinguer entre enfants et adultes. Les adultes n'ont pas l'avantage d'une instruction religieuse adéquate, à cause de leur nomadisme d'autrefois, et le manque de contact avec le missionnaire.

State, health and church agencies vigorously translated such beliefs into practice. Government funds accelerated the process of assimilation by facilitating the implementation of economic, health and educational programs that would promote such ideals. The establishment of Sheshatshit as a permanent community was only part of a scheme that would ensure that the Innu would become part of the Euro-Canadian industrial society. By virtue of an ability to provide essential services to a people whose life-sustaining resources were rapidly dwindling, these agencies were able to dictate the terms upon which the Innu were to live.

After Confederation

Confederation with Canada brought with it a number of potential benefits for the Innu.⁹ These people qualified for a variety of pensions as well as family allowance payments as a consequence of the union of 1949. At this time more Innu began to take advantage of government benefits they were entitled to if and when they chose not to go to the country.¹⁰ Those who stayed by the mission throughout the winter would receive a steady cash income, while those who travelled into the bush would obtain an "outfit," that when coupled with an adequate supply of game, would be sufficient to sustain them during this period. The outfit amounted to considerably less than the regular welfare payments. One Innu comments that in those times the welfare payment for a family who didn't go to the country totalled thirty dollars a month. He goes on to say that "for [a family of] four that was a lot of money." Successful hunting and trapping seasons could not always be counted on, and in contrast to the relative security of a guaranteed source of sustenance, country life took on an element of risk.

In 1951 the permanent residency of a Catholic priest and the subsequent construction of a chapel in 1953 provided added incentive for the people to remain for longer periods at Sheshatshit. As early as 1952 a number remained by the mission throughout the winter (Pirson, 1986). In 1954 the government threatened to withdraw funding for those who went back into the bush in the fall (North West River Codex Historicus, 1952-1974). When the local welfare officer announced that no special outfit would be granted to the people that year, the missionary threatened to go to St. John's on behalf of the people. Instead, the director of DNLA visited Sheshatshit and eventually authorized the allocations. Nevertheless ten tents remained by the mission throughout the winter of 1954-55 (North West River Codex Historicus, 1952-1974).

During this time the International Genfell Association (IGA) stepped up their fight against tuberculosis. Diagnosed as a menace in the 1930's (Tanner, 1944), the disease had continued to spread until it had reached alarming proportions in 1951 when surveys indicated a rate of 9.6% among Innut and 12.5% among Inuit, a rate one hundred times the national average (Jenness, 1965). IGA official's inaugurated an extensive X-ray program from 1948 to 1950 before substantial federal funds provided the impetus for an acceleration of the program. Medical authorities attempted to monitor the Innut to diagnose and treat the disease. These officials recommended that patients undergo rehabilitation from the day they entered hospital so that they would be ready for advanced training when released from the ward. During this recovery period they looked to house patients in cottages near the hospital (Jenness, 1965). Needless to say, the traditional Innu life style posed a multitude of problems for officials who demanded that patients be closely monitored. Residents of Sheshatshit confirm that hospital officials actively discouraged those who were infected from going to the country.

Although DNLA worked toward the integration of the Innut into the wage labour economy, it attempted one last ditch effort to take advantage of Innut's traditional skills. In 1958 officials sought to revive the trapping industry by sponsoring an expedition to Marie Lake. This enterprise, however, was not aimed wholly at engendering self-sufficiency for the Innut, for the director hoped that the government could profit from such an undertaking. He believed that 50% was not an unreasonable figure (Rockwood, 1958a, 1958b). The Division, however, put an end to these plans after officials learned that the Indian agent who coordinated the operation had overspent his budget by approximately \$9,000 (Rockwood, 1959b).

The construction of houses remains perhaps the single most significant event in the establishment of the community of Sheshatshit. Unlike tents, houses are not conducive to a transient life style: rather, they inhibit it. For the Innut ownership of houses would reflect a permanent and lasting attachment to one fixed location. Chronic habitation of these dwellings would solidify lasting ties to Sheshatshit.

Both government and health officials promoted housing projects. As early as 1955 an IGA sponsored inspection identified housing conditions as a major contributor to poor health. Officials who conducted the survey reasoned that it was an exercise in futility to restore people's health and "then send them back to live in these unsanitary hovels" (Jenness, 1965: 80). Rowe (1985) identifies the tent dwellings in which the Innut lived at the time as a major factor in the spread of tuberculosis.¹¹ He notes that in view of what he believes were the deplorable conditions at the time, "extraordinary measures were needed if the extinction of two more Indian groups, in addition to the Beothucks, were to be avoided" (1985:150). He

concludes that improved medical services and the construction of houses combined to save the Innut from extinction!

The combined results of segregating infected persons, improved medical treatment, the success of the Oblate priests in getting patients to the hospital, the building of houses to eliminate the tent syndrome, and the institution of basic hygiene all combined to save the Naskapi Indians of Labrador from extinction (Ibid.:151).

Such a claim may be somewhat exaggerated. By the time the first house was constructed at Sheshatshit in 1957, officials at the Labrador Conference, which was held the previous year, claimed that the disease was under control and there is no active case which is not under treatment." Furthermore, Bruemmer (1971:96) disputes the notion that tents contributed to ill health. He argues that "In 1967 when nearly all the 150 Davis Inlet Naskapi were still living year-round in tents, they had the lowest mortality rate of all the people on the Labrador coast, 9.6 per 1,000 (only slightly higher than the Canadian national average of 8 per 1,000 in 1960)."

Nevertheless, health officials pushed for the construction of housing. Mailhot and Michand (1965) note that the chief medical officer at the hospital in North West River was a driving force behind the inauguration of the first housing project. The government introduced this initial venture in efforts to induce the Innut of Sheshatshit to form an attachment to this type of dwelling. Instead of building structures for the people, they made it known that they would supply the balance of the materials to those willing to obtain certain designated parts on their own. Officials would then expect residents to construct their own houses when they had all the materials at hand. They reasoned that

It would be simpler to provide all the materials and labour in building these houses, so that nothing would be required of the Indian but to move in when the house is completed. If the purpose of the programme is to prove how much can be done for the Indian instead of how much he can do himself, this certainly would be the thing to do. It is hoped, however, that the plan will first of all awaken a desire on the part of the Indian to own a home, and that once it is acquired he will have a homeowner's pride in it (DNLA, 1959:124-125).

Innut constructed two houses at Sheshatshit in 1957, seven in 1958, three in 1959 and two in 1961 (DNLA, 1958-1962). After an interval of a few years, the government renewed its housing program with the signing of a new federal-provincial agreement. This time, however, the sheer magnitude of the operation required that contrac-

tors be brought in. They constructed fifty-one houses from 1965 to 1968 (DNLA, 1966-1969). In contrast to the houses built for government officials and teachers around the same time, these houses were not equipped with running water. A government report (DNLA, 1966:244) describes the twenty-three houses built in 1965 at Sheshatshit. "Twelve of the houses contain three bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and living room combined; the remaining eleven contain two bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and living room combined."

The federal-provincial agreement of 1965 also provided funding for the construction of a large new school at Sheshatshit. The missionary, however, initiated formal schooling as early as 1952. Both the missionary and, in time, the professional teachers who came to teach in the area, pressured the Innut to send their children to school. The priest applied pressure of two sorts. When he noticed that children were missing from school he would search the community. Current residents of Sheshatshit who were students at the time recall how he would "twist ears" when he found truant children. One former student remembers it was enough that they miss school, but when students avoided religion class it was considered an offense of immeasurable magnitude. Those who did so inevitably felt the wrath of the priest. Although people resented the way this man treated their children (McGee, 1961), few would say anything, for most feared him.

Prompted no doubt by the questioning of the sporadic school attendance by school officials in St. John's (Vardy, 1983), the priest who was stationed at Sheshatshit investigated another avenue that would induce parents to send their children to school.¹² Although it would appear that he supported the traditional life style of the Innut, he was most reluctant to see school-age children accompany their parents to the bush and miss valuable school time. Eventually he considered recommending that government officials deprive those families who neglected to send their children to school of their family allowance payments.¹³ The following correspondence with the superintendent of the school system would seem to indicate that while the priest appeared to tolerate a fall migration, he was prepared to recommend the loss of family allowance to those who didn't send their children to school at other times of the year.

Every time I was filling the monthly report for school attendance, I was feeling guilty. Now, I think the time is due to give a true picture of what is going on here. Looking at this monthly report, you will notice that there are 21 pupils attending school here at North West River, (I mean Indians). But according to the census of the Indian population, 53 children are supposed to attend school. So 31 children are not in school. The difficulty

with the Indians is the following. Most of them are moving because they are supposed to be hunting people. I will agree that when the time for hunting and trapping is in the fall. But after New Year, all of them are very near to North West River, and one [main] reason to stay away from here is to have the chance to make and drink beer abusely; because the government is giving relief to all of them, there is no good reason to stay from the settlement and doing so prevent the children going to school. Last year, some children attended school only four weeks. I think that I have to do something. I told the parents many times I am afraid to do that but I will suggest to inform the Family Allowances Department and ask them to discontinue allowances to parents who are careless (Pirson, 1959a).¹⁴

Professional teachers who began arriving as early as 1959 in Sheshatshit reorganized the structure and curriculum practices of the school according to Newfoundland standards (Vardy, 1983). According to a number of community residents, these school officials insisted that the people send their children to school all year. These teachers felt that the school should take precedence over the seasonal migration. One resident maintains that.

The principal didn't like it [when the people took their children to the country] so he said that the family allowances would be cut off if the kids didn't come to school...Even when [the missionary] was there they were told that they would have their family allowances cut off if they sent their kids to the country. The people didn't like it but they didn't have any choice but to send their kids to school...The teachers and the principal eventually won and the people stopped taking kids to the country.

By the 1960's fewer and fewer people made the trek to the country. Further, many of the men who did go left their families behind. Mailhot and Michand (1965) note that in 1962 forty-one complete families went to the country, ten complete families stayed by the mission and nine men journeyed to the bush without their families. Over the next few years the numbers going to the country declined dramatically. Most who made the trip travelled without their families, spent considerably less time away from the settlement than they had during previous years and covered less territory. By November of 1967 only a few had ventured into the bush.

Quelques famille Indiennes sont partis dans le bois — deux...quelques hommes (4)...Le reste de la population est ici (North West River Codex Historicus, 1952-74).

During this time the availability of work prompted many men to remain at Sheshatshit for most of the year. After the Marie Lake fiasco, DNLA (1961) acknowledged that efforts toward economic rehabilitation had "not been very effective." In order to rectify the situation they embarked on a program that initiated local construction and eventually succeeded in establishing a sawmill industry. DNLA was not the only party interested in the latter endeavour. Both the director of the hospital (Budgel, 1984) and the local missionary were instrumental in efforts to obtain provincial funding for this enterprise. The priest, in fact, met with the premier who seemed "very sympathetic" to his request (Doug, 1963). The mill began operations in 1966 and in that same year produced 130,000 board feet of lumber (Newfoundland and Labrador. Northern Labrador Services Division (NLSD), 1968). Perceptions of this endeavour vary. On the positive side the Northern Labrador Services Division (NLSD), DNLA's successor, paints a rosy picture.

The Indians at North West River have taken a great interest in the woods operation. They realize it is possible to make money in the woods and improve their standard of living. In the beginning it was difficult to find enough workers. Today this has changed. There are many times when it is possible to provide work for the number of people seeking employment.

Budgel (1984:45) on the other hand, contends that "the mill seems to have been plagued with personnel problems, and problems of communication between white foremen and Indian workers." Personal testimony, archival material and heresay would seem to support the latter statement. Nevertheless, the sawmill did provide an opportunity for most men of the fledgling community to try their hand at wage labour, a situation which was generally not present before this time and would not occur again in the future. The sawmill continued to produce lumber into the 1970's until it quietly ceased operations shortly after the Innut assumed control.

The shortage of game animals in the immediate vicinity, increasing surveillance of wildlife restrictions, the availability of work at the saw mill and other agencies, the attachment of many to their houses, the presence of health care in the community and the efforts of school officials to have children attend school all year combined to erode the incentive of many to travel to the country. The drive for development threw up yet another barrier that would impede the Innut's pursuit of their traditional life style in 1969. The Churchill Falls Corporation ensured that many Innut would never see their hunting grounds again when it dammed the Churchill River, flooding thousands of square miles of territory, and sweeping away canoes, weapons and traps that belonged to those who regularly hunted in the area. By the time it reached its peak in 1973, this newly created

body of water, subsequently named the Smallwood Reservoir, covered an area of 2,200 square miles, and became the third largest man-made reservoir in the world (Smith, 1975). One Innu (in Tanner, 1977:98) talks about the flooding:

Our hunting territory there is no good to us anymore, because all our traps and belongings are under water. We lost mostly Innu manufactured items. I lost two canoes, about 500 traps, snowshoes, caribou-hide scraper, beaming tools, ice chisels, axes and many other items. We knew there was going to be damming of the river, but we did not know what it would mean. We had no idea of what level of the water would be. At most we compared it to a beaver damming a river.

In 1974 with the infusion of government funds the Innut again began returning to their hunting grounds in the fall and spring. But there could be no return to their nomadic way of life. Even though many would eventually travel to the country, the strong ties to the community dictated that all would return to Sheshatshit after approximately three months. Although men would sometimes travel long distances, they rarely if ever took their families: women and children would remain behind in the base camps. Moreover, the employment of a number of residents by non-Innu as well as Innu agencies, the marriage of Innut to non-Innut who would just as soon not travel to the bush, and the acquisition of valued material goods added yet another dimension to the permanency of the community.

The changing conditions that Innut faced over the years — many of which were engineered by non-Innut — provided them both with incentives to change their lifestyle and penalties for resisting this new life. Initially many Innut embraced elements of this new settlement pattern for it held new possibilities that could make life easier for them in a land where they had traditionally faced great hardships. Remaining at Sheshatshit year round gave them access to health care that would prolong their lives and lessen the suffering of the ill. Furthermore those who remained at this central location could obtain housing facilities along with adequate funds from the government or wage labour to guarantee the livelihood of themselves and their families. Like their predecessors many of these people were willing to make adjustments in their living practices. Unlike their forefathers, however, who merely incorporated changes into their traditional living patterns and continued to maintain their time-tested practices, these new changes demanded a wholesale transformation of even the most basic elements of their culture. Many Innut could not forsake the lure of the traditional life, however, and continued to pursue these activities travelling to the country in the fall and spring of the year. But as the 1960's wore on even those who persisted found that it

was impossible to sustain themselves in the bush without some outside assistance. Nevertheless, some resisted the temptation to settle, ignoring the warnings of school officials who claimed that they would see to it that offenders would lose their family allowance payments for not sending their children to school all year, consistently violating the growing number of government wildlife restrictions, and disregarding the instructions of health officials. Eventually, however, even the most persistent found they could not maintain their traditional patterns when faced with the overwhelming obstacles that lay in their way. Other forms of political resistance or protestation were simply not in the repertoire of a people with only a limited understanding of Canadian society and an inability to communicate in English.¹⁵ Indeed the one upon whom they relied to translate their needs and feelings to outside agencies was, for the most part, in favour of Innu settlement. Even though the missionary was prepared to tolerate seasonal migrations, he wished to have the children attending school, the men working at wage labour and the people attending church all year round. It could not be said that Innu settlement was accompanied by either a wholesale acceptance or widespread resistance: there was evidence of both acceptance and resistance. Ultimately, however, those who resisted faced insurmountable odds and eventually, like those who initially embraced permanent settlement, found themselves in the midst of community life.

Epilogue

Faced with the prospect of their incapacity to survive by traditional means and the encouragement of those who now held the key to the new life-sustaining resources, Innut had little choice but to settle and live in a fixed location and abide by terms which these non-Innu institutions set. The settling of the Innut at Sheshatshit involved much more than the mere stationing of human beings: this process entailed the wholesale transformation of a people who spent virtually the entire year at one location and who depended exclusively on government relief for their livelihood. Ironically, those efforts of philanthropic proponents of development to economically rehabilitate these people have backfired. Instead of prosperity, happiness and good health, this community, like so many other Native communities across Canada, is burdened with chronic alcoholism, child neglect, family strife, disease, violence, unemployment, poverty, and despair. Even today this state of affairs stands in marked contrast to the serenity of bush living. Those individuals and groups who looked to integrate the Innut of Labrador into Canadian industrial society to promote their well-being would have done well to heed the warnings of Richard White (1931:3) who issued the following prophetic state-

ment long before the cause of development was taken up.

To attempt to civilize them or in any way hinder their nomadic form of life would undoubtedly finally destroy the Labrador Indians, for they would degenerate to mere hangers-on at the settlements, losing their self-reliance and dignity. Any effort, however, well-meaning, to civilize them must inevitably have disastrous effects.

Would conditions be any better for these people today if proponents of progress hadn't been blinded by the panacea of economic development and worked instead to assist the Innut in maintaining their traditional ways? One can only speculate. Unfortunately we will never know the answer.

NOTES

1. Among status Indians in Canada, for example, the life expectancy is ten years less than the national population. The rate of violent deaths is three times the national average, and the suicide rate is six times higher. Among younger people these figures are even higher. Between 50% and 70% receive social assistance, and one in three families inhabit over crowded housing (Canada, 1982).
2. Tanner (1977) notes that the sole exception to this rule was a caribou hunt in 1963-64 which was opened only to the Innut.
3. My primary data sources included government documents and archival material. I also utilized other literature resources and the testimony of residents of Sheshatshit to confirm and extend the information I retained through these sources.
4. Matthews (1976) estimates that in 1949 Newfoundland had approximately 1,500 communities, most of which had fewer than 300 residents.
5. Many non-Innut still refer to the Innut as Naskapi and Montagnais. For a complete treatment of the origins of these names see Mailhot (1983).
6. Although DNLA was not formally charged with the supervision of the Innut of the Sheshatshit region until 1957, the Division had dealings with these people from the time of its initial formation in 1951. DNLA's function as dispenser of welfare

brought it in contact with all Native people in Labrador at this time.

7. Early traders who established posts at Sheshatshit on the shores of Lake Melville called it North West River. From this point on the majority of non-Innut referred to it in these terms. It was not until the 1970's when the Innu component on the south side of the river ceded from the settler population on the north side to officially become a municipality that those other than Innut began calling the south side "Sheshatshit." The north side is still known as North West River.
8. Federal-provincial agreements: 1954 — (1) \$21,000 compensation for relief from 1949-54, (2) — federal government assumes full cost of capital expenditures up to \$200,000 and full cost of health care, (3) Newfoundland government assumes responsibility for financial administration and relief, (4) agreement covers ten years; 1965 — (1) ten year health care agreement renewable after ten years, (2) federal government assumes 90% of all costs pertaining to Native people up to a maximum of one million dollars per year, (3) federal government reimburses the provincial government for capital expenditures before 1965 for an amount up to \$225,000; 1973 — Limit raised from \$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000 per year; 1975 — Limit raised \$4,500,000 per year; 1981 — five year agreement totalling 39 million dollars of federal funds.
9. When Newfoundland entered Confederation in 1949 provincial and federal officials left the Native people in Labrador out of the Terms of Union. As a consequence they were not granted official status. Budgel (1984) contends that both federal and provincial officials accused each other of renegeing on a deal that had been worked out to recognized the aboriginal people of the area prior to Confederation. Even though Innut did acquire a few benefits, they were also deprived of such services as access to housing programs, educational opportunities and other privileges including special hunting rights.
10. Most Innut refer to the experience of living off the land in the wilds of the bush as "country life." I will also refer to this event as a "traditional" way of life.
11. As a minister in the Smallwood cabinet from 1952 to 1971, Rowe was partly responsible for resettlement projects in Newfoundland and Labrador. Much of his book, *The Smallwood Era*, is directed at defending the actions of the government of the time.

12. These school officials rejected the priest's request to have the school year changed to accommodate the Innut's migratory habits (Vardy, 1983), a move that was recommended by DNLA (1960).
13. The government of Newfoundland introduced this provision in 1949. Coates (1986) notes that this tactic was regularly employed by government officials across Canada to entice Native people to send their children to school.
14. I discovered this item tucked inside one of the old school registers in the basement of the school. I can't be sure whether the missionary actually sent the letter, however. He does address some of the same issues in a letter to the director of DNLA dated April 30 of the same year (Pirson, 1959b).
15. Today Innu political groups are among the most active in Canada. Their projects have included resisting Wildlife regulations and protesting military operations, among many others. They have also presented their land claims concerns to the United Nations and have successfully pursued a case that involved human rights violations in this same international forum.

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