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WRITING IN INUKTITUT:

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

"We were stupid. We should have thought of writing on sealskins."[1] So said Peter Pitseolak, commenting on his forebears' failure to leave a legacy of written records.

Peter Pitseolak, Inuk writer and author of People from our Side *and* Escape from Death, *who realized the value of written records. Credit: Dorothy Eber. (10K)*

Throughout the North, Inuit had no traditional writing systems. No attempts were made to develop writing systems for Inuit until after contact with whites. When that contact occurred, it was white missionaries who made the first attempts to reduce the Inuktitut language to written form.

Early Greenlandic Writing

The earliest attempts to develop an orthography for the Inuktitut language were the attempts by Lutheran ministers to develop a written form for Greenlandic. Poul Egede, son of Hans Egede, the first missionary to Greenland, was the pioneer in this work. He drew on the earlier work of his father and other missionaries in translating the New Testament, which was published in its entirety in Greenlandic in 1766. By 1760 Egede had also published a grammar of Greenlandic. In writing Greenlandic for Greenlanders, Egede used Roman orthography, but one which differed in some points from that of Egede. In 1822 a third translation of the New Testament was published, this one by the German Moravian missionary, Johan Conrad Kleinschmidt; it too differed orthographically from the previous translation. The aim of these early attempts was usually not to produce an Inuktitut orthography for Inuit, but rather "for use of other white people, and possibly for the student from amongst the Eskimo people who has been trained by white scholarship." [2]

By the mid-1800s it was obvious that there was a need for a standard method of writing in Greenlandic. If not, people would continue to write Greenlandic in a way which seemed best for each individual but which, together, would be very confusing to the readers.

Greenland was fortunate at that time to have a remarkable man working in its Moravian priesthood. He was Samuel Kleinschmidt. The son of a missionary, he had been born in Greenland and had grown up speaking Greenlandic. His interests

were wide, but his most important contributions were to the cultural life of Greenland, through the publication of his Greenlandic grammar and dictionary and his contributions to the newspaper, *Atuagagdliutit*. Kleinschmidt worked on Greenlandic orthographic reform for many years. As a linguist he was far ahead of his time. In 1850 he wrote:

It is a serious fault when different sounds are indicated by means of one letter, or one sound by means of different letters, and the fault is doubly grave in a language which is so thoroughly regular as that of Greenland. [3]

By 1871 Kleinschmidt was satisfied with his revised orthography and used it consistently in the dictionary he published that year. His innovation became the official standard for written Greenlandic for the next century, and was used consistently in books, newspapers and all official publications.

From Greenland to Labrador

The first missionaries to Labrador were Moravians with Greenlandic experience. They established a mission in Labrador in the late eighteenth century. Most of these missionaries were fluent in Greenlandic already, and found few differences between Greenlandic and the Inuit dialect of Labrador. From Greenland they brought a Roman orthography to Labrador, but their arrival pre-dated Kleinschmidt's work on the development of standard Greenlandic orthography by almost a century, so the Moravian orthography introduced in Labrador and used to this day differs in many points from Kleinschmidt's Greenlandic. In 1899 a writer made this comment about Labrador Inuttut:

Unfortunately the orthography of Eskimo which we usually use is still very imperfect, in itself varied and inconsistent. [4]

The difficulties, in the opinion of a linguist, were "largely due to the fact that the Labrador dialect had never been independently analysed. The orthography was based on Greenlandic, which was demonstrably different from Labrador Inuttut." [5]

Samuel Kleinschmidt has been credited with the development of a standard Greenlandic orthography used for over one hundred years in Greenlandic publications. (19K)

The earliest detailed grammar of Labrador Inuttut, written in German by Bourquin, relied heavily on Kleinschmidt's analysis of Greenlandic and its presumed similarity to Labrador Inuttut.

Roman orthographies were used too to write Inuktitut in the western Canadian Arctic, although no standard form developed.

Alaskan Picture Writing

The only place where Inuit attempted to develop their own systems of writing was Alaska. The most well-known innovator there was Uyaqoq, a Yupik-speaker from the Kuskokwim River, better known by the name Helper Neck ("neck" being the English translation of his name), a helper at a Moravian mission station. About 1900 Neck, who could neither read nor write English, began to develop a system of picture-writing. Other Inuit, working at the mission station and inspired by Neck's innovation, developed their own picture-writing systems, most of which could be read only by themselves. Meanwhile Neck continued to work on his system, adding extra symbols and eventually developing a syllabic writing system, that is, a system of writing in which one character represented one syllable; it was composed of Yupik (Eskimo) phonetics, English words and arbitrary symbols. While Neck developed his unique system, some of his closest associates continued to develop the earliest stage of his work, the pictorial writing.

In northern Alaska, in the Inupiaq-speaking area, an independent development of picture-writing occurred in the Buckland area on Kotzebue Sound, where Lily Savok and her mother, Kiloraq Ruth Eyak, developed a style quite different from that of Helper Neck. Their system was not fully developed until 1914. A third system was developed on Nunivak Island in the 1940s by Edna Kenick, the wife of a missionary.

A sample of Alaskan picture writing by Edna Kenick from Nunivak, Alaska. During the 1950s Edna Kenick wrote 49 passages from the Bible in picture writing like that pictured here. The manuscript for this material is now kept in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, Denmark. (27K)

It is significant that all of these developments, occuring independently of each other, were made by Inuit associated with missionary work. Further, they were not intended to be used in writing to other Inuit, but only as memory aids to assist the innovators in their preaching on Biblical texts.

Pages from an Eskimo-Russian dictionary compiled by E.S. Rubtsov under the editorship of G. A. Menovskikov and published in Moscow in 1971. Note the cyrillic Russian script. (27K and 42K)

The Alaskan picture-writing is a thing of the past. No-one uses it today and the originators of the various systems have all died. Save for these unique attempts by Inuit of Alaska to develop their own writing systems, the Roman alphabet has been used to write Alaskan Yupik and Inupiaq. It was also used in Siberia, before it was eventually supplanted by a system using Russian Cyrillic characters.

Inuktitut Syllabics: the Origins

In the eastern Canadian Arctic, excluding Labrador, the situation developed quite differently, and it took its cue from the work done in the mid-nineteenth century among Cree Indians at Norway House.

In 1840 the Reverend James Evans, a Wesleyan missionary, transferred from southern Ontario to Norway House, then part of the Hudson's Bay Company's vast territory. In Ontario, Evans had struggled to devise a means of recording accurately the sounds of the native Ojibway speech in the Roman alphabet, but had finally given up and developed a method of his own. He knew Pitman shorthand and turned this knowledge to good advantage in creating a syllabic script. He created nine symbols, each of which could be written in four different positions; these were sufficient to represent the vowel and consonant combinations of Ojibway. The mission board to which Evans reported, however, did not favour innovation of this nature and refused him permission to use his creation.

James Evans, who first devised a system of syllabic characters for Canadian Indian languages. (17K)

Almost two decades later, at Norway House, Evans learned the Cree language but again faced difficulties in reducing it to writing in the Roman alphabet. Here he re-examined his syllabic system, modifying it somewhat to suit the peculiarities of the Cree language. He taught the simple system to the Indians at Norway House and produced religious material for them to read. The results were amazing. The system was so simple that it could be mastered and literacy acquired within a few hours. Moreover, every Indian who mastered the system became a teacher of it, and use of the system spread rapidly as far as the Rocky Mountains. Even on the trail, Indians were able to communicate by leaving messages drawn with charred sticks in birchbark sheets. One writer at the time noted:

The Cree syllabarium from which the Inuktitut syllabic writing system was derived. (17K)

All accounts represent the diffusion of the syllabic characters among the Indian camps of the vast interior occupied by the Cree tribes as extraordinary. Parties descending rivers would exchange messages by inscriptions on banks or bars of the stream and its acquisition was only the labour of a few hours.[6]

James Evans became known as "the man who made birchbark talk."

Indians with James Evans reading syllabics written on birch bark. (36K)

Evans had difficulty meeting the demand for reading material in Cree. The Hudson's Bay Company had prohibited the importation of printing presses into their territory, so Evans improvised again - he produced material using syllabic characters carved in wood, lead melted from the linings of tea chests, ink made from soot mixed with fish oil, and birchbark for paper. Eventually his missionary society was able to provide him with type, ink, paper, a hand press and a building.

The use of syllabics prevailed among the Cree because the Indians themselves favoured the system. This is not to say that there was not criticism of the syllabics. The Anglican Bishop of Rupert's Land wrote in 1849:

The Wesleyans ... have, very unfortunately ... adopted a new character ... A few of the Indians can read by means of these syllabic characters; but if they had only been taught to read their own language in our letters, it would have been one step towards the acquisition of the English tongue.[7]

The bishop thus saw literacy as a means to speed assimilation.

Roman Catholic and Anglican missionaries nevertheless adopted the syllabic script for their translation work among the Indians. In 1861, 15 years after Evans' death, the British and Foreign Bible Society in London produced the entire Bible in Cree syllabics.

Adapting Syllabics to Inuktitut

Edmund James Peck is usually given credit for the adaptation of Evans' Cree Syllabics to Inuktitut, but this is not strictly correct. The adaptation was actually made by John Horden and E.A. Watkins, missionaries sent from England to the Diocese of Moosonee.

By 1856 Horden, working at Moose Factory, and Watkins at Fort George, were producing material in syllabics for Inuit. On June 19, 1856, Watkins noted:

This morning I spent an hour and a half with an Esquimaux youth, who had come ... from Little Whale River ... He seemed very anxious to acquire a knowledge of the syllabic characters.[8]

In the same year he mentions having received back from Moose Factory some Bible selections which he had prepared in Inuktitut and sent down to Moose Factory for printing in syllabics.

It was soon evident, however, that the syllabic characters were being severely "strained" by the demands of Inuktitut, and that some revisions would be necessary if Inuit were to learn and use the system well. Horden himself was not convinced that a revision was desirable, but in 1865 he met with Watkins in

London, under instruction from the Church Missionary Society, to modify the Cree system to the Inuktitut language.

John Horden (left) and E.A. Watkins, two missionaries from England, adapted Cree syllabics to suit Inuktitut. (10K)

Interestingly enough, one of the improvisations that Horden and Watkins brought to the system was not their own but one that they had borrowed from the legacy of Robert Hunt. Hunt, a Church Missionary Society missionary who had gone to Rupert's Land in 1849, established Stanley Mission near Lac La Ronge in what is now Saskatchewan. In 1853 he proposed some modifications to Evans' Cree syllabics, but his suggestions did not catch on and were never formally adopted. The method used today of representing syllable-final consonants and vowel length were Horden's and Watkins' adoption of Hunt's suggestion.

It is clear that the adaptation of Cree syllabics to the Inuktitut language was made by Horden and Watkins. Why then is Edmund James Peck usually credited with this accomplishment? The answer is probably that Horden and Watkins were primarily missionaries to the Indians and lived among Indians. The Inuit work was a side-line for them and neither was able to devote much time to it.

The Spread of Syllabics

The Inuit work would not flourish until a missionary was recruited to labour permanently among the Inuit. That did not happen until 1876 when Edmund Peck was called to the ministry. His task was to translate Biblical material into Inuktitut in the syllabic script, promote its use, and teach reading and writing to the people.

Edmund Peck - known to Inuit as Uqammak, the one who speaks well - was assigned the task of translating Biblical material into Iunktitut. (10K)

Peck had been born in England in 1850. After a brief career in the navy, he took a year of theological training before coming to Hudson Bay with the Church Missionary Society in 1876. He established a mission at Little Whale River where he ministered to both Indians and Inuit, but his particular love was work with Inuit. Initially Peck relied heavily on a Moravian translation of the New Testament in the Labrador Inuttut dialect, which he had gotten in London before his departure. He studied that material on his Atlantic crossing and preached from it on his arrival in Little Whale River. He wrote that, on his arrival, "I read to them the Word of God, which, to my great joy, they understood." [9]

Peck relied heavily on Reverend Theodor Bourquin's study of the Labrador dialect and Samuel Kleinschmidt's study of Greenlandic, which he called "this mine of

linguistic treasure,"[10] but he was aware that the dialect of lower Hudson Bay differed somewhat and he made use of native assistants in getting a grip on those differences. He wrote:

... in finding out how far the Moravian Brethren's translation of the New Testament was understood in the Little Whale River dialect, both John Melucto and Adam Lucy proved most valuable helpers.[11]

Peck set himself a rigorous schedule for the study of native languages. In his diary for November 1876 he noted:

My plan is to write down some simple words and sentences. I then get the corresponding Indian or Esquimaux words ... I find all very willing to help me, for which I am indeed thankful. My daily collection averages from eighty to a hundred words. These are learned the following day, and brought into use as soon as possible ... I have now got some thousands of words, mostly Esquimaux, which I gathered by study of the Testament, and from different friends.[12]

Peck considered himself to have mastered Inuktitut only after six hours of study daily for seven years. In this way he earned his Inuktitut name - Uqammak - the one who speaks well - by which he is remembered to this day.

Peck considered himself to have mastered Inuktitut only after six hours of study a day for seven years. (20K)

Almost as soon as Peck arrived at Little Whale River, he began working in the Inuktitut language, and in 1877 he wrote:

I have succeeded in teaching several of the Eskimos to read in the syllabic character; they were very eager to learn.[13]

In 1884 he made a long journey from Little Whale River to Ungava Bay where he spent three weeks teaching the Inuit there. Fifteen years later he received a letter from the Moravian, Bishop La Trobe, who passed on the comments of a Moravian missionary who had visited Fort Chimo some years after Peck's visit:

All the Eskimo, even the old people, are learning to read and write in the syllabic character, and your extracts from the Bible and the Catechism are highly prized.[14]

In 1894 Peck established a Church Missionary Society mission at Blacklead Island in Cumberland Sound, the first permanent mission on Baffin Island. He spent four periods of two years each at Blacklead, spending one-year furloughs in England between periods, where he attended to such matters as seeing the four gospels through the press and supervising the production of other church literature.

Peck established a mission at Blacklead Island in Cumberland Sound near Pangnirtung in 1894. This photograph shows Inuit reading in Inuktitut. The books were published in England by Peck when he went back there on holiday. (15K)

Even before missionaries had reached other areas of the Arctic, Peck was active in proselytising, sending copies of church literature with expeditions, traders and Inuit travellers. In 1903 the gospels reached the Pond Inlet area when Inuit from Cumberland Sound travelled there on a small trading vessel, the *Albert*. Peck sent manuscript copies of some portions of the gospel on the vessel. He wrote:

I also had copies of some of the books of the Old Testament and the Epistles written out by the Blacklead scholars, and these were of great use to me ... These copies I have sent away far up north to the completely heathen Eskimo.[15]

In 1914 E.W.T. Greenshield, one of Peck's successors at the Blacklead mission, wrote about a trip he made in a whaling vessel well north into Davis Strait:

We also met two men, Eskimo from the northernmost point of Baffin Land, where they had never seen a missionary yet ... Both had some portions of the Scriptures, and with their wives they came to me asking to have many passages explained.[16]

Similarly, on the Fifth Thule Expedition from 1921 to 1924, Therkel Mathiassen noted of the Iglulik Inuit:

The Peck Syllabic Writing has spread widely among the Iglulik Eskimos, where the mothers teach it to their children and the latter teach each other; most Iglulik Eskimos can read and write this fairly simple but rather imperfect language and they often write letters to each other; pencils and pocket-books are consequently in great demand among them.[17]

Peck and a man from Blacklead Island looking over Peck's Inuktitut word book. (16K)

A tantalizing bit of information contained in a letter from a free trader on Baffin Island to a competitor, in 1907, suggests that some knowledge of Inuktitut syllabics may even have reached certain areas of southern Greenland. The letter, from Osbert Clare Forsyth-Grant, says:

It may interest you to hear that I am in the habit of carrying letters written under the supervision of the Danish priests by the Eskimo of West Greenland to the Eskimo of the West Coast of Davis Strait and of taking back the answers written by the West Coast natives in what looked to me symbols, each symbol representing not a letter but a syllable, and that these Eskimo with hundreds of miles of sea between them can understand one another and take a genuine interest in hearing from the other side.[18]

Teaching Syllabics

The Anglican Church was able to proselytize successfully over such a wide area of the Arctic largely because the syllabic orthography was so easy to learn. Inuit taught each other. With the assistance of well-travelled native assistants who worked with Peck, Bilby and Greenshield at Blacklead Island, and with Bilby and Fleming at Lake Harbour, a large number of Inuit who had never met a missionary nonetheless had access to the Bible and were able to read it in syllabics. Two of the best-known native assistants were Luke Kidlapik and Joseph Pudloo.

Pudloo and Kidlapik were two assistant lay ministers who worked with Peck. (8K and 7K)

As a boy Joseph Pudloo had learned syllabics in Reverend Fleming's senior class in Lake Harbour. Later he became Fleming's sled driver, taking the missionary thousands of miles on visits to Inuit camps. After that he spent two years working with the Reverend B.P. Smith at Baker Lake, the first native assistant to work in a dialect markedly different from his own.

In 1914 Reverend Greenshield wrote that there were at that time 12 Inuit men and six women scattered in different parts of the country, the men acting as preachers and the women teaching the children:

They are all voluntary workers, and are doing a good work in a humble, quiet way. Our two old friends at Blacklead Island, Peter Tooloogakjuak and Luke Kidlapik, are known and respected by all for hundreds of miles round the coast. They are now in full charge of the northern district where there is no white missionary at present.[19]

Luke Nowdla, one of the assistant teachers at Blacklead, with his wife and family. (26K)

Archibald Lang Fleming, later Bishop of the Arctic, wrote about his travels with Luke Kidlapik while Fleming was stationed at Lake Harbour:

On our journey south over the frozen surface of Frobisher Bay we visited several encampments and held services with the Eskimo. Kidlapik and I took turn and turn about preaching and conducting the services, while Rhoda, Kidlapik's little wife, led the singing very nicely. Kidlapik's addresses were delivered in a quiet, earnest voice and, thanks to the teaching he had received from Peck and Greenshield, he displayed a wonderful knowledge of the Gospels. For me it was an inspiring experience to get to know this man and a friendship was begun then that remains ...[20]

Peck conducting an open-air service on Blacklead Island. (25K)

On one of Kidlapik's journeys along the shores of Hudson Strait, he reached Inuit who had never seen a missionary but who could almost all read "chiefly through copies of the Gospels which they had obtained and read continually. Some of these copies of the Word were so dilapidated through continuous usage by several families that they were literally dropping to pieces ..."[21]

Alookie Kilabuk of Pangnirtung, who was born at Southampton Island at the turn of the century, grew up at Blacklead Island. She remembers Peter Tooloogakjuak and Luke Kidlapik and the work they did there. They were genuine helpers, she says, who were able to perform marriages and baptisms, and had been taught well by the early missionaries.

Two Inuit evangelists working with Peck at Blacklead Island. Peter Tooloogakjuak is seen here with Luke Kidlapik. (22K)

For many years Kidlapik was the Anglican catechist on Southampton Island where he and his wife moved in 1926 and where Fleming met him again in 1942 and in 1946.

Luke Kidlapik, a lay preacher at Blacklead Island with his wife Kidlapik. (24K)

Wherever these native catechists served, they took with them not only religion but also literacy.

Roman Catholic missionaries established their first mission in the eastern Canadian Arctic in 1912 at Chesterfield Inlet under the leadership of Father Turquetil. The Roman Catholics also adopted the syllabic orthography, although with some differences, from the Anglican system.

The Church at Blacklead Island, from a drawing in the Church Missionary Gleaner, *a newspaper printed in Britain. (19K)*

Among the very oldest of Inuit in Baffin Island today are a few who remember Reverend Peck from their childhood. Alookie Kilabuk remembers, as a small girl, being bounced on his knee in the tiny mission house while the missionary sang hymns. Peter Pitseolak, the Inuit historian of the Cape Dorset area, who died in 1974, wrote:

I was born when Christianity had already come to Baffin Island. For myself, I did not like the old, old way because the shamans would kill the people they did not

like. When the ministers came the shamans stopped their killings. Reverend Peck - Okhamuk - was the first minister to bring the word of God to Baffin Island. People were very fond of him because he was so loving with all the people and very friendly.[22]

Learning from Parents

Old-time missionaries such as Peck often operated day classes for children at the missions or at the camps they visited. But probably most Inuit learned their syllabics from their parents, by rote. On evenings children would sit with their parents and, with the prayer book open, memorize the syllabic symbols, reciting chant-like, "ai, i, u, a, pai, pi, pu, pa." Peter Pitseolak recalled:

Even before I was able to talk I had learned all the alphabet songs by listening to people sing them. Okhamuk taught the people the alphabets by singing. When the government had come to the North and they were handing out these papers with the Eskimo alphabet and the English alphabet, a man came and said, "You have to learn these." I told him, "I knew them before I could talk." He said, "You can't possibly know these," and I said, "What do you want me to do? Close my eyes and sing them to you?" He was very surprised that I knew them in both languages. He said, "So you have learned."[23]

In 1972 Agnes Poksiak of Whale Cove wrote in the *Keewatin Echo*:

I will never forget the few nights that I spent learning syllabics. There were few of us inside that igloo, dad, mom, Marie, my older sister, Susie, my younger sister, and myself ... Dad would open his Bible and teach me one syllabic after another until I was able to read it well enough.[24]

A drawing done by a Blacklead Island resident. Note the meat drying racks on the tent. (16K)

In the 1950s and 1960s, before telephones were common in the north, letters written in syllabics often provided the only link between Inuit children who left home and lived in hostels to further their education and the parents who had, often reluctantly, agreed to let them go. Agnes Poksiak continued:

... it was only a year later that I had my first airplane ride to the unknown with my older sister. On that first year in school, Marie and I got one letter from mom. That letter was written in pencil on an old piece of tea bag but those few written syllabics were the only ones that told us that mom and dad were at least alive ... I know that being able to write syllabics is a great help when you're away from home. [25]

Mark Kalluak of Eskimo Point wrote of his desire to learn syllabics in his youth:

I know I don't stand alone when I say I never learned syllabics in school ... Like many others, I learned it from the back of prayer books and Bibles, and I believe people who claim learning syllabics is one of the simplest systems there is. When I was sent to the hospital at the age of four I thought I was being transported to another world and my parents would never find me. Perhaps because of my desire to communicate with my parents, I had one object in mind - to learn to write. Maybe that is why I learned to write syllabics so early.[26]

Drawing of amauti pattern pieces for women of the Cumberland Sound area. (12K)

The German missionaries who came to Labrador in the eighteenth century started schools for the Inuit. By 1790, notes Rose Jeddore, "the Labrador Inuit were learning reading, writing, and arithmetic ... In 1821 the Book of Acts was printed and was soon followed by the whole New Testament, hymnbook, the book of Isaiah, Bible stories for children, and some schoolbooks. By 1841 only 9 or 10 in the congregation of 334 were unable to read." [27] All instruction in the Inuit schools was carried on in Inuttut and Inuit teachers ran the schools. The most notable of these teachers were Nathaniel Ilinniatitsijuk, who taught for 50 years, and his wife Frederike, who taught for 30 years. Such was the situation until 1949 when Newfoundland joined Canada, at which time all instruction in Inuttut was discontinued. Only since the mid-1970s have attempts been made to re-instate Inuttut in the schools.

A Permanent Record

Inuit developed skill in the use of syllabics quickly, learning by rote from missionaries, their parents or other Inuit. With syllabics, Inuit of the Eastern Arctic were at last able to communicate with each other at a distance and letters were exchanged between camps. With syllabics, Inuit were finally able to leave a permanent written record of their activities. Many took to keeping diaries, making daily entries about the weather, animals taken, family events and other occurrences. In some families these diaries are personal treasures, kept within the family and not shared with outsiders. To non-Inuit, the most famous of the Inuit diarists who worked in syllabics is Peter Pitseolak, for two books of his work have been translated and published in English. These books are *People from Our Side*, a history of south-western Baffin Island, and *Peter Pitseolak's Escape from Death*, based on two accounts he left of his and his stepson Ashevak's narrow escape from danger on a hunting expedition. Pitseolak realized early that Inuit life was rapidly changing and he began "writing down what happened from day to day so my grandchildren will know what went on when I was alive."[28]

Escape from Death *and* People from our Side *are the two books written from the diaries of Pitseolak, and published after his death. (33K and 101K)*

Other Inuit, living outside the areas where syllabic orthography was used, kept diaries in Roman orthography. In the western Canadian Arctic, Father Maurice Metayer translated the autobiography of a man, Nuligak, who lived at Herschel Island and later at Tuktoyaktuk. The manuscript, which he received in 1956, was published in English in 1966 under the title *I, Nuligak*. Metayer says:

The original manuscript is somewhat like a mate's log, where seasons and even years are not mentioned while the most especially interesting facts of an eventful life are related.[29]

The Eskimo Book of Knowledge *was published by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1931, to instruct Inuit in the standard life-style of Southern Canadians of that day. (13K)*

Missionaries had intended their orthographies, be they syllabic or Roman, as means of spreading the Gospel, and they were very effective in accomplishing that purpose. But it was to be many years before reading material in Inuktitut, other than religious material, became available. When it did, it was almost always material prepared by government to inform Inuit. In the Labrador dialect, one of the exceptions was the Hudson's Bay Company publication of 1931, *The Eskimo Book of Knowledge*, with sections entitled "The British Empire to Which You Belong," "Health" and "Work." In syllabics and English, the federal Department of Mines and Resources published *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo* in 1947; two years later it published a revised version in syllabics, Western Arctic Roman orthography and English.

First, and Only, Syllabic Book by an Inuk

The first book to be written by a Canadian Inuk and published in syllabics was *The Autobiography of John Ayaruaq*, published by the federal government in 1968. Many other Inuit stories and articles have appeared in syllabics in various publications, most notably in *Inuktitut* magazine, but none have appeared in book form. The first original story to be published in Canadian Inuktitut, a novel, was written by Markoosie, a pilot and hunter then living in Resolute, and published in serial form in *Inuktitut* in the late 1960s. A government official described it as "a story of life in the old days, not as it has appeared to southern eyes, but as it has survived in the memory of the Eskimos themselves."[30] The story was later translated into English and published as a book entitled *Harpoon of the Hunter*.

The Autobiography of John Ayaruaq was the first book published by a Canadian Inuk. The front cover and a page from the book are pictured here. (17K and 182K)

Need for Syllabic Reform

When Catholic missionaries established missions among the Inuit in the early years of this century, they used a syllabic orthography which differed in some respects from that used by the Anglican clergy. One of the main differences was in the showing of vocalic length. The Anglican system placed dots over symbols to show whether the vowel of that syllable was "long" or "short," but it considered the terms "long" and "short" in the same sense as they are considered in English in which, for example, "bit" contains a short sound, but "beet" the long sound of the same vowel. In Inuktitut, the terms "long" and "short," as applied to vowels, describe the relative length of time that the same sound is held, so that, for example, "inuk" has a "short u" sound but "inuuk" a "long u" sound. The Catholic syllabic orthography recognized the difference in vocalic length, but did so by duplicating the symbol for the vowel which was long, so that any syllable containing a long vowel required two symbols to write it. Thus the Anglicans wrote "ataata" (father) as ᐊᑕᑕ while the Catholics wrote it as ᐊᑕᐊᑕ. There were other minor differences between the two systems.

With the spread of secular literature in Inuktitut syllabics, it became apparent to government officials and to many Inuit that there existed a need for orthographic reform in Inuktitut, to enable all Inuit to write using the same consistent orthography.

Harper, Kenn. "Writing in Inuktitut: An Historical Perspective", *Inuktitut*. Ottawa : Affaires indiennes et du Nord Canada, septembre 1983, p. 3-35. Avec la permission d'*Inuktitut* Archives.

Footnotes

1. Dorothy Eber (ed.), *Peter Pitseolak's Escape from Death* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), n.p.

2. Maurice S. Flint, *Revised Eskimo Grammar (Canadian Eastern Arctic)* (Toronto: Trinity Church, 1954), p. iv.

3. Samuel Kleinschmidt in James L. Cotter (tr.), in *Greenland Eskimo Grammar* (unpublished English translation in Arctic Collection, M71-4, Box 10, General Synod Archives, Anglican Church, Toronto).

4. A. Martin, quoted in Lawrence R. Smith, "Some Recent Phonological and Orthographic Changes in Labrador Inuttut," in Bjarne Basse and Kirsten Jensen (ed.), *Eskimo Languages, Their Present-Day Conditions* (Aarhus: Arkona Publishers, 1979), p. 106.

5. Lawrence R. Smith, *ibid*.

6. quoted in Kenn Harper, *Uqammak: The Life of Reverend Edmund James Peck* (unpublished manuscript, 1982), p. 20.

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