

## **Inuit Economic Responses to Euro-American Contacts: Southeast Baffin Island, 1824-1940**

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### Résumé de l'article

Les premiers contacts entre les Inuit et les chasseurs de baleines européens dans la péninsule de Cumberland ont occasionné un mouvement de population considérable après 1824. Les baleiniers favorisèrent la mobilité des groupes de chasseurs ce qui donna lieu à des cycles de travail saisonniers. Ils amenèrent des changements dans le matériel de chasse utilisé par les Inuit et les habitudes saisonnières d'exploitation des mammifères d'exploitation marins. La rareté des baleines boréales dans les années 1870 amena les Inuit à diversifier leur chasse en faveur du commerce, et diminua le nombre de chasseurs de baleines vivant en permanence dans la région, ou la visitant de façon saisonnière. L'abandon graduel de l'hivernage des navires augmenta l'importance des stations de pêche permanentes comme sources de ravitaillement en vivres et munitions. Avec l'effondrement de l'industrie de la pêche à la baleine et le début de la première guerre mondiale, la plupart de ces stations, y compris plusieurs installations nouvelles, furent confiées à des autochtones qui les administraient pour le compte de commerçants Britanniques. Dans les années 1920, l'établissement du nouveau poste de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson à Pangnirtung élimina les concurrents, entraîna une concentration sur la chasse au renard blanc comme nouvelle fourrure d'échange et réorganisa la production désormais axée sur divers petits camps de chasse. Cet article examine la façon dont les Inuit ont facilité certaines de ces transitions et ont résisté à d'autres.

# Inuit Economic Responses to Euro-American Contacts: Southeast Baffin Island, 1824–1940

PHILIP GOLDRING

## *Résumé*

*First contacts between Inuit and European whalers on Cumberland Peninsula led to considerable movement of population after 1824. Whaling vessels aided the mobility of hunting groups and developed seasonal employment patterns. They also changed the material culture of Inuit hunting and the seasonal pattern of exploitation of marine mammals. Depletion of bowhead whales in the 1870s led the Inuit to diversify their hunting for trade, and diminished the number of whalers permanently living or seasonally visiting the region. The decline in ship-winterings increased the importance of permanent whaling stations as sources of ammunition and provisions. Collapse of the whaling industry and the outbreak of the First World War left most stations, including several new ones, under native management on behalf of British traders. In the 1920s the new Hudson's Bay Company post at Pangnirtung squeezed out less-efficient competition, concentrated on the white fox as the new fur staple, and reorganized production through small hunting camps. This paper examines the manner in which the Inuit facilitated some of these transitions and resisted others.*



*Les premiers contacts entre les Inuit et les chasseurs de baleines européens dans la péninsule de Cumberland ont occasionné un mouvement de population considérable après 1824. Les baleiniers favorisèrent la mobilité des groupes de chasseurs ce qui donna lieu à des cycles de travail saisonniers. Ils amenèrent des changements dans le matériel de chasse utilisé par les Inuit et les habitudes saisonnières d'exploitation des mammifères d'exploitation marins. La rareté des baleines boréales dans les années 1870 amena les Inuit à diversifier leur chasse en*

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## INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

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It is now generally recognized that native populations often affected the pace and direction of Euro-American penetration of British North America's resource frontier. The fur trade as a set of economic institutions<sup>1</sup> and Christian missions as ideological ones<sup>2</sup> have recently been studied as widely distributed agencies of change with distinct local and temporal variations. Incomers relied on natives for information, for indigenous technology for survival and travel, and for labour, before overseas investors made continuous commitments of men, capital, and goods to remote regions. Such partnerships, whether equal or not, allowed aboriginal societies in contact with Euro-Americans to retain essential elements of their ideology, social structure, and way of life even when superficially subordinated to a nonindigenous system of production.<sup>3</sup> Although these perspectives evolved with reference to the sub-Arctic fur trade, they are relevant to other fields of inquiry, including the contacts between Inuit and southerners before the advent of the fur trade.<sup>4</sup>

The Inuit of southeast Baffin Island have a complex history, richly documented over nearly 160 years, but discussion of the region has only recently been drawn into the mainstream of Canadian historical writing. Southern penetration here lagged behind the western parts of Canada north of sixty degrees.

1. Useful modern reviews include A. Tanner, "The End of Fur Trade History," *Queen's Quarterly* 90:1 (Spring 1983): 176-91; J. Peterson and J. Afinson, "The Indian and the Fur Trade: A Review of Recent Literature," *Manitoba History* 10 (Autumn 1985): 10-18; and B.G. Trigger, "The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present," *Canadian Historical Review* 67:3 (Sept. 1986): 315-42.
2. J.W. Grant, *The Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto, 1984).
3. A. Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters* (St. John's, 1979).
4. See also further publications of Memorial University's Institute of Social and Economic Research, both edited by R. Paine: *Patrons and Brokers in the Eastern Arctic* (St. John's, 1971), and *The White Arctic: Anthropological Essays on Tutelage and Ethnicity* (St. John's, 1979).

Fur trade companies, for example, entered Baffin Island a century after they reached the Mackenzie valley. Granted, commercial fisheries began off Baffin Island in 1820, but serious scientific inquiry started in 1882, the first Christian mission was established in 1894, the Hudson's Bay Company arrived in 1911 and the RCMP followed in 1921. The little mineral exploitation undertaken was rarely a commercial success before 1975.<sup>5</sup> Historical interest, like economic development, has been slow to take account of Baffin Island.

Baffin is one of the world's five largest islands, but it lies entirely north of sixty degrees and north of the tree line. Until the 1960s, most people in this region lived in multifamily hunting groups, depending for food, fuel, and shelter on marine mammals — chiefly the ringed seal — and on caribou. Loosely grouped as "tribes"<sup>6</sup> living around Cumberland Peninsula, the Inuit of southeast Baffin Island have linguistic and cultural affinities with other groups as far afield as Alaska, Siberia, and northern Greenland. In 1981 the island had four thousand people in eight hamlets and settlements, and another twenty-three hundred in the one town, Frobisher Bay. Little has happened to draw Baffin Island into the broader story of Canadian development.

Historiography caught up with the northwest coast of Hudson Bay in the 1960s<sup>7</sup> and substantial advances have followed in the literature on Baffin Island. Alongside the indigenous traditions, most districts now have a century and a half of recorded contact with southerners.<sup>8</sup> The orientation of historical scholarship has also changed: less research is now focused on European exploration, and historical writing is coming to terms with a shortage of paradigmatic events with broad national implications. Led by historically minded social scientists, inquiry into Baffin Island's past reveals a story which invites comparisons with widely separated events elsewhere on the resource frontier, particularly in regard to exchanges between natives and incomers. Although general propositions about such exchanges have been offered, study is still at a stage where local case studies help advance a broader understanding.

A great deal of recent attention has been devoted to southeast Baffin, the areas surrounding Pangnirtung and Broughton Island. Until fifteen years ago written accounts of this region's history relied heavily on government reports hastily

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5. Frobisher thought he had mined gold in Frobisher Bay; lead and zinc are mined at Nanisivik, as was mica at Lake Harbour ca. 1900–10; coal was mined for local use at Pond Inlet. Mica (ca. 1875–76) and graphite (1926) in Cumberland Sound were always commercial failures.
  6. W. Kemp, "Baffinland Eskimo," *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. D. Damas, Vol. V: *Arctic* (Washington, 1984), 463–75.
  7. D. Damas, "The Eskimo," *Science, History and Hudson Bay*, eds C.S. Beals and D.S. Shenstone (Ottawa, 1968), 141–71; W. Gillies Ross's 1969 Cambridge PhD thesis was published as *Whaling and Eskimos: Hudson Bay 1860–1915* (Ottawa, 1975).
  8. For precontact conditions, see A.P. McCartney, ed., *Thule Eskimo Culture: An Anthropological Retrospective*, Mercury Series (Archaeology), No. 88 (Ottawa, 1979).

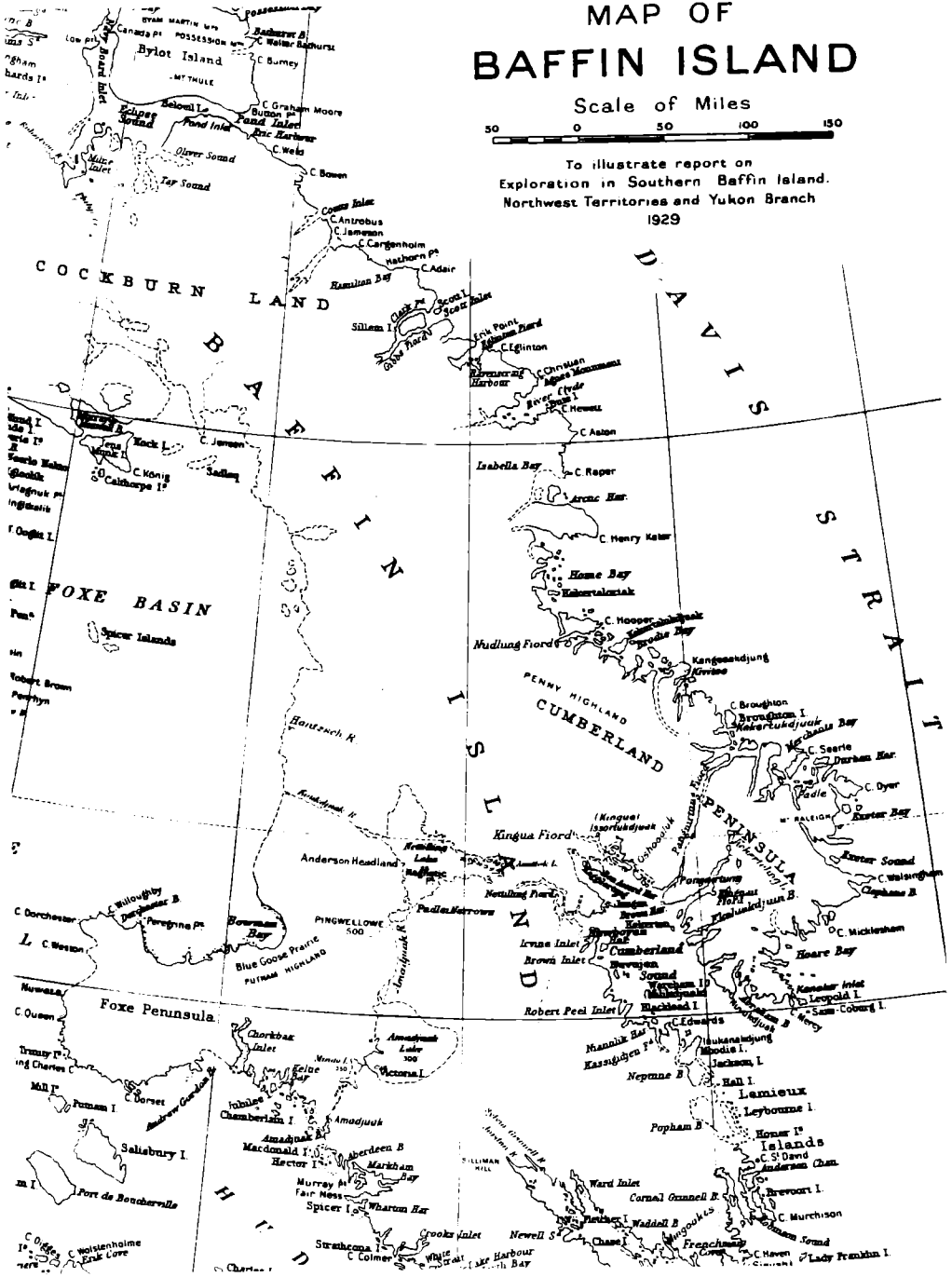
INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

# MAP OF BAFFIN ISLAND

Scale of Miles



To illustrate report on  
Exploration in Southern Baffin Island.  
Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch  
1929



compiled around 1900. Since 1970 geographers, ethnographers, and historians have uncovered a distinctive history and exposed rich veins of primary source material. Clive Holland,<sup>9</sup> W. Gillies Ross,<sup>10</sup> and local historian Kenn Harper<sup>11</sup> unearthed a considerable number of first-hand accounts of whaling in the area. Maija Lutz's work on musical traditions at Pangnirtung documented interaction between whalers and Inuit,<sup>12</sup> and the Rev. Dr. Gavin White expertly probed the region's distinctive trading patterns between 1900 and 1925.<sup>13</sup> R.G. Mayes provided an outline of the region's history to 1973.<sup>14</sup>

More recently, the centennial of Franz Boas's field work in southeast Baffin stimulated useful articles by historian Douglas Cole and geographer Ludger Müller-Wille.<sup>15</sup> Bibliographer Karen Evans described the Rev. Edmund Peck's contributions to syllabic literacy,<sup>16</sup> and archaeologist Marc Stevenson exploited old sources and, through excavation and interviews, virtually created new ones to study the last days of the whaling industry at Kekerten Island.<sup>17</sup> Parks Canada commissioned interviews with a dozen Pangnirtung elders in 1984<sup>18</sup> and a recent research paper by John Bennett sensitively linked oral and artistic sources to show

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9. "William Penny, 1809-92: Arctic Whaling Master," *Polar Record* 15:94 (1970): 25-43.
  10. Most recently in *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas; Narratives of the Davis Strait Whale Fishery* (Toronto, 1985).
  11. K. Harper, "Historical Survey, Baffin Island National Park," Contract No. 74-140, Environment Canada (Parks); mss. on file at Prairie and Northern Region Office Library; also "The Moravian Mission at Cumberland Sound," *The Beaver* 312:1 (Summer 1981): 43-5; and "Profile" of William Duval in *Arctic* 38:1 (March 1985): 74-5.
  12. M. Lutz, *The Effects of Acculturation on Eskimo Music of Cumberland Peninsula*, Mercury Series (Ethnology), No. 4 (Ottawa, 1978).
  13. I am indebted to Dr. White for letting me read his unpublished manuscript, "The Far Shores of Baffin." His published work includes "Scottish Traders to Baffin Island, 1910-1930," *Maritime History* 5:1 (Spring 1977): 34-50; "Captain W.J. Jackson of Baffin Island," *Polar Record* 17:109 (1975): 375-81; and biographical profiles of Henry Toke Munn and Hector Pitchforth in *Arctic* 37:1 (March 1984): 74-5, and 38:1 (March 1985): 78-9.
  14. R.G. Mayes, "The Creation of a Dependent People: The Inuit of Cumberland Sound, Northwest Territories," PhD diss., McGill, 1978.
  15. Notably D. Cole and L. Müller-Wille, "Franz Boas' Expedition to Baffin Island, 1883-1884," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 8:1 (1984): 37-63.
  16. K. Evans, "Edmund James Peck: His Contribution to Eskimo Literacy and Publishing," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 26:2 (Oct. 1984): 58-68.
  17. M.G. Stevenson, "Kekerten: Preliminary Archaeology of an Arctic Whaling Station," unpublished mss. on file, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife, NWT.
  18. Jaypeetee Akpalialuk, interviewer, "Oral History Interviews; Pangnirtung and Auyiuttuq," mss. on file, Prairie and Northern Region Office, Environment Canada - Parks; cited hereafter as "Auyiuttuq Interviews."

the continued importance of the late whaling period in the way Pangnirtung elders perceive their past.<sup>19</sup>

Such works can all be supplemented or debated in detail, but they make events in Cumberland Sound reasonably accessible to students of the North. Abundant documentation on the whaling era, and a considerable body of later evidence which is less widely known, make it possible to go beyond local history and to consider the experience of this region and its people in light of interpretive frameworks devised to describe change elsewhere. Modern interpretations of the fur trade as an agency of contact have already been mentioned; relevant work has also been published on events north of the tree line. In a survey of Hudson Bay, David Damas in 1968 divided the postcontact experience of the Inuit into four periods, defined roughly by the importance of imported material culture and foodstuffs, and the frequency and nature of face-to-face encounters with southerners.

In the period Damas termed "aboriginal," Inuit met occasional parties of explorers but little trade occurred to bring European items into local use. In Hudson Bay this period ended in 1860, when American whalers began wintering. This ushered in a "transitional" stage marked by frequent direct trade, and by the transfer of rifles and whaleboats to Inuit as trade or wages. This phase in turn gave way between 1904 and 1920 to a "contact-traditional" era marked economically by trapping of the Arctic fox, and socially by the archetypal northern white community of HBC trader, mounted policeman, and missionary. The hegemony of this trio was shattered in the 1950s and 1960s by government agencies: teachers and settlement managers urged Inuit to abandon the trapping camps. Damas called this the "centralized" period.<sup>20</sup>

This periodization was generally endorsed by W. Gillies Ross in *Whaling and Eskimos*, with one important refinement. Ross saw change as cyclical: in the first and third periods the Inuit dispersed in small hunting groups. In the intervening whaling era and the modern, centralized period Inuit gathered in larger numbers for social and economic exchanges with southerners. Whaling was not part of a continuum from isolation to close contact, but an interruption in traditional relations between the people and the land.<sup>21</sup> In southeast Baffin Island, socioeconomic changes occurred in stages that are similar but not identical to the experience of northwest Hudson Bay.

#### FOUR STAGES OF CONTACT IN SOUTHEAST BAFFIN ISLAND

Baffin Island has always been marginal to the southern economic systems that intermittently exploited it; therefore, the chronology of contact varied from one locale to another. Damas's four-stage model of contact can be applied to Baffin

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19. J.R. Bennett, "Whalers, Missionaries, and Inuit in Cumberland Sound," masters research paper, Carleton University, 1985.

20. Damas, "The Eskimo," 142.

21. Ross, *Whaling and Eskimos*, 137-8.

Island, but the dates differ, not only between Hudson Bay and Baffin Island, but among Pond Inlet, Cumberland Sound, and Hudson Strait.

The change from “aboriginal” to “transitional” conditions, which occurred early in the 1860s in Hudson Bay, was more diffused in Baffin Island. Whaling fleets made contact with Baffin Island Inuit in 1820, but until 1903 people around Pond Inlet had only intermittent contact with whalers in summer. Hudson Strait (south of Frobisher Bay) was so isolated from the whaling industry that American captains brought Inuit whalers from Cumberland Sound in the 1870s to hunt bowheads.<sup>22</sup> The people around Lake Harbour, in effect, remained at the “aboriginal” stage of contact until commercial whaling was near collapse. In southeast Baffin Island, the region north of Frobisher Bay and south of Cape Henry Kater, whalers first made contact in 1824 and were wintering ashore or in ice-bound vessels from 1851 onwards. The change was particularly rapid on the productive new whaling ground of Cumberland Sound, reached by British whalers in 1840 and the focus of wintering voyages thereafter (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Crews Wintering in Cumberland Sound, 1851–80**

1851 – 1	1861 – 2	1871 – 4
1852 – 0	1862 – 3	1872 – 2
1853 – 4	1863 – 6	1873 – 1
1854 – 0	1864 – 7	1874 – 1
1855 – 3	1865 – 9	1875 – 2
1856 – 3	1866 – 7	1876 – 2
1857 – 5	1867 – 9	1877 – 5
1858 – 2	1868 – 5	1878 – 3
1859 – 4	1869 – 10	1879 – 1
1860 – 11	1870 – 6	1880 – 0

**NOTES**

1. Covers winter harbours between Cape Edwards and Cape Mercy. Additional US vessels wintered near the mouth of Frobisher Bay between 1855 and 1862, and in Hudson Strait after 1876.
2. Includes crews of wrecked vessels and of the *McLellan* in 1851–52. Crew size varied between five and fifty men.

Principal sources: Dennis Wood, “Abstracts of Whaling Voyages,” manuscript in New Bedford Free Public Library; Dundee University Library, Kinnes mss., printed annual returns of whaling voyages; Alexander Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery* (New York, 1964) and Reginald Hegarty, *Returns of Whaling Vessels Sailing from American Ports, 1876–1928* (New Bedford, 1959).

22. F. Boas, “Baffin-Land,” *A. Petterman’s Mitteilungen* (Gotha, 1885), 34; W. Wakeham, *Report of the Expedition to Hudson Bay and Cumberland Gulf in the Steamship ‘Diana’ . . . 1897* (Ottawa, 1898), 59–60. Yale University Library has a log of this voyage of the *Era*.



## INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

Although commercial whaling lasted around Cumberland Sound for a century, resource depletion brought substantial changes after roughly 1871 as fewer vessels visited, and the social environment changed when vessels stopped wintering after 1880. In some years no ships called at all, two or three white men staffed a couple of stations, and the local pidgin English fell into disuse.<sup>23</sup> From 1880 to 1920 the annual routine of spring and autumn whale hunts continued, but on average only one whale was caught each year (Table 2). Seal-skins, with blubber attached, became the staple trade of most of Cumberland Sound's three hundred Inuit by 1880. The period from 1851 to 1919 does correspond to the "transitional" stage of Damas's model, but it was in fact two sharply different phases. After twenty exuberant years of opportunity came forty years of difficult adjustment, when Inuit frequented large settlements where they had access to Euro-American manufactures, but had fewer face-to-face encounters with whites than before. The old whaling stations experienced a very brief revival after 1919 as centres for a briskly competitive fur and seal-oil trade. This competition was short-lived. Between 1923 and 1927 the Hudson's Bay Company bought out or outlasted all its competitors and the people settled down, somewhat reluctantly, to a "contact-traditional" period not unlike the similar stage in Hudson Bay.

Settlements at Pangnirtung and Broughton Island remained small until 1962, but centralization was swiftly achieved thereafter. Although local differences were experienced between the two populated coasts of Cumberland Peninsula, a general

**Table 2**  
**Bowhead Whales Taken by Stations in Cumberland Sound, 1883-1914**

1883 - 1	1894 - 1	1905 - 0
1884 - -	1895 - 3	1906 - -
1885 - 2	1896 - 3	1907 - 0
1886 - 2	1897 - 1	1908 - 0
1887 - -	1898 - 2	1909 - 1
1888 - 0	1899 - 2	1910 - 1 (sucker)
1889 - 3	1900 - 1	1911 - 0
1890 - 0	1901 - 2	1912 - 0
1891 - 1	1902 - 0	1913 - 1 (sucker)
1892 - 1	1903 - 2	1914 - 1
1893 - -	1904 - 0	

### NOTES

1. The dash ("-") represents a year for which no report has been found. Years following a dash may include returns caught the previous year.

Sources: Kinnes lists, missionaries' journals, PAC Whaling Logs Collection, and logs and published journals of whaling and exploring ships.

23. D. Cole and L. Müller-Wille, "Boas' Expedition to Baffin Island," 54; Hector Pitchforth found it remarkable that the octagenarian "Jimmy Alexander" (Netyape) knew a few words of English "and certainly a few he didn't ought to know." Public Archives of Canada (PAC), MG 28 I198, Pitchforth Journal, 30 March 1924.

exchange of population prevailed across the peninsula during the whaling and fur-trading eras, and the choices of individuals were influenced, in succession, by whaling ships, whaling stations, trading posts, and government agencies. The chronology of these developments is accessible in outline through the secondary literature. The focus in this paper is therefore on the transitions between the first three stages on contact.<sup>24</sup>

## ENDURING FEATURES OF LIFE AROUND CUMBERLAND SOUND

Although the postcontact history of southeast Baffin Island may be divided coherently into stages of contact, enduring ecological and social facets of that life can be examined by themselves. Inuit have lived in the region for many centuries; they displaced or merged with the Tunit or "Dorset" people who, though distinct in the artifacts they have left behind, were probably similar in culture and even language. The Eskimos or Inuit are the postcontact descendants of the people archaeologists call "Thule."<sup>25</sup>

The Thule culture is distinguished by its technique for hunting and using the bowhead whale, *Balaena mysticetus* but, like other cultures above the tree line, the people depended mainly on other marine mammals. The most important of those in Cumberland Sound has been the ringed or jar seal, *Phoca hispida*.<sup>26</sup> Apart from offering a balanced diet almost without supplement, the ringed seal provided heat and light from its blubber and clothing from its skin. It has therefore been consistently harvested for centuries. The skins of harp seals, bearded seals, and caribou all had important specialized uses for clothing, shelter, and boats, but the ringed seal was the dietary mainstay except during the late summer caribou hunt. In the 1850s and 1860s additional pressure was put on ringed seal stocks as the Inuit hunted fresh meat for the whaling crews, who understood its value as an antiscorbutic and, unlike their counterparts in Hudson Bay evidently consumed little caribou meat.<sup>27</sup> In the 1870s seals became an export commodity, their skins dried or salted, and their blubber scraped from the skin and boiled at the underemployed try-works of the whaling stations.

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24. For the period 1953–73, see Mayes, "Dependent People."

25. P. Schledermann, "History of Human Occupation," *The Land that Never Melts: Auyuittuq National Park*, ed. R. Wilson (Toronto, 1975).

26. A.W.F. Banfield, *The Mammals of Canada* (Toronto, 1975), 372–5.

27. This observation is based on log-books and journals; see particularly the account of the *Florence* in 1877–78; she wintered much nearer the caribou-hunting grounds than was customary, but may have used as few as three caribou carcasses all winter to supplement regular rations of fresh seal meat. See H. Howgate, ed., *The Cruise of the Florence, or Extracts from the Journal of the Preliminary Arctic Expedition of 1877–78* (Washington, 1879).

## INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

In 1877 German-American naturalist Ludwig Kumlein denounced what he saw as overhunting of seals, but his concern was misplaced.<sup>28</sup> Conditions in Cumberland Sound are ideal for ringed seals and, in most years, for those who hunt them. Bad weather or ice conditions wrought severe hardship in exceptional years such as 1846, 1847,<sup>29</sup> 1894, 1899, and 1903.<sup>30</sup> Franz Boas was severely critical of much of Kumlein's research: he believed that there was no biological shortage of animals. Bad hunts were due to ice or storms, and hardship was worse when religious beliefs prevented hunting after a recent death.<sup>31</sup> In 1922 a trader estimated "the number of seals of all kinds killed yearly in Cumberland Gulf at 5000 to 6000, and the supply does not appear to be affected, as this has been going on for many years."<sup>32</sup> Seal-hunting gradually began to change. On the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Pangnirtung in 1921 blubber skins continued to be traded, but they were not very profitable and the commercial seal hunt (as distinct from the meat hunt) shifted to newborn "white-coats" and yearling "silver jars." Under this pressure the Inuit in 1946 began to report a shortage of seals, probably due to the annual killing of two thousand to twenty-five hundred whitecoats.<sup>33</sup> Despite this scarcity stocks held up, and in the 1960s ringed seal skins were again as big a part of the local economy as they had been from 1880 to 1920.<sup>34</sup>

Gillies Ross has identified population change as one of the central but most intractable issues in the historical literature on whaling. American whaling contributed to the virtual disappearance of the original Mackenzie Delta Eskimos before 1915, and it is sometimes loosely assumed that the same occurred in the eastern Arctic as well. Ross noted that contemporary observations were unsystematic and he emphasized how whaling stimulated group migrations, which further confuse attempts to measure net population changes.<sup>35</sup> In southeast Baffin during the whaling era, people migrated frequently across the Cumberland Peninsula, and between Cumberland Sound and the mouth of Frobisher Bay. In the contact-traditional period, free movement continued between Davis Strait and Cumberland Sound. Disease was a persistent problem in the whaling era: as late as

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28. L. Kumlein, *Contributions to the Natural History of Arctic America Made in Connection with the Howgate Polar Expedition, 1877-78* (Washington, 1879), 60.
  29. *Periodical Accounts of the Work of the Moravian Missions* 19 (London, 1849), 19-23.
  30. Mayes, "Dependent People," 99.
  31. Franz Boas, "The Central Eskimo," in *Sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology 1884-85* (Washington, 1888).
  32. H.T. Munn, "The Economic Life of the Baffin Island Eskimo," *Geographical Journal* 59:4 (June 1922): 269.
  33. PAC, RG85, Interim Accession 84-85/554, Eastern Arctic Patrol Journal by J.G. Wright, 21-25 Sept. 1946.
  34. Mayes, "Dependent People," 103; see also the important work by A.A. Haller in *Baffin Island - East Coast: an area economic survey*, ed. G. Anders (Ottawa, 1966); Haller notes (35, 98) a local belief that Cumberland Sound seal stocks may be recruited annually by seals drifting in from Davis Strait.
  35. W.G. Ross, "Whaling and the Decline of Native Populations," *Arctic Anthropology* 14:2 (1977): 1-8.

1898–99 epidemic carried off 10 per cent of the people of Cumberland Sound.<sup>36</sup> Population was probably at its lowest ebb in 1883–84 when Franz Boas counted 245 Inuit in eight winter camps around the Sound. Families were remarkably small. Kumlein reported in 1879 that infanticide was no longer practised, but his ship-mate George Tyson remarked that very few women had three children still living.<sup>37</sup> Boas noted seventy-seven married couples with only sixty-six children — a low ratio even if many couples had grown children. Infertility, infant mortality, or both must have been prevalent during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>38</sup>

Imprecise though they are, the early demographic data all point in the same direction: in 1840 up to one thousand Inuit lived around Cumberland Sound. Starvation in the mid-1840s and diseases introduced by whalers in the mid-1850s cut that figure perhaps as low as 350 people by 1857. Deaths exceeded live births by at least one hundred in the next twenty-five years. Later reports consistently showed 250 to 300 in the sound,<sup>39</sup> although people followed the Anglican missionaries between 1911 and 1914 to Lake Harbour, where communications with Britain were better.<sup>40</sup> Despite losses by out-migration, a reliable census in 1925 showed a population that was about equal to Boas's report (see Table 3). It grew steadily

**Table 3**  
**Population of Cumberland Sound, 1924**

Less than one year old –	11
1 – 5	40
5 – 10	26
10 – 15	43
15 – 20	18
20 – 25	17
25 – 30	21
30 – 40	21
40 – 50	22
50 – 60	17
60 – 70	14
70 – 80	4
80 and up	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>

Source: PAC, RG85/64, file 164–1(1), Burwash to Finnie, 3 March 1925.

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36. PAC, MG17 B2, Church Missionary Society manuscripts C.1./0. item 1899–102, Peck, circular 30 Sept. 1899, and item 1899–104, Sampson, circular 20 Sept. 1899.
  37. Kumlein, *Natural History of Arctic America*, 15; Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 69.
  38. Boas, *Central Eskimo*, 426.
  39. E.g. W. Wakeham *Report of the Expedition to Hudson Bay and Cumberland Gulf in the Steamship 'Diana'* (Ottawa, 1898), 24.
  40. Anglican Church Archives, Peck manuscripts iv-1, Fleming to Peck, 5 Sept. 1914.

thereafter and now, with the northeast side of Cumberland Peninsula, may exceed fifteen hundred — about the number some observers thought were present when the whalers first made contact in 1824.

A third enduring factor was native leadership. In the earliest contacts individual Inuit took the lead in exchanges with southerners; not all of these people were necessarily hunting leaders or shamans, but many were. Commercial whaling gave added prominence to men whose skills lay, specifically, in hunting bowhead whales. Certain names recur in the whaling narratives; Tesuwin negotiated for about two dozen Inuit whalers at Kekerten Harbour in 1859, and in 1877 conducted a middleman trade at Niantilik for vessels wintering one hundred kilometers away.<sup>41</sup> In the same year an American captain came to terms with the noted hunter and whaler Nepekin, and remarked in passing, “of course his boat’s crew will do as he tells them.”<sup>42</sup> This is apparently an early prototype of the “Eskimo boss” of the contact-traditional era, the hunting and trapping leader who acted as intermediary between incomers and Inuit, and gave direction in hunting matters as well.<sup>43</sup> An RCMP corporal, reporting on the free traders in the 1920s, described their methods as “the old whaler system of trading, whereby a few were overpaid at the expense of the many.”<sup>44</sup> The success of the most skilled and knowledgeable hunters was vital to the whole group and these leaders, by common consent, controlled the use of scarce tools, especially whaleboats.<sup>45</sup> This was not essentially a class distinction, nor was it unique to the whaling period.

Some southern observers thought that the authority of the best hunters could extend to an unequal distribution of food and of material things generally. Marc Stevenson’s analysis of the Kekerten site, and his interviews with Etuangat Aksayook, link the size and elaboration of dwellings to their owners’ status in the whale hunt.<sup>46</sup> In the early twentieth century several known traders or camp leaders

41. W.G. Ross, *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas*, 169; Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 25, 30, 119.
42. *Ibid.*, 27.
43. The Parks Canada Auyuittuq interviews included a question on leadership; the rich variety in the answers suggests that informants understood the question in different ways. Most agreed that leadership devolved upon those who best knew when and how to hunt.
44. PAC, RG85/775, file 5648, Petty to O/C HQ Div., 30 June 1928.
45. In the Auyuittuq interviews two Pangnirtung elders mentioned ownership or control of whaleboats as an attribute of leadership; Shaimaiyuk Simon (10) and Koagak Akulukjuk (11).
46. For distribution of food, see Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 113; this observation does not suggest a class system, for it placed women and children generally in the bottom rank. See also Stevenson, “Kekerten: Preliminary Archaeology.” Stevenson has argued that “Inuit society at whaling stations was divided into two distinct classes: the *privileged* and the *proletariat*.” See M.G. Stevenson, “The Emergence of Class Structure at an Arctic Whaling Station,” paper presented to the 19th annual meeting of the Canadian Archaeological Association, 26 April 1986. Stevenson quotes several passages from Bernhard Hantzsch’s journal in L.H. Neatby, trans. and ed., *My Life Among the Eskimos; Baffinland Journeys in the Years 1909 to 1911* (Saskatoon, 1977).

were first-rate hunters or religious leaders (shamans or catechists) or both. The Inuit who dealt closely with Scottish station managers in the early twentieth century apparently grew accustomed to some hierarchical notions and practices. This was facilitated by the fact that the stations, the mission, and later the government-commercial complex of Pangnirtung gradually took over part of the responsibility for sharing out food or its near-equivalent, ammunition.<sup>47</sup> By the 1930s a new balance was achieved, with the settlement carrying out redistributive functions for people who were too old or disabled to live in camps, and the camp leaders taking care of the rest. As one observer reported, "In these camps there were good hunters and poor hunters, there were natives that were provident and those that were not and I found that those who had food and fuel were sharing with those who had not."<sup>48</sup>

The effect of contact on native social structure is obviously important, but the ambiguity of precontact patterns obstructs clear analysis. So does the flexibility of Inuit social organization in the contact era: "Inuit community organization has varied from . . . small flexible bands without clearly marked leadership, to stable camps with quite powerful leaders, to settlement living without long-term leadership."<sup>49</sup> The Inuit of Cumberland Sound weathered successive upheavals in their social and economic relations with whalers and fur traders, continuing to make choices under the guidance of indigenous leaders.

## EARLY CONTACT, 1824-51

Inuit in southeast Baffin had brief encounters with Frobisher in 1575-77, missed or avoided meeting John Davis a decade later, and had no further contact with southerners until July 1824, when six people in Merchants Bay visited the Anglo-Scottish whaling fleet. The fleet followed declining whale stocks into increasingly perilous waters, and had never before touched Baffin Island so far south. Early contacts were marked by suspicion, some shows of force on each side, but no recorded casualties. The mate of the Scottish whaler *Ellen* went ashore hunting in 1825 and was surrounded by Inuit who tried to take his gun. They aimed their "bows and darts" at him but the mate frightened them off by shooting a dog.<sup>50</sup>

Incidents like this became uncommon, and by 1830 visits of whalers had become predictable enough that some Inuit migrated from Cumberland Sound to live around Durban Harbour. Others migrated seasonally. For the most part Inuit conducted exchanges with caution and reserve, and the British were slow to learn to communicate; the whalers' traditional counterclockwise circuit of Baffin Bay

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47. Ammunition was commonly given as relief to the blind: it let them contribute tangibly to the hunt. See, for example, PAC, RG 85/106, file 253-2/170(2), relief invoices.

48. PAC, RG85/815, file 6954(2), Dr. MacKinnon to McKeand, 6 Apr. 1935 and to J.L. Turner, 31 Aug. 1935.

49. P. Lange, "Some Qualities of Inuit Social Interaction," in Paine, ed., *White Arctic*, 108.

50. Mystic Seaport Museum Library, Collection 55, vol. 54 (*Alexander*, 1825), Journal of Thomas Scoresby, 24 Sept. 1825.

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brought them late in the season to Cumberland Peninsula and few chances arose to pursue the natives' reports that whales were abundant in Cumberland Sound, just 250 kilometres south of Durban Harbour.<sup>51</sup> These rumours were given substance in 1837 when Inuit went overland in five days to fetch baleen to trade with two Scottish captains. Two years later at Durban Harbour a number of Inuit boarded the *Neptune* to help her captain produce a tolerably accurate map of potential whaling grounds to the southwest. One of these Inuit, Inuluapik, visited Britain with Captain William Penny and piloted Penny into Cumberland Sound in 1840. Repeated Inuit attempts had at last drawn the hesitant whalers into uncharted waters.<sup>52</sup> Cumberland Sound's productivity may have attracted enough whalers in the 1840s to check the flow of population northward across Cumberland Peninsula. Inuluapik's safe return from his visit to Britain probably reinforced trust between Inuit and whalers and such visits, though never routine, persisted into the twentieth century.

One consequence of this exchange was that Inuit began to incorporate the whalers into their own systems of sharing resources to minimize the risks of Arctic living. Initial interest centred on tools: Europeans traded or gave away files, nails, needles, and knives, as well as bread and molasses. In the short term commercial whaling gave Inuit access to stranded carcasses from which only baleen and blubber had been stripped. In this early stage of exchange the Inuit traded baleen from their own hunts, traded weapons and implements as souvenirs, hunted seals for wintering whalers, and admitted Europeans and Americans to the system to wife-exchange even though incomers could not reciprocate directly.

Inuit were also anxious to increase these contacts, because of the mobility and reserves of food that whaling fleets represented. Two consecutive winters of poor sealing occurred in 1846 and 1847. When Captain Parker reached Niantilik in 1848 he found twenty of the 160 people at the settlement had died of hunger in the preceding winter, "of whom several, horrible to relate, had gnawed the flesh from their own arms" — or so British press reported. On Parker's departure a young couple asked to be taken to England where "food was to be had at all times, and people did not die of hunger." The wife died on the return trip but her husband, Memmiadluk, chose to return to his birthplace at Durban Harbour. He contended that food was more abundant there than in Cumberland Sound. This was not always the case, but may have been temporarily true because of imbalances caused by Inuit migrations in response to the whalers. Parker reported in 1848 that "many more natives than usual were in Northumberland Inlet [Cumberland Sound] this

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51. Other important surviving manuscript logs and journals include *Brunswick*, 1824 (PAC, MG24 H69) and *Abram*, 1839 (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG11 A7).
  52. Printed sources for the period before 1850 include the *Nautical Magazine* (London) 6 (1837): 165-7, 321-3; and 9 (1840): 98-103; *Periodical Accounts* (1849, 1851-58); and A. M'Donald, *A Narrative of Some Passages in the Life of Eenoooloopik* (Edinburgh, 1841).

autumn, in the expectation of meeting with whalers and obtaining useful articles from them." Only the *Truelove* arrived, and many were disappointed.<sup>53</sup>

In these circumstances the Inuit in the 1840s had two courses open: to write the whalers off as unreliable contacts and make little effort to meet them, or to encourage the whalers to visit more regularly. Cumberland Sound was still only visited late in the season by vessels with cargo space to spare. The Inuit repeatedly informed the whalers that bowheads were most numerous in spring at the floe edge, where they could only be reached by parties who wintered in the sound. At length this advice was heeded by the one American master in the whaling fleet.<sup>54</sup> Following a poor hunt in 1851 the *McLellan* left two boats' crews to winter at Kingmiksok, a large settlement near Niantilik. The Americans "had to learn the Esquimaux way of eating and cooking," and could not have sustained themselves without "the help of the friendly Esquimaux." The floe edge was well up the gulf in 1852 and with native help (or, more likely, under native guidance) the Americans took seventeen whales. "Had we been more experienced, we could have captured many more," wrote George Tyson afterwards, "but this was the first season that any whalers had passed the winter in that region, and we had everything to learn."<sup>55</sup>

### INTENSIVE WHALING, 1852-80

This American success disappointed Captain Penny of Aberdeen, for it stirred interest in other British whaling ports, and ruined Penny's slender chance of getting a monopoly licence and land grant to carry out a gradual harvest of whales. Penny was more successful in the short run than his rivals in Hull: their supply vessels scattered, their land station was vandalized by Americans and they did not winter over. Penny, on the other hand, wintered successfully with two ships in 1853-54 and in 1855-56, and with ships and two land stations in 1857-58.

Penny's stations were an important innovation because they relied primarily on native whale-hunters; his wintering vessels also depended partly on Inuit. Penny engaged fifty Inuit at Niantilik in 1853, presumably to hunt seals for his men and whales for his Scottish backers; this they did, despite a midwinter epidemic which carried off a "chief" and seven of his relatives. The successful spring hunt depended almost entirely on Inuit: whales were encountered nearly twenty miles from the ship and the Scottish crewmen at first refused to "enter on the fishery." They ultimately took part, but it was Inuit who carried the fifty sledge-loads of blubber and baleen from seventeen whales over the ice to the boiling-house on Nuvujen Island. Penny in the *Lady Franklin* returned to Aberdeen with this cargo early in 1854. The

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53. *Periodical Accounts* 19 (1849): 19-23.

54. P. Goldring, "Last Voyage of the *McLellan*," *The Beaver* 66:1 (Jan./Feb. 1986): 39-44.

55. E. V. Blake, *Arctic Experiences; Containing Capt. George E. Tyson's Wonderful Drift on the Ice-Floe* (New York, 1874), 89-90.



*Sophia* stayed until the end of the season, her crew of fourteen men, with Inuit, catching a further dozen whales.<sup>56</sup> The success of Penny and the two American whalers attracted international attention, ensuring that this whaling ground, like any other, became popular for a time but was quickly depleted.

For the people of Cumberland Sound, this activity stimulated competition for their services as whale-hunters. Cumberland Sound, apart from Repulse Bay, was the last place in the eastern Arctic where the Inuit had a regularly successful whale hunt when the Europeans arrived; eight to twelve whales were being taken yearly at the head of the sound.<sup>57</sup> Skilled in handling small craft and knowledgeable in the ways of whales, the Inuit were probably better whalers than the incoming crews, who always included many green hands. Inuit apparently contracted as crews to hunt for the southerners, with one or more leaders in each party. The well-known hunter Tesuwin was reported in 1859 to have travelled across the Sound at the end of May "with three or four boats and crews" to offer to help hunt for the *Emma* of Hull. Cryptic notes in a seaman's journal suggest that Tesuwin negotiated with Penny's station as well as the nearby *Emma* before going to work for the vessel, and that separate disposal of the blubber and bone were included in the terms of negotiation. At the floe edge, native and English crews took turns manning the same boats in shifts.<sup>58</sup> When the *Lady Franklin* arrived at Niantilik in 1857 she found only a blind man and some women and children on hand; the men had all gone further up the sound with the ships.

A minority clung to the old ways: one old hunter from the head of the sound refused to work for Europeans, though they "had promised him much, if he would work for them, he had always kept at a distance from them, and had therefore remained a real Esquimaux, making use of bows and arrows, while some of the others obtained fire arms — though not a few, alas, possessed neither the one nor the other." This missionary's assumption that a man without traditional weapons was not a "real Esquimaux" became commonplace among visiting whites. It does not seem to have troubled many Inuit.<sup>59</sup>

This old man must have been quite atypical by 1858. There is episodic evidence of the reluctance of small bands or individuals to deal with whites, and one anecdote from 1870 points to the fact that the reciprocity involved in wife-sharing sometimes broke down.<sup>60</sup> Yet on the whole, as long as whales were plentiful, the whalers were welcome and the terms of exchange did not appear onerous to Inuit. The natives

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56. *Times* (London), 1 Sept. 1854, reprinted in part in *Whalemen's Shipping List*, 3 Oct. 1854.

57. Alexander M'Donald, *Some Passages*, 118.

58. W.G. Ross, *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas*, 167-9.

59. *Periodical Accounts* 23 (1858): 131.

60. Relations with the Nugumiut seem to have been especially strained, but see J.P. Faulkner, *Eighteen Months in a Greenland Whaler* (New York, 1878), 203-06, for a tale of a Niantilik man who attacked sailors from a vessel which his wife visited regularly.

were handling American-built whale-boats as early as 1852<sup>61</sup> and the references to Tesuwin, cited above, suggest that in 1859 one Inuk controlled four whaleboats and bargained on behalf of his crews for division of the hunt.<sup>62</sup> This was similar to the way in which whalers, particularly Americans, paid their crews, but with one difference. The whaleboats themselves could be part of the bargain, remaining in the hands of the natives as wages at the end of the season. This practice is known to have started by 1858 at Frobisher Bay and 1867 at Repulse Bay.<sup>63</sup> It probably occurred quite early in Cumberland Sound, though recorded instances are later. Nepekin received a boat from the *Isabella* in 1876, and another from the *Florence* in 1878.<sup>64</sup> When the *Mattapoissett* set sail for New Bedford on 8 July 1879, her native boatheader Toawadle received a boat and oars, with a rifle and six hundred rounds of ammunition; he had also been drawing clothing, tobacco, small tools, and cooking utensils all winter. Boatsteerer "Jim Brown" received the usual winter rations plus an E. Allen rifle and five hundred rounds at the end of the season. Six other crewmen received less, though all got ammunition.<sup>65</sup>

The intensity of disruption in the 1860s may be surmised from the state of affairs when the *Florence* arrived to winter in 1877. She was only the fifth vessel into the sound but found that the Kekerten stations and four steamers had come to terms with virtually the whole population from Blacklead to Kekerten for the winter. Tyson, the *Florence's* master, was well acquainted with the local natives but had to winter at Anarnitung near the head of the sound. There he could trade for meat and skins with the prosperous camps near Netilling Fiord, but was barred by ice from the spring whaling.

According to Euro-American accounts, it was during this period that the Inuit virtually lost their aboriginal hunting skills through trade with the whalers. Matthias Warmow noted reprovingly in 1857 that many Inuit had firearms — he forgot, perhaps, that guns had been delivered free by philanthropic Englishmen in response to tales of native destitution. Kumlein was of Warmow's persuasion; he believed that the "Cumberland Eskimo of today, with his breech-loading rifle, steel knives, [and] cotton jackets. . . is worse clad, lives poorer, and gets less to eat than did his forefathers." Although the hand harpoon was still used for sealing, the bow and arrow was little more than a child's toy; caribou hunters used rifles.<sup>66</sup> Franz Boas, without moralizing, noted similar changes in 1883.<sup>67</sup> Successive visitors painted progressively bleaker pictures. Canadian mariner William Wakeham

61. W. Barron, *An Apprentice's Reminiscences of Whaling in Davis Strait. . . 1848 to 1854* (Hull, 1890), 40–42.

62. Tesuwin or "Tes-e-wane" was considered "a very useful man" by whalers until partly disabled in a hunting accident about 1875; Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 24.

63. Dr. Susan Rowley, pers. comm., re. whaleboat given by Buddington to Cudlargo in 1858; for Repulse Bay, see W.G. Ross, *Whaling and Eskimos*, 93.

64. Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 29, 176.

65. Old Dartmouth Historical Society, Whaling Museum Library, International Marine Archives, mss. no. 310 – *Mattapoissett*, Account Book, 1878–79.

66. Kumlein, *Natural History of Arctic America*, 14, 34–35.

67. Boas, *Central Eskimo*, 466–8.

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reported in 1898 that “in the neighbourhood of the whaling stations the natives are fast ceasing to be expert in the use of their old fashioned weapons, such as spears, small harpoons, bows and arrows. . . and there can be little doubt that those who have been brought up about the stations would be badly off if these were closed.”<sup>68</sup> The leader of the next Canadian expedition was more emphatic: “The natives. . . have quite given up the use of primitive weapons, and there is no doubt that a withdrawal of the whalers would lead to great hardship and many deaths among these people” unless the government intervened.<sup>69</sup> Traditional weapons were still prized for competitive, recreational uses,<sup>70</sup> but the Inuit of Cumberland Sound had seized the chance to hunt more efficiently. Indigenous hunting skills were as necessary as ever but, by the end of the century, imported weapons were thoroughly integrated into the hunting economy.

This change took place against a background of shrinking personal contact between Inuit and whites. For five of the ten years from 1860 to 1869 whaling crews probably outnumbered the Inuit in Cumberland Sound; in 1861 gatherings of two hundred people — natives and sailors — attended theatrical events on board the *Antelope* north of Kekerten Harbour.<sup>71</sup> After 1880 only station schooners or tiny supply vessels wintered, sometimes unintentionally. The whalers’ original land-base at Nuvujen was abandoned by the mid-1860s; the Blacklead Island station was only intermittently manned between 1870 and the late 1880s; skeleton staffs kept trade going at Kekerten. After 1880 the sound rarely saw one ship, or a dozen white men, from November to July.

### MARGINAL WHALING AND THE SEAL-SKIN TRADE, 1880–1919

The virtual withdrawal of whites and the depletion of bowhead whales did not send the people quietly back to their original way of life. Just as the bowhead had been converted from a subsistence item to a commodity, surplus ringed seal skins were sold to the stations, blubber attached, so that supply vessels need not go home empty. From 1883 to 1903 the average trade was thirty-seven hundred skins a year, which helped carry the stations through the years (of which there were at least eight between 1883 and 1914) when no whales were caught. In 1883 the stations sent sledges “from one settlement to another to exchange tobacco, matches, coffee, bread, &c. for skins and the spare blubber which the Eskimo have carefully saved up,” while the Inuit themselves took skins and blubber to the stations to trade for heavier durable goods like cooking pots.<sup>72</sup>

Even the Americans’ withdrawal from Cumberland Sound in 1892 barely saved the Scottish stations. When their owners’ supply vessel sank in 1902, she was

68. W. Wakeham, *Report of the Expedition. . .*, 75.

69. A.P. Low, *The Cruise of the Neptune*, 271.

70. W.G. Ross, *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas*, 238.

71. Old Dartmouth Historical Society, Whaling Museum Library, Log No. 771, *Antelope*, 1860–61: 22 Jan., 22 Feb. 1861.

72. Boas, *Central Eskimo*, 467; also Howgate, ed., *Cruise of the Florence*, 91 for similar trips five years earlier.

succeeded by chartered vessels which were too small, inexpertly commanded, and often unseaworthy: some sank. Whaling vessels rarely called, and no bowhead was caught by a pelagic whaler in Cumberland Sound after 1880.<sup>73</sup> A two-man Anglican mission after 1894 was an alternative source of employment and provisions; if the Scottish station owners were quite willing to let the missions issue relief, they nonetheless controlled the missionaries' access to the labour of Inuit living around the stations.<sup>74</sup> A few beluga-hunting whalers,<sup>75</sup> government expeditions, and gentlemen-adventurers arrived between 1895 and 1910 to create momentary price fluctuations for skins, handicrafts, and casual labour, but the hard-pressed Scottish stations set the terms of trade most of the time. Relations between Scots and "station natives" or "sailors" in this period were as close to a system of personal labour relations as this region ever experienced. Traders dealt with their "sailors" on preferential terms, and there was a formal ritual for engaging men each autumn, with the phrase "You are going to be my sailor."<sup>76</sup> It is mainly this social context that makes it possible to describe the years from 1880 to 1919 as "transitional" rather than "contact-traditional."

Visitors and missionaries almost invariably described the population as concentrated at the two stations, Blacklead and Kekerten. Some allowance must be made for distorted perceptions during ship-time but most Inuit were considerably more closely linked to the stations after 1880 than they had previously been to any one ship or whaling company. Traditional life continued during the floe-edge and breathing-hole sealing seasons, and during the late summer caribou hunt.<sup>77</sup> For the rest of the year Inuit gathered at the stations as a seasonal reserve of labour for resident and visiting southerners.

Through all this the Inuit continued going down to the floe edge after whales in the spring and onto the stormy waters in autumn, and the whalers continued advancing them provisions and equipment to do so. Because of overhunting before 1880 this would not thereafter have been a profitable routine using carcasses for traditional purposes, but the survival of the whaling stations assured access to international markets, and for the Inuit the hunt was worth pursuing even if it failed. Kekerten station in 1883 mustered five whaleboats and Blacklead about as many; together they caught one whale all year (see Table 2). Although bowhead

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73. PAC, MG29 A58, vol. 8, file 6 (clippings).

74. PAC, MG17 B2, Church Missionary Society manuscripts C.1./P, item 1905-32, Bilby to CMS, 12 July 1905.

75. R. Reeves and E. Mitchell, "White Whale Hunting In Cumberland Sound," *The Beaver* 312:3 (Winter 1981): 42-49.

76. See Scottish Record Office, C.S. 241 W/25/8, Inventory of Process, Second Division, Lord Salvesson, Part I Ordinary, Wrightington and Co. against O.C. Forsyth Grant, 100. I am indebted to the Rev. Dr. White for this reference. Other aspects of this relationship in summer are documented in the logs of the *Erme* (1912-16) in the Stefansson Collection, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

77. In 1899 the whaling crews were paid off on 25 July, and immediately began preparing for the caribou hunt. PAC, MG17 B2, CMS C.1./0. item 1899-114, extracts from J.W. Bilby's journal.

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stocks were virtually exhausted, the Inuit persisted in the whale-hunting routine and continued to think of themselves as a whale-hunting people. Markosie Pitseolak recalled his youth many years later: "Then the white whaler chose his men to go out on the next whale hunt with him. They had to let you know a few months ahead before they went out whaling. Even if it was hard work, I really wanted to go, and when I was chosen to go I was so happy."<sup>78</sup> Life at the floe edge was reasonably secure. Rations were issued to whalers, the abundant seals could be hunted when whales were not actually being chased, and dependents were provisioned back at the stations. The social life of the floe edge was distinctive too; the early Christian convert Tulugajuak honed his teaching skills when camped for the whaling, and the whaling was followed by baptisms in 1904.<sup>79</sup> The presence of the whaler-traders allowed Inuit men to continue a socially valued routine even though its economic value was questionable.

Intermittently after 1880, southern visitors predicted the complete collapse of the whaling industry and a great deal of resulting misery for the Inuit. Contact was saved by the trade in seal oil and skins, by a market for walrus products arising about 1900, and by growing international interest after 1900 in the pelts of the white fox and polar bear. Despite the new market for these "scraps" or "Arctic produce," Cumberland Sound very nearly was cut off from the outside world during the First World War; to survive the war, the lone white man in the sound depended on the charity of the Inuit for whom he had nothing left to trade.<sup>80</sup> The Dundee syndicate which bought the stations in 1914 was unable to send a vessel in 1915 or 1918, and resupplied the posts but lost the returning vessel and produce in 1916.<sup>81</sup> When a chartered schooner got through in 1919, her success was reported in the London *Daily Mail*. The schooner had received "a most joyous welcome from the Esquimaux. . . [whose] ammunition has run out and they had had a severe struggle to sustain themselves. For a couple of years they had only seal meat to eat, and their clothing made wholly of the skins was very dilapidated. The influenza epidemic had extended to the gulf, but only four deaths occurred."<sup>82</sup> If this account is literally true the Inuit had, as earlier observers foretold, lost the capacity to kill caribou with bows and arrows. Although total dependence on the seal was no great hardship in the short run, the people of southeast Baffin Island apparently needed their international contacts in order for their hunting economy to remain viable.

### THE WHITE FOX ERA, 1920–40

The transition from whaling to the fur trade followed a distinctive course in Baffin Island, particularly in the southeast. Pangnirtung so quickly became the focus of

78. *Stories from Pangnirtung* (Edmonton, 1976), 25.

79. Anglican Church Archives, Peck manuscripts xxxv no. 4, Journal, 30 Apr., 24 July 1904.

80. *Stories from Pangnirtung*, 35–36 (Jim Kilabuk) and 75 (Malaya Akulujuk); and Ross, *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas*, 227–39.

81. Voyage information in Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), A.92/212/1, Kinnes to HBC, 28 April 1922; partly corrected by reference to *Erme*, 1916.

82. *Daily Mail* (London), 21 Oct. 1919.

white activity over a large area that it is surprising to note the recollection of Jim Kilabuk in 1976, of a time when "there were only Eskimo leaders to lead the people. Before, they used to have white men coming by ship."<sup>83</sup> Martha Kakee in 1984 also referred to the time when Kaneaku was leader at Nauleeniaqvik, "when they only had Inuit leaders not the white men."<sup>84</sup> These recollections are almost perfectly accurate; for a decade after 1916 even the Anglican mission was kept in operation by the catechist Peter Tulugajuak, without white intervention.<sup>85</sup> As whaling collapsed the number of trading stations actually increased: British speculators put tiny depots at most of the places where Inuit had previously gathered to meet the ships. Crawford Noble and Company sold the Blacklead and Kekerten stations in 1914 to a Dundee syndicate headed by whaling agent Robert Kinnes.<sup>86</sup> Kinnes kept the stations open, though they were unsupplied during several war years. Noble's former employee James Mutch made annual visits to direct operations for the Sabellum Trading Company. This small London-based concern stayed out of Cumberland Sound, but set up seven posts from Frobisher Bay to Cape Henry Kater, showing enterprise and invention in testing supplies of various exportable commodities, but making most of their precarious profits on the white fox furs which Inuit were learning to trap in earnest after 1912. The strangely named Arctic Gold Exploration Syndicate (AGES) had one dependable German-American employee whom they moved around as opportunities offered. Before 1914 he was at Durban Harbour and after 1920 he was near the head of Cumberland Sound at Usualuk.

The trading picture in the region in 1920 was roughly this: in Frobisher Bay and nearby Cape Haven, a new post and an old whaling station were managed by Godiliak and Michiman for the Sabellum Company. On Blacklead Island in Cumberland Sound, Kinnes' station was run by Paul Roche, the elderly native son of an American whaler-trader. The mission house was occupied by Tulugajuak. Nearby, Kinnes' Kekerten station was run by Angmalik, and his relatives formed much of the island's greatly reduced population. (His wife had been housekeeper to one of the last Scottish traders.)<sup>87</sup> The Usualuk post was run for AGES by William Duval, nearing the end of his fifty years among the Inuit. At the mouth of Cumberland Sound Kanaker (Kaneaku), a long-time Sabellum contact, managed two small stations. Overland at Cape Durban "Harry" Kingoodlee, who had organized trade there during the whaling era, managed a small depot. At Kivitoo, north of Broughton Island, a noted hunter named Niaqutiaq was rounding out a decade's work for the Sabellum Company at the old whaling haven of Hooper

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83. *Stories from Pangnirtung*, 35.

84. Auyuittuq Interviews, Martha Kakee (2).

85. *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society* (London, annually), and *The Year Book and Clergy List of the Church of England in the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto, annually).

86. See HBCA, A.92/212/1, Kinnes to Secretary, 28 April 1922 for transfer date. Records connected with the dissolution of the Cumberland Gulf Trade Company are preserved in the Scottish Record Office, BT2/11549.

87. Auyuittuq Interviews, Katchoo Evik (13), Etuangat Aksayook (22).

Harbour. A shell-shocked Englishman, Hector Pitchforth, kept the small Sabellum post near Cape Henry Kater.<sup>88</sup> This system worked for a short time because of the reliability of the native traders and because the Inuit trusted the itinerant Mutch, the acculturated Duval, and the experienced Kinnes Company. Veteran whalers and native managers were essential to the new trading companies, and ties between the companies and Inuit were personal as well as economic. When Kinnes sold out in 1924 the agents received substantial gifts.<sup>89</sup>

These distinctive arrangements were upset by powerful competition. In September 1921 the *Bay Chimo* established a Hudson's Bay Company post in Pangnirtung Fiord. Tough competition and bad luck drove Kinnes and AGES out of the region within two years, and central mismanagement and James Mutch's retirement undid the work of the Sabellum Company's native managers. The HBC had no effective opposition after 1924. Initially the outlook was not so clear, and the first two years' post journals by the HBC's J.W. Nichols reveal a good deal about the economy and social organization of Cumberland Sound during the last stage of transition.

Within his first month at the post Nichols engaged a boat's crew of Inuit — six or seven men under a leader, probably Veevee — to help haul goods, hunt seals and caribou, and begin trapping foxes. Visiting Inuit invariably expected to be fed, though not all accepted advances to trap for the HBC. "These people are evidently used to the custom of changing masters every year and cannot be depended to stick by any one Company," the trader remarked.<sup>90</sup> Initial fox returns disappointed Nichols, who recorded an ingenious excuse offered by the Inuit, that they were inexpert trappers because the whalers "had always taken every [pound] of fat & oil these natives would get and would never allow them to keep any for themselves. Consequently instead of hunting foxes in winter they have to hunt seals."<sup>91</sup> The reverse was actually true. Seal meat was always in demand for people and for dogs, but the skins were used, traded, or discarded. The whalers had taken on the task of distributing blubber skins in winter to people who needed oil, since the fat was not processed until May. Nichols himself, the Inuit thought, demanded too many skins in trade, and the story about excessive demands may have been invented as a warning which he failed to understand.<sup>92</sup>

Because the native station-keepers travelled a good deal, in the tradition of successful Inuit hunters and of wintering whaling captains in the past, Nichols could size up his opposition. "Both Angmalie [of Kekerten] & Kanaka [of Cape Mercy]

88. Major sources on the free trade era include the work of Gavin White and the following unpublished sources: PAC, RG85/568, file 0049 (AGES); RG 85/775, file 5648 (Sabellum); RG85/762, file 4958 (Duval); RG85/763, file 4999 (Pitchforth); the Stefansson Collection in the Baker Library, Dartmouth College contains a number of important logbooks. See also HBCA, A.92/212/1 (Kinnes) and A.92/179/1 (AGES).

89. HBCA, A.92/212/1, Kinnes to HBC, 16 May 1924.

90. HBCA, B.455/a/3, 12 Nov. 1923.

91. HBCA, B.455/a/1, 9 Dec. 1921.

92. See PAC, RG85/610, file 2712, Greenshield to Finnie, 5 March 1923.

seem to have a wonderful hold on the natives with them and it means a lot of hard labor long pow wows and a great deal in the expense line to break their hold."<sup>93</sup> Nichols seems to have encountered the tradition of men engaging to work in parties of six or seven under a leader who handled relations with the white man. Kinship could cement the tie: "it seems that most of them are brothers or Brother-in-Laws to the man in charge [Angmalik] and do not want to leave him until the place [Kekerten] is sold to us," at which time, Nichols fulminated in his diary, they should be broken like dogs.<sup>94</sup> Nichols had never encountered such opposition elsewhere. Duval, Angmalik, Roche, and Kanaker all treated their trappers as "servants,"<sup>95</sup> issuing their rations in advance and then bartering for their skins.

Nichols made another note on this relationship, though it seems likely the natives were taking advantage of his ignorance: when two prominent hunters left the Blacklead station to work for the HBC, they told Nichols they had been forced to surrender their rifles, presumably to Roche. It meant, wrote Nichols, "that we have to give them a new outfit."<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, by the end of the winter thirty-three hunters had attached themselves to the HBC and many others paid intermittent visits, either to barter their pelts directly (making no promise of future trade) or simply to accept the free rations that Nichols did not dare refuse them.

Not only was Nichols an outsider in a trading system governed by tradition and kinship, he was also up against men who could better his prices. Nichols attributed this in part to the fact that he was supplied from Montreal while the British free traders dodged Canadian customs duties. When Nichols' terms of trade failed to come up to what the natives thought right (for example, a pocket knife for a blubber skin), they accused him of cheating them. Nichols, for his part, thought Kanaka must be trading at a far more generous standard than Mutch had authorized, "but in any Case it knocks the price of our Rifles all to hell[.] [I]t seems that all his other goods. . . is priced in proportion to his Rifles and Gramophones," which were trading at two white foxes and five white foxes respectively.<sup>97</sup> These rates in fact were not out of line with prewar prices<sup>98</sup> and it is likely the HBC had simply underestimated the savings to be made by companies using native staff in the country and "unwanted ships and unwanted men"<sup>99</sup> on the North Atlantic. Had the HBC understood just how complex a situation existed in Cumberland Sound it might never have sent in a man like Nichols, tactless and unfit for winter travel.<sup>100</sup>

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93. HBCA, B.455/a/1, 6 Feb. 1922.

94. HBCA, B.455/a/1, 13 Feb. 1922 and a/2, 18 Dec. 1921.

95. Nichols used "servants" in the Scottish sense, implying moderate status and considerable security; HBCA, B.455/a/1, 6 Feb. 1922.

96. HBCA, B.455/a/1, 22 Feb. 1922; it is most improbable that as powerful a man as Tulugajuak did not own his own rifle by 1922.

97. HBCA, B.455/a/1, 6 Feb. 1922.

98. Stefansson Collection, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, Log of the *Erme*, 1913.

99. Gavin White's splendid phrase, in "Scottish Traders," 46.

100. Nichols' travel journals in HBCA, B.455/a/2, contain such expressions as "Now god knows where between Padley and Pangnatoot" (12-18 March 1922) and after aborting a trip to Cape Haven, "d — glad to once again get under a wooden roof." (26 Jan. -5 Feb. 1922).



## INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

He was not left in place long enough to enjoy the results of his early stumbling efforts.

Nichols had urged Inuit to join him by arguing that the HBC would soon buy out Kinnes and AGES, and in fact in this region the HBC was uncharacteristically willing to buy out opposition. While the Sabellum Company folded under the weight of its own inefficiency, Kinnes and AGES sold out well below their owners' initial optimistic valuation. Early in 1922 the Kinnes Company offered its Baffin assets to the HBC for £ 20,000. Unfortunately its schooner burned to the water-line at Kekerten Island, erasing the advantage gained when the HBC's supply ship failed to penetrate Cumberland Sound.<sup>101</sup> Nichols' trappers had to take fox skins to Kekerten to buy molasses and biscuits from Angmalik for the HBC post.<sup>102</sup> The Scottish firm's advantage was short-lived; the investors decided not to replace the burnt schooner, offered all capital assets to the HBC for £ 5,000, and accepted £ 2,000 a month later. The managers admitted reluctance to "forego the result of 50 years difficult labour and organization" but their anxiety to cut their losses is obvious: the HBC would have paid up to £ 5,000 to avoid even larger losses to win over "the natives who have been regularly employed by Kinnes for many years past."<sup>103</sup>

This left the HBC with only Henry Toke Munn's Arctic Gold Exploration Syndicate to contend with in Cumberland Sound. In addition to the Usualuk post near Pangnirtung, AGES had a serviceable little schooner and an established trade at Pond Inlet. Early in 1923 Munn offered £ 8,000 for the Hudson's Bay Company Pond Inlet and Cumberland Sound stations, or would sell the syndicate's own assets for £ 12,000. Munn was bluffing. After rapid negotiations in London and Montreal, AGES sold all its shares for \$28,000, about half Munn's original offer. The Sabellum Company failed to resupply its posts after 1925, so the HBC had no serious opposition in southeast Baffin Island for the remainder of the "white fox" era.

Superficially the transition was complete: Kinnes and Munn withdrew; Duval and Roche became HBC employees; the old shaman Kanaker died at his station in 1926, still managing property for the Sabellum Company which would never return. In Cumberland Sound a white missionary was placed over Tulugajuak in 1925; he and Angmalik became leaders of the two largest trapping camps in Cumberland Sound. The centre of population probably shifted somewhat to the north and west, not in response to the position of Pangnirtung but because good fox trapping was discovered in what had always been the best seal and caribou district, the mouth of Netilling Fiord. No longer was it necessary to gather in spring at the stations, to go down to the floe to try to catch the great bowhead whale.

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101. HBCA, B.455/a/3, 11, 15 Sept. 1922.

102. HBCA, B.455/a/3, 15 Jan. 1923.

103. HBCA, A.92/212/1, correspondence from and concerning Robert Kinnes and Sons.

In this period, too, occurred something like a division Frank Vallee has described elsewhere<sup>104</sup> of people into “nunamiut” and “kabloonamiut” (people of the land and people of the white man). Each of several white institutions — HBC, hospital, RCMP, and so forth — hired one or more Inuit as hunters, dog-drivers, and general assistants and these men, with their families and with the chronically ill or aged, formed the nucleus of the settlement of Pangnirtung while the majority of the people, under the best of the hunting leaders, remained for most of the year in camps.<sup>105</sup> This was in contrast to the whaling era, when most people lived around ships or stations for much of the year.

Whaling of a sort continued, but it was beluga whaling, using small boats and loud noises to strand white whales behind a reef on a falling tide. This drive operated continuously from 1923 to 1937 and resumed intermittently thereafter. The oil and hides of beluga whales were luxury items that did not always show a profit, but the local HBC management valued them as a means of demonstrating that local resources were being harvested for the benefit of the natives. The company view was that the natives’ profit on the whale drive outfitted families completely for the autumn caribou hunt. The inquisitive Dr. Bildfell noticed something else about the whale drive: “it appears to me that the Native benefits very little from this materially,” he wrote in 1934, “but it appears to be a routine which he enjoys.”<sup>106</sup>

From the white incomers’ point of view, one of the challenges of working in Cumberland Sound was the contentment of the Inuit. The Anglican missionary at Lake Harbour found his charges there “more active and industrious than those of the Pangnirtung area. . . due to the fact that the former have to go long distances to get food and clothing.”<sup>107</sup> When Pangnirtung’s Blacklead outpost closed as a cost-cutting measure early in the Great Depression, trapping declined: “they are more or less content to hunt seals, and the fur hunt is becoming of secondary importance. They appear to have little ambition to secure anything but ammunition and tobacco.”<sup>108</sup> Nearer Pangnirtung this may have been less of a consideration. The sealskin returns of Outfits 252 to 266 (Table 4) confirm the local conformity to a general northern pattern: in good fox years seal returns were lower, not because fewer seals were killed but because of “the disinclination of the natives to clean and

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104. F.G. Vallee, *Kabloon and Eskimo in the Central Keewatin* (Ottawa, 1967), 132–40. Vallee was careful to explain that his terms were not distinct opposite types but the ends of a spectrum. He also acknowledged that the settlements attracted, in bad hunting seasons, many people who were still basically oriented towards the land.

105. Much of the best social commentary on Pangnirtung in the “white fox” era is in the reports of medical officers at St. Luke’s Hospital; though marred by amateur ethnography and outdated racial views, the reports of Drs. Livingstone, Stuart, Bildfell and MacKinnon repay study; see PAC, RG85/815, file 6954, Pond Inlet and Pangnirtung Health Reports, 1925–51.

106. PAC, RG85/815, file 6954(2), “Medical Report, 1934,” 17.

107. PAC, RG85/1045, file 540-3(3-C), memo by D.L. McKeand, 14 Nov. 1939.

108. HBCA, D.FTR/27, annual report, outfit 264 (1933–34).

INUIT ECONOMIC RESPONSES

**Table 4**  
**Sealskins Traded at Pangnirtung Post, 1922–36.**

Year	Common Jar	White Coat	Silver Jar	Total
1922	520	–	–	520
1923	920	41	–	961
1924	1,969	200	–	2,169
1925	2,195	1,142	–	3,337
1926	3,672	907	–	4,579
1927	1,239	530	27	1,796
1928	732	721	70	1,523
1929	1,238	1,424	350	3,012
1930	1,050	930	583	2,563
1931	224	872	756	1,852
1932	240	663	692	1,595
1933	675	1,875	1,803	4,353
1934	55	750	952	1,757
1935	81	2,638	1,486	4,205
1936	454	1,801	932	3,187

**NOTE**

1. The “jar” or ringed seal has white fur for a few weeks after birth in March or April, and silver hair until it has spent a winter in the water.

Source: Unclassified manuscript graph in Hudson’s Bay Company Archives.

The “jar” or ringed seal has white fur for a few weeks after birth in March or April, and silver hair until it has spent a winter in the water.

bring in the skins while they can obtain their requirements much more easily with fox skins.”<sup>109</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, the Cumberland Sound natives’ economic strategy was well understood and accepted with resignation by the HBC’s managers. The Inuit lived comfortably on seals until they wanted coffee or biscuits, then trapped a few foxes to warrant a trip into Pangnirtung. The traders imagined that the Inuit were unusually stoical or passive. “He is also essentially a whaler type of native brought up entirely on the whaling tradition. This symptom was noted in the early days at the Hudson Strait Posts but fortunately has since almost disappeared. We have no doubt however that in time the Cumberland Sound natives will become better ‘Hudson’s Bay men’.” Meantime, the local Inuk was a “pretty fair sealer and whaler but a very poor trapper.”<sup>110</sup> Though these remarks were meant to be mildly derogatory, there is a delicate irony in them. From 1857 onward, missionaries, scientists, and even whalers deplored the influence of the whaling industry on the Inuit of Cumberland Sound and predicted that the people would become corrupt

109. HBCA, D.FTR/27, enclosure, Commissioner to Manager of St. Lawrence–Ungava District, 6 Feb. 1935.

110. HBCA, Ungava Annual Reports, S.J. Stewart, 28 July 1939.

and dependent. “Lofty” Stewart’s complaint suggests, on the contrary, that a distinctive environment and the whaling tradition helped the Inuit of Cumberland Sound retain a stubborn detachment from the values and preferences of the HBC post manager.

## CONCLUSION

Inuit in southeast Baffin Island responded to commercial whaling in much the way sub-Arctic Indians responded to the fur trade. They informed British and American whalers of the best opportunities to hunt and provided essential logistical and social support to the whalers’ initial faltering efforts to winter over. Inuit admitted southerners into the local system of sharing resources, and during intermittent periods of hardship they made heavy demands on the whalers (and later on missionaries and the Canadian government). They also made significant efforts and sacrifices, especially in hard years, when they hunted for the southerners.

Inuit also paid heavily for these exchanges through exposure to European diseases, but the winters of 1846–48 appear to have been the last instance of widespread starvation caused solely by shortage of seal-meat. In this sense the adoption of Europeans into Inuit economic systems, and their own response to Euro-American commercial contacts, met the basic objective of increasing security for the indigenous groups.

Inuit also adjusted to the changing character and demands of subsequent groups of incomers. These strategies could not prevent destruction of bowhead whale stocks, and exposed the Inuit to the vagaries of international markets for Arctic produce. They were in no position either to control the movement of external prices, or to reap the full benefit when markets were most favourable for their commodities — whale oil and baleen, sealskins, or Arctic fox. None the less, changes in the culture of southeast Baffin Island after 1824 embodied the choice made by Inuit to participate, as far as their own cultural values and their local resources allowed, in international commerce.