

Where Acton Man Lives and Works . . .

Eskimos Hunt Traplins by Flashlight, Trade on Sprees

The street lights come on before five o'clock these dull, pre-Christmas days. We complain a little about the gloominess of the weather.

But last Christmas time one Actonian was in a much darker location. Constable Clayton Fryer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was occupied with the relocation of several families to Craig Harbour on south-eastern Ellesmere Island in the Hudson Bay area. There the sun is not seen above the horizon from the middle of November to the middle of February!

At Christmas, Eskimos who on working days hunted for and tended their trap lines with much-needed flashlights, came to the R.C.M.P. detachment for Christmas festivities. "A dance and games were staged and enjoyed by everyone," Const. Fryer reported.

Government Plan

Main project for him last year was carrying out the government's plan of moving some Eskimo families to better hunting grounds farther north. He took some beautiful colored slides of the project and many in the district have seen his most unusual

pictures. He was home on leave until about a month ago.

Explaining the move, Const. Fryer said, "For many years it has been evident that Eskimo districts were becoming over-populated and that game was gradually dwindling."

"The Canadian government decided to take steps to rehabilitate groups of natives to areas farther north, where game was known to be plentiful. With this plan, the Eskimos could follow the native way of life and become less dependent on the white man."

"One of the natives would be appointed trader. The member in charge of the RCMP detachment would supervise the trading until the native trader was capable of assuming full responsibility."

Four Port Harrison Eskimo families and two Pond Inlet families disembarked at Craig Harbour from the ship C. D. Howe in late summer, 1953. Const. Fryer wrote about the whole rehabilitation program in a special article in the RCMP Quarterly.

On Walrus Hunt

After the natives were temporarily encamped, close to the detachment, the men were taken on a hunting trip. Hunting conditions were ideal for walrus on this particular day, he said. There were large packs of loose, floating ice, on which groups of walrus were sleeping. Three walrus were killed and at least 50 others were counted, but left unmolested as the boats had full loads.

"We returned to Craig Harbour with a spirited group of natives, who were enthused over the abundance of game."

Ten caribou were obtained, mainly for the purpose of supplying the natives with skins with which to make winter clothing.

The young Mountie from Acton noticed that even a short time after the natives arrived at Craig Harbour, there was a marked difference in them. The first impression was that they were a depressed, lifeless group, looking for "too many handouts from the white men."

Once they were familiar with the new location, they had a new eagerness to look after themselves. They hadn't been in their new location long when the Mounties noticed that they had all put on weight, all looked healthier and happier.

In three trips with the Police powerboat, all the natives and their belongings were transported to the new site. During these trips, six walrus, two bearded seal and several common seal were contributed to the cache of meat.

"Were all the natives satisfied?"

No Wide Open Spaces

All but one, Const. Fryer says that "one old character" from Port Harrison didn't like the idea of having a 1,000 foot mountain directly in back of him, when he was accustomed to the wide open spaces.

The families managed fine. They saw large numbers of caribou, hundreds of ptarmigan and scores of Arctic hare.

The Mounties withdrew their direct assistance and the natives took over. But Const. Fryer saw the members of the group regularly when they came to the station to trade. Ivory carvings were traded. He says that these Eskimos, with their ability to carve ivory and stone, would never have to go in need even in a poor trapping year. They have a steady source of income.

They were given Family Allowances and loaned some traps. Conditions were good and Const. Fryer called their visits to the store "spending sprees." He thinks they are among the best-off Eskimos in the north.

And they appreciated it all but one. The one old-timer, even at the end of the first long, dark winter, wouldn't admit he liked the change. He was going to see how the group managed through the spring and summer first.

And Const. Fryer doesn't know

how his friends, the Eskimos, managed yet himself. He started not long after on the trek back south. He was home for several months, spending his time in Acton and Ottawa. He left here about a month ago and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Fryer, Acton, believe that this week he is probably at Fort Smith on Great Slave Lake in the North-West Territories, waiting to be taken in to Spence Bay.

There is considerable interest in Acton in Const. Fryer's work, and gifts for the Eskimos have been sent south from the town.

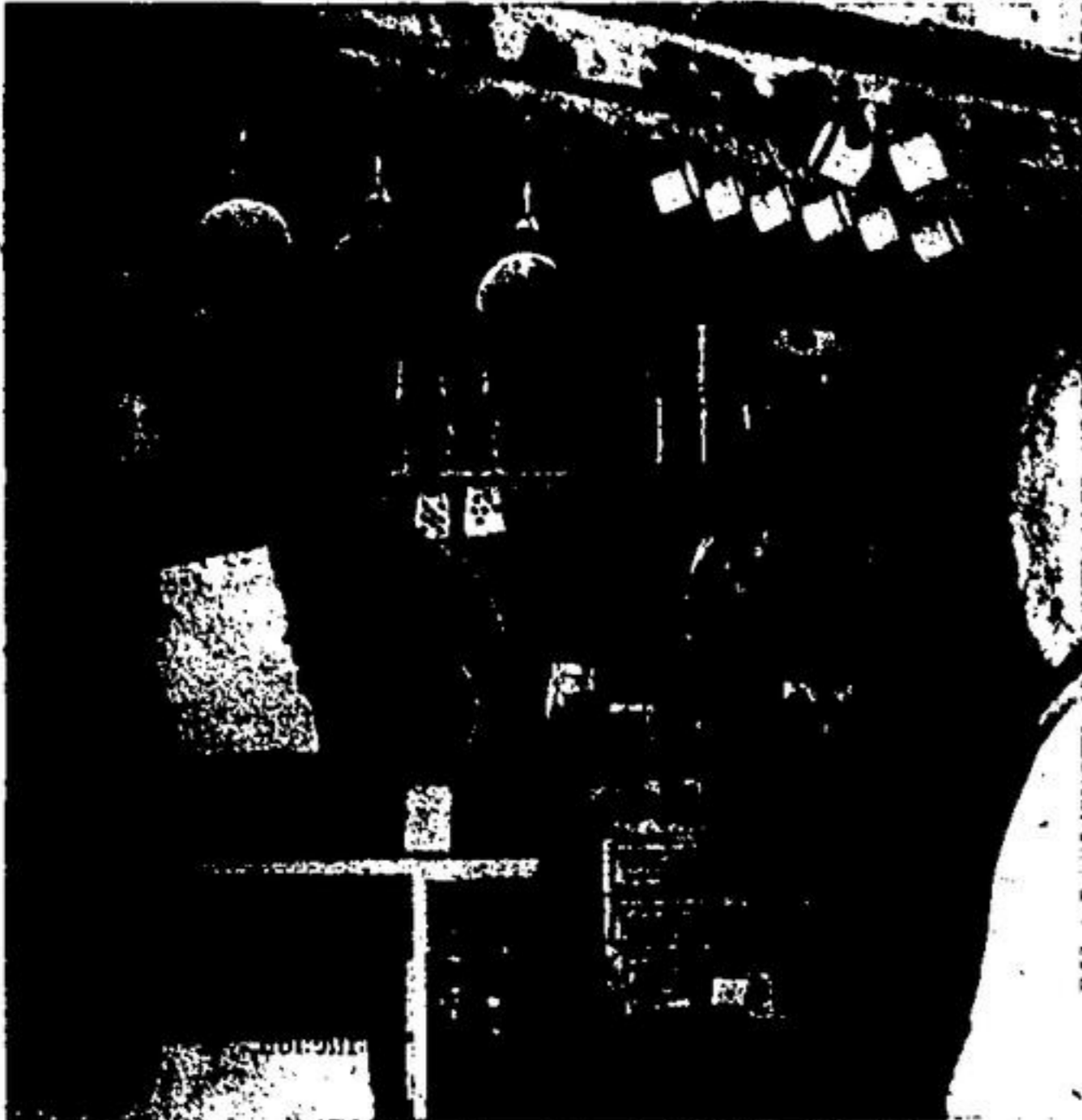
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"SHOPPING SPREES" are indulged in by Eskimos who, after moving to an area where there is more game, are among the best-situated natives in the north. They are trading with Royal Canadian Mounted Police Constable Clayton Fryer of Acton. He assisted the families in their move to a new home, just 1,000 miles from the north pole.

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