

"Lawrence of the Eskimos" L. A. Learmonth Famous Figure in Canada's North Country

L. A. Learmonth, the inspiration for this article in a recent issue of the Star Weekly, is well-known in Georgetown where he visits with his sister, Miss N. Learmonth, Main Street South. His brother, the late Dr. R. S. Learmonth was a veterinary in Georgetown for many years before his death.

LAWRENCE OF ESKIMOS by Harold Hilliard

In the Toronto Star Weekly, a man who knows by the first name just about every living Eskimo in the western half of Canada's frozen Arctic "backyard" is off again this winter, seeking new adventures and more answers to some of the secrets of Canada's mysterious, barrenlands. He aims, for one thing, to reach a remote island never before visited by man, an island which wasn't even known by Eskimos to exist until it was spotted by a recent RCAF aerial survey.

He is L. A. Learmonth, a Hudson's Bay Co. trader and spare-time explorer and amateur scientist who has become almost a legendary figure in the Canadian polar regions during his 39 years in its remote reaches. And according to top Canadian museum officials, his contribution to man's knowledge of the Eskimo and the Arctic has been unmatched by any other Canadian. One purpose of the present trip is to resume his search for rare archaeological specimens of early Eskimo cultures for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. He wants to add these to an exhibit, recently opened at the museum, of a collection of tools and weapons of prehistoric tribes, which he previously plucked from the frigid shores of Somerset Island. The island is

beyond the magnetic pole and even beyond the most northerly mainland point of the continent.

At the same time, he will test out two new theories about the ill-fated Franklin expedition, one of his own and the other advanced by a Royal Navy officer living in England. The expedition perished to a man on the Arctic wastes over a century ago, while seeking to be the first conquerors of the Northwest Passage. Learmonth is one of the four men in history reputed to have travelled the passage in both directions—a feat performed not as a planned effort but in the normal course of his trading duties.

Specimens Unmatched

Learmonth of the Arctic has acquired as varied and fabulous experience as any man who ever inhabited Canada's polar regions. His newest and largest of a number of exhibits in the Royal Ontario Museum represent the fruits of a 1948-49 expedition, which started out to be one of a few weeks' duration but which led to adventures that extended it to a year. He was stationed at Fort Ross on Somerset Island, just across Bellot straits from the northern tip of Boothia peninsula. His destination was a prehistoric Eskimo whaling camp at Creswell Bay, 80 miles up the east coast of Somerset.

He arrived there in the late summer aboard a whaleboat with several Eskimos, to discover a camp of about 20 natives stricken by a contagious disease. Prehistoric remains forgotten for the moment, he sped back to Fort Ross for medical supplies. But the radio there had been dismantled so it was well into winter before he could flash the

word "outside", after mashing 200 miles across shifting ice and Baffin Island to the radio equipped post of Arctic Bay.

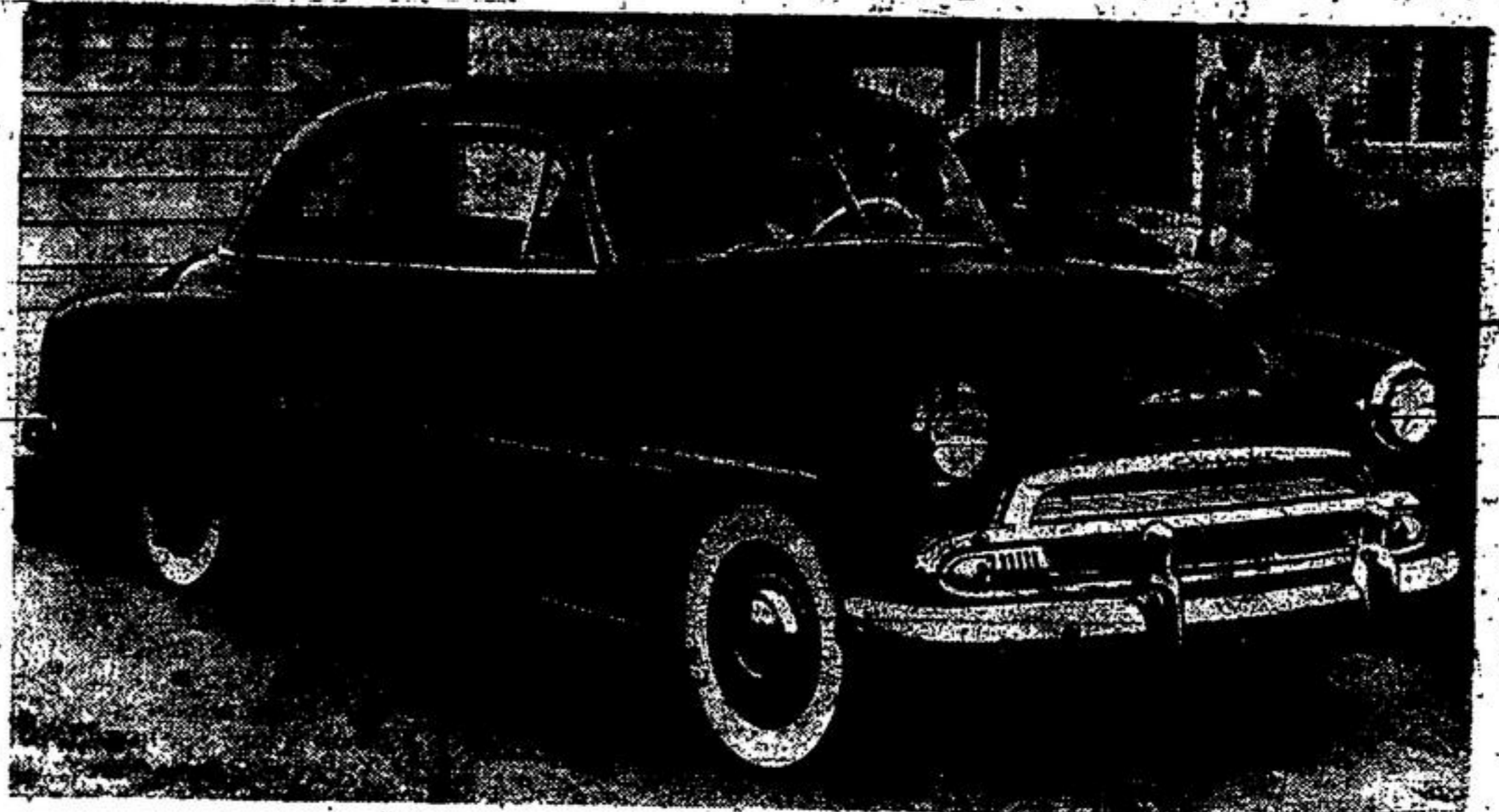
Before the mercy mission was completed by RCAF aircraft, a feat which was the subject of wide newspaper publicity for weeks, winter was about over. So Learmonth's digging wasn't completed until the summer of 1949. Then he had to wait weeks for weather and ice conditions to be right so he could navigate treacherous ice back to Fort Ross. Bellot straits leading to it can be crossed, even at the best of times, only at certain hours of the day, with which only those with long experience in that area are familiar. To reach his destination, Learmonth had to lie off the entrance to the straits waiting for the right hour. An incoming tide was forcing ice into the entrance, like a cork in the neck of the bottle, so the trick was to slide through on a falling tide which uncorked the bottleneck of ice.

The specimens now on exhibit represent the first so complete a collection on the Thule Eskimo culture (about 900 to 1300 AD) ever to appear in the Royal Ontario Museum. While there are four other comparable collections in the world, in museums in Ottawa, Copenhagen, New York and Philadelphia, Learmonth's specimens come from remote Arctic regions which no other scientific man ever visited.

The Creswell Bay finds brings to over 900 the number of archaeological specimens Learmonth has contributed, without charge, to the Ontario Museum. Many come from almost inaccessible places where the cost has barred scientific expeditions. Prof. T. F. McIlwraith, associate director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, believes that because of his knowledge of the north, Learmonth can locate specimens in days that would take other scientific men months. The 400 to 500 Arctic bird skins he has contributed to the Royal Ontario Museum

of Zoology are a key portion of a North American collection unmatched by any other museum in the world.

Learmonth had been contributing historical specimens to his company's museum in Winnipeg for years when he was introduced in 1935 to Dean H. A. Innes of the University of Toronto, who was combining a holiday with scientific research at the Chesterfield Inlet post on Hudson Bay. Innes, familiar with Learmonth's travels, asked if the trader explorer would be interested in sending specimens to the Royal Ontario Museum. Two years later, Learmonth walked into the museum in Toronto with his



CHEVROLET for 1951 presents a new profile, with extended rear fenders, newly designed grille, longer, lower, more sweeping lines; and many other features. Chevrolet also offers Powerglide automatic transmission, as an option at extra cost. Powerglide is fully automatic and eliminates the clutch pedal and the mechanical shift. This is the first fully automatic transmission to be offered in the lowest price field. Also offered are new Jumbo-Drum brakes which require 25 percent less pedal pressure. Shown above is the 1951 Chevrolet Styleline Deluxe four-door sedan. There are 11 other models including the Chevrolet Bel Air, Canada's first "hard-top" convertible.

first offerings, and a steady stream has been arriving since. One historical specimen is a cannot dating back to Elizabethan times, which he recovered from ruins of the HMS Fury. It foundered on an island in 1824 when Admiral Parry made an unsuccessful attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage.

Reopens Franklin Story

In 1951 he has agreed to guide and advise what officials of the Royal Ontario Museum hope will be the first of a series of annual scientific expeditions to Canada's most remote north. If the plan materializes, it will carry such investigation closer to the North Pole than ever undertaken by any Canadian institution. The objective is a composite expedition, consisting of top field men of at least three of the Royal Ontario's Museums — archaeology, zoology and geology — as well as other scientists, including some from the University of Toronto's geography and oceanography departments.

The archaeology men will look to Learmonth to lead them to prehistoric Eskimo camps, because he is believed to know of more such sites than any other living man. Geologists will seek information about rock structures, to help encourage prospecting of an "empire within a country" which a federal government geologist believes to be the world's largest, untapped mineral storehouse.

In 1936 Learmonth was the leader of one of six expeditions in 82 years to locate concrete traces of the Franklin expedition. After virtually writing finis to the Franklin story, Learmonth has renewed it lately by advancing his own theory that Franklin, whose remains never were found, may be buried on the unnamed island not even known to exist until spotted by the RCAF aerial survey. The existing theory is that Franklin was buried at sea, after death from sickness aboard his ship, while it was ice-locked about 25 miles off King William Island. Learmonth argues that an ice-bound ship isn't likely to bury its dead at sea. It is now known the ship was frozen in at a point about halfway between King William and the newly known island, so Learmonth thinks a search of the latter may reveal not only the expedition leader's burial place, but possibly some of the missing expedition records.

The other new theory has been advanced by Admiral Noel Wright. He has made a lifetime hobby of studying every tittle of information surrounding the death in 1847 of Franklin and his 134 officers and men, and the unexplained disappearance, without trace, of the expedition's two ships. Wright thinks records of Franklin will be found under a stone cairn farther north than anyone has yet searched.

Learmonth has won a place in the affections of Canada's Eskimos which can be compared with the esteem felt for Britain's Lawrence by the natives of Arabia before and during World War I. This is particularly true among the 1200 who sparsely populate the portion of Canada's frigid wasteland lying between the Alaskan border and the western coast of Baffin Island. Strangers to him, however, are several hundred Alaskan natives who have "invaded" the delta at the mouth of the Mackenzie River in the last two years to trap muskrats. This has followed the sharp decline in the price of the white fox, which is to the Eskimo's economy what wheat is to the prairie. The invasion is posing no small problem for the Canadian Government, particularly since the Canadian Eskimos are as hard hit by the low price for white fox—a price which has forced many of them to give up trapping.

Today's price of \$5 or less has brought Jean times to the northern natives, and Learmonth believes they can be helped only if their talents are put to work by the government. He's in favour of federal

plans to provide education for them, because he believes it will enable them to compete on equal footing with whites for the growing number of Arctic opportunities. Ottawa is receiving his advice on the preparation of proposed textbooks in the Eskimo language. Learmonth thinks the natives would be particularly valuable as civilian ground personnel for the air force, as they have an uncanny grasp of mechanics. Nine times out of ten they probably can beat a whiteman repairing a motor.

Land of Opportunity

A man who has lived longer in the far north than probably any other white Canadian, Learmonth received his baptism to Canada's barrenlands long before he got intimate glimpses of its cities. He left his native Orkney Islands as a youth of 17 in 1911 and, except for a brief stop at Montreal, made his first landing at Davis Inlet, in far-north Labrador. Each move from post to post was westward until he was ordered to the west coast of Hudson Bay, and he has remained west of there for most of his trading career. He mushed 2,000 miles a winter by dog-team when district inspector of the western Arctic for the Hudson's Bay Co. between 1941 and 1948. Since he left that position, a company plan has been introduced to speed up the inspector's travels.

Although now officially semi-retired, Learmonth remains as active as ever, and his present assignment is the arduous task of closing down the post at Fort Ross, which he first established 13 years ago. Unlike putting the shutters on a corner grocery store, it's at least a three-year job.

Having lived through the span of Arctic evolution which has seen the changeover from an era when the dog-team was the only mode of winter travel to one in which the aircraft has supplemented—but not replaced — dogs, Learmonth welcomes the new aid as a tool to hasten the advance of his pet projects. To the forefront are his archaeological and Franklin investigations, but equally important in his mind is the move by Ottawa to re-establish a sound economy for the Eskimos. These are first steps, he feels, in the constant search for ways and means to transform Canada's great barrenlands from little more than a huge curiosity shop, and a stepping-stone for a potential enemy, into a land of opportunity, dotted by great mines, fisheries, and other sources of economic wealth.

Mrs. Campbell Sinclair New President Knox Women's Missionary

Mrs. Campbell Sinclair was elected president of the Woman's Missionary Society of Knox Presbyterian Church at a meeting in the church last Wednesday. She succeeds her mother-in-law, Mrs. W. T. Sinclair who has been president for several years.

During the meeting presentations of cups and saucers were made to Mrs. W. T. Sinclair and the retiring secretary, Mrs. Alex Hume. Mrs. Hugh Clark read an address to the ladies, thanking them for their faithful service and Mrs. R. B. Foulis made the presentations.

Mrs. William Cromar read a chapter from the new study book. Arrangements were made for the day of prayer and a service will be held in the church in February.

Officers of the organization for this year are: Mrs. W. T. Sinclair, past-president; Mrs. Campbell Sinclair, president; Mrs. William Cromar, 1st vice president; Mrs. Alex Calder, 2nd vice president; Mrs. Sam Mackenzie, secretary; Mrs. R. B. Foulis, treasurer.

A cat's whiskers are delicate sense organs which help him find his way about.



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Canada's population has grown by 3,000,000 since 1935—almost a third.

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Manufacturing was almost three times greater.



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Oil production was twenty times greater.



Construction last year was almost ten times greater.

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