

InfoNorth

The Photographic Archives of the Arctic Institute of North America

by Constance Martin

ONE OF THE LEAST-KNOWN TANGIBLE ASSETS of the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA) is its photographic collection, which includes images dating from the 1890s to the mid-twentieth century. These 4000 photographs—which reside, uncatalogued and rapidly deteriorating, in two file cabinets—are a valuable resource. The rich visual records contain important scientific information on all aspects of the Arctic environment, its geology, archaeology, geography, glaciology, and anthropology, as well as information on Arctic exploration and the cultural life of the indigenous people. One example of the richness of AINA's collection is the 142 photographs donated by Walter Wood, scientist and explorer, who was engaged in AINA's Snow Cornice Project of 1948 and the Icefield Ranges Research Project in the St. Elias Mountains from 1961 to 1972.

Visual communication through photography, including motion pictures and television, has accelerated over the last half-century to a point difficult to imagine before this technological revolution. Today there is a growing

recognition that photographs are more than an accessory to history's written text. They are an essential element in the very construction of that history, both written and oral. AINA's collection of photographs is no exception.

AINA proposes to make the collection widely available by creating an electronic database. Each photograph will be researched and scanned into the computer using the University of Calgary's InMagic database software.

The potential for the collection is enormous. Made available to the indigenous peoples of the North, it will help them to recall their own history. It will present information of value to anthropologists, archaeologists, professional historians, and scientists. Commercial and academic publications needing visual material will also be able to draw on AINA's photographic archive. Like other great archives worldwide, AINA's will be an immense asset, providing flexible access to a wealth of previously neglected information. The Institute hopes that making these photographs available for public use will generate revenue to further enhance its collections.



An igloo at Minto Inlet, Victoria Island, March 1946. Photo by Canon James Harold Webster.

**THE ARCTIC INSTITUTE OF NORTH AMERICA
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES SAMPLE COLLECTION PROFILE**

Main Entry: Larsen, Henry

Title: Henry Larsen fonds

Biographical Sketch/Administrative History: Originally from the same Norwegian coastal district as his boyhood hero Roald Amundsen, Henry Astrup Larsen (1899–1964) was en route to Vancouver in 1924 when he took his first foray into Canadian seamanship. His tour as a navigator on board the Arctic trading ship *Old Maid* led to his enrolment with the RCMP in 1928. Larsen's career with the RCMP was marked by his captaincy of the 104-foot *St. Roch*, and from 1940 to 1942 he became the first man to traverse the Northwest Passage from the Pacific to the Atlantic, sailing from Vancouver to Halifax. In 1944 Larsen crossed again from east to west, becoming also the first to navigate the passage in both directions. Through his police work, Larsen was well known for his high level of awareness of and interest in indigenous Inuit culture. He retired from the RCMP in 1961 as a superintendent and was duly recognized for his achievements with several honours.

Dates: 1930–1948, some n.d.

Physical Description: 142 black-and-white photographs - 67 total of Inuit, 17 with names

Scope and Content: Primarily photographs of Inuit peoples and natural landmarks, taken during Larsen's RCMP patrols through the Canadian Arctic and during his captaincy of the *St. Roch*.

Custodial History: Earliest known custodian is McGill University, Montreal; transferred to University of Calgary in 1973.

Location of Originals: AINA, University of Calgary

Restrictions: Permission of AINA

Call Numbers:

Accession Numbers:

Alberta Topical Classification:

- 8. Exploration, discovery and travel
- 10. First nations
- 15. Law and justice

Associated / Related Material: BASSET, J. 1980. Henry Larsen. The Canadian Series. Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited.
LARSEN, H. 1948. The North-West Passage, 1940–1942 and 1944. Vancouver: City Archives.
———. With SHEER, F.R. and OMHOLT-JENSEN, E. 1967. The Big Ship: An Autobiography. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
OMHOLT-JENSEN, E. 1983. Henry Larsen (1899–1964). Arctic 36(3):302–303.
———. 1996. Henry Larsen (1899–1964). In: Davis, R.C., ed. Lobsticks and Stone Cairns: Human Landmarks in the Arctic. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. 19–21.

Processor: Constance Martin, Lars Christensen, 2003

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

The Photographic Archive and Research Project is directed by longtime AINA Research Associate Constance Martin, an Arctic art historian who has authored several books and is acting curator of AINA's art collection. A Special Project grant from the University of Calgary in the spring of 2003 allowed Lars Strøm Christensen, a recent

graduate in anthropology and archaeology, to help Constance organize Phase 1 of the project. This phase involved consultation with archivists regarding archival procedures and with personnel from the university's Information Technologies Department, who were assisting with the set-up of the InMagic program. Phase 1 also involved sorting the collection by fonds, which are groups identified by the photographer. If no photographer was identified, the photographs were sorted by



A 1940s settlement of caribou-skin tents on the Barren Grounds. Photo by Canon James Harold Webster.



Kukilugak splitting a salmon for drying at Coppermine. Photo by Canon James Harold Webster.



Sixteen-year-old Jane Kogliak at Itchen Lake, Coppermine region, in 1944. Photo by Canon James Harold Webster.

expedition or institution name. An example of the fonds for Henry Larsen is shown in the sidebar on page 318.

Phase 2 of the project involves researching and creating a worksheet for each fonds, according to the categories defined in the database, and scanning the photographs for inclusion in the database. Once the data entry is complete, the original photographs will be conserved in Mylar sleeves and filed in sequential order. Following the departure of Lars Christensen from the project in July 2004, Constance hired Josiah Xiong as project assistant.

The success of this archival project will ultimately depend on funding from external sources. A total of \$70,000, in addition to the in-kind support provided by other university departments, will be needed to offset the costs associated with archiving the collection to meet professional archival standards. To date, the Institute has received generous support for the project from Devon Canada Corporation, ATCO Frontec, TransCanada Corporation, Mackenzie Delta Integrated Oilfield Services, Akita Equitak Drilling Ltd., Mullen Transportation Inc., and Air NorTerra Inc. In the future, AINA hopes to access government funding for the project.

LONG-TERM GOALS

The successful completion of the archival database will effectively position AINA to incorporate other photographic collections within AINA that are separate from the original 4000 photographs; to attract donations of other photographic collections; and to provide a system for the future inventory of AINA's collection of art and artifacts, as well as its collection of film and video. AINA's art collection, valued at approximately \$250,000, includes a wide variety of visual imagery pertaining to early and contemporary exploration of the polar regions. Oil paintings, historical maps, engravings, watercolours, sketches, drawings, lithographs and prints, and artifacts are included, as well as the yet uncatalogued photographic collection.

An important aspect of the project will be to work with groups of Native people who may have ties to the unidentified individuals and places depicted in so many of the photographs, in the hope that they can contribute memory culture to this rich visual heritage.

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