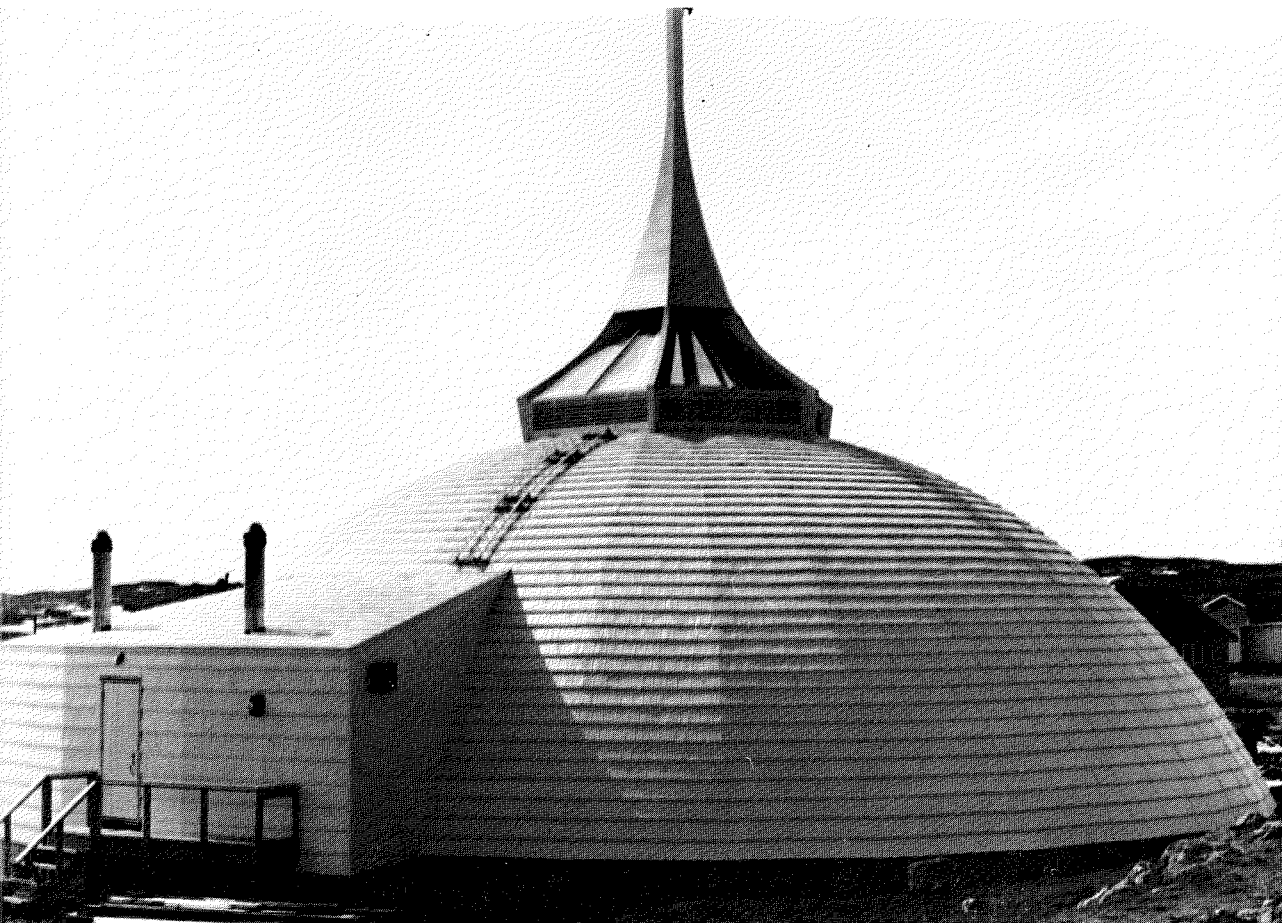


St. Jude's igloo-shaped Cathedral at Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories. Erected by the Eskimos under the very capable leadership of Peter Markosie in early 1972, the Cathedral is a tribute to the abilities of the Eskimo people and gives way to no other building in Frobisher in its care of construction. *Photograph courtesy of Archdeacon Don Whitbread.*



Non-Professional Indigenous Staff in Northern Research

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In both Alaska and Northern Canada research and especially research in the social sciences has come under considerable fire in the past several years from many who would question both its relevance to northern needs and the propriety and sensitivity of many projects. It would be improper to cite examples, and unnecessary since there are few people active in the field who do not bear some scars and perhaps open wounds from reaction to their own work. Certainly there are few unaware of the problem.

The results of this reaction are felt in many ways. There are researchers who are no longer welcome in the areas from which they have made their greatest contributions to science. In some areas the Native political leaders exercise a *de facto* veto over research and researchers working in represented communities. But even without being formally excluded, researchers not well received in a community are essentially nullified; in some cases previous events nullify them before they begin.

Clearly we are witnessing a fundamental change in the terms of reference for northern research arising from the Northerner's rejection of his imposed role as object of investigation and curiosity. This change suggests a number of factors of which the following seem to be especially important:

- 1) Growing outside pressure on the limited resource of rural northern communities as sources of data for essentially scholarly and pedagogic purposes.
- 2) A proliferation of government agencies with overlapping functions focused intensely on the northern rural community.
- 3) A growing sophistication in rural northern communities so that the purposes, costs and results of research are more apparent and subject to enlightened criticism.
- 4) Increased self-defence and political action in rural northern communities evoking both the mood and means for expression of concern about unwelcome intrusions.
- 5) Frustration arising from the apparent ease with which outside groups are funded while local initiatives seem to go begging.
- 6) Some degree of arrogance and/or deceit associated with some research projects.
- 7) Innocence or disinterest about local matters on the part of some outside research personnel.
- 8) Lack of recognition given to the co-operative and instructional roles of local people in support of research in their communities.
- 9) Differential treatment and payment for services of local personnel *vis-à-vis* outside research personnel.

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This is not an exhaustive list nor should it be thought to reflect on any particular research project. Yet these are recurrent factors that have become all too substantial in the total aspect of northern research. Their effect has grown to the point that social research has been jeopardized in many northern areas today. This is an especially unfortunate situation in that there remains need both for better general understanding of northern communities and environments and for the benefits that could be realized by the communities, as well as outside interests from well-considered and well-executed research.

There have been some recent efforts to establish more empathetic and more effective approaches to social and environmental research in the North, the Arctic Institute's Man-in-the-North (MIN) Project being a notable one. The MIN Project sought local initiatives on both needs and procedures in social change in broad terms. The fact that the results of the project have not been entirely consistent with the rush of events only further demonstrates the basic differences between the self-perceived needs of northern people and the "benefits" being laid on them by external forces.

The absence or near absence of qualified professional staff indigenous to northern communities is often cited as a deterrent to effective participation of northern people in research. Yet the MIN project and such projects in Alaska as the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, the Alaska State Office of Economic Opportunity and the Sky River Project suggest that professional credentials are not essential for significant professional contributions in local administration. However, the effectiveness of non-professionals specifically in professional research roles, as far as I know has not yet been reported.

In attempting to determine the possibilities for effective involvement of local non-professional staff in professional research roles, the University of Toronto and the Mackenzie Institute of Inuvik, with the support of the Donner Canadian Foundation, have now concluded the field phase of an experimental program of research on resident travel and land use in several communities in north-western Canada.

The program was highly unorthodox, being more a test of certain methodologies than a carefully conceived and operationally designed research project. It involved a minimum of professional staff and aimed at maximum participation of local non-professional people in what would ordinarily be professional capacities. Moreover, the professional staff sought a very low profile in order to draw out local initiatives and responsibility.

Project personnel in each community were selected as much on the basis of benefit to them as on their qualifications for the job. The project co-ordinator, suggested by local Native leaders, was a former teacher originally from the south who is highly regarded in the Native communities. In one community the local investigator could neither read nor write. His operation was a family affair with his children helping to observe the travels of the people, and his wife completing the reports and analyses. Working together they produced a nearly faultless record of the travels and land use of everyone in the large and dynamic Mackenzie Delta community of Aklavik.

In each settlement the co-ordinator and the local investigator worked out what

they believed to be a useful research project and the most effective means for carrying it out consistent with the very general terms of reference set by the professional staff.

At the outset the project focused on the problems and economics of travel. In the course of the year of record, interest grew in the associated record of travel as an indicator of land use and occupancy. People were becoming concerned about industrial land use conflicting with their traditional use. Through the project, they began to build a case in terms of their land rights. The project took a new complexion to become an integral part of a general political movement throughout northern Canada to establish Native land rights on the basis of use and occupancy.

There were also two contrasting but related operations aimed towards the same general goals. In one, an undergraduate student from Toronto who had lived the previous summer in the community returned on the invitation of the settlement council to help them prepare a land use record. In another community a graduate student worked on the same general task and related questions. The project employed the Band Chief to teach her the local language, to supervise her work in the field, and to manage the land use survey. Both approaches were successful.

I have described briefly the nature of this project. There have been both negative and positive results. The most prominent positive result was the strong demonstration of the value of local experience in both conceptual and operational problems. One significant negative result was the demand and apparent need for greater guidance, reassurance and human contact of professional staff by the non-professionals.

The role of the professional staff has been a point of debate amongst a number of people involved directly or indirectly with the project. My own feeling has been that the professionals tend to dominate any scene they enter, and deny by their initiatives the potential initiatives of non-professionals, who left to themselves would be more productive. Others have raised good arguments that the professional presence can or should be a contributing element to these local initiatives. The evidence seems to support the latter arguments. It appears that professionals, besides the obvious contributions they can make, can have a strong catalytic function. They can also, of course, dampen the initiatives of the non-professional staff if they are of such disposition. Since this is largely a matter of personality and sensitivity, it points up the importance of these factors in the selection of professionals who will be involved in northern work.

The evidence of our work suggests the following methodological propositions:

- 1) The process by which local research needs are met requires an intimate association of professional and community people to conceive and to design the research procedures. Effective communication must be established so that the professional people become sensitized to the local situation and the community people come to know and understand the objectives and role of the professionals. It is highly improbable that a research project will have much real value to a community unless this communication is made effective early in the project.

- 2) It is extremely important to establish clear communication with Native organizations having jurisdiction or effect in the communities in which research is to be conducted. It is important to understand the role of those organizations in the community and to work in respect of that role. It has become essential in many northern communities that the researcher have the confidence and respect of those organizations and that he work in cooperation with them.
- 3) There is no great problem in finding capable people in northern communities to staff a research project even in capacities which might seem overly technical considering the formal education of the professional personnel. In work that relates to their experiences, such as environmental or social research, this experience will often be of more value to the project than more elaborate systematic education.
- 4) Selection of non-professional staff for professional responsibilities should not be based on ordinary educational criteria. It is not necessarily the person with the most formal schooling who will make the best researcher. Far more important are motivation, attitude, and experience with the phenomena under investigation. In social research it is extremely important that the researcher be in reasonable harmony with the community, a condition, incidentally, often lacking in the young people likely to have the most schooling.
- 5) Throughout the research it is extremely important that the professional staff be available to the local staff and the people of the community, and that they exchange understanding of the work and the subject of investigation. The confidence expressed in this kind of relationship is critical to the success of the research, and it is called for as an ordinary courtesy.
- 6) Complete and open honesty is essential on the part of the professional staff. Concealment or deception of any kind is generally transparent and dangerous. This implies that there be no mysteries created or held as a protective cover and that authority trappings be set aside. It similarly implies that false modesty be avoided.
- 7) There ought not to be any difference between the treatment of professional and non-professional staff, either in a positive or negative sense.
- 8) A definite policy should be established to ensure that full credit be given to all participants on the basis of their contribution and not on the basis of authority or credentials.
- 9) Participating communities and individuals should have full access to collected and processed material; the material should be written or re-written, if possible, so that it has meaning to the community, and they should have an approval option to safeguard against misrepresentation.
- 10) The implications of all work should be made clear to all involved parties.
- 11) Very serious consideration ought to be given to attitude in the selection and training of professional field personnel.

We have been told, often in no uncertain terms, that research in northern communities will have to take new directions and meet new purposes. Our response to this demand will probably determine whether or not there will be

significant social research in the North in the next few years. However one chooses to proceed, it certainly appears that new terms will have to be met. Our work in northwestern Canada has attempted to determine some means to meet these new demands and, in fact, to capitalize on the increasingly critical attitudes of local people. It seems clear that this criticism and the concern behind it for significant and accurate representation of northern conditions could lead us into an era of greatly more effective environmental and social research in the North. It will surely be the end of lesser work, which should be a blessing both for science and for the people of the North.