

VISIT TO NORTHERN LABRADOR NATIVE COMMUNITIES
AND
INTERNATIONAL GRENFELL ASSOCIATION ESTABLISHMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The administration of financial arrangements with the Newfoundland-Labrador Government and the International Grenfell Association became the responsibility of Atlantic Region during the last year. Costs have been rising and the International Grenfell Association has been asking us for increased assistance to continue and improve their service to the Indians and Eskimos of Northern Labrador. So that we would be in a position to understand such requests, it was decided that Dr. McCaw and I should visit the Labrador communities, confer with the I.G.A. officials, and study their operations at first hand. With the co-operation of Dr. Paddon and Dr. Thomas, the visit was arranged, and once we arrived at Goose Bay, all transportation and accommodation was provided by the Association. In Labrador, the transportation was by Beaver aircraft and from Goose Bay to St. Anthony, via I. G.A. Grand Commander. The Beaver is on continuous charter to I.G.A. and is based at North West River, Labrador while the Grand Commander is I.G.A. owned and is based at St. Anthony, Newfoundland. Both aircraft are used for transporting staff and equipment and patients throughout the Labrador and Northern peninsula area. In addition, the "Strathcona III" - a medical vessel - visits all the coastal communities in Labrador, staffed by physician, nurses, dentist and technicians.

NORTH WEST RIVER

North West River is a village of 1000 population divided approximately 50:50 Indians to Whites and Settlers. Separation of the races is somewhat apparent since the Indian Community of 500 people live on the south shore bordering on Lake Melville. Approximately 50 Eskimos also live in the white

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section. It is in this section where the I.G.A. Hospital, child care establishment and other buildings are located. The two sections of the village are connected by a cable car crossing the river. There is no road connection between the two sections. However, it is the white section which is most isolated from the outside, since a gravel road from Goose Bay (25 miles) ends at the Indian community. Conversely the medical facilities are somewhat difficult for the Indians to reach, especially in emergencies.

The hospital is a frame building of approximately 50 beds - providing treatment for general conditions, tuberculosis and minor surgical conditions. Patients who require special treatment or major surgery are sent to Happy Valley - a modern 50 bed hospital adjacent to Goose Bay - or to the very modern, fully staffed and equipped facilities at St. Anthony. The I.G.A. also operate a craft shop and a child care centre at North West River. Three doctors are a normal staff but they cover all the Northern communities by air and the STRATHCONA III. At the time of our visit the medical staff consisted of Dr. Paddon, Director of Northern Health Services for the I.G.A. and one other. A new doctor was expected in a month's time. An ophthalmologist had arrived from England to provide one month's volunteer service. Several of the hospital nurses are short term appointments also and are mostly from Great Britain. There is a very active out-patient department and dispensary at the hospital.

One public health nurse, based at North West River, covers all the native communities in Labrador - an impossible task which will be discussed later.

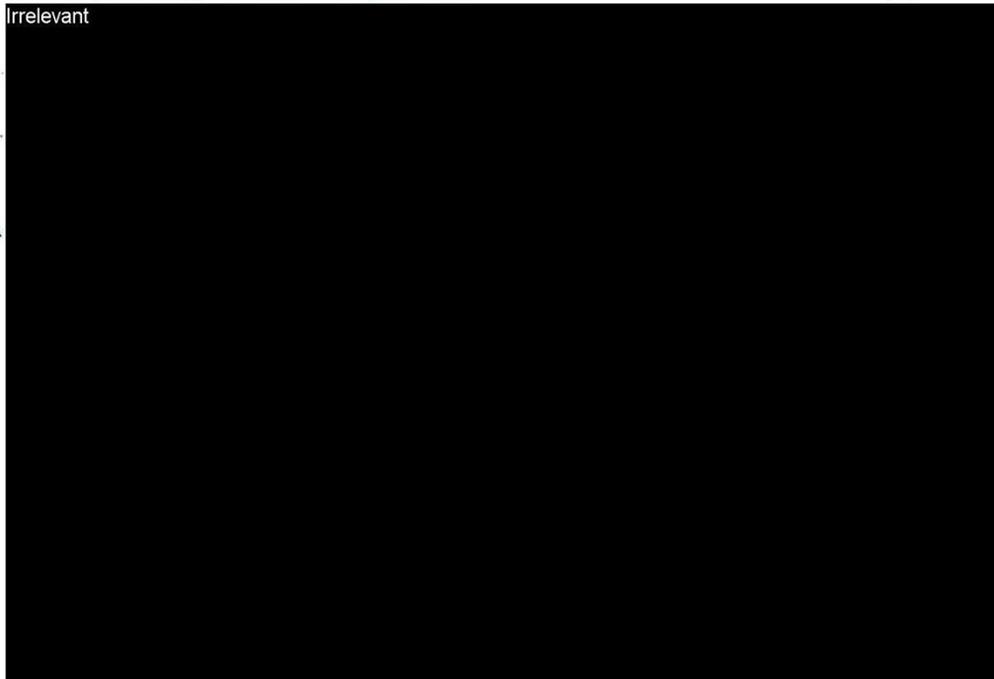
The Indian community at North West River is located on a slope overlooking the River and Lake Melville. The population of 500 is housed in what appear to be neat, attractive homes until one comes closer - and then enters!! These houses, though built recently in an area of severe winter weather, have

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no foundations, no insulation, no water, no sewage disposal facilities. Furnishings are sparse, and heating is generally by obsolete wood stoves. The homes generally contain a general purpose room and three or four small bedrooms, and for the most part evidence of housekeeping was non-existent. Sewage and waste water is disposed of from the back door, and garbage is strewn everywhere. Water is provided by two taps in the community but the water is foul tasting, full of iron and so the Indians carry their water from the river - some as much as ½ mile. A few of these Indians have employment in a saw mill one mile from the community - a few work in the woods cutting trees for lumber and pulp, some are employed by I.G.A., but most are unemployed. The people appear fairly healthy except for the inevitable infected insect bites. According to the priest and Dr. Paddon, abuse of alcohol is a major problem in the community. Tuberculosis is the major medical problem.

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DAVIS INLET

North-west from Hopedale about 50 air miles is the community of Davis Inlet, a community of 200 Indians served by a Roman Catholic priest, Father Pieters (Dutch Oblate). He has been at Davis Inlet for 16 years and serves as a health aide - operating a radio telephone link with the hospital at North West River. In fact Father Pieters it seems often acts more like a doctor than an aide. He has a fairly comprehensive dispensary at his disposal and on occasion even delivers babies.

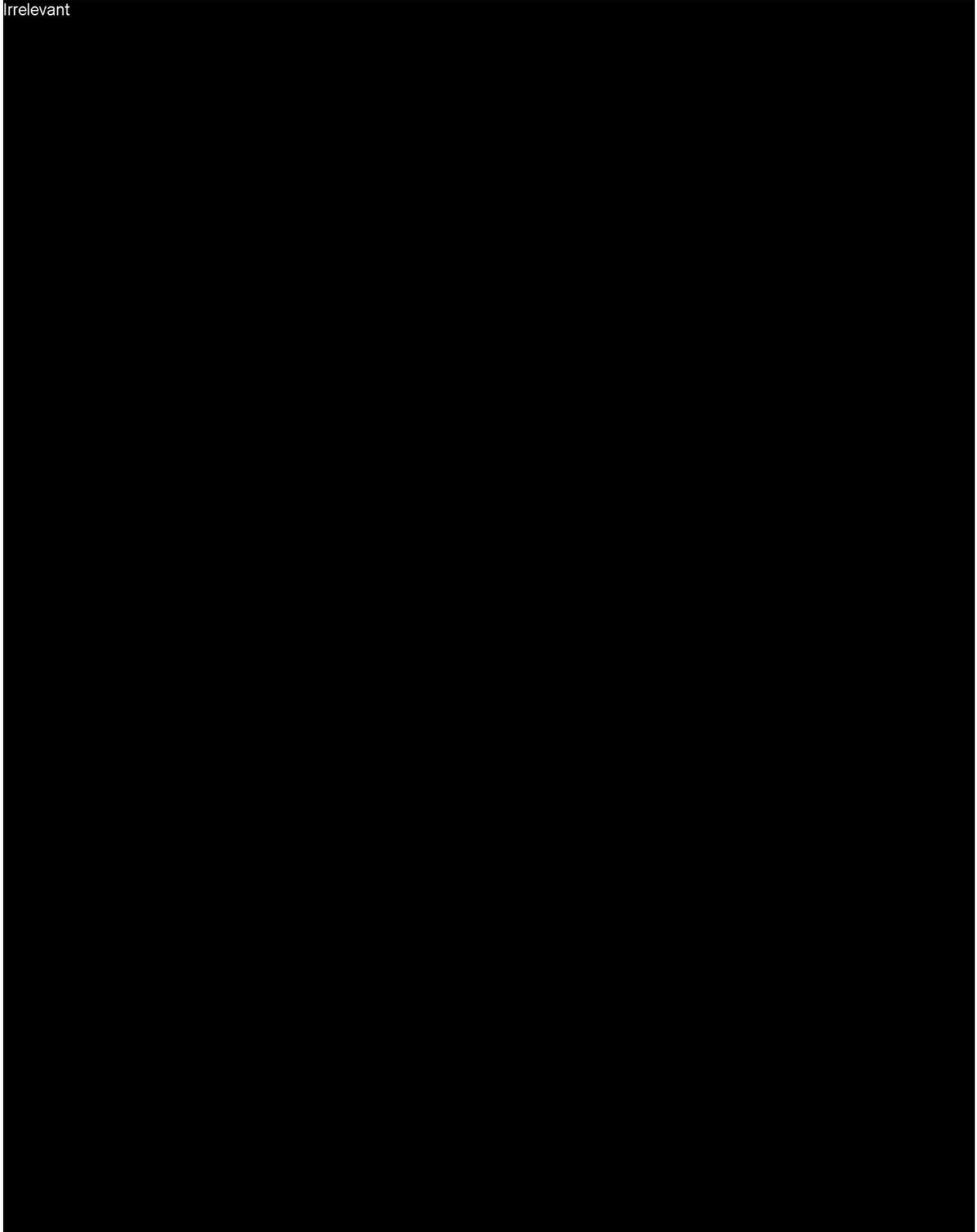
Housing at this community is very similar to that outlined for North West River - no water - or sewage disposal arrangements. Water is available in front of the Mission for the use of the residents.

Recently Dr. Paddon has recommended that Rev. Pieters be paid a small salary for his services, and now we are reimbursing I.G.A. at the time of the yearly payment \$190.00 per month for his services equivalent to a lay dispenser or community aide in this department. Through the general agreement with Newfoundland, a small Halliday sectional house is to be built this fall to serve as a Health Station and residence for Father Pieters. This building is 20' x 30' in size - complete package - exclusive of foundation but including plumbing and heating cost \$6800.00 + \$600.00 for shipping charges, probably \$6000 - \$8000 for erection costs.

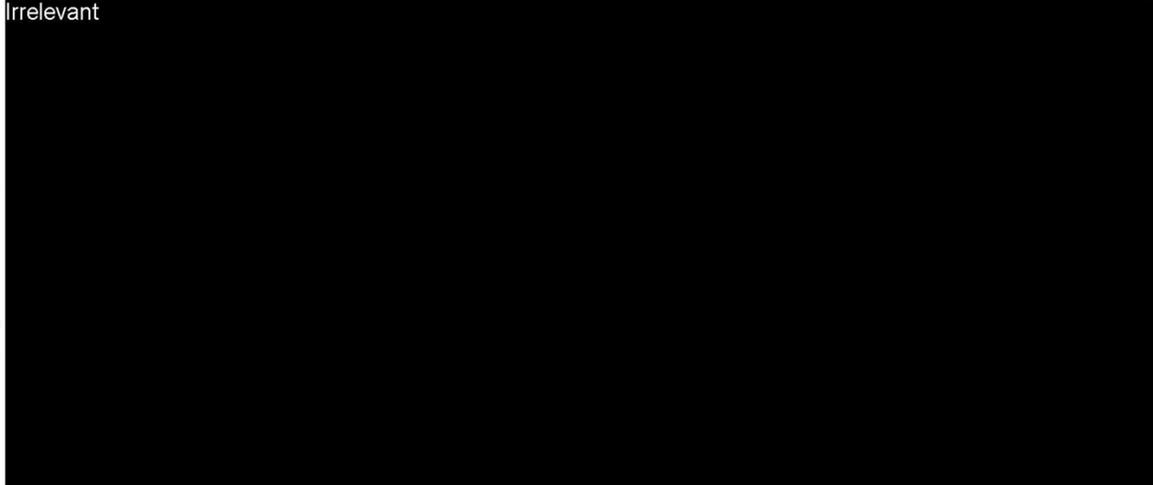
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OBSERVATIONS

Treatment Services

We were impressed with the treatment facilities and staff provided by the Newfoundland Government and the International Grenfell Association. The hospitals and nursing stations provide adequate treatment services, and, between charter aircraft and the I.G.A. aircraft, evacuation to the local and more distant hospitals is accomplished without difficulty in good flying weather. However there are many periods of bad flying weather in this part of the country. In fact when we arrived at North West River, Dr. Paddon had been waiting for over a week to get some patients home and bring others to the hospital.

Public Health Services

One public health nurse located at North West River provides a service to all the communities in Northern Labrador. Since most of the communities can only be reached by plane or boat, it is obvious that very little is being accomplished, in fact she even finds it difficult to maintain immunization schedules. There is a great need for public health education, pre-natal clinics, well baby clinics, home visiting and improved school health activities. In my opinion this could only be achieved by providing nursing services as follows:

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1 PHN at North West River to cover the community and hospital.

1 PHN at Irrelevant to cover Irrelevant and Davis Inlet.

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I believe that the native communities would benefit from a program similar to our Community Health Worker program. Could we explore the possibility of offering assistance to I.G.A. in one or more of our training programs? There are many other problems connected with the inadequate housing, lack of water and sanitation equipment which will take many years to improve in an area of very severe climatic conditions. However a good public health education program could be very beneficial in helping the people improve their health status within these existing facilities.


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