

800-1-20

VISIT
TO
NORTHERN LABRADOR
NATIVE COMMUNITIES

APRIL 11 - 15, 1977

VISIT TO NORTHERN LABRADOR NATIVE COMMUNITIESAPRIL 11 - 15, 1977

This visit to Northern Labrador communities was organized so that we could compare conditions with those seen during a previous visit (July 18 - 23, 1971), meet with Native leaders to discuss the health needs of the Native people, and to appraise the total environmental conditions and health needs in the light of a report prepared by Dr. Peter Sarsfield who conducted an extensive survey of the health facilities in Northern Labrador for the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association and the Labrador Inuit Association.

Arrangements for visiting the communities were made through Dr. Tony Paddon, Director Northern Health Services, International Grenfell Association. Over-night accommodation was in Grenfell establishments, and transportation was by Turbo-Beaver ski equipped aircraft.

The following Medical Services officials, accompanied by Dr. Paddon, toured the northern communities:

Dr. Brian Brett	-	Principal Medical Officer, Program Management
Dr. Otto Rath	-	Senior Adviser - Indian Health
Dr. Lloyd Hirtle	-	Regional Director - Atlantic Region
Dr. Dermott Waldron	-	Acting Assistant Regional Director - Atlantic Region.

The North West River International Grenfell Association Hospital is the headquarters for the Northern Health Service of the International Grenfell Association. The hospital is in need of maintenance and upgrading. The equipment is ageing, and there is very little in the way of up-to-date equipment - although we did note the hospital now has an emergency cart with a

...../2

- 2 -

with a defibrillator. There is a small operating room but little surgery is performed since there is no physician available trained in anasesthesia. There is a delivery room and facilities for general medical care and also for tuberculosis treatment. There continues to be an active out-patient department. The tuberculosis control program is centered on this hospital - some 4000 films are taken annually throughout Labrador, and the films are filed at North West River.

Generally there are four physicians on staff - including the Director, one of which is in constant travel status to the out stations along the coast. Medical students from the United Kingdom and from Memorial University rotate through the International Grenfell Association program as part of their training. Most of the professional staff, including nurses, are from the United Kingdom. There is a medical social worker at the hospital, who also serves as the coordinator of a Native Alcohol Program for North West River, which has been funded by Non Medical Use of Drugs Directorate.

The hospital is receiving increasing usage as a chronic care institution, even though it serves as the primary care institution for all of coastal Labrador. A few referrals are made to the Melville (I.G.A.) Hospital at Goose Bay, but most surgery and specialist care cases are referred by air to the hospital at St. Anthony on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland.

North West River also serves as the base for a public health nurse, but the public health program is directed from St. Anthony and appears to be kept very much as a separate program from treatment nursing.

...../3

- 3 -

The International Grenfell Association also operates a number of other institutions at North West River - an Infants' Home, which cares for disadvantaged and misused infants (up to age 4). This is a newly constructed facility, and provides good facilities and what appears to be excellent care for these children.

There is also a dormitory for children up to age 14 who because of family problems are attending school at North West River. This building has recently been remodelled and extended and provides good care and boarding facilities.

Another new dormitory building provides accommodation for 75 high school students. The northern communities do not have any schools providing teaching beyond Grade IX, so high school students must come to North West River.

NORTH WEST RIVER

The community of North West River straddles the shore on both sides of the river as it enters Lake Melville. On the south side reside the 500 Indians - on the north approximately 500 white people, settlers and approximately 75 Inuit people. The only link between the two halves of the community is a six passenger cable car. All the hospital and International Grenfell Association facilities are on the north side of the river, so the community is divided by geography, by culture, and undoubtedly by biases. Housing on the north side is relatively good, and most are serviced by running water and septic tanks. However, the south side Indian community is a totally different picture. Housing in this community can only be described as deplorable. Most houses were built around 1967, and for the most part are now beyond repair. There are no foundations, little insulation, windows are broken and stuffed with burlap and plastic bags, or covered with cardboard or boards. Many houses have been torn apart

.... /4

- 4 -

by vandals during the occupants' absence - so that only the framework now stands. None of the homes have running water or sanitary facilities - most are heated by ancient wood burning kitchen stoves. Garbage and toilet wastes are disposed of in heaps outside the front door. There is only one water tap in the community, so water must be carried long distances from this tap or from a lake approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the community. This community is a picture of apathy and hopelessness, alcohol problems are rampant. Yet this community has a large, well maintained school with gymnasium. We are told that it is only available to the residents during school hours - it could be a recreational and training centre for the benefit of all in the community.

The type of soil at North West River should be satisfactory for installation of septic tanks, and the lake only $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away could be used to provide a good water system for the settlement, but nothing has been done to improve the situation at all. In fact this community is in much worse condition than when I visited it in 1971.

There is a Native Alcohol Program - housed in a converted warehouse from where Mr. Charles Andrews directs the program. He is assisted by Mr. Allan Pallet, social worker at International Grenfell Association, and a staff of counsellors. They feel they are beginning to make some impact on the community, and are presently hoping to further remodel the building to provide craft work, and other forms of occupational therapy. The program currently sponsored by Non Medical Use of Drugs will terminate in three years unless other financial assistance can be secured. Our meeting with this group was revealing and certainly emphasized the cultural division between the residents of the two sides of the river.

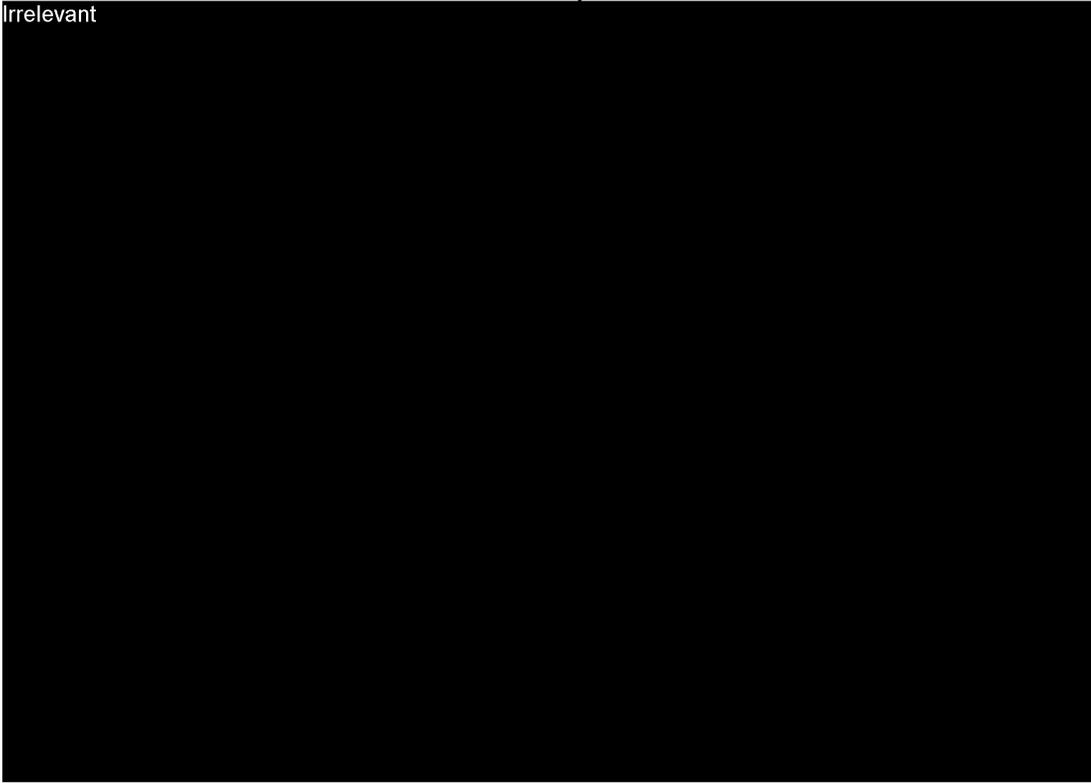
...../5

We had occasion to meet with the town council which supposedly represents both sides of the river, but we noted only north side residents were at the meeting. They give lip service to trying to unite the two communities, but we get the impression that there is a reluctance - almost a fear - to cooperate with the south side. While suggestions of discrimination would be denied, it does exist functionally and attitudinally.



...../6

- 6 -

Irrelevant
DAVIS INLET

This Indian community is located 180 miles north of North West River and is populated by approximately 240 Naskapi and Montagnais Indians, and 30 non-natives. Like the Indian community of North West River, it is about as miserable a community as one could imagine. Housing, except for three new homes, is dilapidated and vandalized. Windows are broken, boarded up or just stuffed with plastic bags or burlap. Most are heated with wood kitchen stoves. There are no foundations or insulation to shield the residents from the harsh Labrador winter. Even the three new homes have no piped water (although they do have water heaters, full bathroom and kitchen sinks!!) The new homes (one has a foundation) are constructed of very flammable materials. They do have a floor oil fired furnace. Garbage and sewage disposal is in heaps outside the door as is common to these communities.

..../7

- 7 -

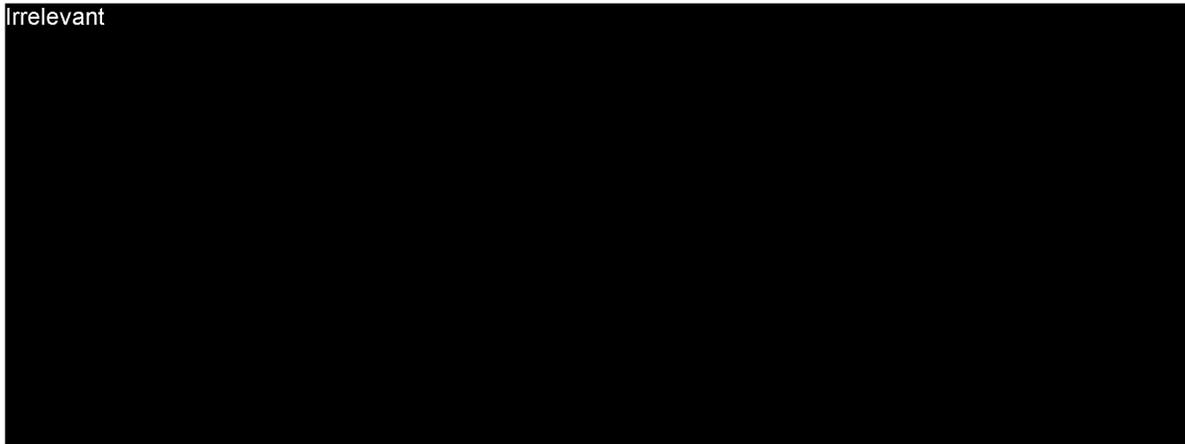
This community has a remote water hole, tiny and inaccessible, not protected in any way from pollution. In despair, some residents cut a hole in the ice of a brook $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away to obtain water. The community has a sandy soil and we believe a water system could easily be constructed, centered on a drilled well. All shallow wells have gone dry.

The people of this community have a dejected appearance, and this is even reflected in the community council leaders. We met briefly with them but apathy was so ingrained that it seemed impossible to communicate our concerns or to determine their concerns for the community.

The nursing station is small, and while only 4 years old is deteriorating badly. Living accommodation for the Roman Catholic nursing sister is inadequate, and the station is not well equipped. The nurse is obviously very dedicated and though overworked, seems to provide a satisfactory clinical program for the settlement. She has radio contact with North West River. The Public Health Nurse from North West River visits occasionally.

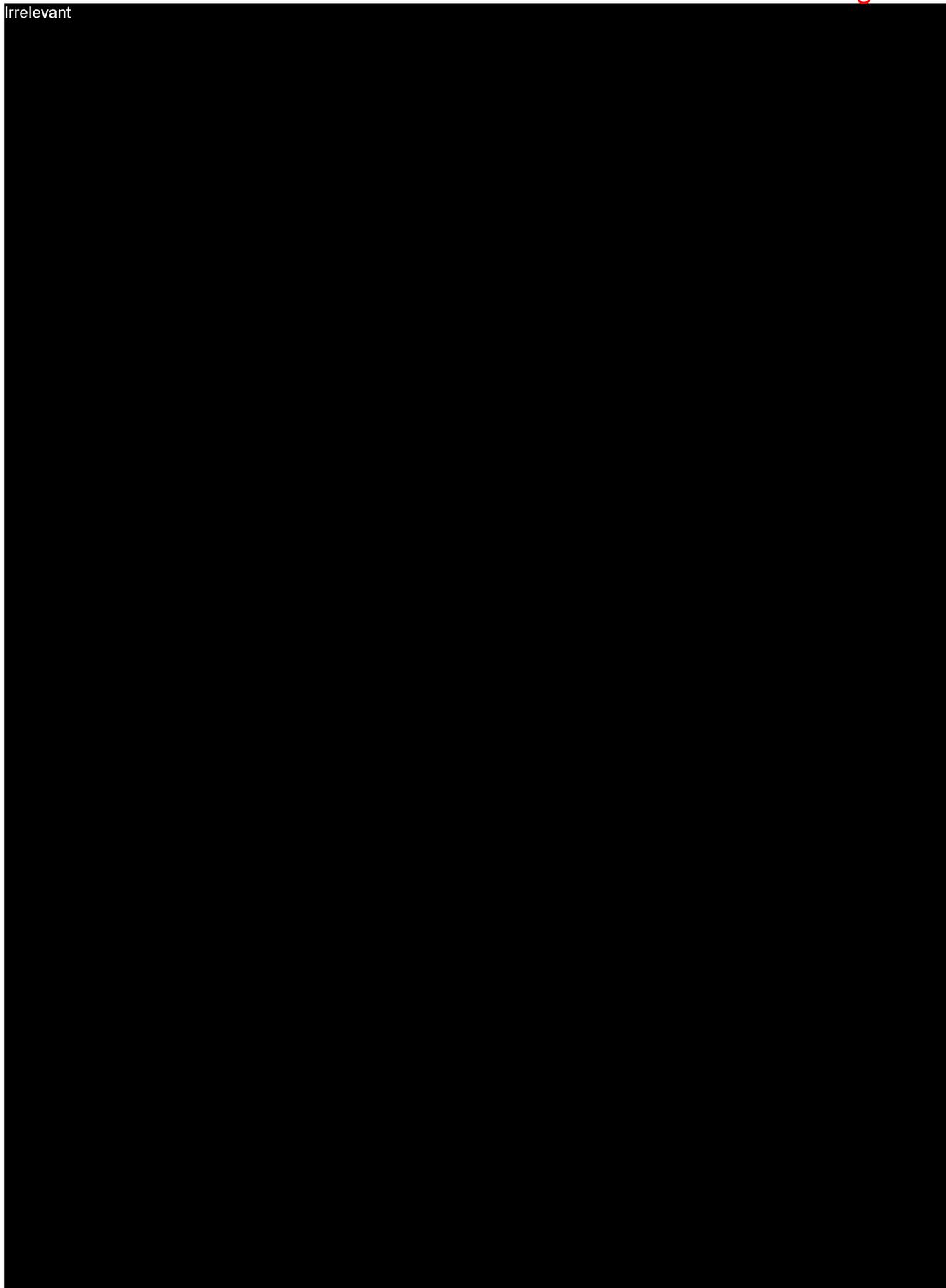
Alcohol abuse is a major problem in this community - home brew predominates.

Irrelevant

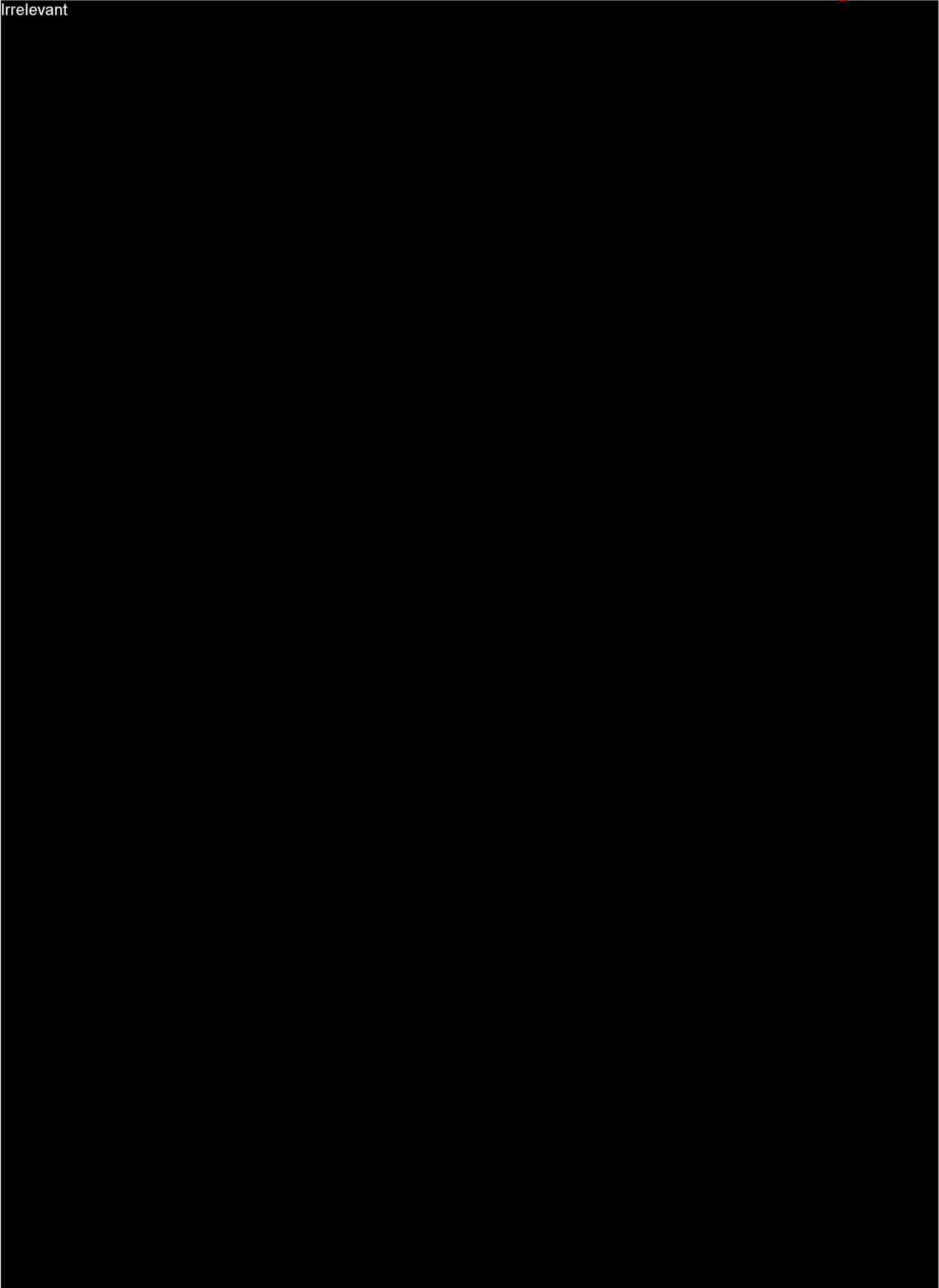


...../8

Irrelevant



Irrelevant



- 10 -

INTERNATIONAL GRENFELL ASSOCIATION

The International Grenfell Association has provided good service to the coastal communities of Labrador for many years - even if with a somewhat paternalistic attitude. Treatment services with inadequate facilities and scarcity of trained staff has been good, but public health services are sadly lacking. There appears to be a dichotomy between treatment and public health services. Treatment services are directed by Dr. Anthony Paddon who has resided in North West River since 1946. On the other hand, the public health services are directed from St. Anthony on the northern peninsula of Newfoundland. Nursing staff assigned to the two health functions do not inter-change - so there is not the benefit of a health service combining the public health and treatment services into a common health service. In fact, public health nurses are likely to be called to a treatment function whenever a shortage of treatment nurses occurs - the opposite is not likely to occur. There are currently only two public health nurses for the northern coast - one stationed at Nain and one at North West River - considering the isolation, difficulty of transportation, and the climate, this is a grossly inadequate staff for 3000 people.

One dentist, located at North West River, covers the entire coast using portable equipment.

None of the nursing stations have X-Ray equipment - although [irrelevant] are scheduled to receive machines sometime this year.

Communication is poor, with only radio communication available at the nursing stations, telephone service where it does exist - is not reliable.

...../11

- 11 -

TRANSPORTATION

A partly paved, partly gravel road extends from Goose Bay thirty-five miles to North West River. Beyond this point, there are no roads. During the mid-summer months, boats can get into the coastal settlements and it is during this period that most heavy supplies are sent to the communities. Single engine aircraft service the communities - on skis during the winter months, pontoons during the summer, but there is a period of six weeks approximately in spring and fall, during break-up, when aircraft cannot be used. The only emergency service available at such times is by helicopter - and that is most unreliable due to adverse weather conditions. Flying is hampered by the lack of radio beacons and the pilots can only rely on VFR navigation. There are no air strips in the northern communities - North West River does have a short strip but it too has no navigational aids.

SPECIALIZED HOSPITALIZATION

We visited the Melville Hospital at Goose Bay, previously a U.S.A.F. hospital. It is well equipped, and has a large out-patient department, but unfortunately very few Natives are referred to this institution, where seven general practitioners are available. Most patients are referred from the nursing stations to North West River Hospital in the Turbo-Beaver aircraft chartered by the International Grenfell Association. If specialized services are required, the patient is transported by road 35 miles to Goose Bay Airport, then flown in the International Grenfell Association twin engine aircraft to St. Anthony. The St. Anthony Hospital is a modern, well equipped hospital, with specialist services available. A few cases are referred by air to St. John's.

...../12

- 12 -

It would appear to me that secondary care facilities could be developed at the Melville Hospital, thus reducing the requirement for air evacuations, and also providing better facilities than are currently available at North West River.

NASKAPI MONTAGNAIS INNU ASSOCIATION

A major reason for our visit was to meet with the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association at North West River. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Tony Penashue, chairman of the Association; Mr. Anthony Jenkinson, the executive director of the Association and Mr. Bart Jack (the Chief from North West River) were the main spokesmen, but through translation two elders were kept informed, and advised us that this was the first time any doctors had taken the trouble to meet with them.

The Association presented a brief outlining their concerns for the Native communities of Labrador. This brief is reproduced here for ready reference. Because the issues raised concern policy and federal provincial relationships, we volunteered to accept the brief as a document to present to our superiors for further consideration. After discussing the purpose of our visit, and describing our involvement in health services through the federal/provincial agreement, other general items were discussed.

The International Grenfell Association was severely criticized for their lack of communication with the Native people and particularly for allegedly "blackening" the name of Dr. Peter Sarsfield who wrote the report on health services for the Association. There was also critical comment concerning the charges made by International Grenfell Association for glasses, drugs and dental treatment.

...../13

- 13 -

Chief Jack recommended that a committee be funded to study the Sarsfield Report and to implement it. We, however, related that the Inuit Association felt it would be months before their people could be informed of the contents (after translation) and provide their recommendations. Mr. Jenkinson, however, stated that they now had \$10,000. to translate the document into the Indian and Inuit language, and that this would not take very long. We left, promising to associate in a Tri-partite meeting (Federal, Provincial, Native) once the Sarsfield Report had been translated and the people had an opportunity to study it.

It is quite obvious, however, that prior to such a meeting, we shall have to consult with the Newfoundland Department of Health, to prevent any misunderstanding.

COMMENTS

It is difficult to provide recommendations at this time, due to the minor participation of this Branch in the health care delivery system of Northern Labrador. Much needs to be done to define what our participation should be in supporting provincial health services in this part of Newfoundland - and what might be the consequences of providing increased services to this one area when there are many isolated communities throughout the province that need assistance?

My recommendations at this time are as follows:

1. Meet with the Department of Health and discuss the concerns of the Native people - and the implications of the Sarsfield Report.
2. Meet in Tri-partite Committee when the Native people have had opportunity to study the translated version of the Sarsfield Report.

.... / 14

- 14 -

3. Prepare with Provincial authorities (and with Native input) a new Agreement concerning Federal participation in the Health Services.

The brief presented by the Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association will have to be answered - but since it involves many policy decisions, it should perhaps be answered by the Minister or Deputy Minister. Federal/Provincial relationships will have to be carefully considered.

One could suggest many ways to bring the delivery of health services up to Medical Services Standards. Certainly vast sums of money would be required and the question of priorities arise. We certainly believe that the greatest health benefits would arise if massive support of housing programs, water and sewage facilities were provided, together with the building of all-weather air strips with navigational aids - to facilitate medical evacuations throughout the year.

Alroy R. B. B. B.