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VANTA KUTCHIN



BY

DOUGLAS LEECHMAN

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YUKON RIVER

ARCTIC

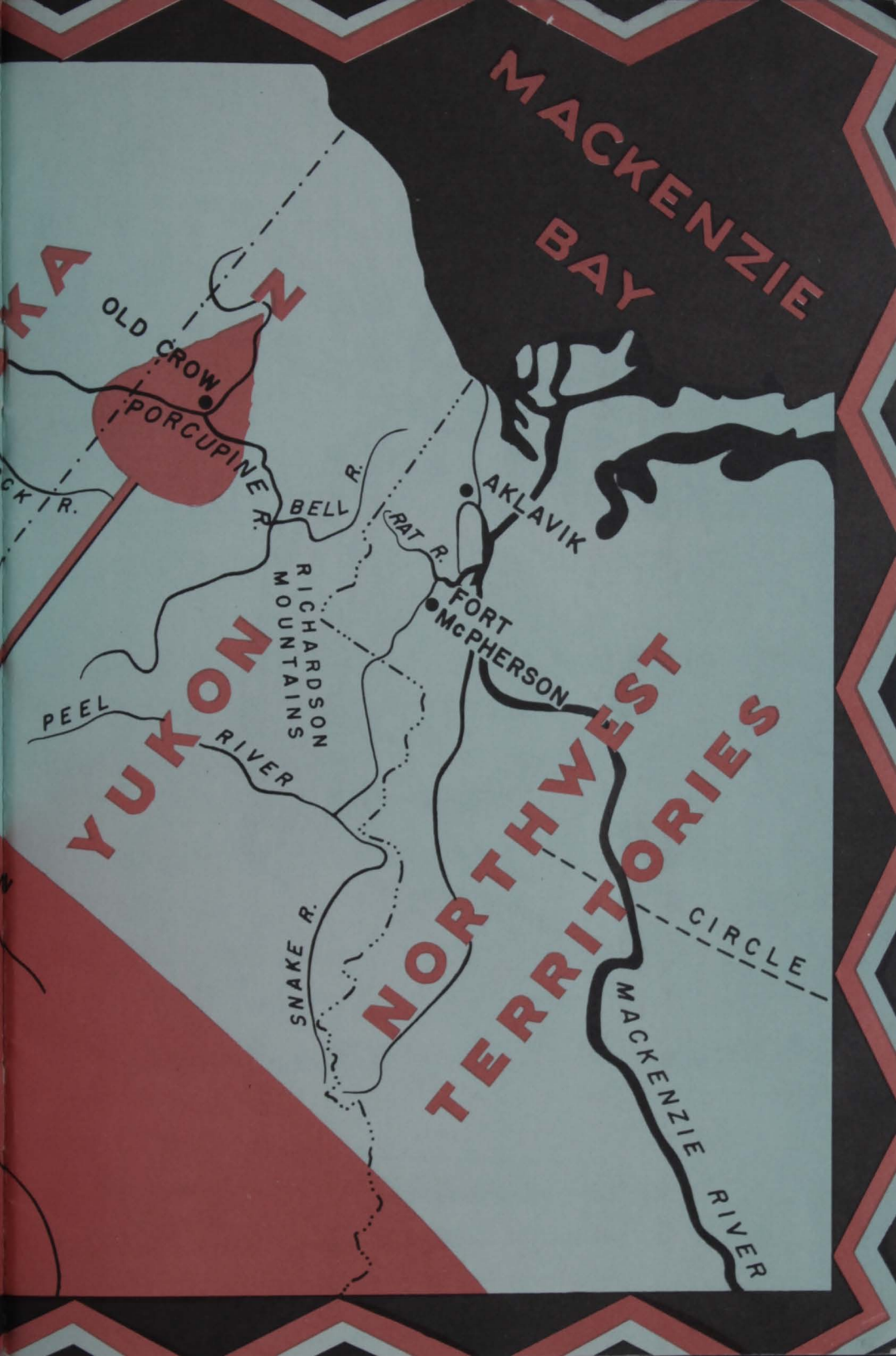
FORT
YUKON

ALA
BLA

DAWSON

140°





MACKENZIE
BAY

YUKON

OLD CROW
PORCUPINE R.

YUKON R.

BELL R.

CHAT R.

AKLAVIK

FORT
McPHERSON

PEEL

RIVER

RICHARDSON
MOUNTAINS

YUKON

NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

SNAKE R.

CIRCLE

MACKENZIE
RIVER



CANADA

DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND
NATIONAL RESOURCES

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THE VANTA KUTCHIN


By

DOUGLAS LEECHMAN

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THE VANTA KUTCHIN

INTRODUCTION

The information on which this contribution is based was collected in the village of Old Crow in the northern Yukon in the summer of 1946, between July 14 and August 24. As my primary purpose was archæological research, no effort was made to complete the study of the culture of the Vanta Kutchin, "the people of the lakes", a sub-group of the Loucheux, who occupy this area.

The fullest account of the Vanta Kutchin is that published by Dr. Cornelius Osgood in his "Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin," and the notes I collected should be considered as supplementary to his material.

My principal informants were Balaam Jhudi, a Vanta Kutchin of approximately sixty years of age; and Julia MacDonald, a Vanta Kutchin woman of perhaps forty. Many of the adults in the village contributed, directly or indirectly, to the accumulation of data, and I owe them a debt of gratitude for their willing co-operation and friendly helpfulness.

The village of Old Crow is a comparatively recent settlement, established about 1912, but a fishing camp existed near here for many years before that date. The village is situated on a level bank of alluvial silt which stands about thirty feet above the Porcupine River, a tributary of the Yukon which joins the main stream at Fort Yukon in Alaska, nearly three hundred miles downstream from Old Crow. The flat on which the village stands was originally covered with spruce, but most of this has been cut for building logs and firewood. The people now have to go several miles to find good stands of timber.

The village lies about seven miles east of the 140th meridian and a mile or less west of the junction of the Old Crow River, which flows in from the north, with the Porcupine. The Old Crow River traverses an area of swamps and lakes known as the Old Crow flats where thousands of muskrats have their home; from them is derived most of the local trapping revenue. The coast of the Arctic Ocean, at the site of the now vanished Shingle Point, lies one hundred and twenty miles to the northeast, and the Arctic Circle is about seventy-two miles to the south. The nearest settlements are: Aklavik, in the Mackenzie Delta, one hundred and thirty-two miles away, north of east; Fort McPherson, one hundred and forty-five miles to the east; and Fort Yukon, one hundred and sixty miles in a direct line to the west. The village may be reached by aeroplane, or by ascending the Porcupine River from Fort Yukon by boat, or from the Mackenzie Delta by ascending Rat River to McDougall Pass and descending the Bell River, past the site of the now-abandoned La Pierre's House, to the junction of the Bell with the Porcupine, and thence down this river to Old Crow. All these routes are in use, the aeroplane being preferred for passengers and perishable freight, but more bulky supplies are usually brought in from the west by way of the Porcupine River. This means shipping either from or through Alaska and, unless goods from Canada are shipped in bond, duty must be paid on them on their arrival in Old Crow, as well as on goods bought in Alaska.

Immediately behind the village lie the Old Crow Hills which, like the river and the village, took their name from a chief, now long dead, whose name meant "Crow-May-I-Walk", which was rendered "Old Crow" by the first white men in that area. The word "crow" actually refers to the raven, the true crow not being known as far north as this.

The immediate neighbours of the Vanta Kutchin to the north are the Eskimo. To the west live the Natsit Kutchin who occupy the basin of the Chandalar (Gens-du-large) River. To the south of them are the Tranjik Kutchin in the Black River basin, and to the east the Tukuth Kutchin who occupy the basin of the Upper Porcupine River.

THE PEOPLE

Nearly all European travellers who have visited the Loucheux refer to their fine physical appearance and pleasant dispositions. I found them to be self-confident and forthright, kindly, generous, intelligent, and honest.

They are less Mongolian in appearance than are the Indians of the British Columbia coast. The children are more so than the adults, and the epicanthic fold is easily observable. This feature is marked, as a rule, among younger women but is frequently less evident in men. Many of the people are light in complexion though there seem to be two distinct ethnic strains among them. They themselves are aware of this and assert that those who trace their origin to the interior of the northern Yukon and the headwaters of the Peel River are, in general, darker in complexion and heavier in build than those who originated in the Porcupine River area or from the Chandalar region to the west. Julia thinks that the people from Old Crow Flats, who are just over the divide from the Eskimo, are lighter in colour than those she calls the "real Indians", who come from the headwaters of the Porcupine and are darker.

The Indian population of Old Crow, at the time of my stay there, was approximately 115. During the summer, people are frequently absent on expeditions down the river or across McDougall Pass, and in winter many people are away on their trap-lines. Nearly all of them are clean and well-dressed, with intelligent faces and bright and ready smiles. They seem to be more polite in their behaviour than the Indians of many other parts of Canada. It was evident not only in their relations with me but with each other as well; for instance, seeing that everybody is served at meal times and frequently saying "Please" and "Thank you". Most of the women are quick to adopt European ornaments and jewellery, and some of the younger men like to wear brightly-coloured leather jackets with zippers. I saw one girl using purplish lipstick, and several of them used red nail polish, at least occasionally.

They are ready conversationalists and find a great deal to talk about. On an expedition by boat down the Porcupine River, we talked of such things as the hardships of winter trapping, the annual dog races at Old Crow, the New Year's masquerade ball, which is looked forward to with great eagerness, and the ingenious costumes that many of the people then wear, the Indian names of various animals, and incidental comments on anything of interest which happened to catch the eye. They have a keen appreciation of the beauty of the landscape and called my attention more than once to skeins of geese flying high among the clouds, to the perfume carried on the breeze from the river banks, and told me how beautiful the hillsides would be when the autumn colouring became more pronounced.

The Reverend W. W. Kirby visited Fort Yukon in the summer of 1862, and a fairly constant succession of missionaries has been in the country ever since. This would imply that birth and death statistics have been kept, though perhaps somewhat sporadically for a great many years now, but many of the natives are not sure of their age. Balaam says that he once knew his own age, but he has lost the paper on which the record was written. He knows that he was a small boy when the gold rush of '98 occurred but is not sure how old he was at that time. He remembers the boundary survey (1911-13) at Rampart House, down the Porcupine River, when he saw many white men and many horses.

Some of the Indians, especially those with large families of children old enough to assist in the annual rat trapping, are reasonably well-to-do. In the summer of 1946 muskrat skins were selling at \$3.75 each, and it was not unusual for an active man and his family to have as many as two thousand skins to sell. As a result, some of them have more money than they quite know what to do with, and they are likely to spend it following a pattern of conspicuous waste. For example, Peter Tizya, who travelled from Old Crow to Fort Yukon by boat, hired a plane when he arrived there, to take his family to Dawson, and he also engaged a nurse from the hospital at Fort Yukon to go along with them and paid her plane fare as well as their own.

The young people, especially, joke and laugh a great deal, and many of the boys have a high girlish giggle. There is a good deal of practical joking and many pleasantries about the reluctance of girls and their great desirability.

The people in Old Crow are quite familiar with the Eskimo, and many of them have been to Aklavik and have met Eskimos there.

The people here, when beckoning to a child to come to them, extend the right hand, palm upwards, fingers curved slightly, and raise it and drop it a few inches repeatedly. The gesture is soft and inviting, but can be made imperative.

When demonstrating shooting, whether with a bow and arrow or a gun, one hand, the left, is extended, and the right hand is tucked under the right jaw. At the moment of shooting the fingers of both hands are released suddenly. If it is a gun, the demonstrator says, "pouff" or "bang".

Agriculture is not part of the native tradition, and I do not remember that any of the Indians in Old Crow had vegetable gardens. One or two of the white inhabitants, who live at the west end of the village, raise potatoes and such things as lettuce and radishes, but the growing season is short in spite of the long hours of summer daylight. Killing frosts may occur in any month; when I was there, the last spring frost came on the 25th of June and the first autumn frost on the 26th of July. All water for the garden, except rain, has to be carried up from the river, entailing considerable labour.

Mosquitoes are among the major pests of the summer months and have been so numerous on occasion, especially in the Old Crow Flats, that they have actually been known to kill the dogs by the loss of blood and perpetual irritation. Balaam told me that in the old days people used to stay up on the mountains as much as possible where the breeze would keep the mosquitoes away.

The Vanta Kutchin do not appear to have any clear idea of their origin, but there seems to be a general opinion among them that the headwaters of the Peel and the upper reaches of the Porcupine are their original

Rachel Cadzow



Robert Steamboat



Woman using baby belt

Margaret Black Fox

habitat. Archæological material is very scarce, and it is probable that the constant meandering of the river has destroyed most archæological sites along the river banks, if any ever existed. The people were familiar with stone implements and reported having seen them in the area of McDougall Pass, but I was not able to collect any specimens in the village. Two or three people once had polished stone axes in their possession but had either lost them or given them away.

On one occasion, while walking along the north bank of the Porcupine with Balaam, I found several fragments of black chert at two points, several hundred feet apart. These fragments gave the impression of having been broken deliberately, and lay close together, within a radius of about a foot. I called Balaam's attention to them, and his immediate comment was, "Somebody work here!" The edges had the appearance of having been roughly chipped, and the fragments looked slightly water-worn. Nearby we found a slender prism which Balaam identified as a whetstone.

The first white man to visit these people was Alexander Mackenzie near Fort McPherson in 1789, but contact with Europeans was rare and sporadic until the 1840's when the Hudson's Bay Company established posts at Fort Good Hope in 1804, Fort McPherson in 1840, and Fort Yukon in 1847. La Pierre's House was founded in the same year (1847).

They have a number of stories relating to the adventures of individual Indians who met white people for the first time. I was told that the first Indian near here to see white men was one who had no skins to make clothing with; he was wearing trousers made from long grasses. His name, in fact, was "Grass Pants" (*thlo-thul*). He was sitting on the banks of the Mackenzie River when he saw a strange animal coming along the water. He thought it was a "dragon" and decided that, as he had no chance to fight it, he might as well sit still. Then he saw there were men on it, and when they saw him, they stopped and came ashore. They made signs that they would not harm him and tried to talk to him. He asked them, by counting on his fingers, how many men there were on the boat. They asked him how he lit a fire, and he showed them flints which they threw in the water. Then they broke up his arrows and his bow, and threw them away too. They took off all his clothes and led him to the water's edge. He thought they were going to drown him, but they rubbed some white thing all over him, and soon he was covered with foam. Then they rubbed him all over with something until he was dry. They put white man's trousers on him and a coat and a hat. He felt stiff and awkward, "like a broomstick", and when they put shoes on him, he stepped high and awkwardly. They gave him matches and showed him how to use them. They gave him a flintlock gun, and he was so surprised by the noise that he thought his head would split. They shot again, and though the sky was clear, he felt sure it was thunder. They told him to go home and tell his people. It took him a long time to get home because of the awkward shoes. When he got there, he was afraid to enter the camp, for he knew his people would attack any stranger rather than risk a surprise. He sat on the hillside where they could see him. Gradually they approached him, and when they were within shouting distance, he called out to them. "My friends, I have seen the strangest things I ever saw in my life." They all gathered round and he showed them his matches, but when he fired his gun they were so astonished that they ran away, and he very nearly killed one of them in his demonstration.

HUNTING

The Vanta Kutchin were dependent for their food almost entirely on hunting and fishing, though large quantities of berries and other vegetable foods were used on occasion. Caribou, moose, bear, beaver, muskrat, lynx, rabbits, porcupines, groundhogs, squirrels, all were eaten. Hunting and fishing techniques divide themselves into two principal groups: those in which the animal is killed directly by the hunter, as with an arrow, spear, or club; and those in which the game is caught or killed in the absence of the hunter by means of traps, snares, and nets. Most animals may be taken by either one of these two methods.

In earlier days, caribou supplied a large part of the native food. Sometimes these were taken in snares, and sometimes they were speared as they forded shallow rivers in the course of their migrations.

About fourteen miles east of Old Crow, up the Porcupine River, was a well-known caribou crossing which is still used by the caribou but not to nearly the same extent as it was in Balaam's childhood. He took me there one day and described the scene in some detail. We landed on the north bank and followed a caribou trail to the top of a hill covered with much comminuted sandstone. At the top were two or more fire-places built in the sandstone fragments, where people had made fires while watching for caribou.

Balaam said he remembered when canoes were lined up side by side in the water for a long way, waiting for the caribou, usually in August or early September when the skins are best. They were birch-bark canoes, well made and "fancy", and the people were careful to keep them clean, allowing no blood to stain them. When the caribou entered the water, men would paddle a canoe right up on the animal's back and let it rest there. At first the caribou would strike out with its forefeet to rid itself of the canoe but would then content itself with merely swimming faster. Through fear, the herd of caribou would spread a little, making a path for the one bearing the canoe, and the man armed with a spear with a caribou-antler point would stab the animals on each side of him.

Caribou antler spear points were intentionally made short, long enough to reach the animal's heart but not long enough to bend readily. Similar spears made from caribou leg bones were considered "fancy" but broke easily.

Caribou were often caught in snares twisted from six strands of caribou babiche. More would prevent its drawing tight. The snare is set with the bottom of the loop about two feet above the ground, and the opening in it is roughly two feet wide and three feet high. It is tied at the four corners to willows with wisps of grass that will break easily. Bull caribou insert their antlers carefully in the loop without realizing that it is a snare. Bulls fight much more than cows when snared. A quick stab in the heart with a caribou spear will finish any found alive. Some men will put out ten or more snares and run them as a trap line. They are used only in cold weather when the meat will keep well. A strong bull will sometimes break a snare.

During my stay in Old Crow there was a marked scarcity of caribou, though in August the annual migration was expected daily. Men and women, hoping to see the moving animals silhouetted on the skyline, stayed outside their houses and scanned the crest of the Old Crow Hills to the north with battered telescopes and field glasses. It is a proud distinction

to be the first to see them, and the discoverer will raise a long drawn cry of "Wutzai!" In the previous year (1945) they passed about twenty-five miles to the north, and only a few came near Old Crow. The normal path lies along the Old Crow Hills, across the Old Crow River, and approximately southeast to the caribou crossing place previously mentioned. Several years ago the animals moved right into the village itself in the course of their migration, and some men killed animals within a few feet of their front doors.

Nobody was at all willing to leave Old Crow in August lest they should miss the caribou, and people who were ready to leave for their winter trapping grounds would not go till the caribou came.

On the 10th of August, Annie Schaeffer killed the first caribou of the season while she was on the mountain picking berries. She had taken a rifle with her and killed the one caribou she saw, but she reported numbers of tracks which showed that some animals had already passed by. In spite of this one success, no more were seen for many days.

Balaam told me that caribou antlers when small and in the velvet are a great delicacy. The hair is singed off, the stubble scraped away, and the skin and underlying tissue are roasted. It tastes much like bacon.

Porcupines are frequently eaten and are much relished. On our way up the Porcupine River the Indians killed a porcupine, and I had an opportunity of watching the process of preparing it for cooking. The quills had been burned off and the entrails removed. It had a singed black skin. First Francis James cut off and discarded the terminal joints; then, the neck and head. He kept the carcass submerged in a tub of water while working. The porcupine had been killed by clubbing, and two long quarter-inch sticks were thrust down its throat into the thorax.

Quoting from notes made at the time: "He scraped the charred part of the skin with a knife, not very thoroughly, and rinsed the body in the river over the side; cut out the anus and sexual organs; cut down one side of spine to ribs; cut off hind legs at joint; cut off right front leg; same with the left front leg. The meat is red and not unappetizing. The large muscle on each joint is slashed to facilitate cooking. Next cut off ribs. Discarded the thoracic organs. Severed the ribs by chopping blows with a hunting knife. The back leg is the best for eating. Cut spine into three pieces, then wash. After the pieces were washed he brought them up to the galley on the boat to be cooked. This was to be done by boiling till tender (he said half an hour) with no salt or pepper."

This was done in the evening, and the smell was terrific. We opened all the windows, and even then we had to go outside till it abated somewhat. It was a musky odour, not comparable to anything familiar and not at all appetizing. The boys had it for their midnight snack and ate it all with the exception of one piece, which they left for me.

I heard of the use of "bone grease" as a food. I was told that it was used much as we use butter, that it could be eaten alone when it was frozen hard, although it was very rich, and that it could be used for cooking. One day I happened to see several handfuls of comminuted bone lying in a shallow pan, and asked Julia McDonald about it. She answered that she had been making bone grease and described the process as follows:

Bone grease is made from caribou and moose bones. After the meat has been cut off, the bones are left for one day, which allows them to dry a little. If the bones were left for two or three days, the bone grease made from them would taste too strong to be pleasant. A caribou skin from which the hair has been removed is laid on the ground, and an anvil stone

Main street in Old Crow



Smoking moose hides



Women at funeral feast



Men at funeral feast



is placed in the middle of it. The bones to be broken are placed on the anvil stone and are smashed with the back of an axe into little pieces, "as big as finger nails". In the old days stone hammers were used for this. The broken bones are then put in a kettle with a little cold water and placed on the fire. As soon as the water comes to a boil, cold water is added (snow in the winter time) so as to keep the water simmering rather than boiling hard in order to allow the oil and grease rendered out of the bone to float to the top; this they would not do if the water were to boil vigorously. The grease is skimmed off and put in a separate vessel, usually the small inner part of a caribou's stomach. Here it will keep quite well for two or three years. Some of it was used for making the best grades of pemmican, a food well known in this part of the Yukon; some of it was kept for daily use in cooking.

Fish guts were used in the same way to make fish grease. When the process was completed, the grease was purified by re-heating and straining. This, too, was used for pemmican, and, Julia added, "it tastes of fish and is very greasy".

One of the important foods is the Arctic hare (*Lepus americanus*) known throughout the northwest as "rabbit". The women constantly set snares in the bush. They run these miniature trap-lines every day. Rabbits are also a ready source of food when men are travelling or hunting in the bush and are away from camp for several days. The spring-pole and the set-snare are both used.

Balaam showed me a method of rabbit hunting which was new to me and which I do not remember seeing in the literature. I happened to pick up a wing feather of an eagle as we were walking along the beach of the Porcupine River, and he took it from me and immediately searched about for a piece of driftwood. He selected a stick about a foot long and two and a half inches thick. He tied the feather to the wood, leaving about six inches of string between them. He explained that when a man had no snares or weapon, he could steal up to within thirty or forty feet of a rabbit and hurl this device at it. As it flew through the air, the feather would flutter and buzz like a bull-roarer. To the rabbit, this was the sound of a stooping hawk or eagle, and he would dive precipitately into the nearest bush and freeze. While the rabbit sat frozen, the hunter would creep up to it and simply pick it up with his hands.

Balaam later made me a model of this device using a six-inch caribou leg bone instead of the piece of wood. He said that the only doubtful point in his mind was as to how long the connecting string should be. He said that it could be used for geese and goslings too, as well as rabbits, and that merely throwing one's cap into the air, so that it sailed like a hawk, is sufficient to make geese freeze so that they may be caught in the same way.

Bears occupy a large part of the interests of the people of Old Crow. They are numerous in the district but are not particularly dangerous unless one encounters a female with young. It is the custom of women when picking berries in the bush to keep up a lively chatter or singing so that bears may know of their presence and keep away. A man, unarmed, encountering a bear in the bush, usually stands perfectly still. The Indian theory is that bears do not see well and have short memories so that a bear, having caught sight of a moving object, finds it difficult to distinguish it or to remember seeing it as soon as it stops moving. I have never had occasion to test this theory.

There are many stories about bears. Balaam told me of one old woman who killed a bear that came right into her tent, by pushing a hollow burning section of a spruce log over its head. Julius Kendi, a native Anglican clergyman, is quite famous locally for his courage in venturing into a cave suspected to be occupied by a bear. Many years ago a group of Indians going from the Bell River to the Yukon found the tracks of a bear leading into a cave. The Indians went in, lighting shavings as they went. When some distance in, they discovered that the cave forked into two branches. In one of these they found a bear, and Kendi shot it by the uncertain light of the shavings. This cave, like many others in the Northwest, is said to show traces of prehistoric occupation, and the Indians who entered said that the other fork had what was like a table inside, with cups, plates, knives, and forks, all made of stone. Kendi denies this but does admit that in the part that he saw there was a rock which had a vague resemblance to a fifty-pound sack of flour. Neither he nor Balaam has ever found artifacts in a cave.

There is a local legend to the effect that bears have been known to attack winter camps in very cold weather and to have protected themselves against arrows by first wading in riffles in the river so that their coats might freeze into a protective armour. It seems incredible that people should believe this, and I am inclined to think that they know it is merely folklore.

Polar bears occasionally reach as far as Old Crow. In the winter of 1945-1946, a polar bear was shot at the headwaters of the Porcupine River when it attacked a dog. It was very thin. About three years before this, another was seen in the Old Crow Hills, but I am not certain whether it was killed. I saw the skin of the first one when it was offered for sale in the summer of 1946.

Balaam told me that many years ago there were few wolves. Nine was a large group. However, about 1901, he found numerous wolf tracks near the foot of a glacier. In an effort to convey some idea of their abundance, he estimated that at least 3,000 wolves must have been present. This is not to be taken literally, as Balaam is somewhat out of his depth when he gets beyond hundreds, but he meant that he saw very many wolf-tracks. The people are afraid of wolves and consider them even more dangerous than dogs. Poison was tried, he told me, in an effort to get rid of some of them, but it was ineffective. He didn't know what kind of poison it was.

Ducks and geese are eaten in spring and autumn, and grouse and ptarmigan during the winter. Almost any bird, except perhaps the raven, is eaten in times of famine.

Hunting, being so constant an occupation, has much folklore and anecdote connected with it.

John Tizya, before he became a preacher, was camped at the foot of a mountain near Old Crow Flats. His sister-in-law was with him to carry any rabbits he got. John Kwatlat was also out after rabbits. They both saw a patch of willows in which there might possibly be rabbits. Each announced his intention of going there, and neither would relinquish his right. They fought all day about it, rolling over and over, each trying to seize a stick, and the woman would repeatedly take it away. They were supposed to be getting rabbits but spent the whole day fighting over a patch of willows. Black eyes, bruises, and tears at night.

Sometimes, when hunting, it was necessary to cache some of the meat or other possessions. This was done by tying the goods or food to the end of a long spruce pole and leaning it up against a tall tree.

FISHING

On approaching Old Crow from the west along the Porcupine River, we first encountered fish nets three or four miles away from the village. These were made of white man's cotton twine, each about fifty feet long, and were set in quiet eddies at right angles to the bank, one end floating free or moored to a stone let down to the bottom. They were intended to catch king salmon. When there is no convenient eddy, one may be made artificially at a suitable place on the river-bank where the current is gentle. This is done by driving willow stakes, two or three inches thick, in a line straight out from the bank for six feet or so, and using them to retain a little dam or break-water of brush, stones, and mud piled against the upstream side. The upstream end of the net is fastened to the outermost stake, and the net, in this case, floats down stream parallel to the bank. On one occasion when Balaam and I were going upstream in a motor boat owned by Robert Bruce, Steamboat asked if he might come with us. He loaded his little canoe into our boat. It was the usual tiny affair that seems to be preferred in this district. Both Balaam and Steamboat brought rifles and ammunition with them. Steamboat's reason for coming was to inspect his fish nets which were on the south side of the river, two or three miles upstream from Old Crow. They were set parallel to the river bank just below a small artificial eddy constructed in the manner described above.

A man's right to set his nets in a certain eddy seems to be recognized. Thus Balaam, Steamboat, Margaret Black Fox, and Robert Bruce always set their nets in the same place. Whether this right is capable of being passed on to another by inheritance or by sale, I did not discover.

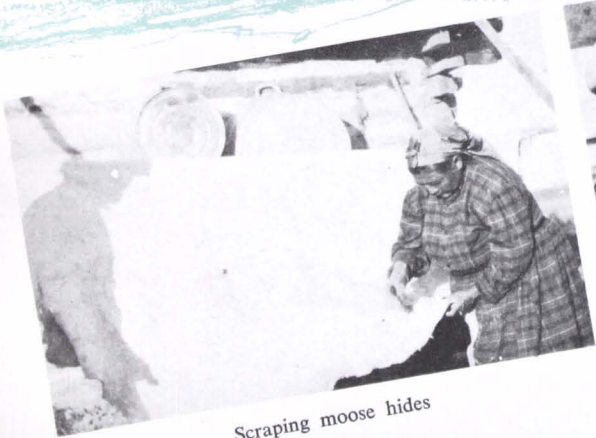
His first catch was an awkward chunk of driftwood which had entangled itself in the net. Next came a large red salmon about three feet long, which he stunned by repeated blows on the back of the "neck" with a hickory slat from an old toboggan. Another salmon, full of fight and even larger, followed, and then a third, smaller and already dead. Steamboat worked silently and patiently at getting the salmon out of the net, untangling and freeing it from the side of his canoe on which it snagged again and again. He gave one of the salmon to Robert Bruce in payment for his ride up to his nets.

Fish nets have to be "run" or inspected daily, or oftener, to collect any fish that may have been caught or to free the nets of driftwood, which, if not removed, might drag them downstream. Sometimes a rise or fall in the water, which takes place suddenly and frequently, will necessitate shifting a net to a new position. Almost every family has a net set at all times when fish are running.

On one occasion Balaam showed me a small dip-net made of twine and explained that they used to be made of spruce roots. The roots were split into three, dried and smoked, then soaked in warm water and dried again, and then twisted and manipulated until soft. Spruce roots could be collected only in summer when the ground was not frozen. Twisted and crooked roots were rejected. The preparing, drying, and smoking took three days. The dip-net was often carried by a man out hunting; he could cut a spruce pole and bend the flexible slender end into a loop whenever he needed a hoop and handle for it.

Balaam told me that fish traps or weirs were made from willow saplings and that an occasional birch sapling was used too. Suitable long saplings were cut while green and tied tightly in bundles so that they

Typical log house



Scraping moose hides



Balaam and Sarah



Elias and his wife



Crossed dog and coyote

would be straight when dry. He drew a diagram of the way weirs were constructed and said that often half a dozen of them were built side-by-side and that many people camped nearby. The sticks were driven into the river bed with heavy rocks, used without a handle. The trap and its catch belonged to those who built it. Each man had two or more wives to look after his fish-cleaning and drying.

The point where the Old Crow River flows into the Porcupine is known as "Fish Trap Place", because there was once a permanent fish weir there.

Fishwheels, which are common in the Yukon River below the mouth of the White River, are useless in the clear waters of the Porcupine. They are not aboriginal.

Fish, both fresh and dried, is used quite extensively as a food. On one occasion when I went to see Balaam, I found him having a meal, part of which consisted of a cup of tea and some cold fish entrails (cooked), including the stomach, which he cut open and then cleaned out the contents with a teaspoon.

Dried fish is used both for human food and for dog food, and is a regular article of commerce, being done up in large bales for transportation. We had several such bales on board while coming up the Porcupine River, dried and smoked salmon in this case, which smelled like very strong kippers.

The Vanta Kutchin eat the inner bark of various trees in the spring-time. It is said to be both nutritious and refreshing. Balaam informed me that the inside bark of the birch is very good and full of juice "like peaches".

He told me that the front foot of a rabbit, from which the claws had been cut, was dipped in warm soup and given to little children to suck. Young mothers who didn't know any better would dip it in hot soup, and then all the hair would fall out.

Before the introduction of tea and coffee, water and soup were the only beverages. At Old Crow the water supply is something of a problem as the river bank is about thirty feet high and all water for drinking and for domestic purposes has to be carried up by hand. Pumps have apparently been tried without much success.

Although game usually was sufficient, if not abundant, there were times when famine threatened, and actual cases of starvation and death are not unknown. The summer of 1946 was a difficult one in this respect, and the people made a joke of it, saying: "No caribou, no fish, no wood, no water in the river, no aeroplanes, pretty soon no Old Crow."

Balaam says he has never seen so bad a year and never one in which the growth of plants was so rapid. The two months of almost continuous sunny weather apparently caused the low water and the absence of caribou.

Julia told me that everybody had heard of cases of enforced cannibalism during times of starvation. It should be noted that in two legends I collected, a soup made from dried caribou tripe is mentioned as being a suitable food to give people after a period of famine.

Now that white man's food is available, the Indians use a great deal of it, and many of them are disinclined to use the less attractive native foods. I was told of one Indian at Old Crow who said he simply had to have his grapefruit for breakfast. "And what else do you have?" "Oh, smoked salmon", was the answer.

One of our passengers on the boat coming up the Porcupine River was a small white pig. He started from Fort Yukon in a wooden box which had once contained two cans of gasoline, but the pig grew larger

and larger as his journey lengthened. Before very long he could hardly turn round in his little box, and later on he couldn't turn at all. At the back of one of the houses in Old Crow was a sort of pen built of logs in an L-shape, with no roof on it. This was converted into a sty, and the whole village turned out to see the pig installed in his new quarters. Probably none of the people had seen one before. They were intensely interested in seeing the actual source of the familiar ham and bacon. One of the Indian children named him "Pups".

Balaam informed me that fire was obtained by sparks from a black stone which he was not able to show me. A fungus which grows on birch was used as tinder.

CLOTHING

European clothes are worn almost exclusively today in Old Crow, except that most of the people still prefer moccasins, though many of them own shoes as well. Old Crow moccasins are famous throughout the Yukon for the elaboration and good taste of the beadwork, mainly floral, with which the women decorate them. Low moccasins, coming just above the ankle, frequently sell for \$15 a pair, and the higher ones, coming half-way up the calf, for \$25. Broad belts of caribou skin or cloth, heavily decorated with beadwork and fringes, are used by the women to support a child carried on the back. They are often valued at \$50 or more. There has been great difficulty in obtaining beads for the last few years, and more than once I saw women taking an old piece of beadwork to pieces so that they might use the beads in a new design.

Caribou skin was the principal material for making clothing in the old days, and I bought from Peter Charlie a child's winter suit of caribou skin, tanned with the hair still on it, turned outwards.

Peter Moses, the chief, usually wears an official-looking peaked cap, on the front of which is a badge bearing the word "Chief", but this is the only sign of ceremonial costume that I detected. I was told that at the annual dances at Christmas, some of the people wear most ingenious and elaborate costumes, and it is often difficult to know who is concealed beneath the disguise.

The septum of the nose and the ears were often pierced to receive ornaments in the old days, but I did not notice any pierced ears or noses at Old Crow.

In the days before soap was easily available, people used the hind foot of a rabbit, from which the claws had been cut, for washing one's face in the morning. People who expected to go to a camp where there might be no rabbits would take a stock of these prepared feet with them.

HOUSING

Nearly all the houses in Old Crow are log cabins, built from locally cut spruce. They are warm in winter, cool in summer, and inexpensive to build and maintain. The windows are, as a rule, small and few, since they have to be imported and their weight and fragility make this expensive. In summer, tents are used to some extent and even far into the cold weather in cases of necessity.

A few feet below the surface, the ground is permanently frozen and provides excellent cold storage. A cellar is dug below the house, down in the permafrost, and the temperature can be kept low enough to ensure

the preservation of vegetables and canned goods indefinitely. A few feet down, meat will freeze hard, so that an autumn supply of caribou and moose, which keeps fresh and good as long as there is any of it left, may be laid in. This device is used more frequently by white men than by Indians.

Outside the front door, usually the only door, of most cabins is a storm porch which serves as a place in which to hang heavy outer garments in winter. Here, too, are stacked several armfuls of firewood, and such things as rifles and snowshoes; a few traps hang from pegs or nails. The storm porch serves also to protect the door itself from the direct onslaught of the weather.

Lighting is, for the most part, by means of coal-oil lamps. There are three wind-powered generators in the village which supply a somewhat inadequate amount of current. Several of the whites and some Indians have battery radios, usually not in very good order, which are of use chiefly for news reports and notice of local plane flights.

TRAVEL

In the summer, travel is almost entirely by way of the rivers, except for short distances. The native canoe of this region is small and not decked in. It is usually covered with canvas now, rather than with the birch-bark of aboriginal days. A single paddle is used, and it is common to stroke on either side alternately. Some paddlers give two strokes on each side. The canoes are controlled easily, and often men use only one hand in paddling. The whole thing seems quite effortless. The bigger travelling canoe, once in common use, seems to have been displaced entirely by larger boats described later.

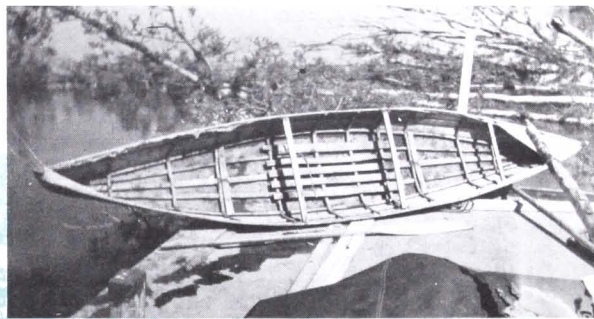
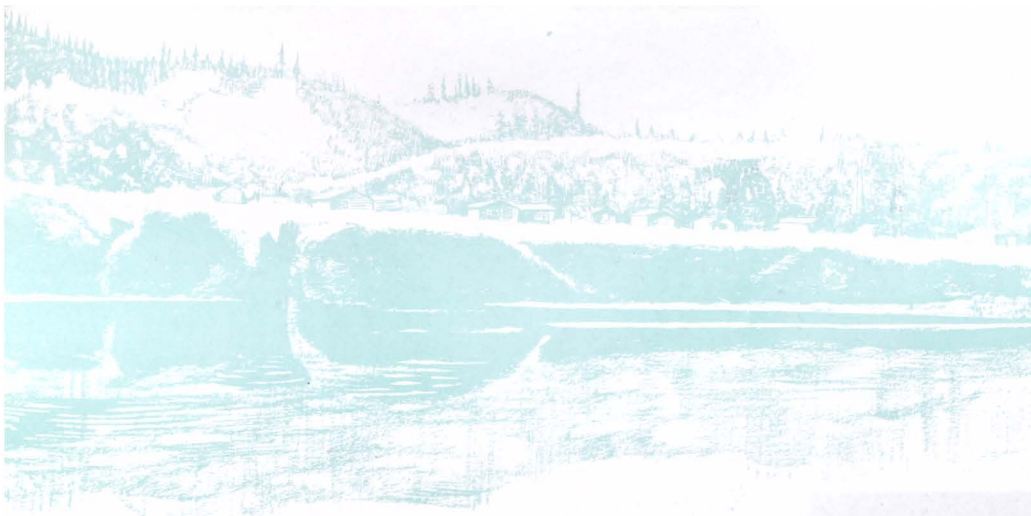
One young man from the Chandalar country commonly knelt amidships in the canoe with his feet crossed behind him, sitting on his heels, supported by a thwart in the small of his back. He used the paddle on alternate sides and, though he said he had not been in one for years (having recently returned from the United States Army), he seemed to have no difficulty at all in keeping his balance and managing the canoe.

The paddles are narrow, and the blade is keeled on one face only; it is this face which is presented to the water in paddling. Daniel Fredson explained that it was used in this way to prevent the paddle from twisting when pressure was applied to it.

Lying on the beach at Old Crow, a little way downstream from the village, was the framework of a clumsy boat or scow made of spruce saplings. This was originally covered with canvas and had been used by a native trapper to float him, his family, and all his equipment downstream from his trapping grounds. On arrival, the canvas was taken off and used for other purposes. Before canvas was available, moose skins were used in the same way.

Today they use larger boats, thirty or forty feet long, about five feet wide, and powered with either an inboard or an outboard motor. These are used for the three-hundred-mile-trip to Fort Yukon for supplies or for running upstream to the Peel River district.

For winter transportation, dogs are used almost exclusively, and their constant howling is one of the notable features of Old Crow. As soon as they see a nearby team being fed or watered, all the other dogs in sight



Interior structure of canoe



Robert Steamboat
killing salmon



Titus Peter
in canoe



Kutchin canoe

Framework
of scow



set up a yapping and howling. So do they, too, if a dog is moved from one place to another or if a rifle is fired, or a motor boat heard in the distance, or an aeroplane, or the church bell. Very few, if any, of them bark.

They are used by traders and trappers, by Indians and whites alike, for hauling wood and for visiting trapping cabins. The cost of maintaining a dog team is high, whether in money or in work. In money, commercial dog foods, such as cereals, edible tallow, and dried fish, have to be imported. In work, the owner of the dogs has to hunt meat for them, which can entail the expenditure of a great deal of time and energy. When one remembers that there are usually at least five dogs to a team, the cost is easily seen to be high indeed.

All the dogs are chained to stakes, which may be (in fact, usually are) driven into the ground, or may be living willows. However, now and then a dog gets loose and into some sort of mischief. They are always hungry and on the alert for anything edible.

They are suspicious of strangers and by no means safe to pet. Even their owners treat some dogs with a great deal of caution. On one occasion Balaam and I followed a poor trail in preference to a better one near which many dogs were tied. He commented that dogs "don't like anybody", and he was careful to keep away from all strange ones.

Dog packs are used in summer, and people going on a trip overland will frequently take one or two dogs along to carry food and spare clothing. Lazarus Peter told me that he paid \$150 for two year-old dogs this spring and that this is not an unusual price.

Some men will stake out a female in the bush in the hope of obtaining pups cross-bred with a wolf or a coyote. These hybrids make good sleigh dogs, but those which are half-wolf are said to become ill-tempered as they grow older. Dogs which are half-coyote are good too, but they become ill-tempered when tired by heavy work. Both are considered less desirable as sleigh dogs than animals of the second generation, or quarter-breeds.

There was in Old Crow a bitch that was half-coyote and half-dog. She was the mother of two dogs that Julia MacDonald owned. Frank Foster looked after this half-breed bitch and also a dog from the same litter. He says that the mother was running loose in the bush and was in heat at the time. The natives are quite certain that she mated with a coyote. Foster says she is a good worker and quite friendly with him, though he was warned that she might bite. However, she never has. He told me of a man who once had a team of wolves which he presumably got when they were pups. The same man tried a lynx in a team with dogs, the lynx in the wheel position, but it wouldn't work. Another man, in Dawson, tried to hitch up a pet bear with four dogs. The bear went wherever he wanted to, pulling the dogs with him and paying no attention to orders. On his route was a restaurant where he had often been given a handout; here the bear would drag the whole outfit inside after him.

Frank Foster tells me there is no evidence, other than circumstantial, that the dog and bitch he has are actually half-coyote. Their mother got away and returned pregnant, but, as all the dogs in the village were tied up, they had no chance of access to her. Moreover, the Indians are quite familiar with the appearance of dogs cross-bred from foxes, coyotes, and wolves. Bitch wolves, he tells me, will kill a bitch dog if they find her in the bush, unless she is under the protection of a dog-wolf that has mated, or intends to mate, with her. Hybrid dogs make no noise, or, at any rate, far less than ordinary dogs.

In a good many parts of the central and southern Yukon, one may encounter specimens of the Tahltan bear-dog, but I saw none of these at Old Crow, and the people there do not seem to be familiar with them.

Jones (1866) refers to Kutchin dogs as "miserable creatures no larger than foxes", which statement supports the belief that the dogs of today, which are much larger than foxes, are comparatively recent imports.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Cordage and rope are now nearly all imported, but skin lines, both tanned and in the form of babiche, are still used to a large extent. A line braided of three strands of tanned caribou skin is used just as we use rope. It is made by the women; both men and women use it. It is about as strong as babiche snare line. Braiding with three, four, or five strands is familiar, and eight-strand braiding is known, though seldom used.

In the old days, fish nets were made from the inner bark of the willow. The preparation of this cordage was a tedious process, and much of the work had to be done with the hands under water to keep the fibre moist and flexible. The bark was best when gathered in summer. The threads were rolled on the naked thigh, and experts could make them quite long. If gathered too late in the season, the fibre was brittle. A net would easily last a year and sometimes more. Today most of the nets are bought from white traders, but some men prefer to buy cotton twine and make their own nets. For this they use the familiar netting needle and mesh gauge. A leather finger-stall is used in net-making to prevent the twine from chafing and cutting the worker's fingers.

The mesh gauge is a simple rectangle of wood and varies in size with the type of net desired. Nets with a small mesh are used for jackfish, inconnu, grayling, and whitefish, and a net with a larger mesh is used for salmon.

Among his equipment, Balaam had a long thin spruce pole with a retrorse hook on the end. He uses it with the hook down, for pulling in driftwood. Farther up-river and on the tributaries, a similar pole and hook are used with the hook up, for gaffing fish. The pole is slid along the bottom and jerked back, and the pull kept constant until the whole thing is on shore. Often two fish, and sometimes as many as four, are caught. These are then killed with a priest, and the fishing goes on.

Stone tools do not appear to be an important part of Athapaskan material culture in general, and I strongly suspect that most of the implements chipped from stone found in present-day Athapaskan territory are to be attributed to some other people. This does not imply that they were totally unaware of its use, and such things as polished stone axes, stone skin scrapers, and stone hammers were known to them. Chipped stone artifacts seldom, as far as my own experience goes, form part of the present or recent culture. Nevertheless, Balaam mentioned a place where stone suitable for chipping could be found. This is at the head of the Driftwood River, the Indian name of which is *shee-tsi* meaning "stone, hard".

The late Jim Jackson told me that Indians from as far away as Nenana used to come to John Herbert's village to get flint. The deposit is five miles up the creek from the village, and he was not able to find it himself.

Birch saplings were used as handles for stone axes and hammers.

The stone skin scrapers are of the type known as *tei-tho*, made from a thin slab of schist. Suitable pieces are shaped and used by the women. They are good for a long time, especially the heavier ones, but some rocks

break easily. The back has a leather guard, as a rule. It is held with the back in the palm of the hand, four fingers on one side and the thumb on the other.

One day Balaam brought in two pieces of slaty-sandstone of the type used for making these scrapers. I showed them to old Mrs. Black Fox, who was sitting on the ground just outside her cabin having tea with Julia MacDonald. Mrs. Black Fox pulled towards her an axe that had been used to cut wood for the little fire on which their tea was brewing, and, laying the axe flat on the ground, she used the metal head as an anvil on which to batter the slab of rock, which was roughly rectangular in shape, perhaps four by six inches. Holding one of the longer sides in her right hand, she tapped the opposite edge repeatedly on the axe head, so that chips were knocked off and the sandstone rapidly assumed a crescent shape along the edge which she was working. She tilted the sandstone slightly to the right or the left to take chips off one side or the other. The finished object looked as though it had been prepared by a free-hand percussion technique. The whole process took only a few minutes, and the resulting skin scraper was not a mere model but completely ready for use. She explained that the straight edge should be covered by a leather pad for protection. Skin scrapers of this type are used very extensively and may frequently be found lying about on both deserted and occupied village sites.

Another type of skin scraper, a beaming tool, is made from the tibia of a caribou and is generally used in working small skins. The skins were laid over a log or beam for scraping. Balaam stated that they were occasionally used for larger skins too.

One skin scraper was collected which proved somewhat surprising in that it had a handle of the humped-up type with finger grooves, familiar among the Eskimo. Elias agreed at once that it was Eskimo in type but explained that they are often used here.

Skin scraping and tanning, which involves washing in rain water and smoking, is a constant occupation of the women. It is not light work, and they often complain of the toil involved. Mrs. Elias paused in her scraping of a large moose skin and smiled at me. She ran her tired hand over her sweating forehead and commented, "Indian woman hard life".

Previous camp-sites are often marked by small pits in the ground, perhaps a foot across and a little more than a foot deep. In these pits, smouldering fires of orange-coloured rotten spruce wood are lit. Over the pit, willow withes are bent to make a framework over which the moose hide may be draped so as to retain the smoke from the smouldering fire in the pit.

On one occasion Julia was making a parka for a little white girl, using Arctic hare skins which had been tanned chemically rather than by native methods. The damp skins had a sour acrid smell, and a small boy who happened to come in commented that they smelled just like a white man.

Most of the natives go out on the traplines in the winter and, at the time of the spring break-up, move to the Old Crow Flats where thousands of muskrats live in a maze of small lakes. Peter Tizya got 1,400 rats in the spring of 1946 and sold them for \$3.00 cash each—\$4,200. Most of the natives are paid in "trade"—that is, in credit at the store.

A Danish trapper, who is married to a native woman and has several half-breed daughters, said that trapping is hard work and the winters are very cold, but that actually there will be only ten or twelve bad days in the winter and the rest of it is pleasant enough. When a man comes home to a warm cabin and finds pleasant companions and a hot meal waiting

for him, trapping is no hardship; but when a man, after a hard day on the trail, comes back to a cold cabin and must light a fire, get wood and water, and cook a meal, things are less pleasant. One is all too apt to make a scanty meal of cold baked beans eaten out of a can and go to bed with no further fuss.

In his family, everybody traps; the girls go out in pairs leaving two behind in the cabin to do the housework and to skin and stretch yesterday's catch. They run three teams of dogs, of three dogs each, and feed them (at least in part) on the carcasses of the animals trapped.

It costs him about \$5,000 a year to operate. The girls feel that the furs they trap are rightfully theirs and that they are entitled to what luxuries they want, a view in which their father concurs. His annual income is usually more than \$5,000, so he is able to salt away something for the future.

Balaam showed me a large scoop, made from birch, which was used in lifting ice from a muskrat's hole when trapping. It was also used for bringing snow into the house for melting. Such spoons were far too large to use in cooking.

Bows and arrows are not used very extensively, though a number of men still have them. I was told by David Tobuk, a very intelligent Eskimo from the Kobuk River, who acted as pilot on a boat which attempted the ascent of the Porcupine River, that diamond willow split down the long way makes a very good strong bow. His grandfather had such a bow, and David, though then a sturdy boy of twelve, could not draw it. The lightest spruce available was used for arrows, with three feathers and heads of jade, obsidian, or, recently, of iron. Feathers and head were served with sinew and smoothed down with spruce gum and tallow, boiled together. The bow string was a braided sinew, square in cross-section. David remembers the bow as being about five feet long. On one occasion his grandfather got two caribou with a single shot, the arrow going right through the first and killing the second. He used a long, smoothly-tapered iron point on that occasion.

Arrows with bunt heads were used for small game, and some of those intended for moose and caribou had a shaft of spruce, a foreshaft of antler (either caribou or moose), and a bone tip. The bow was of birch, by preference, according to one informant, or sometimes of poplar. He himself, when a boy, had shot caribou and moose with a bow, as well as smaller game. He said the game would fall very soon after being hit.

One day Daniel Fredson gave me the tail of a hawk. He said the stiff feathers were used for fletching arrows and the soft white ones for decorating a man's head-dress.

Metal working does not occupy a large part of the native tradition. Indians in the southern part of the Yukon made fairly extensive use of copper nuggets which were hammered into shape. One informant, at Aishihik, assured me that the metal was heated before being hammered. I asked him how he could hold the hot metal, and he promptly stooped down and picked up an ingenious clamp of green spruce wood which he himself had been using a few minutes before.

Apparently they have learned at least some metal working skill from contact with white men. Balaam showed me a crooked knife, with a steel blade and wooden handle, made by his late brother many years ago. To bend the steel, he said, it must be heated but not to the point of redness, or the temper will be lost.

A number of steel axes or hatchets are in use here which are similar in pattern to the old French axes found in eastern Canada, except that the eye is cast in the steel.

Among his other equipment Balaam had a large snow shovel made from a slab of spruce driftwood. In construction it was reminiscent of the Eskimo snow shovel familiar farther north.

He showed me, too, the lower jaw of a marten with the canine teeth still in place which, he explained, was used as a tool in making snow-shoes. Many of his smaller possessions are kept in carrying-bags of caribou skin. These bags, made from either green or tanned skins, are used for general carrying purposes. They are made by women and used more frequently by them than by men.

WARFARE

Moses Tizya says that even as recently as fifty years ago, Indians (Beavers, he believes) from east of the Mackenzie River used to come up to this district to fight with the local Indians in the hope of capturing women and children.

Balaam reports good friendship between Indians and Eskimos in recent years but says it was bad "a thousand years ago".

This view seems to be supported by Isbister who wrote, about 1867, as follows: "They (the Loucheux) maintain friendly relations with the Esquimaux in most parts of their course, but at the mouth of M'Kenzie's River the two tribes are continually at hostilities. With the Chippewyans, on the other hand, they do not seem to have had much influence".

When an enemy was killed in battle or otherwise, says Balaam, the belly was slit open and a thin slice of abdominal fat was eaten by each of the victors. This, among other things, prevented the ghosts from pursuing them. Nothing was said about restricting this custom to one's first victim.

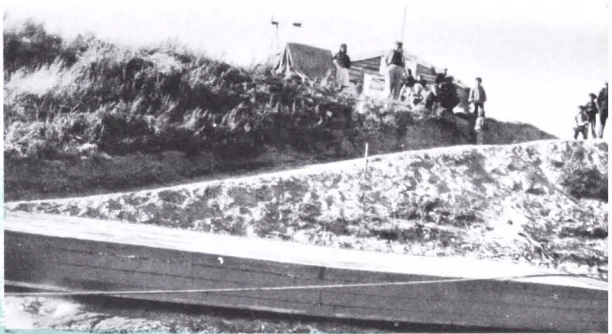
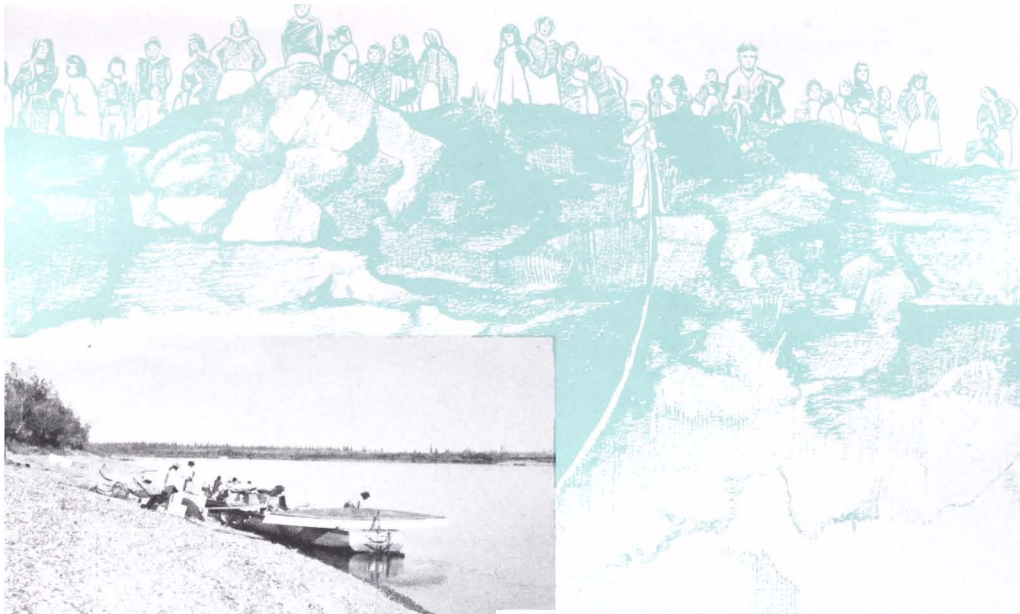
ART AND SCIENCE

The church is a neat log building, simple and adequate. Its outstanding claim to fame rests in its altar cloth, which is made from bleached moose hide, fringed and most exquisitely beaded. It is a very fine and beautiful piece of work.

Whistles, similar to our conventional model except that the hollow bark tube is continued for almost two feet, seemed to be well known. I watched one of them being made by Sam Charley. He got the wood out of the bark by cutting off a couple of inches of bark, so as to expose the wood, and then pulling it out with his teeth. It must be a straight piece of willow shoot, or the bark would split during this process. Sam was able to get several different notes by stopping the open end and by over-blowing. He says he never heard of putting a hole in the bark tube itself. The notes produced are pleasing and melodious, but I was not able to determine whether the tunes he played were improvised or already familiar aboriginal airs.

Poker is a favourite gambling game, and relatively large sums may be wagered. I have seen muskrat skins, valued at \$3.75 each, used as chips.

Most of the older people are firmly convinced that the Indians were much less afflicted by sickness before the white man came. Some of them even go so far as to insist that there was no sickness in aboriginal times



Ramp from bank to river



Scene on Porcupine River



Village of Old Crow



Modern river boat



Old Crow Hills

and that all the trouble and sickness of today was foreseen and foretold by the old people in their stories.

Today, sickness is anything but a stranger. Tuberculosis appears to be one of the more prevalent diseases and seems particularly dangerous to children who are just reaching the age of puberty. One little boy, about twelve years old, died of it while I was there, and a little girl whom I saw in apparently perfect health in August was dead in September of the same disease, according to my information.

Dermatitis seems to be common among the children, and I have seen a number of them with sores on their faces, and with running ears. Colds, too, are common.

One notable feature is the excellent teeth which most of the people have, especially the younger natives. They are very white, strong, and regular, and generally appear to be clean.

Epidemics of one sort and another have afflicted these people on several occasions, but both the dating and the diagnosis are vague. Balaam showed me a grassy flat on the north bank of the Porcupine which was a favourite camp-site, and his mother had once told him that this was where the people were living when the first great sickness came down the Porcupine River and many people died, only a few being left alive.

Julia MacDonald is of the opinion that unsuitable clothing and frequent wetting, especially in the spring when the people are out ratting during the break-up and all their clothes are soaking wet, have much to do with the high death rate. She herself is paralysed from the waist downwards and has been since about 1937. She attributes this to having got very wet and cold in the spring of that year while ratting.

It was taken for granted that if a young person, apparently in good health, died, his death was to be attributed to evil magic, except in the case of obvious physical accidents, such as drowning or falling over a precipice. Old people, too tired and feeble to work or keep up with the group, would sometimes ask to be put to death. A thong was wound round the old person's neck and whoever would, might pull on it and strangle him.

I made inquiries at the hospital in Whitehorse and also in Fort Yukon, and the doctors there agreed that the Mongolian spot was "always" present. It varies in size and in permanence, but more data on this phenomenon would be most useful. I asked also about the inheritance of the Mongolian spot in half-breeds. Dr. Roth, who was then in charge of the hospital in Whitehorse, told me that he had seen it in reputed half-breed children; and Effie, in Old Crow, told me that some half-breed children have a Mongolian spot and others show none. Her little daughter, Susie, who is one-eighth Indian, had a small spot. The obvious difficulty in examining the matter is, of course, that one can seldom be absolutely certain of the paternity of the child, and an infant who should, by social convention be a half-breed, may, in point of fact, be a full-blooded Indian child.

I am able to record one case in which there is no doubt at all as to paternity. A white girl, a very light blonde, of my acquaintance married a full-blooded Japanese, and each of her two children showed the Mongolian spot.

Medicinal herbs were well known and extensively used, in spite of the statement by Jones (1866) that "they have no knowledge of them whatever". Balaam professed a certain knowledge of them but was not so learned in his discussion of their properties as was Julia MacDonald who

became very impatient at her inability to go with me to collect specimens, for she remembered well exactly where they grew and was eager to help me in their study. The best I could do was to bring in samples of the plants I thought she referred to and then discuss them with her.

Balaam's knowledge was obviously incomplete; he was both interested and astonished when I told him that aconite was a poison. It seems extraordinary that he should not be aware of this, especially as it is used on the west coast of Alaska in whale hunting (See Heizer).

In the following paragraphs, plants are identified by their generic names only, arranged alphabetically, with the information supplied by Balaam and by Julia MacDonald.

ACHILLEA. An infusion of dried and powdered yarrow roots (aromatic) was used as a tonic and for headache.—Balaam. He says the whole plant was gathered and washed. A large handful was put in hot water. It makes the water yellow. The infusion was then poured into bottles, a little sediment was allowed to settle, and it was decanted after about an hour. It has a pleasant taste and is good for headache. He made ten bottles of it a couple of years ago.

Julia says bees get honey from it, but she knows of no medicinal use.

ACONITUM. I pointed out some monk's-hood to Balaam and asked him if he knew it was poisonous, but he knew nothing of it.

Julia, too, knew nothing of its properties—"Just a flower, just grow for nothing".

ALNUS. Julia says an infusion of alder bark was used for tuberculosis and colds. The dead or dried catkins(?) were chewed to ease a persistent cough.

Effie showed me a cup in Julia's cabin. It contained a strong infusion of alder bark which Julia was taking as a medicine. Effie was not very clear as to what benefits it was expected to produce.

Balaam says the inner bark was shredded and boiled, making a strong yellow. It is rather strong in taste; one spoonful is plenty. His wife made infusions of alder bark for Benjamin Kendi, who died of tuberculosis this summer.

ANEMONE. Anemone roots were eaten raw as a tonic.—Balaam.

ARCTOSTAPHYLOS. Balaam recognized kinikinik at once: "Tobacco! Lots of time people he smoke that kind!"

Julia referred to it as "stone-berries", used with pemmican and with fish-eggs. "Fish-eggs don't stick to your teeth so much then".

ASTER. Balaam says the dry roots are gathered in August and scraped clean. They are then pounded up and steeped in cold water. This makes a pleasant drink, but not necessarily medicinal. He says he has not much personal experience with it. Julia knows of no use for it.

BETULA. Balaam says the inside bark of the birch is very good and full of juice, "like peaches".

BOSCHNIAKIA. Boschniakia is known as *do-i-as-si*. Balaam did not know that it is edible, but had heard of a large curved root and stem being used as a tobacco pipe.

Julia MacDonald tells me *do-i-as-si* ("healed his uncle") is used as a medicine. It is boiled and drunk, and the infusion is rubbed on sore parts.

CERASTIUM. Balaam says it was dried and the powder steeped in hot water. It made a soothing infusion in which to wash. It is not used now, he added. Julia says nobody uses this plant.

EMPETRUM. Julia says crowberry leaves are good for the stomach. Drink the infusion.

EPILOBIUM. Balaam knows of no use for fireweed. Julia says that bees and butterflies get food from it.

FUNGI. Julia says the powder from dry puff-balls is put on running sores to soak up the pus and heal the sore. "Mushrooms" are eaten but not puff-balls. Only the stems are used. They are diced and fried.

LACTUCA. Lactuca is known as "bad medicine", but Balaam doesn't know why. He tasted it once and it made his tongue numb. He says, too, that it smells bad.

LEDUM. Balaam pointed out Ledum as good for scanty urination, as well as for making a good tea, which a number of old people still use. Julia also referred to its use for making a tea.

LUPIN. Balaam referred to Lupin as "mountain squirrel food"; he says the squirrels eat the leaves. Balaam and Julia agreed that it had no medicinal value.

PICEA. Julia says spruce twigs should be heated on the stove and then applied to the part where there is pain.

Balaam says the twigs and cones were boiled for two hours, and the resulting infusion was drunk for pains in the lungs. The tips of the twigs are especially good. The gum is still chewed by everybody. Before chewing gum was introduced, spruce gum was to be found in every house. Julia mentioned the extruded gum from the cones as being chewed. The buds are used in making spruce beer, which was drunk for tuberculosis. The pitch was boiled to treat colds.

POLYGONUM. Balaam says a big bundle of the fleshy stalks was toasted over a fire, peeled, and eaten in the spring. It was also sometimes fried in caribou fat. Julia referred to it as rhubarb, good to eat in June. Neither mentioned any medicinal value.

POPULUS. Balaam told me that ashes were used for making soap, as they gave a strong lye. Moose or caribou fat was used.

POTENTILLA. Balaam has seen people chewing the roots but does not know what their special virtue may be. Julia had no knowledge of it.

PYROLA. Balaam said pyrola was once used by the Fort Yukon people as a medicine, but he does not know the details. He said the leaves stay green all winter.

ROSA. Balaam says the bark of rose roots was dried in the sun or over a fire and powdered. An infusion made from the powder was often used by his mother to treat a cough and soreness in the chest. Julia said the fruit was eaten raw.

SALIX. Balaam says the tender young shoots were chewed by children in the spring. Julia says the leaves were chewed into a pulp and applied to bee stings.

Very little use seems to be made of vegetable dyes, and when I mentioned alder bark as a good strong dye, neither Julia nor her daughter, Effie, showed any knowledge of it. Neither was I able to discover any knowledge of native paints although other Athapaskan groups certainly do make use of them and the use of both dyes and paints is mentioned in early accounts of these people.

Several people had warned me that the Indians might be infested with lice, but I never came across anything to support this idea. These people, in fact, are unusually clean in their persons and in their clothes. That does not imply that not one of the inhabitants of Old Crow was ever lousy.

TRADE

Lying as it does on the Porcupine River, Old Crow is on the main trade route between the Mackenzie Delta and the Yukon River basin, which has probably long been an important artery of commerce. The Kutchin are known to have been trading with white men at Fort Good Hope as early as 1814. John Bell explored the Peel River in 1839 and established Fort McPherson in 1840 for the Hudson's Bay Company. He descended the Porcupine River as far as the Yukon in 1844, and Alexander Murray, who wintered at Fort McPherson in 1846, floated down the Porcupine to its confluence with the Yukon to found Fort Yukon in 1847. An intermediate post was established at La Pierre's House, nearly one hundred miles east of Old Crow, but this was abandoned in 1890, and it is doubtful if even the ruins of it are to be seen now.

However, it is probable that commerce followed the Porcupine River both east and west many years before this, and the Indians still talk of the annual trading expeditions in which chiefs from this district used to go down towards the Yukon River. On the way, somewhere along the Porcupine, they would meet other Indians coming up. The principal exports from here were caribou skins and dried fish; the chief imports were spears and birchbark canoes.

The canoes were made on Black River, where there are large birch trees. The men from Old Crow went downstream on large scows, similar to those made now, which were covered with moose or caribou skins. They came back in the birchbark canoes which they had bought.

The spears had points of a hard black stone, later of iron. The shaft was of birch; spruce was too brittle and dry. The spear was used against bears as a lance; the butt was rested on the ground, perhaps against a niggerhead, and the point was so directed as to enter the base of a bear's throat. The charging bear was occasionally thrown right over, somewhat as in pole-vaulting.

Dentalium was a recognized medium of exchange, and most of the more important Indians had large quantities of it. It was used both for the adornment of their persons and for trade. Moses Tizya tells me that the Loucheux used to use dentalium shells in trading with the Eskimo. On one occasion they made imitations from the quills of large feathers, but the fraud was soon detected and there was a big fight over it. The Hudson's Bay Company once brought in two boxes full of beads which looked something like dentalium, but the Eskimos refused these too, and Tizya suspects that they also were imitations.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

It has been known since the 1840's that the Loucheux divided themselves into three social groups or phratries, and during my stay in Old Crow I showed no knowledge of this subject at all, hoping that it would be brought out spontaneously. It was only ten days before I left that the matter was first mentioned and, though there was no particular disinclination to discuss it, I discovered later that my informant had been reproached for talking about such things with a white man, and was reluctant to say anything more about it. However, I was able to give assurances that I already knew of this and that there had been therefore no breach of confidence.

The following notes are taken almost verbatim from my diary.

In the old days, there were two phratries: *Nasich* and *Jitsha* (servants). A third group, *Tangeratsa*, were the descendants of irregular marriages in either of these two phratries. *Nasich* is higher than *Jitsha*, and *Tangeratsa* was below them both. Marriage is exogamic, and descent is in the female line. Effie thinks that if two of the same phratry got married, the children would be *Tangeratsa*.

These phratries are still recognized in theory, but in actual practice people have to stop to remember who is who.

At feasts and other gatherings, the phratries talk against each other. Talk big and rough to remind *Jitsha* that they are lower than *Nasich*. Both will tell *Tangeratsa* to "get out and shut up".

Not long ago a feast was given in the dance hall. One man who is *Jitsha* was brought up by *Nasich* people. He started to talk big and smart as usual saying, "I'm *Nasich*, above *Jitsha*". And then Ben Cassi said, "Who's this talking?" and pushed him back in his seat. Julius Kendi pointed to him in public and said, "You're a poor *Jitsha*, and the *Nasich* raised you. What business have you to talk big like that?"

As usual, the occurrence of half-breeds upsets the old social organization. Here, in Old Crow, the convention has been adopted that half-breeds, since descent is in the maternal line, have the same phratry as their mother. Today it is almost impossible to adhere to the old rules. A young *Jitsha* may wish to marry, and there may be no *Nasich* girl available who pleases him. Effie, who is a half-breed, is *Jitsha* because her mother was *Jitsha*, and she married a *Jitsha* without exciting adverse comment. This situation is quite common.

Balaam says that he is *Jitsha*, and that Sara, his wife, was born *Jitsha* too, but she was adopted by *Nasich* parents when she was very small, so she is considered *Nasich* too. He says there are many *Tangeratsa* in town, for the old rule of exogamy is often disregarded now, and the children of parents of the same phratries, either *Nasich* or *Jitsha*, are technically *Tangeratsa*. There have been many such marriages in recent years.

Balaam says that if a *Nasich* child is adopted by *Jitsha* people, he may be considered *Tangeratsa*. He pronounced it *Gitsha* rather than *Jitsha* or *Jitsa*.

A *Tangeratsa* could marry either a *Nasich* or a *Jitsha*, and here again the children who follow would belong to the mother's phratry. In spite of the tacit agreement by which people are oblivious of this breach of convention, marriage within one's own phratry is still thought of, in the abstract, as incest.

Cross phratry joking was permitted but was not permissible within the phratry, and the *Tangeratsa* are not allowed to joke with either.

Julia says that the chief always wore a distinguishing mark to tell him from the others—perhaps a necklace of bone, or beads, or feathers in his hairdressing.

LIFE CYCLE

In childbirth, the woman sits on a caribou skin on the floor. One woman sits in front of her and holds her up under the arms. Another woman sits behind to support her and delivers the child when it is born. The woman in labour pulls on the shoulders of the woman in front. The umbilical cord is cut with scissors; it is tied a couple of inches above the baby's body (with caribou skin in the old days, blackened with charcoal so that it would not slip) and tied again an inch above that. The placenta is burned. The child is put in a bag of caribou hair, loose; the hair is changed whenever necessary. Some moss is mixed with the hair, and this part alone gets wet and has to be changed. The child is put to nurse at once. An artificial nipple is cut from the cartilage of a caribou's knee, fastened to a stick to prevent its being swallowed. If a woman has no milk, a soup is made from a boiled caribou head and the child fed with the forefoot of a rabbit.

Twins are well known, but not triplets.

Dr. Roth tells me that a local (Whitehorse district) Indian custom in childbirth is to drive two stakes into the ground. The woman braces her foot against the smaller one and forces her back against the larger one behind her. It gives excellent results. The placenta, he believes, is usually buried.

Births are usually easy, and abnormal presentations rare.

In the old days everybody used to crowd in, especially women and children, light their pipes, and sit down to watch. The husband was usually not present.

Julia once heard of an Eskimo woman who stayed with the captain of a whaling ship at Herschel Island. By him, she became pregnant. She travelled down the Old Crow River on her way to Rampart House. At that time there was nobody living at Old Crow except one old man who had no food, and he was therefore unable to help her. She went on down the trail to Rampart House and on the way gave birth to twins. As soon as they were delivered, she threw them away. They were both girls. The next day she went on. Eskimos often did this, "just like a dog", according to Old Crow people.

When a miscarriage was desired, it was induced by hard work and lifting heavy objects. They had never heard of any medicine which would bring it about.

The children are markedly Asiatic in appearance with large dark eyes, a definite epicanthic fold, straight black hair, and beautiful colouring. They are singularly charming and attractive, and their parents show them great love and kindness.

In the southern Yukon among the Tlinkit, the navel cord is kept after birth. On one occasion, in Carcross, when I was talking with Mary Smarch, her three months' old baby girl was rocking in a hammock with a disc-like beaded amulet pinned on. At first Mary said there was nothing in it, but admitted at once that I was right when I suggested the navel cord was inside. She said it would eventually be hidden in the bush.

Julia told me that when children were caught pilfering, their mothers would slit the tips of their fingers with a sewing awl. They would never steal again.

In aboriginal times if a man wanted to marry some particular girl, he would tie some moss to the end of a stick. Coming up to her tent, he would poke it in at the entrance as a "proposal". If she accepted him (and she could see well enough who it was), she would say, "Yes", or "Thank you", and he would come in. She would hardly dare refuse anyway as he might do her some harm by his "medicine".

Julia said that, in the old days, if a boy and girl met and liked each other, they might simply stay together and were then considered married.

Julia's aunt, Sara, who went to school at Hay River, married an Eskimo who lives beyond Aklavik. He got 500 white foxes one year and is very rich. His name is Orpik (willow?). Once she returned to Bell River on a visit but said she was hungry for seal meat. She carried her baby in the Eskimo style. Julia said she couldn't see how the child could breathe and added "she spoke Husky real good".

Balaam tells me Sara is the only wife he ever had, and she is a good woman. He does not approve of the ease with which young people change partners.

One man asked me a number of questions about godparents; he wanted to know how seriously the white people took such relationships and whether such a relationship constituted a bar to marriage. He seemed somewhat relieved to find out that it did not. He has been a widower for some time. He also wanted to know whether baptism was obligatory or not. He seems to have been told that it was.

The custom of having more than one wife was apparently very common, and any man who attained to any position at all had two wives at least. The type of culture which these people followed was such that one woman alone could, only with great difficulty, look after all the duties which fell to her lot. Tanning and smoking hides; making clothes; making and repairing the tents; looking after the children; cleaning, smoking, and drying fish; cooking; snaring rabbits and running fish nets took up many hours a day, and a man who was at all proficient as a hunter could easily bring in more game and fish than a single woman could manage.

Some men who thought they had strong medicine had as many as ten wives. David John (who died in the spring of 1946) was a descendant of Shaniuti who had ten. He would "just take them", and their husbands could do nothing as, being a medicine man, he could kill them through his dreams.

Jim Jackson pointed out one boy to me as the grandson of an important local chief who had had eleven wives. Whether he had them simultaneously or not was not clear. Apparently a man's authority over his wives was complete, and this particular man is reputed to have murdered his youngest wife because he suspected her of adultery.

Balaam knows of one man here who had eight wives. He told me that he (Balaam) once asked a bishop, in the presence of the R.C.M.P. corporal, why he should not have two wives as men used to. He was told that the penalty might be fourteen years in the penitentiary. Balaam commented that a man might die during so long a time, or one of the two wives might prove unfaithful, or possibly both.

Marriage customs seems to have varied a good deal from time to time. Some of the information concerning this topic may be inaccurate and coloured by a somewhat Rabelaisian sense of humour.

Julia MacDonald



Chief Peter Moses and his wife

Sometimes all the young men would go out hunting, and when they were a short way into the bush, they would take off their skin leggings and hang them up in the bushes. Then the girls would come, and each would select a pair and take them home. When the boys returned (and they might not wait very long), they would ask people in the village in general, "Who has got such and such a pair of leggings?", describing them. And when each boy had found the girl who had his, they would get married.

Once there was a girl who found that the only pair of leggings left were so wrinkled behind the knees and so dirty that she was reluctant even to touch them. However, there were no others, so she took them. When the boys came back, she found that they were the property of the best worker of all the young men. His knees were always bent as he squatted at his work, which was the reason for his leggings being so wrinkled.

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

The usual method of disposing of the dead, before the days of white influence and for some time thereafter, was by cremation.

Balaam told me that when a man died his relatives would hire four men to build a funeral pyre. When it was built, they would wait till there was no wind before the actual cremation, so that the smoke might go straight up; if the smoke went sideways, the people would shout at it to go straight, "and lots of times, she go!"

It would appear that rather extravagant expressions of grief were indulged in. Women would gash their faces and breasts and weep inconsolably for a long time. I was told that once, when people were mourning, some of them dashed through the flames. One foolish man, wearing clothes of woven rabbit skin, caught fire, and the people, turning from tears to laughter, pushed him back into the blaze.

Occasionally there were variants from the custom of cremation and bodies were buried in a deep rock cache to prevent bears from raiding them, but cremation was considered better as the body was then safe from disturbance. Some bodies were placed in a log cache high up among spruce trees.

Today burial in a coffin in the ground is almost universal, and conspicuous graves often crown the summit of low hills along the river banks. In Old Crow there is a native cemetery behind the village. Many of the graves are fenced, but not all. The picket fences are made in the village and are carried out to the graveyard, complete. The custom of building grave houses, familiar in the southern Yukon, is not followed here.

One morning I learned that a little boy, who had been ill a long time with tuberculosis, had died during the night. Moses Tizya and Chief Peter Moses told me about it. I saw the father shortly after breakfast and expressed my sympathy.

A number of people were bringing gifts of food, fish, meat, and so on, and I inquired as to what was usual. I was told a feast would be served to those who made the coffin and to those who dug the grave, as well as to any others who cared to come.

I contributed a tin of hard candy and gave it to the father of the dead boy; he was sitting in the middle section of his cabin watching the busy sawing and hammering of the men who were making the coffin.

Balaam told me that any friends may help bereaved people with the making of the coffin and the digging of the grave and that the phratrries have nothing to do with it. This varies from southern Yukon practice, where Crows arrange the burial of Wolves, and vice versa.

I saw long narrow tables laid out in front of the house for the feast and asked the boy's father if he would like to have a photograph of it. He was very pleased at the idea and invited me to sit at the table with the others.

The meal began with soup; then there was boiled beef, bacon, hard-boiled eggs, duck, fish, and mashed potatoes; mixed canned fruit, blueberries, bread and butter, tea and coffee.

All the men sat down first. I found a place had been laid for me at the foot of the long table with Chief Peter Moses at the head.

The chief made a speech in his own language ending with "Thank you" in English, after the meal; and then we got up to let the women sit down. The children were served last, and my gift of candy was distributed to them.

The church bell was rung at about two in the afternoon of the next day, and a procession was seen coming from the parents' house. The coffin was draped in black cloth; a wreath and a cross of coloured crêpe rosettes, tinsel, and so on, were laid on top of it. Practically all the women and children of the village followed.

The coffin was carried on a litter of spruce poles, apparently made for the occasion. Four men carried it easily.

They were met at the church door by the Reverend Julius Kendi, the minister, and Big Joe Kay, his assistant. After a few words, the litter was laid down, and the coffin itself carried into the church, preceded by the clergy, the bell still ringing. Inside, the coffin was laid on trestles and covered with a cloth, decorated with a border and a cross in gold gimp.

The service was in the Indian language, and I could follow none of it, except to realize that, in a short sermon, the minister referred directly to the dead child, for he pointed to the coffin several times. Three hymns were sung, the last one, "Jesus Loves Me", in English. Before the end of the service the cloth was taken off the coffin, the black cloth was folded back, and the child's face was made visible. All the congregation filed past for a last look, "paying homage", as one native man explained to me.

The child was wearing on his head a crown-like paper cap, cut into a pattern. It looked tawdry and out of place, as though he were playing at "dressing up". His face was a pale waxy brown, and pitifully thin.

When all had passed before the coffin, the lid was replaced and then and there nailed down.

Another prayer and the benediction, and then the coffin was carried out behind the two ministers, followed by the father. Just outside the church, the people, clergy, and parents paused to have a photograph taken.

The coffin was now lifted on to the litter, and the people followed in procession back into town. Here a good many dropped out, while others followed the trail to the graveyard. I walked just behind Chief Peter Moses.

The grave was already dug, and the people crowded round. There were several other graves of the same family nearby, including two children who had died in the summer of 1944.

At one point in the service, all those present picked up a clod of earth and dropped it into the open grave on top of the coffin. When the service was over, the people dispersed and wandered through the graveyard which

most of them seldom visited, as it is nearly half a mile out of town. The ministers doffed their clerical garb in the open, and Julius Kendi lit his pipe. Four volunteers filled in the grave and shaped the earth into a rough mound on which the wreath and flower cross were laid.

After I got back to the village, I met two young men, each with a large bundle on his back, and two others carrying an axe and a can of coal oil. They were on their way to burn the dead child's clothes and other possessions. Nobody else went with them.

Balaam remembers hearing that a dead man's hair was tied to a stake and exhibited on the river bank, but he has never seen it done. In the old days, when a group of people left a camp because of starvation, they would tie a bunch of grass to a stake in the camp as an indication that they had nothing to eat. Similarly, a bunch of the long hair from a caribou's throat indicated that they had killed caribou. A sloping stick was used to show which way they had gone.

The trick of marking the position of the shadow of an upright stick was known to Balaam, who says the old people used it.

MISCELLANEOUS

One of the most famous and best-remembered Loucheux of a previous generation is Sha-ni-uti, whose portrait appears in Richardson's "Journal of a Boat Voyage through Rupert's Land". Several people in Old Crow are his direct descendants. David John, a river pilot, who was drowned in the Yukon River in the summer of 1946, was his grandson, and I flew from Fort Yukon to Fairbanks in Alaska in company with his great-grandson who was then in the United States Army. People still refer to Sha-ni-uti, and Chief Peter Moses told me that this chief had been his mother's father. He was a very generous man and would often distribute food at his door in the evenings, especially to children, who would crowd round him like mosquitoes. He often went hungry himself. Peter Moses said that almost never was "his belly tight".

One of Sha-ni-uti's ten wives was a girl who didn't want to marry him. An old woman decorated her hair with feathers and her cheeks with rouge ready for the wedding, but the girl ran away. However, she didn't run fast enough, and Sha-ni-uti caught her. He gashed her leg badly with a knife, but she merely said "Merci trop, you cut me with a knife". In three days she was all healed up. This was because she was a medicine woman and "dreamed to" knives and axes.

No acceptable study of the Loucheux language has yet been published. Archdeacon Robert MacDonald, who, I understand, was himself a half-breed from Winnipeg, and who married a Loucheux woman from Fort McPherson, published a hymn book, a prayer book, and a Bible in the Takkud-Kutchin dialect. I attended a church service in Fort Yukon in which his hymn book was used, and, following the text as closely as I could, I heard consistent variations from the printed version. In Old Crow I was told that he had often been misinformed and that many of the words he used were totally unknown to the Indians of today.

Moses Tizya told me that Fort McPherson words end with *-ee*, Old Crow with *-sie*, and Fort Yukon with *-kee*. Naturally this applies only to certain words. He says people speaking all three dialects can understand each other, but that the language at Circle is different, though still recognizable as Loucheux. The Beavers speak a different language.

Many of the Indians have had biblical names given them, in addition to their own native names; so we meet Balaam, Moses, and Peter; and Rachel, Sarah, and Mary.

Most of the Old Crow people speak a certain amount of English, especially the younger ones. Many of them have been to school at Carcross or Dawson, and some read and write English with considerable fluency. The older people are less familiar with the white man's language and have had little occasion to use it.

There is more than a trace of Scottish accent to be heard, and the various "Houses" such as La Pierre's House and Rampart House are frequently pronounced "hoose". Another peculiarity noted in the native's use of English is in the negatives. "Not much water here, Balaam!" "Yes." (There isn't.)

Occasionally an Indian in attempting to express his thoughts in English will hit on an original and striking metaphor. I remember once Balaam, trying to arrive at a small boy's age, said, "He not a very big boy but he go in trail already."

As is often the case, the Indians of Old Crow are pleased when a white man tries to learn something of their language, and they are quick to encourage him in his attempts to use it. Balaam once commented on the fact that very few white men did so and felt that this situation was regrettable. Many of the small children speak more English than Indian. This is not so common a situation in Old Crow as it is in villages in the southern Yukon where I have heard old women complain that their grandchildren could hardly speak their native language at all and made no effort to learn it.

Balaam told me that the native name for the Old Crow Hills is *shaka*. *Sha* means "hair", and they are so named because a man wearing his hair in the huge bundle, fashionable years ago, burned it half off.

It appears that, years ago, Julia's great-grandmother was in camp with some other people, including Philip Joe's grandfather. It was summer; the men were hunting rats, ducks, and geese, and the women were just starting a fish trap. Rats are very good when the fur is burned off and the animal then boiled. Philip Joe's grandfather had built a little smudge in the entrance to his new canvas tent which he had bought at Herschel Island. The mosquitoes were bad, and he was trying to get some sleep. The wind flapped the tent door and fanned the smudge, and soon the whole side of the tent was on fire, while the old man slept on. He had a long beard of straggly whiskers which he never bothered to cut.

Julia's great-grandmother seized a large pail of water and threw it on the tent, and all the people shouted together to wake him up. He sprang to his feet and dashed out of the tent unharmed, except that his hair and beard were on fire. As he raced out, with his hair flaming, he tried to put it out with his hands, shouting lustily as he did so. Julia's grandmother threw some more water on him, and he spluttered and yelled again.

When the people saw him with only half his hair and half his beard, and remembered his exit from the tent, they tried not to laugh at him but couldn't help it. "You may as well laugh", he told them, and he began to laugh too.

When they cut the rest of his hair and beard off, to bring him level again, he looked funnier than ever and people started to laugh all over again.

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YUKON RIVER

ARCTIC

FORT YUKON
ALASKA

DAWSON

140°





MACKENZIE
BAY

YUKON

OLD CROW
PORCUPINE R.

BELL R.

RAT R.

AKLAVIK

FORT
McPHERSON

RICHARDSON
MOUNTAINS

PEEL

RIVER

SNAKE R.

YUKON

NORTH WEST
TERRITORIES

CIRCLE

MACKENZIE
RIVER

K.I.R.

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