



# PATTERNS OF CHANGE:

150 YEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE INUINNAIT PARKA



PITQUHIRNIKKUT ILIHAUTINIQ  
KITIKMEOT  
HERITAGE SOCIETY

We would like to acknowledge the multiple individuals and organizations who supported the Patterns of Change program, and helped to make it a reality. Firstly, we wish to thank the Inuinait Elders, both past and present, who have passed along their skills and knowledge to ensure that sewing remains a vital part of Inuinait culture and communities. Mary Avalak, Annie Atighioyak, and Mabel Etegik deserve special mention for their role in guiding this project and overseeing the planning and production of its parka making. We would like to thank all those people who supported and participated this project's many workshops, interviews, and resources. Last, but not least, we wish to thank our funders for their sponsorship of this project. Their generosity has directly contributed to keeping the art of Inuinait sewing alive in our community.

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# PATTERNS OF CHANGE: 150 YEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE INUINNAIT PARKA

Winter clothing in the Canadian Arctic is part of everyday survival. For thousands of years it has allowed people living in that region to thrive despite its subzero temperatures. It has provided them with warmth, identity, and a material way to express their culture, artistry and skill.

This book focuses on the parka traditions of a group known as Inuinnait. Inuinnait are a regional community of Inuit whose homeland lies in the Central Arctic on Victoria Island and surrounding areas. While their culture and history closely follows that of many other Inuit groups, they are unique in many ways including clothing and language.

The last 150 years have brought significant change to the lives of Inuinnait. Over time, their culture and life-ways have transformed from near total reliance on the surrounding environment to being influenced by media and materials from around the globe. Throughout this process, Inuinnait have learned to adapt to change, keeping parts of their culture they want to preserve while also adopting new traditions.



The Patterns of Change program was started in 2017 by Pitquhirnikkut Ilihatiniq to examine how clothing and fashion speak to broader changes in Inuinnait culture over the last 150 years. The program recreated five historical Inuinnait parkas through community sewing workshops. Each parka represents a different stage of Inuinnait history. In preparing and sewing the parkas, participants recreated tools and materials from the specific time period to process hides, create patterns, and sew the parkas together. Both tools and parkas are displayed together in a final museum exhibit located at the May Hakongak Cultural Centre in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. When arranged together, the parkas and tools provide insight into how Inuinnait have grown in new directions, while still anchored in the land, resources and people that make them who they are.

This guidebook was created to provide additional context for each parka in the Patterns of Change exhibit. It explores the relationship between different Inuinnait parka style and the social and cultural environments that led to their creation. For more information about the exhibit, its materials, and the various workshops involved in their creation, please see our website at [www.patternsofchange.ca](http://www.patternsofchange.ca).



# INTRODUCTION

## A HISTORY OF INUIT PARKAS IN THE CANADIAN ARCTIC

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the parkas worn by Inuit and their ancestors were made entirely from resources harvested from the land: sewing needles of pounded copper and sharpened bone, thread of caribou sinew, carefully scraped and dried skins of caribou and seal. A person's clothing tied them into an ongoing relationship with the animals and natural resources on the land that surrounded them.

Archaeological evidence shows that humans first occupied the Canadian Arctic around 4500 years ago, traveling from Alaska to occupy areas made newly inhabitable because of retreating glaciers. These first people are referred to by Inuit as Sivullirmiut (the first inhabitants), and by archaeologists as the Paleo-Eskimos. This populating of the Canadian Arctic happened through small group migrations over hundreds and hundreds of years.

Survival in any new environment requires adaptation, and this was no doubt the case with people's clothing. It is difficult to know what the Arctic's first parkas looked like and how they changed over time, but they would have undoubtedly been acclimatized to the extreme cold and sparse resources of the newly-inhabited region. The earliest evidence of clothing can be found in the sewing tools left behind by these groups. Sivullirmiut used a variety of small tools to create their clothing, including bone needles and awls. The majority of tools were made from chipped stone. These included microblades: long, thin and razor sharp blades of stone inserted into wooden handles for a number of clothing-related tasks such as butchering and skinning animals, and cutting pattern pieces for sewing. A scraping tool known as an endblade—about as small as a thumbnail—was used to remove the fat and skin from hides being prepared for parkas. The use of these miniature, but well crafted, tools have earned Sivullirmiut the title of the 'Arctic Small Tool Tradition' among archaeologists.



Above: Microblades would have been inserted into handles to scrape skins, cut patterns and perform other sewing related tasks.  
Photo by Tim Rast.

A Tuniit carving discovered on Devon Island showing a person wearing a waist length parka with a high collar. McGhee/CMC RbJr-I:198c

Around 2500 years ago, a more uniform culture began to spread across the Arctic. This group is known by Inuit as Tuniit, or as the Dorset people by archaeologists. While this group is believed to have evolved from earlier Arctic cultures, they were unique in that they lacked many of the technologies those cultures used, including bows and arrows, the kayak, and dog sledding. Tuniit also lost the ability to drill circular holes, which was a technique that both earlier and later cultures in the Arctic relied upon enormously. Tuniit continued to tailor their clothing using recognizable sewing technologies, but there were small differences—such as the hole in the head of their bone needles being created as a straight up-and-down slit rather than a drilled circle. There are few explanations for these differences in Dorset technology and lifestyle, and they appear to have been influenced by religion and symbolism.

Tuniit were excellent artists and left behind many carvings of ivory, bone and wood that give us some insight into their lives, including their clothing. One Dorset carving from Devon Island shows a man wearing a short outer parka with a high collar rather than a hood. Based on these figurative artworks by Tuniit, it is guessed that three types of parkas existed (Rast 2013):

- 1) a short outer parka which ends at the waist,
- 2) an inner parka which hangs slightly lower on the hips, and
- 3) a long outer parka which ends at the lower thigh or knee level.

Inuit oral traditions about the Tuniit also shed light on the types of clothing they might have worn. The anthropologist Franz Boaz (1888:635) recorded an Inuit story about Tuniit that was provided to him in the 1880s:

“The principal part of their [Dorset] winter dress was a long and wide coat of deerskins, similar to the jumper of the Eskimo, but reaching down to the knees and trimmed with leather straps. When sealing in winter they wore this garment, the lower edge of which was fastened on the snow



“It was [the Tuniit] who made our country inhabitable, who discovered where the caribou crossed the water and made hunting grounds there, found the fish in the rivers and built salmon dams, built fences here and there and forced the caribou to follow certain paths. They were strong but timid and were easily put to flight and it was seldom heard that they killed others.”

-Unknown Nattilingmiut man recorded in Mathiassen 1927:187



by means of pegs. Under the jacket they carried a small lamp, called tumiujang (literally, resembling a footprint) or quming over which they melted snow in a small pot. Some Eskimo say that they opened the seals as soon as they were caught and cooked some meat over these lamps. When the seal blew in the hole they whispered, "Kapatipara" (I shall stab it) and, when they had hit it "Igdluiliq." Frequently they forgot about the lamp and in throwing the harpoon upset it and burned their skin."

Around 1250 A.D., a new group migrated into the Canadian Arctic from their ancestral home in Alaska. This group, known by archaeologists as the Thule culture, are the direct ancestors of all Inuit. The Thule initially lived in a similar way to their Alaskan ancestors, who specialized in maritime economy and the hunting of whales. They were gradually forced to adjust their lifestyles to accommodate the realities of their new environment. Unlike Alaska, their new home was lacking in driftwood, requiring them to replace open fireplaces with interior kitchens using qulliit (soapstone lamps) that used seal and caribou fat as fuel. Whalebone replaced driftwood as the building material of choice. During winters, Thule began to construct and live in igluit (snow houses), and settlement sizes became smaller to accommodate the frequent travel required to harvest a wider range of animals than they had previously exploited in Alaska.

This flexibility allowed them to expand into more diverse and marginal areas of the Canadian Arctic. Variations in the culture's tools, housing and culture began to appear as different groups of Thule adapted to specific environments and the animals populations that lived there. This transition, which occurred during what is referred to as the Little Ice Age (1400-1600 AD), signals the beginning of regional identities among Inuit, and by the 18th and 19th centuries, most Inuit groups had abandoned the uniform cultural traits of their early Thule ancestors. The hunting of bowhead whales and most other open water marine mammals had almost ceased to exist. Without whaling, Inuit were unable to accumulate large supplies of food for the winter, and spent the cold seasons hunting seals from the sea ice.

The first images of Inuit clothing appear with the arrival of Europeans to the Arctic. While both Tuniit and Inuit most likely encountered Norse at various points throughout their occupation of Greenland and the Labrador/Newfoundland region (c. 1000-1400 AD), the first extensively documented encounter was during the expedition of Sir Martin Frobisher in 1576 to locate the Northwest Passage. Landing on Baffin Island, Frobisher and his crew traded with local Inuit for several days before falling into disagreement with the group. Believing Inuit to have



kidnapped several sailors who went missing from his ship, Frobisher waged battle with the group and ultimately took three Inuit hostage before sailing home to England. The Inuit captives, whose names remain unknown, were to only survive for a single year in England before falling ill and dying. This was sufficient time to have their portraits created by multiple British artists. While these paintings give some ideas as to the clothing they wore, it remains difficult to tell whether or not the clothing's detail is accurately depicted or a product of the artistic imagination. As pointed out by clothing specialist Jill Oakes, the potential for inaccuracy remained strong over the next centuries of European paintings of Inuit. "Some illustrations" she notes (1988:27), "were made by artists who had never seen an Inuk. Others provided models with skin clothing which may have inaccurately depicted a specific family's clothing style."

## IDENTITY AND ARCTIC CLOTHING



Over the last five hundred years, Inuit clothing has been the product of Inuit culture, but has also helped that culture express itself both within and outside Inuit society. The high visibility of Inuit parkas makes them an ideal form of communicating messages about the people who wear them. One of the ways it does this is through defining regional identity. Every regional group of Inuit has their own distinct fashion of clothing. These fashions reflect specific details about the environment, resources and beliefs particular to each group. While many styles have been passed down through generations, they also continue to change and evolve, helping Inuit to express new directions and dynamics in their culture and identity.

Left: and opposite page: Portrait of Arnaq and Nutaaq, by John White, c. 1585. British Museum. Some scholars theorize that John White took part as expedition artist in Martin Frobisher's explorations of the Canadian Arctic from 1576 to 1578.

Another way that Inuit clothing communicates identity is through its distinction of gender. The clothing of men and women were traditionally created to facilitate the respective jobs associated with each gender. Men and women traditionally have defined social and family roles in Inuit culture; men being responsible for hunting animals and providing food for their families, and women overseeing the raising children, sewing, and domestic duties. These responsibilities were seen as a way to create economic balance in families, ensuring partnerships that complemented one another and allowed for the family group to be fully self-sufficient. Despite the social and economic importance of these gender roles, they were not fixed in stone. Both men and women could assume each other's duties if they wanted to or if required by necessity.

Clothing also helped to distinguish the life stages of men and women. Until the age of about 4 or 5, both girls and boys existed outside of traditional gender roles in their community, and were often dressed the same. Once a child gained 'ihuma,' or consciousness of the world, they would be gently introduced into the gender identities that awaited them through games, training, and specific clothing. Young boys would be taught hunting skills, and often provided with a smaller version of a hunter's parka and weapons. Young girls would be encouraged to spend more time with the female members of their family, becoming familiarized with the domestic skills that would be expected of them later in life. A girl would practice the art of mothering by packing a doll in her parka, graduating to a younger sibling once she learned how to support it. Sewing and other domestic tasks were learned in a similar way, with newly gained sewing skills being practiced through the manufacture of doll clothing made from scraps of hide.



An Inuinnait girl in an outer parka with caribou teeth amulets attached to the front, Coronation Gulf, 1916. (Stefansson/CMC 20282).

Around puberty, girls and boys were often dressed in smaller versions of adult parka, with ornaments attached that indicated their readiness and availability for marriage. From this point onwards, an individual would be fully defined by their outfit. Women's clothing would demonstrate her childbearing status, with mothers often wearing an amauti, a parka with a pouch in the back to carry her small child. Men's clothing would often be ornamented in decorative animal parts that spoke to their success as a hunter. The quality, skill, and overall beauty of a person's parka spoke to their success in life.



Higilak sewing while wearing a parka with caribou teeth amulets, Bernard Harbour, 1915 (Wilkins/CMC 51570).

In addition to expressing the social position of their wearers, parkas also help the worldview and spiritual beliefs of their wearer take shape. In past times, parkas were often connected to the world of spirits through the use of amulets. An amulet is an object that is worn because it gives its owner certain new abilities or improves an ability that the individual already has. While many forms of amulets are used, their power is usually derived from the site of their placement on a parka, and from the spirits associated with the materials from which they are made. A bond is created between an amulet's resident spirits and its wearer, channeling certain characteristics and material qualities between them. Amulets can embody the spirits of many different materials, including ancestors, animals or other items from the natural world. A man seeking to better his hunting, for example, might don an amulet made from animals known for their predatory skills. A woman wishing specific qualities upon her unborn child might wear an amulet belt of materials representing desirable physical characteristics (for example, a rabbit's head for a flat and handsome nose, or an ermine skin for fleet-footedness). It is said that for an Inuinnait girl to become a good seamstress, the first piece of her sewing "must be fastened to the sleeve of the person who first took her when she was born" (Rasmussen 1932:48).

As amulets had very specific functions and were only useful in particular situations, most Inuit owned more than one of them. These multiple amulets were sewn into clothing or worn on a belt or sash so their wearer could remain under their influence and protection at all times.

In addition to amulets, the practice of sewing parkas was often accompanied by many taboos to ensure the presence of good luck and spirits. While each Inuinnait group had their own taboos designating where and how sewing could take place, they often revolved around keeping land and sea animals and environments separated from one another. It was often forbidden, for example, to sew new caribou skins while living on the ice during the dark days of winter (Jenness 1922:184).

“When I was a child I was given two amulets by my mother, which I wore on the sleeve of my parka. One was a sandpiper feather, which would give me the ability to sew well; the other was a rippled sea shell so that I could excel in crimping boot soles. A third amulet, a piece of sinew thread, was given to me by a skillful seamstress so I would also become a skillful seamstress.”

—Elsie Nilgak, in July Hall 1994:59



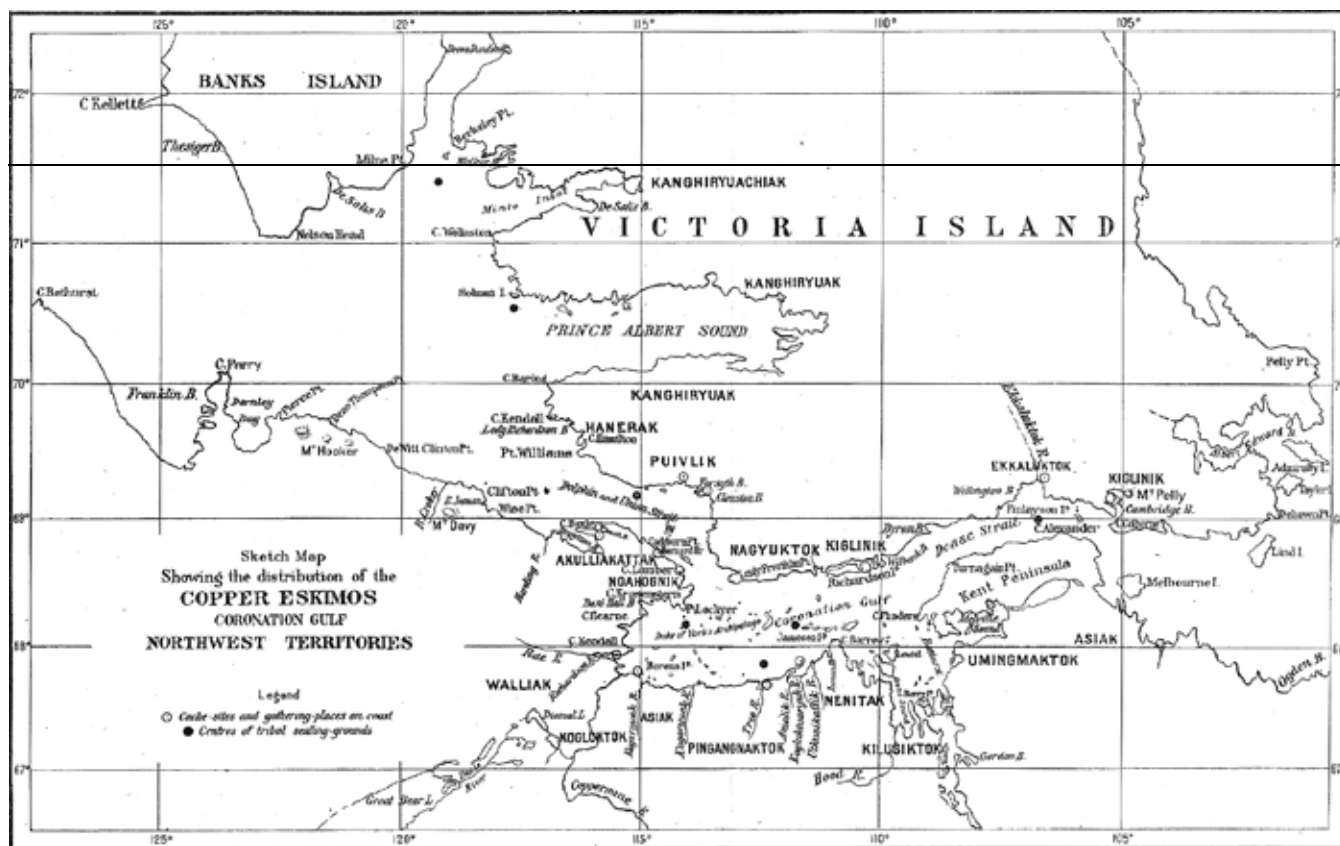
Amulets of bear teeth were often attached to a man’s parka for success in hunting. These also doubled as ornaments to illustrate the status and superior hunting abilities of men. Photo credit: Canadian Museum of History, object IV-D-1294 a-m.



Inuinnait couple Ipkukhuak and Higilak with weasel skin amulets on their parkas, taken at Bernard Harbour, 1916. (CMH/Wilkins/ 36913).

## INTRODUCING INUINNAIT

The remainder of this book will look at the role that parkas have played in the lives of Inuinnaït. Inuinnaït (singular, Inuinnaq ) means 'the people' in the Inuinnaqtun language, and refers to a regional group of Inuit whose homeland lies in the Central Canadian Arctic. When first encountered by Europeans, this group became known as the 'Copper Inuit' due to their use of naturally sourced copper for tool making. Historically, the term 'Inuinnaït' was never used by this group to reference to a collective, regional identity. Much like the word 'Inuit' in Inuktitut speaking groups to the East, 'Inuinnaït' was only a broad reference to being a 'real' human; a category distinguished from the range of other creatures they came into contact with: 'uumajuit' (animals), 'tuurngait' and 'ijiqqat' (the spirits), 'allait' and 'itqilgit' (more southerly indigenous groups), and 'qallunaat' (Europeans or white people). Inuinnaït traditionally referred to themselves according to their family group, taking their specific names from the geography



Above: A map showing the distribution of Inuinnaït groups throughout their territory surrounding Victoria Island (from Jenness 1922).



A map of the Inuinait region showing contemporary settlements. While Ulukhaktok, Kugluktuk and Cambridge Bay are the primary communities of residence for Inuinait, several Inuinait families from the Perry River area moved to Gjoa Haven when the outpost closed in the late 1960s. Photo credit Bata Shoe Museum (with alterations to place names and boundary lines made by PI/KHS).

and environment of the lands in which they traveled, hunted and gathered. Occasionally, Inuinait would be referred to as Kitlinermiut by Inuit to the east and west, Kitlineq being the word for 'boundary,' and was used in reference to Victoria Island. Inuinait originally occupied Victoria Island and the adjacent mainland areas and small islands that surrounded it. The group is also recorded to have traveled to Banks Island as part of their seasonal hunting rounds, with travel there increasing after the discovery of the shipwrecked H.M.S. Investigator in 1852, from which they salvaged large quantities of wood and iron.

When first documented in the early 20th century, the population of Inuinait was estimated to be roughly 800 people divided across 16 to 20 family-based groupings. The extent of their territory is described as follows (Bennett and Rowley 2004:409):

"The lands of the Inuinait stretched from Victoria Strait, where their neighbours were the Qikiqtarmiut; southwest to Contwoyto Lake; west towards Imariauaq (Great Bear Lake), territory of the Dene; and northwest to Banks Island, land of the Awagmiut (Mackenzie Delta Inuit). Inuinait called themselves by the names

of their more than sixteen summer hunting and fishing grounds: Kangirjuarmiut, Ahungaahungarmiut, Umingmaktuarmiut, and so on. These groups were closely related, often mixed with each other, and shared each other's lands. While most Inuinait spent the winter and early spring in coastal sealing camps, a small number spent the entire year inland south of Bathurst Inlet and in the Contwoyto Lake area."

Over the course of the last century, for reasons this book will explore, most Inuinait moved from land-based living into the settlement communities of Kugluktuk, Ulukhaktok, Cambridge Bay and Gjoa Haven. Inuinait continue to engage with their surrounding landscape through hunting, travelling and the seasonal use of cabins and outpost camps. Most importantly, they continue to identify with the geographic regions their families originally inhabited. While centuries worth of knowledge, stories, and travel tying Inuinait to their home territory are more difficult to keep alive alongside the competing demands of 9 to 5 jobs and urban living, Inuinait culture continues to be anchored in the land.



## THE 1880s

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the basic design of Inuinnait parkas is believed to have been largely uniform across their territory. Caribou skin was always the preferred material, with sealskin parkas also being used (albeit less often) for their waterproof qualities. Two layers of parka were worn during the winter months; the inner layer with the hair to the inside and the outer layer with the hair to the outside. Within the cultural pattern of the parkas stayed the same, each seamstress included decorative flourishes that clearly identified the parka as her own.

Despite their reliance on locally-sourced materials to create their parkas, Inuinnait were very active in their contact and trade with one another, and with Inuvialuit and Inuit neighbours to either side of their territory. Each regional group of Inuinnait had their own specialty of resources in which to trade. Kangirjuarmiut possessed a rich source of native copper and exported raw copper and completed copper snow knives. Puiplirmiut collected driftwood on the mainland, and other groups harvested soapstone, which they carved into lamps. This high level of trade

An illustration of an unknown Inuinnait family created by Edward Adams, assistant surgeon on the *Enterprise*, a British ship that wintered on Victoria Island in 1851. This is the earliest known visual recording of Inuinnait parkas. Photo from the Scott Polar Research Institute archives.



undoubtedly helped Inuinnait to form solid social relationships between different family groups, unifying their fashion and inspiring a shared visual vocabulary for their parkas.

Due to Inuinnait culture's reliance on oral rather than graphic forms of communication, no visual examples of early parkas were documented in their culture. The earliest glimpse we have of Inuinnait parka styles comes from the illustrations drawn by explorers. Inuinnait were among the last Inuit groups to be contacted and impacted by the outside world. While Europeans travelled through the Inuinnait region from the 1771 onwards, their interactions with Inuinnait were few, and often brief, doing little to change the course of their culture.

Between 1913-18, the first major anthropological study on Inuinnait lifestyle, objects and clothing was conducted by Diamond Jenness as part of the Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913-18). Jenness's writing provided a window into a culture that would rapidly change in subsequent years. In a report published several years later, Jenness described the Inuinnait clothing he wore, documented and collected during his trip, estimating that it took at least seven caribou hides to provide one Inuinnait hunter with a complete set of travel clothing.

"In winter [an Inuinnait hunter's] costume comprised of two frocks or coats (atigi) worn one inside the other, the fur of the outer on the outside, and the fur of the inner against his body; an overcoat (qulitaq), whenever the weather demanded it; two pairs of pants



An illustration of a man's parka style documented by Diamond Jenness in 1914. (Jenness 1946:14)





(qaalik), worn in the same way as the coats; two pairs of stockings worn similarly, and reaching to just below the knees (inner pair alektik, outer mitqulik), a pair of caribou fur slippers (ilupeqquk) between the stockings; and low sealskin shoes (tuktukaluk) as a final covering for the feet. A pair of mittens completed the outfit... Fashion decreed that between the shoulder blades [of a man's outer coat] should glisten a spot of white fur, preferably the tip of the caribou's tail...A second very common fashion was to adorn the hood with the two upstanding ears of the caribou...It was customary to peak the hood of the coat, and this peaking, with the two upstanding ears and the long tail trailing between the legs, gave a stooping Eskimo so close a likeness to a caribou that it sometimes deceived his dogs hauling on the sled behind him and purred them on to greater effort."

-Diamond Jenness 1946:12

Each Inuit would typically have two pairs of clothing; one for daily work and wear, and the other for special occasions such as drum dancing ceremonies and the visiting of neighbouring camps. Formal clothing was often sewn from light, summer caribou skins with a very high

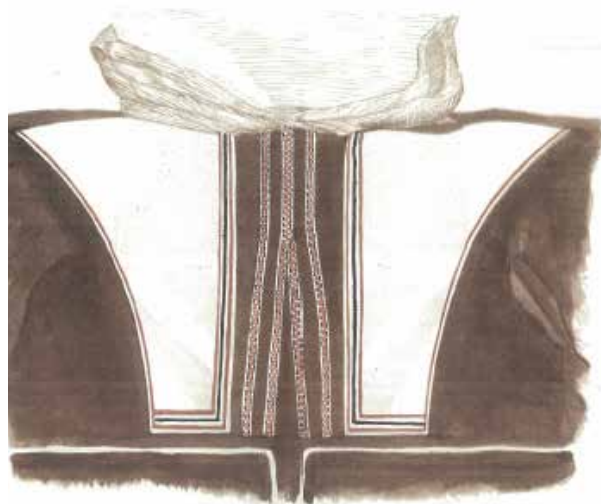


Above: An Inuit man and woman assembling their winter outfits. Illustration credit: Atelier Frédéric Back inc.

Below: Ipkukhuak and his wife, Higilaq, in their fancy dance clothing at Bernard Harbour, 1916. CMH/ Wilkins/ 36913.



waistline, which made it unsuitable for long term travel outdoors. These highly ornate parkas were richly decorated, designed largely as 'status wear' to show off the respective skills of seamstresses and hunters. Everyday work and travel parkas were far less formal, consisting of an outer coat made from heavy, largely undecorated, winter caribou skins that extended as far as the knees. Diamond Jenness notes that Inuinnait from the eastern Coronation Gulf often wore a single coat for every occasion, which was sufficiently decorated for fancy occasions but went well below the waistline so as to be functional while travelling (1946:17). During the wet spring months, a plain coat made from sealskins would be worn for its waterproof qualities.



Red and white detailing on the manohinik (breast plates) of a woman's fancy parka (Jenness 1946: 36).



A waterproof sealskin raincoat drawn by Diamond Jenness (1946:18)

Early Inuinnait parkas were not only functional outfits, but had a high degree of symbolism woven into their design. This was especially the case with the ornate parkas created for drum dancing. The pukiq, or fur from the caribou's underbelly, was of central importance to its design, and was used as trim throughout the parka. The bright white colour of the fur stood out in decorative contrast to the rest of the brown caribou fur and additionally symbolized the gift of the caribou and its spiritual protection for the wearer. White fur was also used to create two breast panels on the front of parkas- known as manohinik- that clearly identified its wearer as belonging to the Inuinnait culture. These panels are believed to represent the markings on the heads of the Canadian goose and loon (Mary Kaniak 2019). Tassles of white fur would often be hung from the shoulders, arms, back, and hood of the parka to create extra ornamentation.

In addition to their white decorations, fancy parkas often included strips of skin dyed red with a paint called 'ivitaq,' created from powdered iron oxide stone mixed with seal fat. Thin red strips were sewn into bands with other de-haired skin strips of white and black to edge the manohinik and outer areas of the parka for decoration and to reinforce them against curling. Amulets were also often used to decorate parkas to bring their wearers new skills and qualities. Ermine skins were commonly stitched to the shoulders and backs of drum dancing outfits to enhance the dancer's fleetness of foot, and accentuate their movements.

## MEN AND WOMEN'S PARKA STYLES

The parkas of Inuinnait men and women were designed in different styles to reflect their status and roles within the community. As soon as a child learned to stand, it was given its first set of clothing, usually a one piece suit that would be worn by both girls and boys. Among the Umingmaktormiut (Inuinnait of the northern Bathurst Inlet area), this first garment is never thrown away, as it is believed that the life and vigour of the child are associated with this first covering (Rasmussen 1932:42). At around 5 or 6, children would be provided with miniature versions of an adult parka, often lacking the long back tail and gender specific traits. At adolescence, they would graduate into the full adult parka of their peers.



Left: Minigurin and her child Itaiyuk, 1916 (Cox/CMC 39726).



Right: A child's one-piece caribou suit (Jenness 1946:44).

A man's outer parka was created to symbolize his role as a hunter, and the caribou that he lived to hunt. These parkas would typically have a tight, pointed hood, a shorted waist-line and sleeves, and a long, straight back tail extending to below the knees. Fringes of caribou skin would often adorn the arms and back of the parka, the number and spacing speaking to the specific regional identity of its wearer. The strategic placement of caribou ears, caribou tails and white stomach fur in the parkas design, further helped the hunter become symbolically closer to his prey. The decorative front panels that adorned the chest of a man's parka were most often rounded.

While the overall design of an Inuinnaq woman's parka was quite similar to a man's—with a short waist and sleeves, elongated tail, and decorative front breast panels—specific details in its design spoke to the woman's expected role as a mother and wife. The back of the parka was extended so that children could be carried there for the first several years of their life. The shoulders on women's parkas were pointed, allowing ample space to move the baby around for breastfeeding. There are also stories that the squared shoulders were used by men in tug of war competitions when arguing over the woman's affections (a competition called *aqhautijuuk*, or *nuhuttaqtuuk*). As described by Metayer (1973), "each man took hold of the woman's clothing at opposite shoulders and tried to pull her towards him. She was supposed to remain neutral, but sometimes favoured one of them." This was in her interest, as the man who managed to pull her to his side kept her." Other distinguishing features of a woman's parka included its long elongated hood, which seems to have been solely for fashion rather than practical purposes, and a triangular tailpiece of brown and white striped fur on the bottom center of their parka's front.



Kila Arnauyuk and Jennie Kanneyuk, Dolphin and Union Strait, 1916 (Wilkins/CMC 51249).

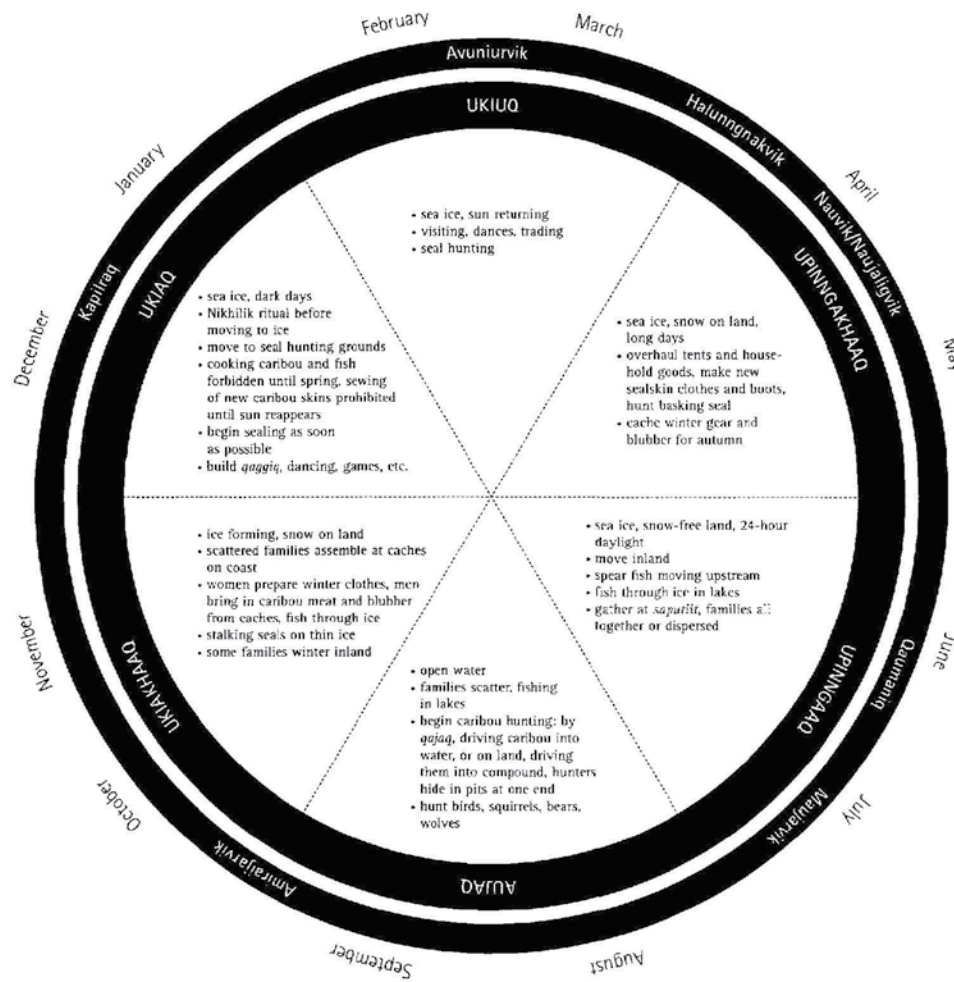
Note the elongated hood, wide shoulders and front triangular tails that defined the Inuinnaq woman's parka.

## PARKAS FROM THE LAND

The earliest Inuinnait parkas were the product of a lifestyle deeply entrenched in the land. The materials used to create the parkas were harvested from the earth as part of the Inuinnait's seasonal rounds. The parkas' fashions communicated and celebrated the skills and roles of men and women as hunters and wives. The way of life that produced these parkas is summarized in the following excerpt (Stern 2004):

"Before the time of trading posts, Inuit in the Central Arctic lived entirely on their own. Food, clothing, implements and tools, all had to be procured or made by themselves. There was a great reliance on cooperation and helping others in need, by necessity. Even today the tradition of helping is carried on. Winter was often the hardest time of the year. About 5-6 months of the year was spent living on the sea ice. In large igloo camps of 100-150 people, each day the men would go out to try their best at breathing-hole seal hunting with harpoons. Often people went hungry, but no one starved while another ate. Women almost always remained in camp having their hands full with the numerous domestic chores, especially child rearing and sewing. There was a rich tradition of drum dancing and story telling. When times were good and there was lots of food, the big winter villages could be some of the happiest time of the year.

The warmer months of Spring and Summer were spent very differently. In May, the 24 hour sun spelled the end to living on the sea ice in igloos. As the snow and ice melted, winter gear would be cached on land and people broke up into smaller groups of a few families or less, and spread out to the various places on land that were good for catching char and caribou, ducks and geese, picking berries, etc. Camps were much smaller and moved more often. Surplus fish and meat was cached under rock piles for future use, in the hope that animals like bears, wolves, wolverines and foxes would not dig them out. In the Autumn, these caches would be revisited and used up. Then people would get ready sewing new clothes, making/repairing hunting equipment and tools at 'iniqhagviit', 'finishing places', to move out onto the sea ice, to continue the seasonal cycle of living."



Above: The seasonal round of Inuinait. From Bennett and Rowley 2004.

“One of the things I noticed is that people were always traveling within our area. They did not stay in one spot. They would travel from one spot to another and I remember people would be going to other lakes...to fish. So people were travelling around all the time. They did not stay in one spot.”

- Marjorie Taptoona, 2001



## THE 1930s

By the 1930s, a new parka fashion had swept across the Inuinnait territory. It began with the Klengenberg family, who moved into the Inuinnait region in 1916 to open a trading post in the area near the current settlement of Kugluktuk. Christian Klengenberg originally hailed from Denmark, and his wife Kenmek was an Inupiaq from Alaska. Finding the short sleeved and short waisted parkas of the Inuinnait too cold, Kenmek continued to sew the longer parkas of her Alaskan homeland for herself and her family, and the style gradually took hold. The woman's version of the Inupiat parka consisted of a long coat of caribou fur, which, unlike the Inuinnait version, adequately covered the body. The parka style used a colourful band of geometric designs called Delta Trim, which began to be created in the MacKenzie Delta during the 1880s . The parka's bottom and sleeves were typically decorated with wolverine fur, which was previously unworn by Inuinnait, but was quickly adopted into local concepts of prestige and beauty.



The Trader Christian Klengenberg and his family (1916).  
Diamond Jenness/CMC/36912)

As noted by Julie Hall (1994:99), the Inupiat parka style varied for men and women:

“The hemline on the A-line-shaped outer parka reached to the upper thigh on men’s garments and to mid-calf on women’s. A triangular inset of white caribou fur on each side of the neckline, a reference to walrus tusks, was an extension of white fur panels on each side of the hood. A decorative trim of appliquéd sheared brown and white caribou fur adorned the hemline and epaulets.”

Around the same time, another parka style from the West took hold. Called a ‘Mother Hubbard,’ this parka was worn only by women—a plain, waist length fabric shell being the preference of men—and consisted of a knee length outer cotton shell over top of a an inner parka made from duffel fabric. While the Mother Hubbard came to Inuinait via Alaskan and the Mackenzie Delta in the 1920s, it was originally introduced to Alaska by Christian missionaries, and can be traced back to earlier trade between the Hawaiian Islands, China and Alaska. The parka is characterized by a brightly coloured cotton fabric known as calico, also introduced to Hawaii by missionaries, and later adapted for cold weather with a fur-trimmed hood when missions moved to Alaska (Oakes 1988:29).



Above: A map illustrating the locations of fur trading posts opened in the Inuinait homeland. Map by M. Poupart, McGill University 2008.



Upon their arrival to the Coronation Gulf in 1916, the Klengenbergs established a temporary trading post near Cape Kendall to the north of Kugluktuk. This post was moved several times before settling on Rymer Point (Nuvuk), near Read Island on the southwest shore of Victoria Island in 1919.

Other entrepreneurs flowed into the area and both a Northern Traders Ltd. and Hudson's Bay Company post were soon operating in the Coronation Gulf. For the first time, western goods became widely available to Inuinait. Some Inuit would travel a long way from Holman Island, Minto Inlet, Cambridge Bay, and as far east as King William Island to trade for metal knives, guns, ammunition and other valuable items from the Coronation Gulf post.

Above: The first meeting of the Western Inuit and [Inuinait] on Banks Island. The Western Inuit are dressed in skins, while the Copper Eskimos are in duffle and stroud. Egg River, Banks Island, N.W.T., 1932. Mrs. Peter Sydney / Library and Archives Canada / PA-027690

Middle: Two Inuit women, a child and a man wearing traditional parkas from the Kugluktuk region standing in front of a building.c. 1930. Royal Canadian Mounted Police collection / Library and Archives Canada / e006581015

Inuit girls, Cambridge Bay, South of Victoria Island, N.W.T., September, 1928. Burwash / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099700



Initially, only the wealthiest families could afford to purchase enough cotton material to make the longer, Mother Hubbard parka style, and it immediately became a sign of wealth and high standing amongst Inuinnait. Only the best hunters could harvest enough fox furs to buy the fabric needed for the parka's cotton cover, and interior lining of duffel wool.

## PARKAS FROM TRADE MATERIALS

Following the introduction of trading posts during the 1920s, both Inuinnait parkas and ways of life began to change. While still anchored in their land and cultural traditions, Inuinnait were also exposed to materials and ideas from distant sources. As explained in this excerpt (Doug Stern 2004):

“The start of the ‘fur trade era’ was the beginning of large changes in the lives of Inuinnait who lived there. With the introduction of trade goods like firearms, sewing needles, stoves, tents, fishnets, etc. people’s possessions multiplied dramatically. And in return, traders wanted furs. Inuinnait were encouraged to buy traps, set trap lines and trap all winter long. It wasn’t long before the communal igloo communities out on the sea ice gave way to families breaking up into smaller groups to establish more permanent camps around good hunting, trapping and fishing places where people could more easily feed themselves and a dog team, and make long trap lines radiating out from there.

While the Arctic fox used to be a largely ignored animal species, the new value of its fur meant that family migration patterns were often re-arranged specifically to harvest as many foxes as possible. It became easier to procure food. Families became bigger. Dog teams increased in size and number. Inuit had the means to give up the winter sealing camps and become more mobile. In the summer, schooners, some of which were owned by Inuit, would transport families far and wide throughout the Central Arctic. For some it was a ‘Golden Age’ in travel. For most Inuit, spring, summer and autumn subsistence activities continued along more traditional lines but trips to the trading posts and picking up some wage labor, meant life would never be the same again.“



## THE 1950s

The 1950s was an era of great transition for Inuinnait. While Inuinnait had previously used western materials to enhance their culture and improve their quality of life, the balance of their utility began to shift. There was a growing dependence on imported goods, and the need to acquire them began to greatly influence Inuinnait seasonal rounds and settlement.

The parkas of this time indicate a thorough mixture of two worlds. The use of traditionally prepared skins to sew parkas was still common among those who could access caribou as part of their daily lives. While canvas and cloth could not compete with the warmth of caribou skin, they were available options for those without the time or equipment to hunt. As more Inuinnait began to move to the vicinity of trading posts and settlements, the utilitarian fashion of fabric clothing gained appeal. While steel sewing needles, thimbles, and scissors had trickled into Inuinnait culture since the first arrival of explorers (Hall 1994:102), the introduction of the hand-driven sewing machine in the 1920s radically increased the interest for fabric and canvas sewing.

While the Mother Hubbard remained the most popular parka style for Inuinnait women, new and more exotically coloured fabrics continued to adorn their covers. Small accessories of traded goods—usually beads and metal tokens—were often used to further decorate them, the traditional use of amulets being strongly condemned by local missionaries due to perceived ties with shamanism and non-Catholic spirits.

The parka design of Inuinnait men also changed in subtle ways during throughout this period. As described by Jillian Oakes (1988:53):

“In the 1940’s, men’s parka hemlines dropped to just above the knee and were curved up at the sides towards mid-thigh. A similar hemline style was worn by a group of Inuit called Kittagazuit from the Mackenzie Delta. By the 1950’s, men’s parka hemlines and hood styles changed. The front hemline remained just above the knee and dropped to a point below the knee at the back. In addition, men began wearing hoods with rounded rather than peaked crowns. An interesting similarity between the silhouette of a man wearing his parka hood (ruff attached) up and the stalking pose of a wolf was noted by Pruitt (1965). While stalking caribou with his hood up he noted that caribou fled; with the hood down the caribou were approachable!”

The most noticeable shift in men’s parkas was again their use of non-local fabrics. As men became involved in the wage economy, particularly on military projects, their access to imported materials greatly increased and began to replace the skin and fur clothing accessories they had relied on for so long.



Leo Manning, manager at the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post, lists the items exchanged for. Kugluktuk, Nunavut], 1949 Harington/LAC PA-143236

## PARKAS FROM SETTLEMENT LIFE

With a transition into settlements, Inuinnait fashion adjusted to the realities of living in town. The parkas of this time speak to this collision of worlds. As described by Doug Stern (2004):

“The introduction of firearms had disastrous consequences to the caribou and muskox populations. Numbers nose-dived as trapping and the size of dog teams increased. People and dog teams suffered as game animals became more scarce. And after 1929, the Depression in the rest of the world caused a sharp drop in the price of fur [from \$50 in 1929 down to \$8.00 in 1934 and \$3.75 in 1947]. The 1930’s and 1940’s saw the overall Inuit population actually decrease even though surviving families were larger than in the past. It was written about in newspapers, magazines and books down ‘South’ that the Inuit might even become extinct. By the 1950’s it was apparent that something had to be done to help the Inuit. The federal government of Canada decided that towns would be established at some of the old trading post sites. Basic services and education would be provided. The DEW Lines were being built across the Arctic at the same time, and would provide wage labour and mobility to many Inuit families.

Most Inuit still lived out on the land, but some were having hard times. Animal populations were decreasing and there were epidemics of flu and measles since the 1920’s. Inuit were encouraged to move to town where they could get housing, medical care, wage work, and education for their children at the new school. Many families arrived by dog team or schooner in those days.

When the Perry Island trading post, that was run by Stephen Angulalik closed in 1967, families from down that way, including his own, moved into town. His wife Mabel remembered coming to town

“In those old days the reason you really moved up this way was dad couldn’t hardly hunt anymore. Caribou or seal...whatever else. Because we were going hungry. And for that reason my mom and dad both came to Cambridge Bay. Because there was a Hudson’s Bay store here. And the way we bought our food was through getting social assistance...And then they had the DEW line here. My dad started working for them, so it was really good. It helped for food, and whatever you needed. Our dad worked for DEW line for many years. But before they started building houses in this area, my mom and dad they made their own house with all the scraps. Well, he was doing odd jobs like seeing the houses inside, moving crates and stuff like that. Whatever the DEW line guys needed to have things moved...So it was good in those days thinking about the DEW line when my dad was working a lot. And when he came home from DEW line he brought back oranges, apples, chocolates.”

-Annie Pokiak, Cambridge Bay 2009

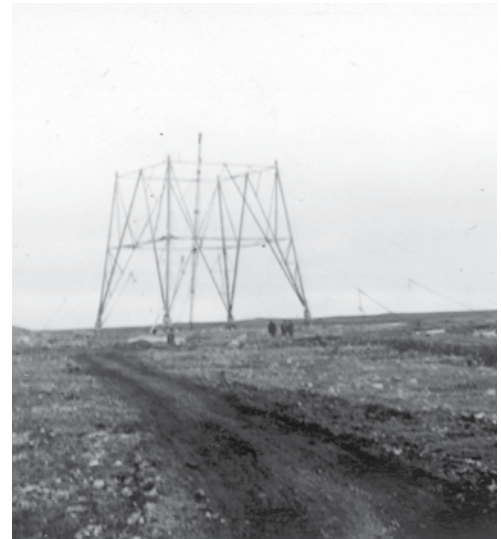
Owen Etegik (left) and Angus Egotak (right) at Cambridge Bay, Nunavut], ca. 1947 J.L. Robinson / Library and Archives Canada / PA-102255



by boat. Lena Evalik, also from Perry Island arrived by airplane to be with her husband, well known schooner pilot Norman Evalik, who was returning from the hospital in Edmonton. A relative brought their dogs to town for them. Evetalegak, Kaosoni, Ohokak, Oakoak, Etibloena, Emingak are just some of the families that came in from the Perry Island area. A lot of Inuit came to town from the Bathurst Inlet area as well."

The history of Cambridge Bay as a settlement (as detailed in KHS 2016) provides a good overview of how Inuinnait were introduced to southern ways of living:

"Until construction of the Loran beacon, [used for radio communication] in 1946, settlement population was made up of only traders, missionaries, police and the 3 or 4 Inuit families employed to help them. But with the spur in the tower construction, Inuit used scrap lumber and plywood at the site and built about 20 cabins, and a community of over 100 Inuit took shape. Soon after there



Construction of the LORAN tower in Cambridge Bay, 1947. Photographer unknown. On file at PI/KHS archives.

was a survival school here and the DEW [Distant Early Warning] Lines started to get built. The DEW Line station at Cambridge Bay was one of a series of 'Cold War' radar sites built from Alaska, across Arctic Canada and Greenland, to watch for an incoming attack from Soviet Russia fighter bombers. In it's heyday over 200 Inuit were hired to work on constructing the DEW Line as over 200,000 tons of supplies arrived to build it. It can not be stated too strongly how such massive undertakings in the 1950's and early 1960's changed people's lives.

Over two hundred Inuit from across the western Arctic found work in this sector in the late 1950s, and many settled in Cambridge Bay with their families. Inuit workers set up their tents and shelters close to the DEW-Line station, and the community started to shift from the east side of the bay to its west arm. The DEW-Line employees worked a wide array of jobs. While many performed janitorial duties and manual labour, others received training as mechanics and carpenters.

A small contingent even traveled to Alberta to learn how to operate heavy equipment. When Cambridge Bay elders remember their time on the DEW-Line, they recall working long days, driving jeeps and trucks for the first time, using new and powerful tools like jackhammers, and eating a great deal of military rations. While many of the men and women who have served on the DEW-Line over the decades remember their jobs fondly, they also highlight the many negative changes the military construction brought.

Inuinait employees and their families quickly adopted elements of the housing, food, clothing, habits and language of their southern colleagues. They used the massive amount of surplus material in the station's dump to construct shacks and modified empty oil drums into rudimentary stoves. Despite their best efforts, these temporary dwellings were cold, uncomfortable and difficult to maintain. While Inuit workers continued to hunt and fish whenever they had a chance, more families started to supplement country food with whatever rations they



A young boy with rifle, 1947. Photographer unknown. On file at PI/KHS archives.

could secure from the DEW-Line. The wage economy began to undermine the traditional social organization of the Inuit, changed family life and parenting norms as men left for weeks at a time, and altered gender roles. The DEW-Line also introduced alcohol into the community, which many Elders remember as its most negative aspect.

“Awhile ago the number of white-men increased and that’s when the changes started to take place. Especially when the DEW-Line sites came, that’s when the lifestyle of the Inuit changed. People started to work for wages. People’s lives changed for the worse when the DEW-Line came in. People began drinking alcohol at the sites. When people began earning money from these sites they started ordering alcohol themselves.”

- Frank Analok, 2000

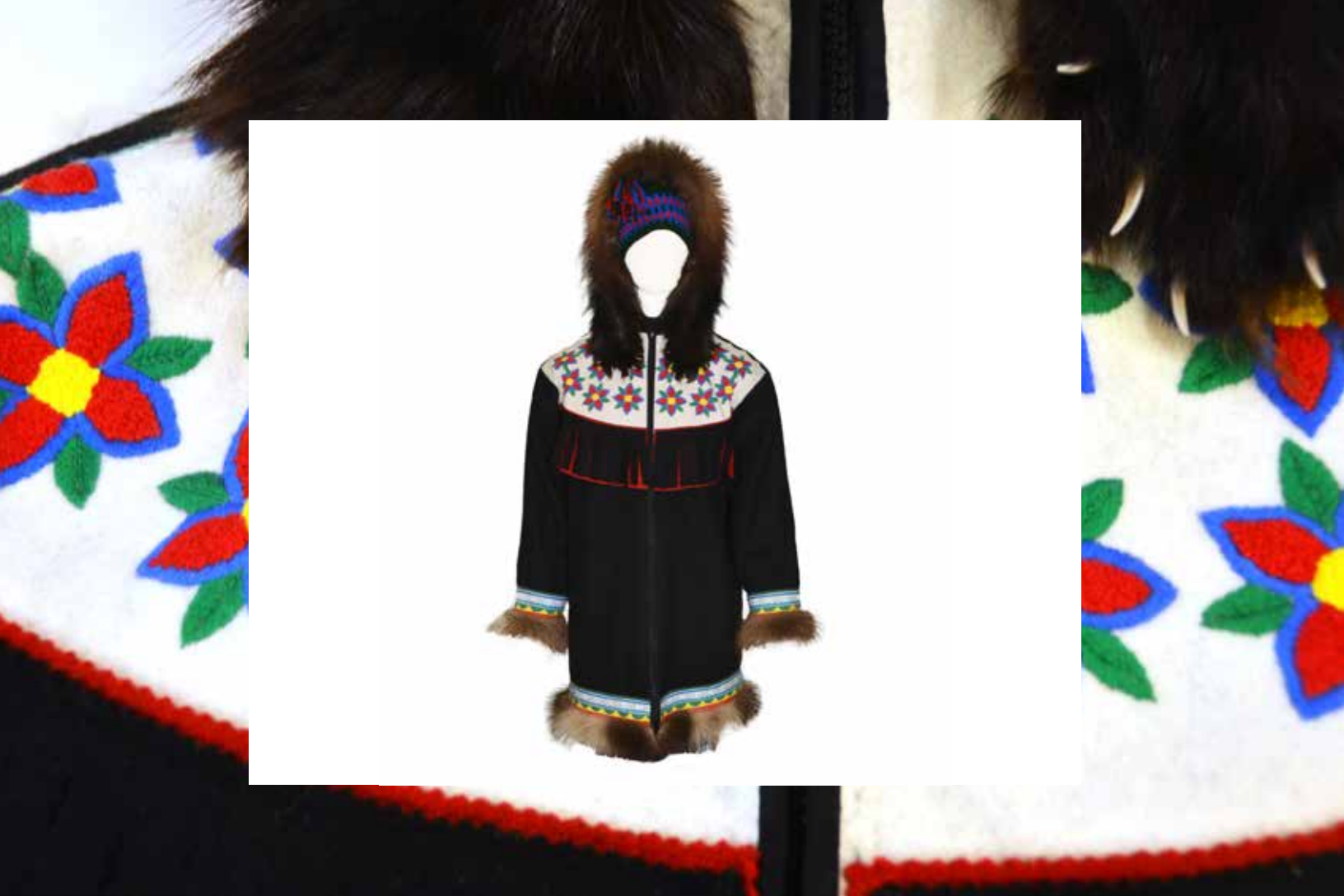


Above: A Model 99 hand crank sewing machine created by the Singer company c.1950. These machines were known as the 'workhorses of the Arctic.' Photo by Brendan Griebel/PIKHS.

Below: Hannak (left) and Bessy Kimirut (right), who is carrying her baby in her amauti 1953, Perry River Library and Archives Canada / e004923624.







## THE 1980s

During the years following the Second World War, Inuinnait realized that they were rapidly becoming strangers in their own land. A generation of children had grown up in residential schooling, during which they were systematically separated from their language and culture. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, over 20 residential schools and federal hostels open in the Western Arctic, with the specific mission to assimilate Inuit youth into mainstream Canadian society. These schools were prone to physical and emotional abuse and many young Inuinnait returned to their communities traumatized. This cycle of trauma continued as they further found themselves caught between worlds: not educated in their culture's traditional language or life skills, yet also rejected by the non-Inuit world their schooling had supposedly prepared them for.

In bringing together Inuit and First Nations youth from across the Western Arctic, residential schooling exposed Inuinnait to a wider community of Indigenous people. Parka styles began to reflect these encounters, incorporating visual cues from multiple traditions. A Gwich'in influenced parka style with embroidered

shoulders, fringes and a flower motif first appeared in the late 1950's and by the 1970s was also present in Cambridge Bay. It is believed the style was passed along to Inuinait during their time with Gwich'in students in Aklavik's residential school. Inuinait parkas also began to incorporate newer forms of Delta braid from Inuvialuit, the trim having evolved from caribou skin patterns to an appliqué of ribbons made from layers of multi-coloured bias tape and seam bindings. The introduction of store-bought parkas also became more popular during this period, with wolverine and wolf fur added to the hood to add protection from the cold and a flair of local culture.

"Today, as ways of travel and communication have become less difficult, the Inuit from Cambridge Bay, Coppermine, and Homan are sharing the same ideas more and more. For example, the Inuit from these communities wear the very same parka for men and the Mother Hubbard for women."

-Peggy and Angela Richardson in Hall 1994:120

"Wolverine tassels continue to demonstrate wealth or prowess as a hunter among Copper Inuit...exceptionally well-made clothing from beautiful material indicates the wearer's special status, pride in her sewing skills, self-confidence, and competence."

-Hall 1994: 121



An example of an ornately embroidered parka in the Gwich'in style in Cambridge Bay, circa 1970s. Credit: McFarlane photo collection. On file at PI/KHS.

## PARKAS FROM A GROWING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

By the early 1970s, the Arctic was the site of numerous development projects for oil, gas and minerals, all of which were being managed by qaplunaat (non-Inuit). In 1971, a group of young Inuit politicians started the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada—which has since become re-named the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)—as a group that could bring together the voices of all Inuit to speak loudly enough to be heard by the south. This organization started the process for the creation of an Inuit homeland through land claims negotiation, a dream that was realized with the formal passing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement in 1993, and the birth of Nunavut as a territory in 1999.

In the 1970s, Cambridge Bay became the scene for some of the first discussions on Inuit land claims. It hosted several important meetings of Inuit leadership, including a pivotal gathering of the territorial government made the community the regional headquarters for the new Kitikmeot Administrative Region in 1981. As the land claims process heated up, local Inuinnait created the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA) to give them a voice in the negotiations and to defend their interests. At the same time, Inuit in the Eastern Arctic were pushing ahead with their plans for the division of the NWT and Iqaluktuutiaq was briefly considered as a potential site for the capital of the proposed new territory. In the 1982



A group of women in Mackenzie Delta style parkas with Delta trim. Cambridge Bay, circa 1970. Credit: McFarlane photo collection. On file at PI/KHS.

territory-wide plebiscite on the proposed division, the people of Cambridge Bay voted against it while 80% of Inuit in the Eastern Arctic voted in favour of it. When the Western Constitutional Forum and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum agreed on a boundary between the NWT and the new territory in 1985, they decided to let the communities of Cambridge Bay, Kugluktuk, Qingaut and Umingmaktuug decide whether they would separate with the Eastern Arctic or stay in the NWT. The residents of all the communities faced a tough choice. Despite their close cultural, economic and political ties with the NWT and the Western Arctic, the lure of joining a new Inuit-led territory was strong and won out.

“ I sensed a great change in settlement living compared to living traditionally from my own home style. Arriving at first here in Cambridge Bay and having to move into a dwelling and too many people and too much alcohol was introduced as we arrived here but having lived in my area that I now long for and moving here it has changed very quickly. It seem like we no longer provide for our own family but having help has changed our way of life. We are given warmth and being idle and it seem we are given every comfort. I long for my old way of life.”

-Mabel Ekvana Angulalik, n.d.



A young boy in a wolverine trimmed parka in Cambridge Bay, circa 1970s. Credit: McFarlane photo collection. On file at PI/KHS.



## THE 2010s

The new millennium has seen the revival and celebration of Inuit traditional culture and clothing. Young people are finding pride in their history, and using their Inuit identity to ground themselves on the global stage. The Inuit parka continues to redefine itself as it borrows from traditions and influences around the world. The use of animal furs continues, but they are most often hides that are chemically tanned, dyed bright colours, and purchased in local stores. Their commercial trajectory from Arctic harvesters, to southern industries, and back to northern markets does little to diminish their connection to ancestry and the land.

The traditional fashions of Inuit, the long tails and manuhinik, are again making a resurgence. The importance and symbolism of these parkas lies in great part in the knowledge behind their creation, passed from generation to generation. Projects to revitalize the art, skills and patterns of Inuit sewing are conducted in most communities, occurring both within the home, and community workshop settings.

The Patterns of Change sewing program, which produced the parkas featured in each of this book's chapters, was managed by Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq's team of Elders in Residence, Mary Avalak, Mabel Etegik and Annie Atighioyak. From 2017 to 2019, these women oversaw the teaching of multiple community workshops designed to give Inuinait parkas representing 30 year increments in the historical trajectory of Inuinait.

The creation of each parka was researched, and meticulously sewn according to the materials, processes, and styles of the particular historical era they represent. Materials were harvested from the land and sewing tools made from locally sourced copper. Historically accurate wool stockings, sewing machines and military issued winter supplies were located.



Above: Elders in Residence Annie Atighioyak, Mary Avalak, and Mabel Etegik use a hand-crank sewing machine to make boots to accompany the 1930s parka.

Left: Exhibit parkas being created through a sewing workshop.

Despite the sewing workshops' focus on historical accuracy, the purpose of this project was ultimately to transfer knowledge surrounding Inuinnait parkas into the future. The Patterns of Change program worked extensively with language experts to document fine grained Inuinnaqtun terminology surrounding Inuinnait clothing and sewing techniques. Sewing workshops encouraged participants to learn from Elders, but also to apply this knowledge towards the creation of parkas for their family and friends. The final Patterns of Change exhibit is accompanied by an interactive community sewing pattern library that encourages public tracing, borrowing, and exchange of sewing patterns.



Left:  
Annie  
Atighioyak  
and Mabel  
Etegik with  
the completed  
Inuinnait Parka  
exhibit at the  
May Hakongak  
Centre in  
Cambridge Bay

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