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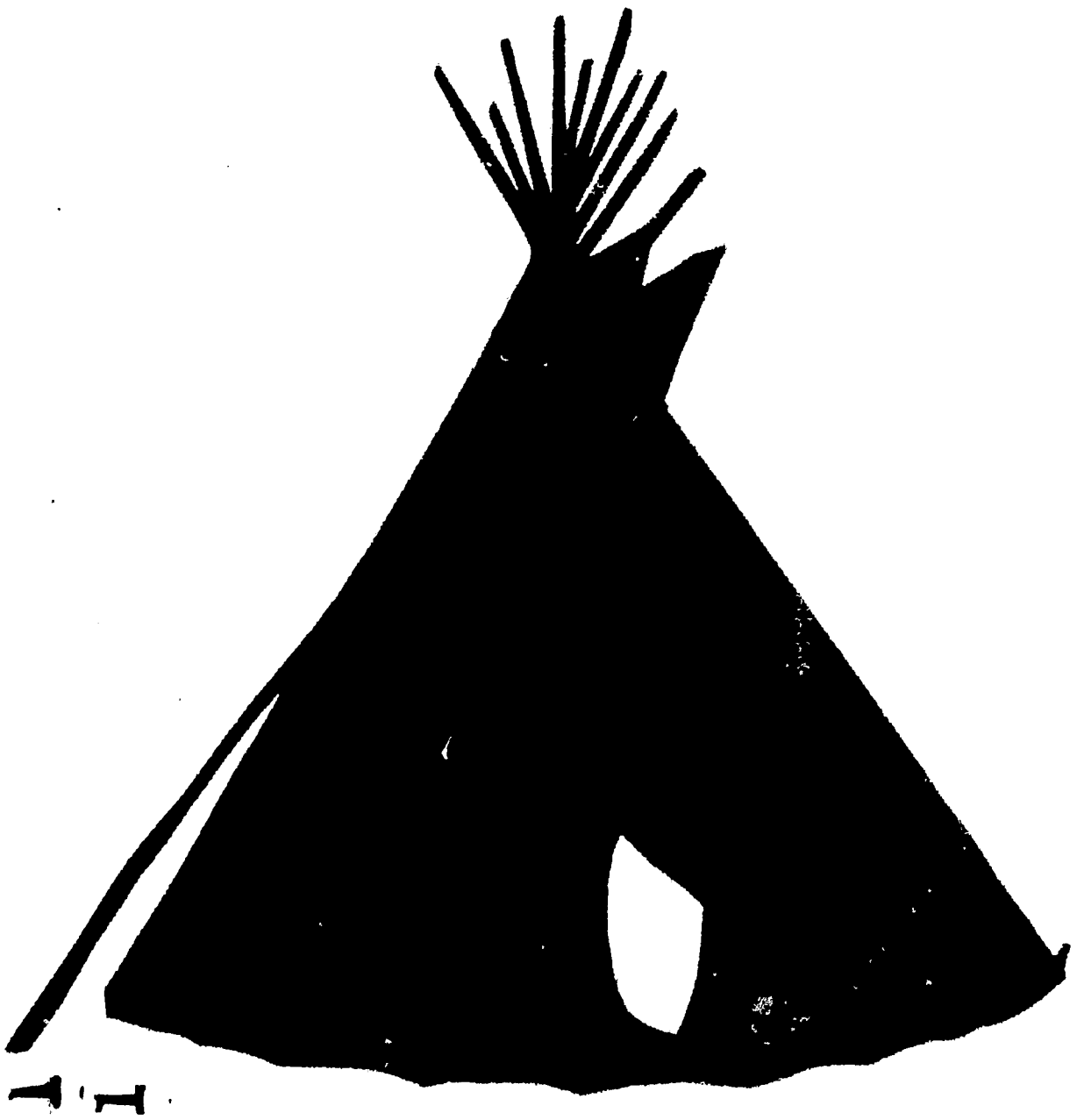
A report is presented of the 7 American Indian tribes (Chipewyan, Yellowknife, Slave, Dogrib, Hare, Nahani, and Kutchin) of the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Described is each tribe's history, foodgathering methods, clothing, work distribution practices, social organization, and religion. A brief history of formal education among the tribes from 1894 to 1965 is given. Present conditions of the 2,352 Indians in the Yukon and 5,503 in the Northwest Territories are also briefly accounted. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (RH)

INDIANS OF YUKON AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

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The Indians who occupied the northern parts of North America in pre-European times spoke in dialects of the Tinneh or Dene language. This is the northern division of the great Athapaskan linguistic family whose southern division is found in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, and includes the Navaho and Apache. Seven Athapaskan dialectal groups lived north of the 60th parallel, namely the Chipewyan, Yellowknife, Slave, Dogrib, Hare, Nahani, and Kutchin*. Today, these groups occupy much the same territories as they did when encountered by the early explorers.

CHIPEWYAN

The Chipewyan were generally found east of Great Slave Lake and Slave River, and composed the most numerous northern Athapaskan group during the first half of the eighteenth century. Their name derives from a Cree word meaning "pointed skins".

They usually lived on the edge of the woods, where some bands moved from one grove of timber to another and others spent the summ s on the barren grounds. They followed the movements of the barren-ground caribou, in summer spearing them in the lakes and rivers, in winter snaring them in pounds or shooting them with bows and arrows. When caribou were scarce they hunted buffalo, musk-oxen, moose smaller game, snared water-fowl, and caught fish with spears, bone hooks and babiche nets. They ate raw meat and fish, or pounded dried meat into pemmican.

The Chipewyan Indians had learned to make hatchets, ice-chisels, awls, knives, and arrow and spear-heads from copper. Birch-bark vessels were used for boiling food, and caribou skin was used for tents, lines, nooses, and nets for fish and beaver.

Clothing consisted of robe, shirt, leggings, moccasins, breechcloth, cap and mittens, all made of caribou skins, a full costume for a man requiring eight or ten skins. The name "pointed skin" is said to have come from the shape of the deerskin shirt, which sometimes had a queue appended to it in the back. Faces were tattooed with three or four parallel bars across each cheek.

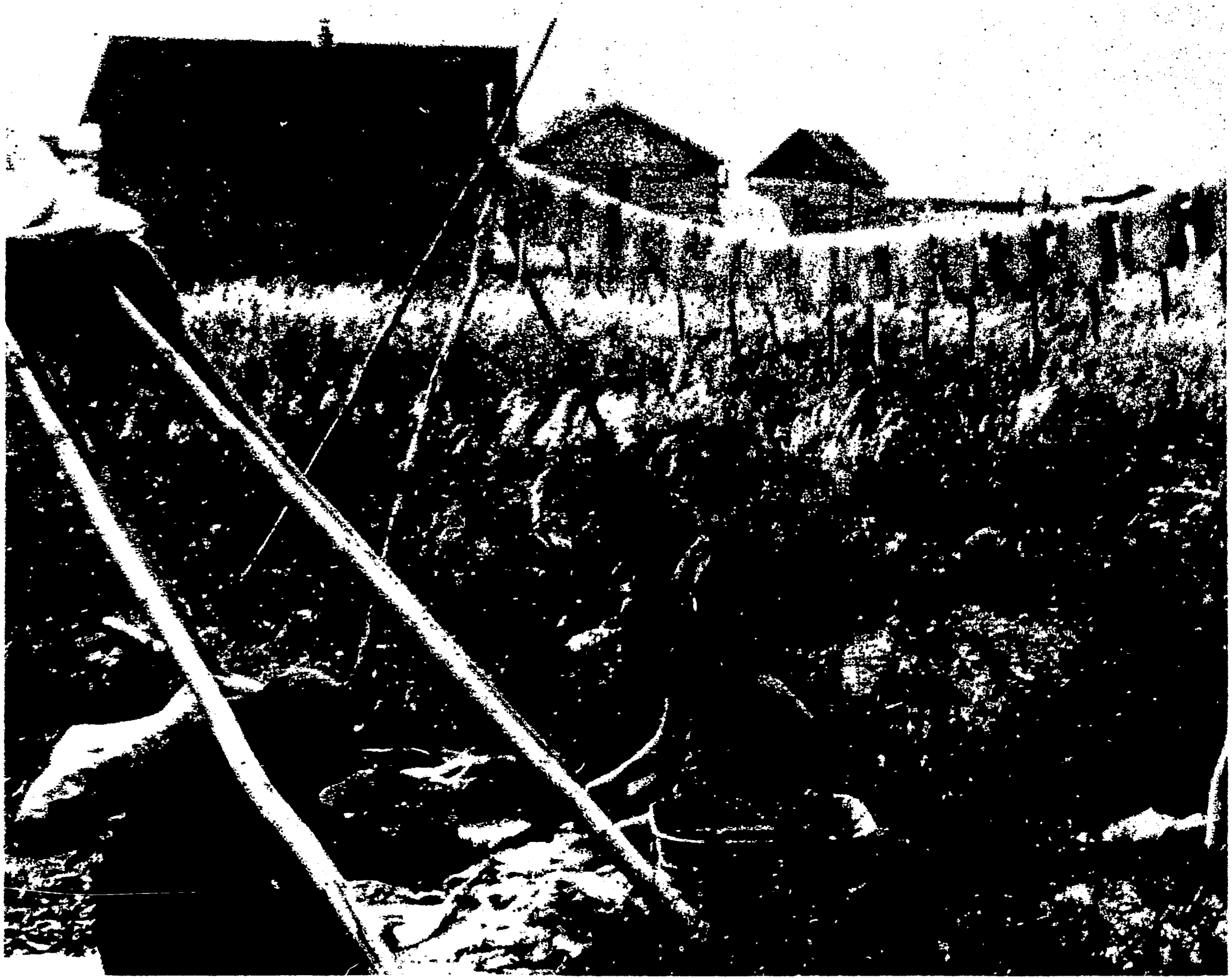
As with other Athapaskan peoples there was little political unity between the numerous Chipewyan bands, large and small, which went their separate ways. Again, leadership within the bands was generally informal and loose.

Girls were separated from their boy companions at the age of eight or nine and married at adolescence, often to older men. They dragged the heavy toboggans in winter, and in summer carried the household goods, food and hides on their backs, freeing the men to hunt. Babies were carried on their mothers' backs as with the Eskimos.

The Chipewyan religion focused on a belief in guardian spirits. Success in hunting was thought to depend on communications from a supernatural world in the form of dreams and visions. Illness and death were attributed to witchcraft and medicine-men claimed the power to cure or cause disease with the aid of familiar spirits. The souls of the dead were thought to travel in a stone boat along a river to a beautiful island abounding in game. The good reached the island safely; the evil sank and struggled in the water forever.

Artistic expression was found in wood drawings and in decorative work with porcupine quills and moose hair.

* includes the Loucheux in the northern Yukon and Mackenzie delta.



Drying Pelts

Photo – Indian Affairs Branch

YELLOWKNIFE

The hunting grounds of the Yellowknife were northeast of Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes. In dialect, appearance and customs they closely resembled their near neighbours the Chipewyan.

Like the Chipewyan they lived on the edge of the woods in skin-covered tipis, hunting caribou and and musk-oxen on the barren grounds. Their name appears to have been related to their use of copper implements.

SLAVE

The name "Slave" was applied to these Indians because of their reputedly peaceable nature, although warfare was not totally absent from their culture. They inhabited the territories surrounding Athabaska Lake, Slave River and the western half of Great Slave Lake during the early eighteenth century. When the Cree invaded their country they retreated down the Mackenzie River and occupied the land beyond both its banks from Great Slave Lake to Fort Norman.

The Slave lived in the forests and along the river banks, hunting woodland caribou and moose. These they snared with the help of dogs or ran down in deep snow with the aid of snowshoes. In the autumn they trapped the beaver in their ponds and in winter broke down their houses and killed them with spears and clubs. Nearly half their diet was fish which they caught in nets of twisted willow bark or with lines of the same material. Hooks were made of wood, bone, antler or birds' claws.

In summer the Slave lived in conical-shaped lodges covered with brush or spruce bark. The lodges were usually pitched together in two-family units which faced in opposite directions and had a common fireplace in the middle. For winter they had low, oblong cabins of poles, the walls chinked with moss and the roofs of spruce boughs. This type of winter dwelling was common to many other as the Athapaskan groups.

Beaver-tooth knife blades were used to whittle wood or bone and stone implements with wooden handles were used to cut down trees. Clubs, spear-points, daggers and arrowheads were usually fashioned from caribou antlers, although there was some use of copper and flint as well. The bark or woven roots of the spruce tree were made into cooking vessels.

Slave Indian clothing resembled that of the Chipewyan but was often bordered with fringes and ornamented with moose hair and porcupine quills. Moccasins were joined to the leggings and the men wore a tassel instead of a breechcloth. Women made garments and cradle bags of woven hareskin. Both men and women wore belts, bracelets and armlets of leather embroidered with porcupine quills. Men wore necklets of polished caribou antler and when engaged in fighting as they sometimes were they wore head-dresses of bear-claws or caps with upstanding feathers. To protect their bodies in combat they had cuirasses of wood or willow twigs. Sometimes a goose quill or a wooden plug was passed through the nose.

The Slave were divided into numerous independent bands generally small in number. An experienced man might be chosen to lead war parties in each band but his authority usually ended with the termination of the fighting. Local quarrels were settled by compensation or an informal council of hunters.

The tasks of women were easier than among the Chipewyan, the hardest work, including the preparation of the lodge and the procuring of firewood, being done by the men. Infanticide was not unknown in what was often a harsh life but the aged and infirm were seldom abandoned, even when there was great hardship on the family and band.

The Slave Indians believed in guardian spirits who appeared in dreams and gave aid in times of need. They held that sickness and death were caused by witchcraft, and so great was their reputed magical skill that other tribes hesitated to attack them. Their medicine-men had no herbal remedies but used massage and suction to draw from the bodies of patients splinters of bone or other objects supposedly placed there by the sorcerers. Patients confessed their wrong-doings in the hope of delaying death. The dead were deposited on scaffolds or covered with leaves or snow with small huts erected over them

as a protection from wild animals. Their property was placed beside them. The souls of the dead were believed to cross a large lake, guided by the spirits of otter and loon, into the world of the after-life.

DOGRIB

The Dogrib Indians believed they were descended from a supernatural dog-man. Their traditional home is the country between Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes. The Dogrib language closely resembles that of the Slave and one group of Dogrib Indians is said to have originally shared with the Slave the country between Lac la Martre and the Mackenzie River. A band descended from both these groups hunts in the same territory today.

The main food supply of the Dogrib was the barren-ground caribou which they snared in ponds or speared in lakes. However they remained out on the tundra for only brief periods because of the lack of fuel. They lived in conical, skin-covered tipis, or, in winter, rectangular huts of poles and bush. Clothing consisted of a shirt, breechcloth, leggings and moccasins, the leggings separated from the moccasins.

As with other Athapaskans the Dobrib Indians believed in guardian spirits acquired in dreams, and they made offerings to local spirits thought to haunt lakes and rapids. They had medicine-men to prophesy and to inflict and cure diseases. The dead were deposited on scaffolds which were decorated with streamers to amuse the souls of the deceased and keep them near their resting places. Mourners destroyed all or most of the property of the dead and the women gashed themselves as a sign of grief. About a year after the funeral the remains were uncovered, the death chants sung once more and a memorial feast held.

HARE

These Indians were named for the Arctic hare from which they derived much of their food and clothing. They lived west and northwest of Great Bear Lake, avoiding contact with other people and going so far as to conceal their camps in the depths of the woods.

In early spring and late summer the Hare Indians hunted the barren-ground caribou which wandered in herds over the tundra north of Great Bear Lake during these brief periods. Throughout most of the year they lived on fish supplemented by hare particularly during the winter months. Since the Arctic hare is subject to an extreme population cycle, there was sometimes much hardship if not actual starvation for these people.

The Hare also lived in rectangular huts of poles and brush, with gabled roofs and covering of spruce boughs. In summer they lived in lean-tos. Their implements and weapons were knives, daggers and ice-chisels of caribou antler, whittling knives with beaver-tooth blades, bows and arrows, fishing spears, hunting snares, and nets of willow bark. They cooked in water-tight baskets of woven spruce roots and willow, dropping in pre-heated stones to boil the water.

Their clothing resembled that of the Slave and Dogrib except for a more extensive use of hare fur and the lack of ornamentation. In summer they wore a shirt, leggings and moccasins, and in winter they added a hare-skin robe and attached a hood to the shirt.

Hare medicine-men suspended themselves from poles to achieve closer communion with their guardian spirits. They held a lunar feast on the occasion of each new moon, and like the Dogrib, held a memorial feast to the dead a year after burial.

NAHANI

The Nahani whose name means "people of the west", lived in a mountainous area between the Upper Liard River and the 64th parallel. They were composed of two principle subdivisions, the Kaska and the Goat Indians. There were apparently several other sub-groups of Nahani, the names of which are now uncertain.

Their principal game animal was the caribou but they also hunted buffalo, mountain sheep and goats. Their weapons were bows and arrows, spears, clubs and snares.

Conical tipis covered with bark or brush, or rectangular huts of the same materials, were the winter dwellings. Simple lean-tos sufficed in summer. Spruce-root baskets were used for cooking with spoons made of wood or the horns of sheep or goats. They had stone adzes and hammers, antler chisels, bone awls, and knives with stone or beaver-tooth blades.

The usual costume was a skin shirt fitted with a hood in winter, long leggings fastened to a belt above and sewn to the moccasins below, mittens, and a robe of caribou or woven rabbit skin. Garments were generously ornamented with porcupine quill embroidery. The women carried their babies in bags of beaver or other skins, padded with moss and rabbit fur.

In their social organization the Nahani alined themselves into two phratries, the Raven and the Wolf, with descent reckoned through the female line only. Prospective bridegrooms hunted for the parents of the brides for a season before marriage but following the marriage avoided all speech with their in-laws. Potlatch or wealth distributing feasts, common amongst the Pacific Coast Indians from whom the custom was borrowed, were held between the two competing phratries.

Medicine-men practised much as they did in the other Athapaskan groups. The dead were wrapped in skins, placed on the ground and covered with brush.

KUTCHIN

The Kutchin Indians who refer to themselves by this name meaning "people", were also known by the French term "Loucheux" a reference to their eyes, albeit a misnomer. They inhabited the basins of the Upper Yukon and Peel Rivers.

The culture of the Kutchin Indians resembled that of the other Athapaskan tribes. In summer they fished with hooks, spears, dipnets and fish baskets of willow. In winter they hunted caribou, moose, hare and other game, with snares, bows and arrows and the caribou pound. They cooked their food in baskets woven of spruce and tamarack roots.

They lived in domed houses, well banked with snow along the outside walls, the floors strewn with fir boughs, and with a smoke hole in the roof. These houses could be kept comfortable on the coldest day with a small fire. For summer, some of the Kutchin had oblong huts of poles, brush and bark, which could also be used for smoke-drying their fish.

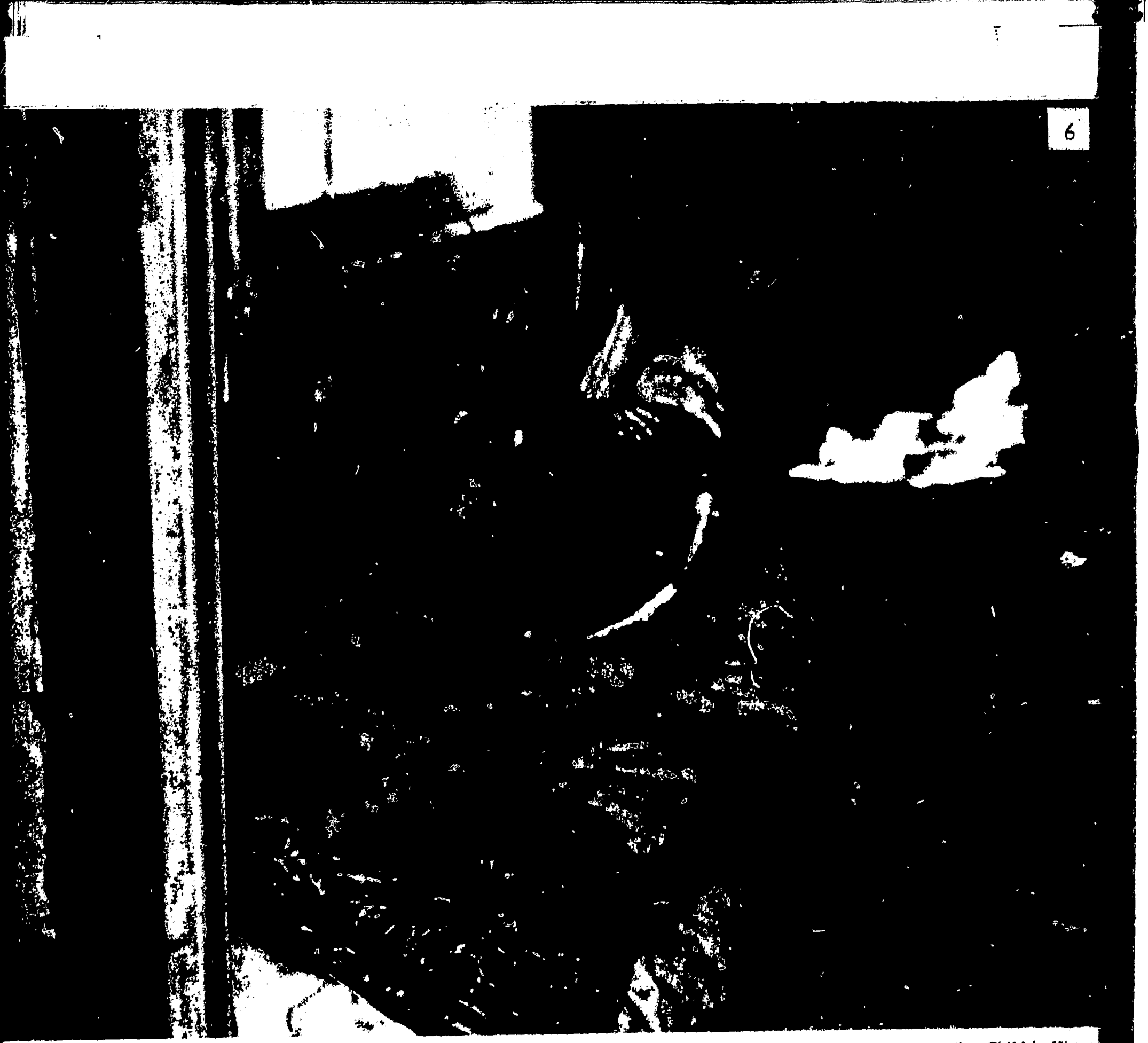
The Kutchin costume consisted of a short-waisted caribou-skin shirt with long tails before and behind, full leggings attached to moccasins embroidered with beads or porcupine quills, long mittens and a hood. The shirts had long fringes decorated with seeds or beads of dentalia shells, and bead or porcupine-quill embroidery on breast, shoulders and back. Men wore head-bands, necklaces and nose-pendants of shells. They painted their faces with red ochre and block lead, placing bright feathers in their hair which was covered with oil and red ochre. Women were tattooed with lines radiating from the lower lip to the chin. They carried their babies in birch-bark cradles.

The Kutchin were divided into three phratries which counted descent through the female line. Courage and wisdom were qualities esteemed in their leaders but they accorded them little authority. Men without relatives attached themselves to leading families in a mild form of servitude. The Kutchin were extremely fond of games, singing and dancing, and young and old, men and women, took part in them.

Women did much of the heavy work, being responsible for transporting the family possessions. Their one main prerogative in family affairs was that of choosing husbands for their daughters.

The Kutchin Indians made offerings of beads to supernatural beings which they believed haunted certain places. Medicine-men fasted and dreamed to gain supernatural powers, and misfortune was attributed to witchcraft. Hunters prayed to a moon-deity and burned fat to ensure success in the chase. In times of extreme hardship the aged and the infirm were sometimes put to death at their own request.

The dead were cremated and their ashes suspended in bags from the tops of painted poles, or, if noted persons, they were put in wooden coffins and left in trees for several months, then burned. Funeral rites included destruction of property and a memorial feast at which the guests sang mourning songs.



Indian Child in Hamm

EDUCATION

As in other parts of Canada, the early education of the Indians of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories was left to the missionaries. The first year in which a government grant to a school north of the 60th parallel was recorded was 1894, when the school at Fort Resolution under Church of England auspices received a special grant of $200 from the Department of Indian Affairs school appropriation fund, 31 pupils being enrolled. In 1896 the Providence Mission, under Roman Catholic direction, was voted $200 and had 26 pupils. The Church of England school at Fort McPherson received a grant in 1899 and the following year grants were made to Buxton Mission in the Yukon, St. Peter's Mission at Hay River and St. David's Mission at Fort Simpson, all under the Church of England.

In 1903 the Church of England boarding school at Hay River received a grant of $72 per capita for 20 pupils, and in 1904 the Roman Catholic boarding school at Fort Resolution received the same grant for 25 pupils. Providence Mission became a boarding school in 1907 with 25 pupils.

The Roman Catholic boarding schools at Fort Resolution and Fort Providence and the Church of England boarding schools at Hay River and Carcross progressed greatly. They had good up-to-date buildings and large gardens which helped provide training in agriculture for the boys and food for the pupils and staff. The girls were instructed in household industries. Inspectors of the different Indian agencies visited these schools regularly and submitted reports to the Department.

By 1917 there were nine Church of England day schools in the Yukon and one Roman Catholic and three Church of England day schools in the Northwest Territories.

In 1922 the Department assumed responsibility for St. Paul's Hostel at Dawson, under the auspices of the Church of England. The Aklavik mission school was opened in 1926.

Beginning in 1942 a special biscuit was manufactured of raw pulped carrots, soy bean flour, oat flour, brewer's yeast and Canada approved vitamin B flour and was distributed to schools as a dietary supplement.

The education of Indian children in the Territories continued to be carried on by day and residential schools operated by the missions with financial assistance from the Government, Residential schools were maintained by the Church of England mission at Aklavik, and by the Roman Catholic missions at Fort Resolution, Fort Providence and Aklavik. Special attention was given to manual and domestic training and hygiene in addition to the subjects usually taught in primary schools, There was a gradual increase in the number of Indian children attending Territorial public schools.

In April 1955 an agreement was entered into with the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories whereby the education of Indian children in the area was carried on by that administration. Also, joint agreements were negotiated with the Yukon Territorial government for the education of Indian children at Dawson in 1958 and subsequently at Whitehorse.

A number of young Indians attended the Sir John Franklin vocational school at Yellowknife during 1958 and thereafter. The girls took commercial and home economics courses, and the boys took carpentry and mechanics. Night classes for adults were conducted at Jean Marie River. Indian women at Fort Simpson, Fort Norman, Fort McPherson and Fort Good Hope attended sewing classes. Day schools were in operation in every settlement along the Mackenzie River. Foster homes were provided for some 50 children on a temporary basis so they could attend day school while their parents followed the traplines.

In 1957 a new school was opened at Fort Smith, and summer seasonal schools operated at Nahanni, Fort Wrigley and Lac la Martre for children who were away with their parents on the traplines during the regular school term. The Aklavik Residential School closed in 1959 and a Government Residential School was built in its stead.

In 1960 a school district was organized in the Yukon with a full-time superintendent to supervise Indian education and visit schools regularly in his district. Hostels were opened at Whitehorse, enabling every Indian child in the Yukon to obtain an education. Indian children may be admitted at the same age-level as non-Indians. Students staying at the hostels attend regular local schools with the non-Indian children, and a teacher-adviser has been appointed to give children additional instruction when required after school hours.

In 1965, Indian school enrolment in the Northwest Territories amounted to 1,786 and in the Yukon there were 596 pupils.

PRESENT CONDITIONS

The pattern of life among most of the Northern Indians is still semi-nomadic. Hunting and fishing are the major sources of food and trapping the major source of income. There is seasonal movement from the larger centers to summer and autumn fish camps and winter and spring trap lines, interspersed with trips to the settlements or trading posts for supplies. Cash is needed for such items as ammunition, guns, fish nets, clothing, tents, tea, sugar and other material goods, and is obtained from fur, wage-labour and

welfare payments. While most men have worked for wages at some time there is still a desire to engage in hunting and trapping for at least part of the year.

There is much closer contact with the outside world than previously. Increasing numbers of non-Indian residents, aeroplane communication with other Canadian centers, daily radio communication with other Canadian centers, daily radio communication with outside points, books and periodicals, moving pictures and the mail-order catalogues have all played a part in acquainting the Indians with the way of life in the rest of Canada.

School populations are steadily increasing and education is now within the reach of all Indian children in the Territories. Although English is taught in the schools, the Indian languages are still very much in evidence in everyday conversation.

Clothing is bought in stores, largely from the mail-order catalogues. Shoes are worn in the larger centers, but the native footwear is preferred in the settlements and the hunting and fishing camps.

Radios are very popular and the traditional Indian music is seldom heard. Old style country music is popular with all ages, while the younger generation are also fond of modern rhythms.

For most of the people each of the four seasons has its own specific activities. Autumn begins early in September and lasts for only a short time until the lakes and rivers have frozen over and the ground is covered with snow. Families with children of school age leave the summer camps and move into the larger centers where the children can attend school, or else they send them away to the residential schools.

The winter's supply of fish for dog food is caught in autumn when the fish start up the rivers to spawn. The fish are placed on a raised platform until it is cold enough to store them in a tent or warehouse for winter. Lake trout and whitefish are the most common varieties caught, but grayling and northern pike are also taken. Whitefish are preferred for human consumption. The fish nets are large and made of nylon or cotton, with large rocks at each end as anchors.

Winter firewood is gathered in autumn and is used as fuel for cooking and heating in all winter houses. Ducks, especially mallards, and pintails, and Canada geese are shot, some being eaten immediately, the others frozen for winter use.

The trapping season begins the first of November when the season for most fur bearing animals opens. Animals caught are marten, mink, lynx, otter, ermine, fisher, beaver and fox.

After the first snowfall many families move to winter camps, travelling by dog team and living in tents banked with snow. The men set their traps and visit them once or twice a week, depending on the length of the trap-line. They usually trap alone. Often the women set out rabbit snares and do some trapping on their own. If a man shoots a moose or caribou the meat is shared by the whole camp, some of it eaten fresh, the rest dried. The woman of the household tans the hide and makes it into mittens and moccasins. Dogs are fed on whitefish caught under the ice.

The campers return home for the Christmas celebrations. There are church services followed by house-to-house visiting. A Christmas party, with Santa Claus, is held at the school for the children, followed by a dance for everyone. There are dog-team races and daily parties the week after Christmas. The week after the New Year the families return to the hunting camps.

At Easter time they again visit the town to attend church services and to sell their pelts. They then return to the camps.

Spring lasts from the first of May to the middle of June. This is the muskrat trapping season, which requires residence near lakes or rivers.

Summer begins the second week of June and lasts until the end of August. Families who have been out on the spring hunt come back into town, where they have houses or set up tents. Children return home from school, sometimes travelling by plane if they have been attending residential schools.

POPULATION

The first available census figures for the Yukon and the Northwest Territories are for 1895. They report 2,600 Indians in the Yukon and 4,376 in the Northwest Territories.

Population figures became more accurate after 1912 when the provincial and territorial boundaries assumed their permanent pattern. That year the Indian population was 1,389 in the Yukon and 3,589 in the Northwest Territories. In 1915 there were 1,528 Indians in the Yukon and 3,600 in the Northwest Territories. These figures remained approximately the same for the next two years. They then began to diminish, reaching the lowest point of 1,264 in the Yukon in 1929, and 3,724 in the Northwest Territories in 1939. On January 1, 1966 there were 2,352 Indians in the Yukon and 5,503 in the Northwest Territories.