

Inuit contact began long ago, editor says

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Contact between the lands of the Inuit was initiated with the big sledjourney Knud Rasmussen undertook through arctic Canada to Alaska almost 60 years ago. For the first time in history the Inuit in Alaska and Siberia received visits from fellow-Inuit in Greenland. That visit is still remembered. Charles Smith from Alaska and Salomonie Qajartjuaq from Igloolik told me that the meeting with Knud and his traveling companions was a great experience for them.

The journey to Pangnirtung
The next contacts was in the summer of 1956, when the good ship H.J. Rink undertook a voyage across Davis Strait to Pangnirtung. Among the participants were our great poet Frederik Nielsen and my colleague Uvdlorianguak Kristiansen, who still works at Radio Greenland.

Two years later Kinsmen of ours from Canada and Alaska visited us. In this way a cultural

exchange began between our lands. Frederik Nielsen was in charge of Radio Greenland at the time. He was very interested in facilitating cooperation among the Inuit. On his initiative broadcasts to our fellow-Inuit were prepared. We young reporters care of the broadcasting of news from Greenland; we call these newcasts univkatuat Akukitsut nunanganit: news from the land of the people with the short flaps, for we were called Akukitsut: People with the short flaps on their parkas.

Many years later I visited Equaluit, Frobisher Bay, and there I heard that both pleasure and benefit were derived by listening to our broadcasts. We also made much use of the list of words we made during the visit of our fellow-Inuit.

The efforts to generate closer contact were given additional nourishment when the French scientists, professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris, Jean Malaurie, who speaks the language of the Inuit, toward the end

of the sixties arranged an Inuit conference in Rouen and Le Havre. It was strange to be able to communicate with each other in the Inuit language in the land of wine, far from seals and polar bears.

But then ICC was established and with that contract increased rapidly. The airport in Nuuk gave another push to the development. Now exchange trips are possible. Friendships are developed across the boundaries. Now we get better and better at understanding each other's dialects.

Hans Egede's achievement
Having the same written forms is the way of leveling out differences in dialects. Here in Greenland we have no difficulties in understanding each other, and that is Hans Egede's achievement. That is what Robert Petersen told me. The apostle of Greenland, the minister Hans Egede from Norway, is today often hung as a destroyer of culture. But he created the basis for a common written language, and it is him we can thank for

the fact that people in Thule, on the west coast and the east can talk with each other and understand each other fully.

The written work means much. We have just got a new system of writing with the recent reform. It is so new that it isn't fully put into use in our newspapers as yet. Who knows? It might become the basis for a common system of writing for all Inuit.

While the written word is under consideration, I will just take the opportunity to tell a little about our newspaper Atuagadliutit. It is the oldest newspaper in the world of the Inuit and it is one of the first papers to use color illustrations. The first issues of the paper have magnificent color illustrations. The paper was started by a friend of the Greenlanders, the Dane H. J. Rink, who then was the highest official in Greenland.

For more than 90 years, Greenlanders published the paper. The first editor was Rasmus Berthelsen who was a tea-

cher at the teacher training college and an author of psalms. His student, Lars Møller, worked on the paper for more than 60 years, out of which he was editor for more than 48 years!

Twenty-eight year ago Atuagadliutit was merged with the Danish-language newspaper, The Greenland Post, which was started during the war. But 18 years ago the paper again came under Greenlandic leadership, when this writer took over the paper.

Until 1927, Greenlandic hunters paid for the publication of the paper with fees paid to the Greenlandic treasury. Today the legislative assembly subsidizes the paper. The paper is published once a week; 7,000 copies are printed; and it is sent to all parts of Greenland. Since 1974 it has been an institution that is owned by itself.

In the hope that our newspaper can contribute to understanding among the Inuit themselves as well as between the Inuit and their southern friends, I bid our guests from Canada and Alaska a hearty welcome.