



Stringer Hall

Inuvik, NWT

Inuvik, meaning “place of man” in Inuvialuktun, is the largest Canadian municipality north of the Arctic Circle. This relatively new community of almost 3,700 is located on a plateau overlooking the East Channel of the Mackenzie River Delta, 100 km upriver from the Arctic Ocean in the Northwest Territories. It is situated in an otherwise barren area, considered in previous generations as a buffer or “no man’s land” between the sometimes hostile coastal Inuvialuit (Eskimo) and the Gwich’in (Dene Indian) peoples of the interior. Inuvik is a planned town whose site was selected in late 1954 as a replacement for the existing government and commercial centre at Aklavik, 60 km to the west. It was briefly known as East 3 or New Aklavik during the selection process, which involved six potential sites. Construction started in 1955 and Inuvik was essentially up and running by 1960.

Aklavik, situated on the Peel Channel on the west side of the Delta, had risen to prominence in the 1920s but was prone to flooding and erosion and, after World War II, found it had little room for further expansion. Among the facilities to be moved or restarted at Inuvik were the Anglican and Catholic residential schools. At Aklavik, the Catholic Immaculate Conception Residential School opened in 1925, followed by the Anglican All Saints Indian and Eskimo Residential School in 1936. All Saints in turn had replaced smaller and outdated Anglican schools at Shingle Point on the Yukon coast and Hay River on Great Slave Lake. Except for the Shingle Point School (for Inuvialuit only), these schools enrolled both native Indian (mostly Dene) and Inuit children.

After World War II, Ottawa embarked on a program of establishing centralized federal day schools in major communities throughout the Northwest Territories. Most were in place by 1952. The classroom blocks at the church run residential schools were then phased out. In 1955, the federal government announced plans for several large student residences to be constructed adjacent to many of the new federal schools. These hostels were expected to be open by the end of the decade. Planning and funding were mostly a federal responsibility, with smaller contributions from the NWT. East facility was to be managed by either the Anglican or Catholic Church, under contract with Ottawa.

At Inuvik, two identical hostels were constructed side by side—Stringer Hall for Anglican students and Grollier Hall for Catholic students. Each had a capacity for 250 children. Management of Stringer Hall was the responsibility of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC), through its agency, the Indian School Administration. The Anglican residence was named in honour of Bishop Isaac O. Stringer, second Bishop of the Yukon (1905-1931), who was well known throughout the western Arctic. The second hostel was named for Father P. Grollier, who founded the first Roman Catholic mission in northern Canada at Fort Resolution in 1858.

As with most construction projects in the Arctic, the hostel buildings were above ground, resting on piles driven into the deep permafrost. Raised and insulated “utilidors” linked the buildings and carried water pipes, sanitary sewers, and heating conduits. Stringer Hall was completed in time to receive its first students in September 1959. Most had transferred from Aklavik, along with former staff.

The majority of students at Stringer Hall were Inuit, whereas Grollier Hall enrolled a mix of native Indian and Inuit children. Métis and white children were also accommodated in both hostels and were supported by a grant from the territorial government. By 1963, Stringer Hall was strained with 300 boarders. Students were drawn from throughout the Arctic and Mackenzie District, including locations such as the Bootkia Peninsula, Banks and Victoria Islands, Spence Bay, Coppermine, Cambridge Bay and many settle-



ments along the lower Mackenzie River. Anglican hostels at Fort McPherson and Fort Simpson took in some of the overflow.

All residential students attended the adjacent Sir Alexander Mackenzie Day School at Inuvik, a government built facility, which opened in 1959. It had classroom space for almost 900 day and residential students, with separate wings for Anglican and Catholic children in the elementary grades and a secular third wing for combined students taking high school. To meet enrolment demand, Samuel Hearne High School opened as an additional secular facility in October 1969.

On April 1, 1969 ownership and operation of Stringer Hall was transferred from the federal government to the territorial government. A new contract between the NWT and MSCC saw the Church continuing to operate the hostel until 1970 when the government took over and supplied staff.

Milestones

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| 1954 Nov. | Inuvik selected as new town site to serve as region's government and commercial centre to replace Aklavik, which has suffered from floods, erosion and growing pains. | 1959 Sept. | Anglican Stringer Hall and adjacent Catholic Grollier Hall open, each with capacity for 250 residential students. 182 students, mostly Inuvialuit, are enrolled at Stringer Hall in first school year. |
| 1955 | Ottawa announces 5-year program to establish large student hostels in major communities throughout the Northwest Territories, adjacent to existing or planned federal day schools. Inuvik is selected as location for large new hostels to replace the Anglican and Catholic residential schools to be closed at Aklavik. | 1959 Sept. | Sir Alexander Mackenzie Day School opens as a secular and denominational federal day school. Anglican and Catholic hostel children are schooled in separate wings and high school students of both faiths are schooled in non-denominational third wing, along with local day students. School has capacity for 900 students in grades 1-9. |
| | | 1963 | Stringer Hall reaches peak enrolment of 300 students (over capacity), with many on waiting list. Some wait listed Anglican children are sent to hostels at Fort McPherson and Fort Simpson. |
| | | 1969 April 1 | Ownership and responsibility for hostels and day schools is transferred from Ottawa to the Government of the NWT. Territorial government signs new agreement with MSCC for Anglican Church to continue to administer Stringer Hall |
| | | 1969 Sept. | Samuel Hearne High School opens as secular school for day and residential students in senior grades |
| | | 1970 | Anglican involvement with Stringer Hall ends when NWT government assumes responsibility for staffing hostel. |



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