

ESKIMO IDENTIFICATION AND DISC NUMBERS

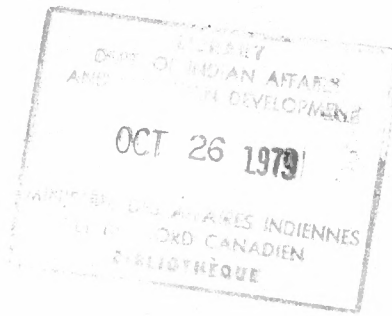
A Brief History

by

A. Barry Roberts

June 1975

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*Prepared for the Social Development Division,  
Department of Indian and Northern Affairs  
June 1975*

For centuries the Eskimos of Canada's Arctic, or Inuit as some people prefer to be called, lived their lives in almost total isolation from the rest of the world. Indeed, apart from their occasional brushes with whalers and explorers, most did not enter into permanent contact with other societies until the Twentieth Century when the spread of trading posts and the establishment of RCMP posts across the Arctic brought once and for all the white man with his institutions, his bureaucracy and his passion for order.

Inuit life was based solidly on the family and, as an extension of that fact, on groups of families cooperating (usually under the leadership of an acknowledged fine hunter) in the business of wresting a livelihood from a harsh land. Within this cultural framework, life went on without (and presumably without the need for) certain elements normally associated with more complex societies. Writing was one of those elements, family names another. Children born into the world usually took one name, that of someone already dead. The names reflected things around them, names such as Ituk (old man), Avingak (mouse), Kopanuak (bird). Suffixes were attached to names to differentiate between persons having the same one. For example, young Kalingo might be known as Kalingoapik, might revert to Kalingo when another, older man of the same name became Kalingoajuk, and eventually take over the latter name when he became the senior holder.

The first major change in this age-old method of identification took place with the arrival of missionaries

who preferred baptismal names of biblical origin for each of their flock. Over a period of time almost everyone took such a baptismal name and - with modifications brought about by Inuit difficulty with their pronunciation and with their translation into syllabic writing script (for example, Leah ᑭᐱ ) introduced throughout the Eastern Arctic - there came about a proliferation of Pauls (Paulusi), Jessies (Siasi), Adams (Atami), Eves (Evie), Matthews (Matiusi), Marks (Markusi), Lukes (Lucasi), Johns (Joanasi) and the like.

The new names were no problem to the Inuit who, in most cases, continued to use a second (Eskimo) one anyway. But to others just beginning to arrive in the Arctic - the traders, policemen, doctors etc. who were stumped by the absence of surnames and either unable or unwilling to learn the distinguishing name - the new method only compounded an already difficult problem.

So there came, with the spread of southern trade and administration across the north during and after the First World War, the first serious calls for some system of identification that would enable the government administrator to distinguish each Eskimo from every other and facilitate the taking of censuses, the keeping of records and the registration of vital statistics. ✓

The first documented request came from RCMP Sergeant O. G. Petty who, in 1929, suggested standardizing the spelling of Eskimo names. Nothing came of that and in 1932 Major D. L. McKeand, of the then Department of the Interior, proposed creating a separate file for each native showing name in English and syllabic characters, and finger prints.

The anticipated objections did not materialize and plans were made to proceed. Two years later Major D. L. McKeand was able to report

*Several attempts have been made to find a solution for the increasing difficulties connected with the spelling of names and the identification of individual Eskimos but it was not until 1932 that definite steps were taken to establish uniformity in this regard, and for official purposes only. The experiment in finger printing, inaugurated in the Eastern Arctic, has been an unqualified success and can be extended by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to embrace all the Eskimos in Canada. The reports of births by Registrars of Vital Statistics (R.C.M. Police) will take care of infants until they reach eight or nine years of age when their finger prints can be taken. Any change in name or spelling which has occurred since their birth can be noted in our records.<sup>2</sup>*

However not everyone shared Major McKeand's optimism. An excerpt from a medical report by Dr. J. A. Bildfell, who accompanied the Eastern Arctic Expedition in 1933 expressed the reservations some held for the program.

*At every post, where examination of the natives was made, the fingerprinting of the patients was in charge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. According to my records, only 17 fingerprints were taken and in each case I have made a note of this on the medical officer's monthly report forms.*

*Only the more important cases were fingerprinted, and in some posts examinations were made and no fingerprints were taken at all. As regards the value of fingerprinting the patients examined, in my opinion the procedure hardly justified itself. The matter caused overcrowding of already cramped examination quarters, and in many cases frightened the natives quite noticeably. I further believe that it requires an expert to interpret the prints, and he is stationed in Ottawa. As a means of identification it is, unquestionably, infallible, but is hardly adaptable, in my opinion, to the north.*<sup>3</sup>

Others appeared to be of the same opinion and it became quite evident that a more thorough and workable program was needed to solve the problem of identifying the Eskimo population. Though finger printing was claimed to be a success it had left too many Eskimos outside the program. Suggestions as to what might be done, began to appear in government correspondence and the difficult job of selecting the most efficient and practical program was begun.

In May 1935 Dr. A. G. Mackinnon, the Medical Officer at Pangnirtung, NWT, in a letter addressed to the Department of the Interior, illustrated the problems encountered in identifying Eskimos.

*There are five divisions to the settlement and I think that if left to get the names from the natives each has a different spelling for each name.*

*It does not seem to ease our troubles any that they have in recent years taken their names from the Bible. A good example of this is in the rather common name of Ruth. The native cannot get his sounding mechanism around the letter R at the first of the word. As a result different persons would write down the following when the native gave the child's name, - Urootee, Olootee, Aloomah with other alterations along the same line. To one who does not know them personally, this makes it rather difficult when it comes to putting them in alphabetical order.<sup>4</sup>*

Mackinnon went on to suggest that Eskimos be given identification disks.

*My humble suggestion would be, that at each registration the child be given an identity disk on the same lines as the army identity disk and the same insistence that it be worn at all times. The novelty of it would appeal to the natives. This would make it possible for us all to start in and have our records the same for the coming generation and would be available at all times.<sup>4</sup>*

No action was taken regarding his recommendation. In September 1936 he wrote once again pointing out how the five southern institutions represented in Pangnirtung had five different ways of spelling and pronouncing the same Eskimo names.

*I think that your department will agree that the four medical men who have been here have had different spellings, also. Cpl. MacInnis told me*

that unless a fellow looked up his former spelling, he would not spell the name the same the second time.

To deal with the divisions of Pangnirtung separately, - The Hudson's Bay Co. have had their own spelling for years. They have permanent records by which they have very little trouble identifying the natives. It would be a good deal of work for them to alter these records if they had any intention of doing so. I have no information that they have the slightest desire to have their spellings altered.

The local Missionary, Mr. Turner, I would say has the greatest influence as to the actual naming of the babes. Whether it is the desire of your department to have the Eskimo adopt the Biblical names in place of their own, I do not know. Whether it is the desire of the Eskimo or the local Missionaries, I do not know.

I think the hospital staff would welcome a standard to guide them. Miss Hockins has informed me that she would be pleased to have a list of the local natives available.

Regarding the R.C.M.P. acting as registrars, in any part of Canada that I have lived, when a name was registered, well that settled that. But I do not think that they wish to get into any controversies about this work that they have taken on here, and which usually is not their work. It also takes a good deal of their time, if one goes to them after every birth is registered, to get the spelling.

Their spelling is by far the most practical we have and both Cpl. MacInnis and MacDowell have been very courteous about giving me any information in this regard.



*As far as the Eskimo is concerned, it does seem to me that this names business is of no great concern to them. They have got on nicely for a long time without cluttering up their minds with such details. They seem to be able to let each other know who they mean even though there are duplicates in the district and this duplicating seems to be increasing with the adoption of biblical names.<sup>5</sup>*

His second letter met with no more success than his first.

In May, 1940 the question of identification was once again raised, this time by Major McKeand. He, like many others, had been confronted with complex problems when it came to a system of individual identification.

*This year I propose to take up the matter of Quebec relief in more detail with the District Manager of the Hudson's Bay Company and the post managers, with a view to working out some system of individual identification. Some system must be devised to get away from the increasing amount of confusion caused by bad spelling, introduction of Christian names, and other factors.<sup>6</sup>*

Once again the question of discs was raised, although with little support.

*The suggestion that metal discs be worn either around the neck or wrist has not met with favour, because -*

- (a) Indians do not wear them;*
- (b) Misunderstandings might easily arise if Eskimos wore chains; and*
- (c) So far as we know, wards of other Dominions do not wear identification discs.<sup>6</sup>*

Major McKeand offered an alternate solution to the problem.

*I think a small identification card (linen) enclosed in celophane - similar to the credit card issued by the oil companies - would meet the situation. Eskimos as a race are instinctively careful of their belongings because of the limited resources of the country. I venture the opinion that the idea of an identification card would appeal to them generally, and the loss of their card would be looked upon as a calamity. Of course, I am only referring to the four or five thousand Eskimos of the Eastern and Central Arctic who read and write syllabics. The introduction of the card system could be the commencement of a general licensing system and Eskimos would be taught to keep records of game seen and killed. By this means they would be taught conservation and gradually come to realize that the Arctic regions are their own and they will be responsible for their development.<sup>6</sup>*

Major McKeand's proposal proved unacceptable. R. A. Gibson, Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories foot-noted his letter with the opinion

*It has occurred to me that without much cost we could issue a numbered identification disc, something the shape of a twenty-five cent piece, with two holes punched in it in case the Eskimos wish to attach same to their clothing or wear same around their neck or their wrist. Better explore this possibility.<sup>7</sup>*

McKeand's staff, given the job of research, reported back to him

*The matter of instituting a simple system of identifying the natives of the Northwest Territories and Northern Quebec has been under review periodically since 1929 and was mentioned several times prior to that date, but while many suggestions have been advanced nothing definite has been decided upon.*

*For convenience of reference the following suggestions of identification have been advanced, -*

- (1) Sgt. O. G. Petty, R.C.M. Police - 31st July, 1929 - suggested the standardization of spelling names.*
- (2) Major D. L. McKeand - October, 1932 - separate files for each native showing name in English and syllabic characters, also finger printing.*
- (3) A. E. Porsild - 25th February, 1935 - introduction of the white man's binominal system of names, compelling the head of each family to select a common name for his family.*
- (4) Dr. Diamond Jenness - 23rd May, 1935 - agreed with the suggestion advanced by Mr. Porsild - the adoption of family names.*
- (5) Dr. A. G. MacKinnon - 21st May, 1935 - identification disc with number similar to that used in the army. Each camp was given an alphabetical letter and the individual members a number commencing with 1).*
- (6) Dr. J. A. Urquhart - 13th December, 1935 - the Eskimos of the delta are rapidly adopting family names which he considered the desirable method*

*of identification. This is in agreement with the suggestion advanced by A. E. Porsild and Dr. Jenness.*<sup>8</sup>

The report suggested that an identification disc with a number stamped on it, and which could be worn around the neck, would be satisfactory. It also proposed that before the system of identification could be made effective it would be necessary to carry out a complete census of the Eskimo.

*We have an approximate idea of the number of natives in each area or trading into each post. It would, therefore, be an easy matter to forward the discs to the doctor, Police, Missionary or trader as the case might be, who would make the census, hand out the discs and prepare a complete list giving the disc number, christian or Eskimo name, general area in which they live and the post at which they trade. For instance, in the Cumberland Sound area there are about 550 natives. 750 discs could be forwarded to Dr. Bildfell. The extra 200 would be sufficient for his needs for some time to come and when these are exhausted a new supply could be forwarded.*<sup>8</sup>

The national decennial census was planned for 1941. Major McKeand advised the RCMP Deputy Commissioner

*With further reference to the suggestion for a universal system of identification of Eskimos in the Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory and Northern Quebec, the issue of identification discs seem to be most favoured.*

*This year we have been asked to take the census and*

*all the schedules will be assembled here. I suppose confidential copies could be made for our own use, as we did in 1921. If so, the allotment of numbered discs to each man, woman and child could be made from here, and distributed through the doctors, RCM Police, fur traders and missionaries. The list of names properly spelled could be prepared here and a lot of confusion and possible errors would be avoided.*

*Regarding the design for the disc, as the musk-ox was adopted as official emblem for the Northwest Territories in 1923 (with the approval of the Minister) I would suggest that we proceed with a design for a disc of the same material and size as that used for the Canadian Armed Forces. We would require about 10,000 discs, numbered 1 to 10,000. This supply should provide only for the immediate issue of about 7,000 and for natural increases, losses, etc. in the next three or four years.<sup>9</sup>*

The matter was submitted to the 122nd session of the Northwest Territories Council in February 1941.

*The Chairman referred to the increasing difficulty of identifying Eskimos and maintaining records of their hunting, education, hospitalization and relief because of the differences in spelling names. Dr. McGill said Indians were given a number and a check was kept of them at Treaty time but he realized this could not be done with Eskimos because there was no tribal system or Treaty payments. The secretary reported that the field officers and missionaries had been consulted and no objection had been raised to the issue of numbered*

identification discs to Eskimos. Samples of Naval identification discs had been secured and were tabled for inspection by members of Council. The Secretary said that discs to be worn around the neck could be purchased for between \$2.75 and \$3.00 per thousand. Commissioner Wood remarked that this year would be the most appropriate time to introduce the system because an issue could be made when the census was being taken. The Chairman referred to the figure or likeness to be embossed on the disc and thought the Canadian Coat of Arms or perhaps His Majesty's likeness would be preferable. It was agreed that the Department of State should be consulted.

It was then moved by Dr. McGill and seconded by Commissioner Wood that the system of identification discs for Eskimos be approved. Carried.<sup>10</sup>

At the next session of Council, held in March 1941

The Secretary referred to the discussion at the last session of Council and reported that the Secretary of State had pointed out that the likeness of the King or the Great Seal of Canada could not be used on the proposed identification discs. The Secretary of State saw no objection to the use of the Canadian Coat-of-Arms. The Commissioner, with the approval of Council, ordered that a sufficient number of discs be struck bearing the Canadian Coat-of-Arms to be distributed to all Eskimos in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after the session Major McKeand wrote to Mr. Gibson proposing that the design suggested by the NWT Council be accepted. But as to the lettering

*I think this is a matter for the Administration to decide.*

*The Coat-of-Arms with "Dominion of Canada" is all that is necessary on the top side. On the reverse side the words "Registration Certificate" are preferable to "Eskimo Identification" because they conform with the wording used under the National Registration Regulations 1940. A copy of the certificate is attached. The word "Eskimo" is necessary and "N.W.T." is desirable because Eskimo affairs are administered by the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories irrespective of where they may be located in Canada. Besides, over 70% of the Eskimo population is actually in the Northwest Territories and will likely be increased as the Quebec Eskimos migrate north.<sup>12</sup>*

*Major McKeand went on to suggest that*

*The numbering ought to commence with four figures if misunderstandings by whites and natives are to be avoided. It would not do to have a number 1 or 01 or 10 or 100 because someone might think that one or two numbers indicated trading affiliation or religious attachment or some other equally outlandish reason. With four figures commencing with 1001 every Eskimo would have at least the same number of figures for his identification.<sup>12</sup>*

*He thought that the identification discs should be distributed to the census enumerators along with the schedules as soon as was possible.*

By August 1941 he was able to report from RMS Nascopie on the Eastern Arctic Patrol

*Census enumerators have been instructed and supplied with schedules. The figures for the white and native population will be wired to the Hudson's Bay Company for relay to you before the 31st of October. Identification disc numbers have been allotted commencing at 1001 to 7400 for the Eastern Arctic. Everywhere the idea of native identification has been welcomed by all concerned.*<sup>13</sup>

The new discs were soon being used.

*We have your forwarding minute of the 13th instant, your reference 42D 637-2-L 9, covering a report from your Chesterfield Inlet Detachment in regard to the accidental drowning of Bernard Teetchak (Eskimo) at Repulse Bay. We note that the identification number of this native is not given, although the number allotted to two of the witnesses interviewed in connection with the accident is provided. From this, upon reference to the 1941 census schedules, we feel certain that the identification number of Teetchak is 5302, although in the schedule in question, the spelling is given as Teeschak. This individual is recorded, however, as the grandson of Teeoomiak (No. 5301) and may reasonably be assumed to be one and the same person.*<sup>14</sup>

The writer went on to suggest that since the distribution of identification discs was fairly complete, it was desirable to stress to all RCMP detachments that all reports dealing with Eskimos should include their identification number. Moreover he stated in the case of death, the disc allocated to



<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Date of birth</u>	<u>Relationship</u>
Alaku	E1-796	1.10.19	Head
Markusi	E1-1122	13. 9.38	Son
Siasi	E1-1187	5. 6.40	Daughter
Tingmiuk	E1-2389	18.12.59	Adopted dau
Agsalik	E1-375	23. 1.36	Head
Mary	E7-1382	10.12.38	Wife
Lukasi Naulituk	E1-2777	16. 9.68	Son
Josepi John	E1-3062	4. 7.70	Son
Alice Sarah	E1-4901	11.10.73	Daughter
Mary Nuvagut	E1-619	1897	Widow
Ainalik	E1-819	14. 2.14	Head
Adami Nunivak	E1-1862	29. 4.43	Son
Peter Ainalik	E1-3307	2.11.74	Grandson

A Sample Disc List

the deceased should be returned to Ottawa to avoid confusion in the future.

But it soon transpired that all was not well, either with the use of the discs or their distribution. Major McKeand wrote

*The Northwest Territories council approved of the issue of identification discs to Eskimos for the sole purpose of keeping track of (a) hunting (b) trapping (c) education (d) hospitalization and (e) misdemeanours, etc. On the two reports hereunder from Pangnirtung Detachment, "G" Division, R.C.M. Police, not one identification number is given. I would not suggest that these be returned to the R.C.M. Police for completion but I would like to have an opportunity of discussing the matter with Inspector Martin to ascertain if it would be possible to add the identification numbers without too much inconvenience.*<sup>15</sup>

Sgt. H. S. Covell of Aklavik brought another problem to the attention of RCMP Headquarters in Ottawa with this letter.

*1. With reference to the Officer Commanding "G" Division's memorandum of September 12th, 1942, concerning the issuing of Identification discs to all newly born Eskimo infants, I wish to report that we have no discs on hand.*

*2. It might be as well to make clear at this time the fact that none of the Mackenzie Delta Eskimos have discs. The Census of the Delta was delegated to Dr. L.*

*D. Livingstone, but the Police took the Census of the natives at Tuktoyaktuk, Banks Island, Baillie Island, Maitland Point, Cape Bathurst, Stanton and Bellot Point. Dr. Livingstone kindly supplied the Police with 300 discs which were issued out to these natives listed by the Police with the exception of the last three names for which there were no discs. Dr. Livingstone was to obtain more discs for distribution by him to the Delta natives but apparently these did not arrive.*<sup>16</sup>

A major difficulty was found to exist in the Mackenzie Delta, as expressed by Inspector D. J. Martin, officer commanding "G" Division.

*I would recommend that this report be forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. It will be seen that none of the Eskimos in the Mackenzie Delta have discs. This fact, coupled with the report that certain Eskimos on Boothia Peninsula destroyed their discs after receiving them, more or less throws the whole system of Eskimo Identification discs out of line.*<sup>17</sup>

To restore the situation a circular memorandum was issued in 1943 to all RCMP detachments in the Eastern Arctic and on the Western Arctic coast by Inspector D. J. Martin.

1. All Detachments concerned are hereby instructed to submit, in triplicate to this office, a list of names of all Eskimos who have been issued with identification discs to date, showing the number of the disc against each name. This list is to include all those who were

issued with discs at the time of the last Dominion census and all those who have been issued with discs subsequent to the taking of the census, i.e., newly-born infants and those adults who, at the time of the census, were not issued with discs. It is realized that, in most cases, the discs issued by our personnel subsequent to the census have been shown by our Detachment personnel on the registration of birth forms insofar as newly-born infants are concerned, nevertheless, these newly-born infants disc numbers are to be shown in the list now asked for. The list is required by the Northwest Territories Administration.

2. Furthermore, after the list asked for above has been submitted, all Detachments are hereby instructed to submit annually, as of July 31st. of each year, a list of all discs issued by them during the previous 12 months (avoiding duplication of the first list) so that as far as possible, we will be posted up to date on these disc numbers. Also, all lists are to show the marital status, age and occupation of each recipient and in the case of married women the number of children she has had.

3. Detachment members could make additional copies of these lists so that they can if they find it convenient to do so, exchange copies of them with neighbouring Detachments. This would serve to keep a check on natives who move from one district to another. 18

Meanwhile, Major McKeand was pointing out the need for careful administration and proper registration.

The real problem confronts us right now. If not solved

immediately, confusion will continue and possibly lead to the dropping of the identification system altogether. The following is suggested:-

1. There must be an efficient and well-staffed division of this Administration in Ottawa charged with the sole responsibility of -
  - (a) Vital statistics.
  - (b) Identification numbers.
  - (c) Issue of identification discs, and
  - (d) Census organization and returns.
2. Confer with the R.C.M. Police and straighten out existing oversights and errors.
3. Evolve a procedure that will be simple and intelligible to government officials, fur traders and missionaries in the field.

In view of the fact that the R.C.M. Police, fur traders and missionaries, are interested in the welfare of the native population in the Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory and Northern Quebec, we should have a fool-proof system of collecting vital statistics and recording Eskimo identification numbers. Unless we have a separate division here charged with the sole responsibility of identification discs and census, we are going to have endless correspondence, multiplication of errors and, ultimately, chaos.

Our knowledge of native health, aspirations, education and other particulars so necessary to the administration of their affairs depend, for the present, on vital statistics and identification. Owing to their nomadic non-tribal

*life, it is impossible to visit every Eskimo family annually and, therefore, decentralization of the administration of their affairs is essential if their welfare is to be looked after intelligently.*<sup>19</sup>

The Deputy Commissioner replied

*I have asked Mr. J. F. Doyle to undertake full responsibility for consolidating in his office the work which is mentioned in your memorandum. It will be necessary to organize this work in such a manner as to carry it on with the existing staff of the Bureau of Northwest Territories and Yukon Affairs because we cannot secure any additional help under war conditions. I gather from my conversation with Mr. Doyle that you have discussed the requirements with him from time to time and I believe that he is prepared to supply the needed service with the present organization on the understanding that the records are consolidated in his office.*<sup>20</sup>

This was done and instructions were sent out into the field during 1944.

#### *Vital Statistics*

*Instructions in connection with Vital Statistics are contained in the Vital Statistics Ordinance and the Handbook on Death Registration and Certification.*

#### *Issue of Identification Discs*

*An identification disc should be issued to any Eskimo who has not received one. This includes all who may*

have been missed in the 1941 census and any children born since then who have not received an identification number.

A new-born child should be given a disc as soon as possible so that the number may be entered on Certificate of Registration of Birth.

Identification numbers to be inserted after names of Eskimos in all correspondence. Also any Eskimo whose name appears on birth, marriage or death returns.

Discs of Eskimos who die are to be attached to Certificate of Registration of Death Form and turned in to the Registrar General. Under no circumstances are discs of deceased persons to be re-issued.

A list should be prepared yearly showing the names and numbers of all to whom discs have been issued during the previous twelve months. Also show sex, marital status, age and place of birth.<sup>21</sup>

In 1945 the Canadian Government began to institute a Children's Allowance scheme (later known as Family Allowances). Suddenly the identification of Eskimos - and the new attendant dilemma of defining who was an Eskimo - became an urgent matter. Mr. Gibson wrote to Major McKeand

Lt. Commander Curran of the Department of National Health and Welfare, called me this morning to see how we could describe Eskimos for the purposes of the regulations under the Children's Allowances arrangement. I explained that every Eskimo was issued

*an identification disk by the Bureau of Northwest Territories and Yukon Affairs and is described as an Eskimo in the vital statistics records.*<sup>22</sup>

A disturbing fact was uncovered

*To date no attempt has been made to enter on our Vital Statistics birth returns, completed prior to the 1941 census, the identification numbers which have since been issued to each Eskimo, nor has this been done on birth returns received since 1941, on which the identification number was omitted.*<sup>23</sup>

Consequently the Deputy Commissioner wrote Major McKeand

*Colonel Craig, who is checking the Vital Statistics records in preparation for the organization of a system to pay Family Allowances provided for the children of Eskimo and of Half-Breeds living the life of Eskimo, has reported to me that is impossible to reconcile to any satisfactory degree the record of identification discs issued with the Vital Statistics record. Under the circumstances, he recommends that we proceed to issue a new set of identification discs this year, tying the number in to the Vital Statistics record in each and every case. I talked with you over the telephone about this and you pointed out that it would not be possible to complete the work this year but that it could be finished up by the Police within a reasonable time.*

*The discs so far have been of fibre quality - but*



*inasmuch as they are to be an integral part of our record, it would seem that we should make them of white metal and possibly with a dignified design on them. I would like to have your suggestions in this connection. It is not contemplated that the name of the Eskimo will be written on the metal disc but merely that the number stamped on the disc should be assigned to him and recorded in our Vital Statistics records here.<sup>24</sup>*

The major, asked yet again to look into the design of the disc, somewhat testily replied

*Answering your question about "the character of the disc" the original idea for the issue was for temporary purposes only. There was never any intention, in my mind, that the identification disc could be described or used as a token.*

*The armed forces have been using regimental numbers for identification purposes for more than forty-five years to my personal knowledge. At the same time His Majesty awarded medals or tokens for services rendered. There is no connection between the regimental or identification number of a member of the forces and a medal for good conduct, efficiency or distinguished service.*

*In my opinion there is no necessity whatsoever for replacing the present identification disc with a medal or token of any kind. As I have been pointing out for twenty years, once the Eskimo realizes that the white man wants him to memorize an identification*

number and use it in all trading and other transactions, the Eskimo will fall in line. There will be no need for the Eskimo to wear identification discs for a longer period than is required for him and his family and friends to memorize the number. We should bear in mind that the use of identification discs is not yet five years old but already they have proven an unqualified success.<sup>25</sup>

In July, 1945 the Department of National Health and Welfare advised

*The Family Allowances Regulations have now been drafted and are in the hands of the Department of Justice for final consideration. Meanwhile, I attach copy of the draft regulations which are being considered by Justice, so that you will be informed as to the provisions which are directly applicable to Eskimos and Nomads. These, I think, are in accordance with the various discussions which have been held with members of your department and this department on this branch of the administration.*

*You will observe that Eskimos and Nomads are dealt with specifically by Part Seven of the regulations. This was considered to be preferable in view of the fact that there may be substantial changes to be made in the regulations as affecting this class of the population.<sup>26</sup>*

Part Seven defined the meaning of Eskimos and Nomads.

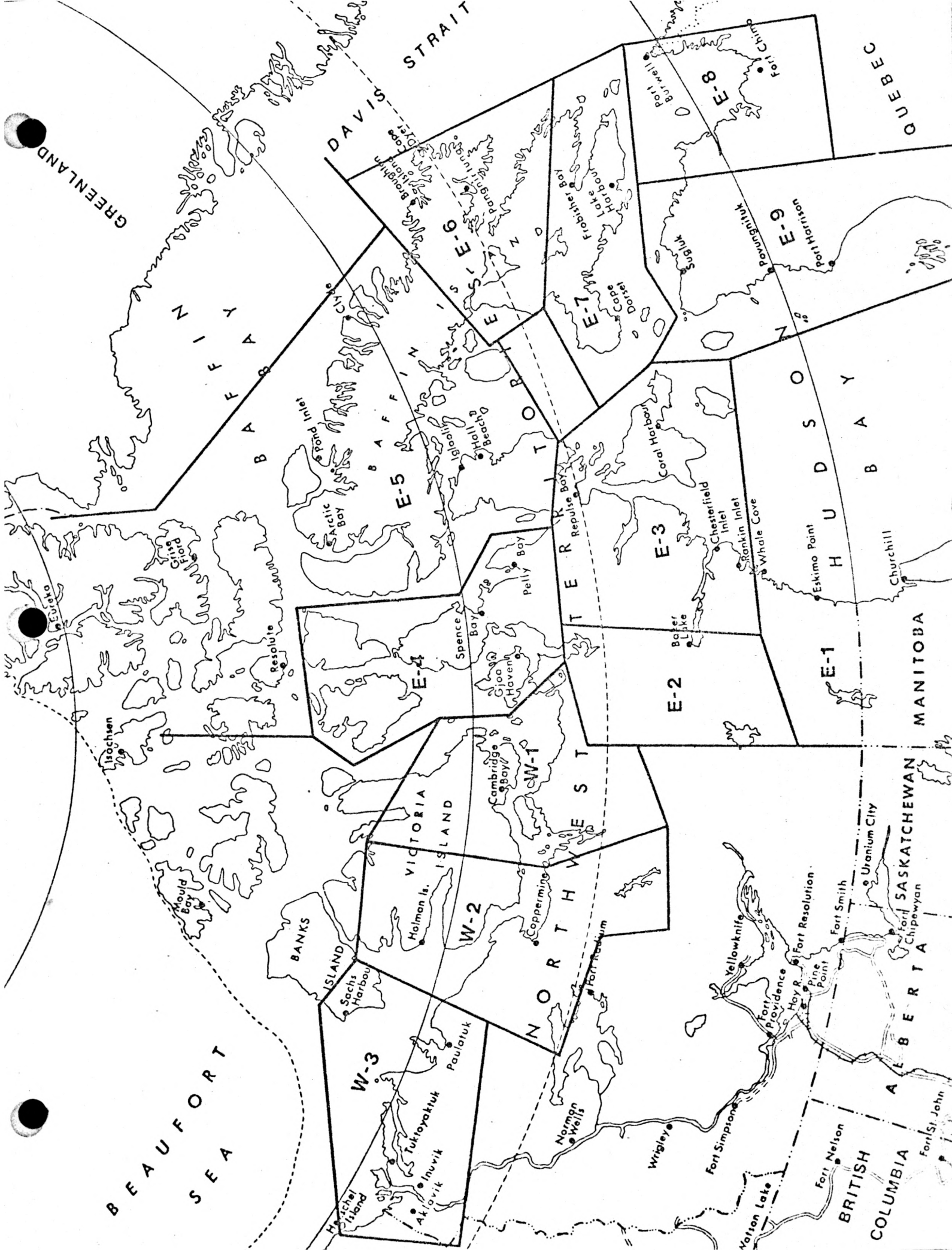
(a) "Eskimo" means a person who is listed as an Eskimo on the roll or records of, and to whom

*an identification disc has been issued by, the Bureau of Northwest Territories and Yukon Affairs of the Department of Mines and Resources;*

*(b) "Nomad" means a person of mixed Indian or Eskimo blood, residing in the Northwest Territories or the Yukon Territory, who is neither an Eskimo nor an Indian, but who follows the Indian or Eskimo mode of living.<sup>27</sup>*

The stringent control required for the distribution of Family Allowances brought into being an effective registration program. The Arctic was divided into twelve districts West (W1, W2, W3) and East (E1 to E9). New discs were issued with blocks of numbers allocated to each district. The old discs were recalled and replaced by new ones, small fibre discs free of design and stamped simply with a district designation and number, for example E3-1212.

The early Fifties saw the end of the Inuit's long isolation. Government moved north in a big way and soon fixed settlements, each an administrative centre, took the place of hunting camps. The Inuit accepted the disc number into his daily life and used it as a quick means of identification in his dealings with officialdom. It appeared on his family allowance cheque and on his pay cheque. He himself used it as a mark on his carvings. All births and deaths were quickly reported to the local sub-Registrar of Vital Statistics (by this time Northern Administrators as well as RCMP officers), birth or death certificates were issued concurrently with the issue or withdrawal of a disc, and certificates bore the disc number as additional confirmation of identity.



Nevertheless, moves to encourage among Inuit the adoption of family or surnames were quickly underway. Most Inuit in northern Quebec had taken names (most often the patriarchal name) by 1961. Others in various parts of the Arctic followed suit.

Still, there were administrators and others who felt that the issuance of numbers to a people constituted some form of slight.

The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories raised the matter officially with the Administrator of the Arctic in 1966.

*I would like to have your advice regarding Eskimo identification discs. It seems to me that there is only one justification for assigning a number to people and actually putting it on a disc. That is, if an absolute requirement exists for identifying people and the alternatives would be an unacceptable level of confusion. It strikes me that we should discontinue the number system and the disc system as soon as possible. I do not know when this will be the case. Indeed, for all I know it is possible to discontinue the system now. I would like to have your advice on this point.<sup>28</sup>*

The Administrator of the Arctic did not fully share this view.

*The question of continuing the use of Identification Disc numbers has been the subject of concern for some time. It was previously suggested that Eskimo identification numbers be abandoned in favour of standardized Eskimo surnames.*

*Eskimo surnames have been adopted in some settlements, however this still does not seem to solve the problem of correct identification. For example, at Pagnirtung, six families have taken the surname of Kilabuk while eight families have the surname of Kooneilusee and six families are known by the surname of Akpaliapik. We also have run into the problem of a number of people from one settlement with the same christian name and surnames who are approximately the same age. When there are three Annie Kilabuks living at Pagnirtung, N.W.T. the only positive means of identification is the identification number. In the south when there are three or more Annie Smiths living in one community each person is identified by their street address, telephone number, place of employment, etc.*

*The discontinuation of identification numbers may be the ultimate aim of our administration but as Mr. Sivertz has intimated in his memorandum, there is still an absolute requirement for identifying Eskimos in the Eastern Arctic. The alternative would be an unacceptable level of confusion. For this reason alone, I could not responsibly recommend the discontinuation of the number system yet. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the need for continued use of identification numbers. The examples mentioned above are only some of the many arguments in favour of this.<sup>29</sup>*

The question continued to be raised. In 1968 it took the form of proposing a standardized spelling of names. F. H. Murphy, Administrator of Ordinances advised the Deputy Commissioner

*You asked me to look into the question of a standard*

*spelling of Eskimo surnames, a question raised by Mr. David Webster, President, Eskimo Point Residents' Association in his letter of January 5, 1968.*

*The question is of course one of establishing identity. Perhaps I should emphasize at once that this matter of identity by spelling is entirely separate from that of establishing identity by disc number. The disc question was thoroughly examined in June, 1966, and the firm conclusion was that disc numbers would be the only satisfactory method of identification for a long time to come.*

*Standardized spelling, by itself, will not resolve the problem of identification although it would be another step in the right direction.<sup>30</sup>*

The question reached the floor of the Northwest Territories Council Chamber in July 1968, as evidenced by the following motion tabled by Professor R. J. Williamson.

**MR. WILLIAMSON:**

*WHEREAS there is much confusion, annoyance, embarrassment for all people in the North, loss of proper family and cultural identity by the Eskimo and difficulty for administrators because of the very widespread and enormous inaccuracy of the spelling of Eskimo names, now*

*THEREFORE I move that the Commissioner seeks means of improving this situation by something like the following procedure:*

*(a) appointment in each region of a bilingual person,*

trained in the standard orthography, preferably Eskimo, who will also be competent in understanding Eskimo family relationships;

(b) this person to go to each Eskimo settlement in the region, and in consultation with the individual Eskimo people concerned, or their parents, to prepare a final and definitive name list, having reference to proper and accurate language usage and family records and preference;

(c) all Eskimo name lists thereafter to be revised according to the improved spellings and accepted as official.

MR. TRIMBLE: Mr. Commissioner, there is a big question mark in my mind of this paper. I wonder if we could have a bit of an address by the mover of the motion to outline his purpose here.

MR. WILLIAMSON: The situation in the Central and Eastern Arctic is such that there is always confusion between the Eskimo people and the white people who are working with them because of the way in which names are spelled. In many cases mail will go missing, cheques will be made out to the wrong people, even with the disc numbers being used all the time. One of the other effects here is that we would like to see the diminution of the use of disc numbers as sources of identity -- but they have to use these numbers so often because spellings are so inaccurate.

The importance of the Eskimo name is something I have spoken of before. It is very important for each



individual to be properly identified. In the Eskimo tradition it had an even greater significance, and there is a persistence of the attitude derived from those traditional beliefs, whereby the name is the soul and the soul is the name. So if you misuse someone's name, you not only damage his own personal identity in the existing society, but you also damage his immortal soul.

MR. SEARLE: Mr. Commissioner, I listened to my friend Mr. Williamson speak about the disc numbers and how there is need for one to keep one's identity. I agree that this is a need, but, you know, in this world of ours it seems to me that government agencies particularly are requiring all of us to have numbers, and I just took out my wallet and took out my social insurance card here that we must all carry and to everybody concerned with me in the bureaucracy of the administration, particularly the income tax people and the IBM machine that record all my data, I am 612-282-418, whether I like it or not.

DR. BARBER: What an unfortunate name!

The Northwest Territories Government took steps to cut short the debate when, in 1970, it launched Project Surname with the avowed intention of persuading all Eskimo adults to adopt a surname or family name. To assist them an Eskimo official of the territorial government visited all NWT settlements to lead public discussion of the issues, give advice to individuals and families, and record the names chosen. His work completed, the use of disc numbers was officially discontinued in mid-1971.

With that action the history of Eskimo disc numbers came to an end (although their use persists in Arctic Quebec, which is not under the jurisdiction of the NWT Government). But not the problems. The standardization of spellings - suggested by RCMP Sergeant Petty in 1929 - has not been achieved. Even when it is, many years will undoubtedly elapse before Eskimos and others alike become fully adjusted to a standard orthography (now under study by a Language Commission) and are persuaded that one - and only one - spelling of a man's name is acceptable. With that done, and with the inevitable introduction of street addresses and house numbers, etc. to further differentiate between individuals, the 'problem' of Eskimo identification will have been solved.

Notes

1. Chairman, Dominion Lands Boards to H. H. Rowatt, Deputy Minister, Department of the Interior, 26 June, 1933.
2. Major D. L. McKeand to J. Lorne Turner, Director, Lands, Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch, 11 April, 1935.
3. Medical report of Dr. J. A. Bildfell, Eastern Arctic Expedition, 1933.
4. A. G. MacKinnon, Medical Officer, Pangnirtung, NWT, to J. Lorne Turner, 21 May, 1935.
5. A. G. MacKinnon to J. Lorne Turner, 8 September, 1936.
6. Major D. L. McKeand to Roy A. Gibson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Mines and Resources, 9 May, 1940.
7. R. A. Gibson to Major D. L. McKeand, 10 May, 1940.
8. J. Doyle to Major D. L. McKeand, 30 October, 1940
9. Major D. L. McKeand to R. A. Gibson, 21 January, 1941.
10. Extract from the Minutes of the One Hundred and Twenty-second Session of the Northwest Territories Council, 11 February, 1941.
11. Extract from the Minutes of the One Hundred and Twenty-third Session of the Northwest Territories Council, 14 March, 1941.

12. Major D. L. McKeand to R. A. Gibson, 26 March, 1941.
13. Major D. L. McKeand's Report, R.M.S. "Nascopie",  
12 August, 1941.
14. R. A. Gibson to Commissioner, RCMP, undated.
15. Major D. L. McKeand to Mr. Macdonald, 2 December, 1942.
16. Sargeant H. S. Covell, Aklavik, to RCMP Headquarters,  
Ottawa, 30 December, 1942.
17. D. J. Martin, Inspector, Officer Commanding "G" Division  
to RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa, undated.
18. D. J. Martin, Inspector, Officer Commanding "G" Division  
to all detachments in the Eastern Arctic and western  
coast, 4 November, 1943.
19. Major D. L. McKeand to R. A. Gibson, 15 November, 1943.
20. R. A. Gibson to Major D. L. McKeand, 16 November, 1943.
21. Instructions re Vital Statistics, undated.
22. R. A. Gibson to Major D. L. McKeand, 5 March, 1945.
23. W. F. Shepherd to Major D. L. McKeand, 26 March, 1945.
24. R. A. Gibson to Major D. L. McKeand, 19 April, 1945.
25. Major D. L. McKeand to R. A. Gibson, 19 April, 1945

26. George F. Davidson, Deputy Minister of Welfare to R. A. Gibson, 13 July, 1945.
27. Family Allowance Act. July, 1944.
28. B. G. Sivertz, Commissioner, NWT, to Alex Stevenson, Administrator of the Arctic, 19 May, 1966.
29. Alex Stevenson to Director, Northern Administration Branch, 10 June, 1966.
30. F. H. Murphy, Administrator of Ordinances to Deputy Commissioner, NWT. 31 January, 1968.