



# Qikiqtani Truth Commission

*Thematic Reports and special studies*

1950-1975

## Igluliriniq: Housing in Qikiqtaaluk



Qikiqtani Inuit Association

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# Errata

Despite best efforts on the part of the author, mistakes happen.  
The following corrections should be noted when using this report:

Administration in Qikiqtaaluk was the responsibility of one or more federal departments prior to 1967 when the Government of the Northwest Territories was became responsible for the provision of almost all direct services. The term “the government” should replace all references to NANR, AANDC, GNWT, DIAND.



# Dedication

This project is dedicated to the Inuit of the Qikiqtani region.  
May our history never be forgotten and our voices be  
forever strong.



# Foreword

**A**s President of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, I am pleased to present the long awaited set of reports of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission.

The *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Community Histories 1950–1975* and *Qikiqtani Truth Commission: Thematic Reports and Special Studies* represent the Inuit experience during this colonial period, as told by Inuit. These reports offer a deeper understanding of the motivations driving government decisions and the effects of those decisions on the lives of Inuit, effects which are still felt today.

This period of recent history is very much alive to Qikiqtaalungmiut, and through testifying at the Commission, Inuit spoke of our experience of that time. These reports and supporting documents are for us. This work builds upon the oral history and foundation Inuit come from as told by Inuit, for Inuit, to Inuit.

On a personal level this is for the grandmother I never knew, because she died in a sanatorium in Hamilton; this is for my grandchildren, so that



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they can understand what our family has experienced; and it is also for the young people of Canada, so that they will also understand our story.

As it is in my family, so it is with many others in our region.

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission is a legacy project for the people of our region and QIA is proud to have been the steward of this work.

Aingai,

E7-1865

J. Okalik Eegeesiak

President

Qikiqtani Inuit Association

Iqaluit, Nunavut

2013



# Igluliriniq

## Housing in Qikiqtaaluk

This chapter examines Inuit experience with the provision of government-supplied housing (single- and multi-family dwellings) in Qikiqtaaluk between 1950 and 1975. A dwelling, whether a qarmaq, an apartment, or a castle, is much more than a human necessity—it is both a reflection and product of culture, social organization, and environment. It marks the boundaries of relationships, creates spaces for family intimacy, exposes connections and separations in the spheres of daily life, and defines the spaces where gender and generational roles can be performed.

The chapter tries to show that the expression “home” is dynamic. A “home” is the place where someone feels they belong, but its geography is not always fixed in time or space—it can expand, contract, move, and change shape according to cultural and personal experiences. Inuit homes had a specific relationship to the land—they came from it and they were part of it. Nobody in particular owned the land or its resources, but they could achieve a measure of status from understanding it. In the new settlements, and in new houses, outsiders with almost no knowledge of the environment set out



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to completely redefine the relationship between Inuit and the land. In this way, colonization became very real.

Before whalers and fur traders arrived, “home” for Inuit families was a broad geography where they were able to find or build everything needed to survive. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, Inuit were expected to become part of an economic, political, and cultural system brought from the South that viewed shelter as a commodity that could be bought and sold.

In 1959, when the federal government outlined the Eskimo Housing Loan Program, the speed at which change was about to occur in Qikiqtaaluk could not be anticipated. Housing was not a stand-alone issue for Inuit or governments. It was completely intertwined with other factors related to the in-gathering of Inuit into settlements. Surrounded by new technologies, business practices, social organizations, and political processes, Inuit had almost no opportunities to influence housing programs or the design of settlements. The federal government did not set out to harm Inuit, but it took advantage of the confusion by implementing programs that met their own objectives first. It was only in the 1970s that Inuit were able to take more control over their communities and housing. During the intervening period, with the limited information available to them, they tried to choose the options that would be best for their families, both in terms of where they lived and the type of shelter they used.

Many Inuit did not feel “at home” for many years after moving into the government-sanctioned settlements and into permanent housing, but they never fully released themselves from the land they knew well, nor from the cultural practices that were performed inside houses. Anthropologist Hugh Brody noted that even after most Inuit had moved into settlements in the 1970s, they continued, as they often do today, to live on the land for at least part of the year.

However much they may depend on rental housing in a government village, whatever their problems of isolation as the last to

stay on the land, such men as the Inummariit still keep many or most of their possessions in the camp and try to spend as much time there as possible.

Inuit also continued to live in multigenerational families, and to share food, chores, stories, and laughter together in a single room.

## Inuit Housing

For thousands of years, Inuit built permanent all-season houses and semi-permanent winter and summer shelters. Permanent all-season qarmaq were often semi-subterranean and made of stone, whale bone, and sod, sometimes insulated on the outside with snow. Summer shelters consisted of tupiq made of skin, duck, or later canvas, sometimes lined with moss. In some instances, wood obtained from whalers and traders was integrated into more traditional forms. In winter, igluvigaq were used only on hunting trips, since they were quick to construct. European observers (explorers, naturalists, and ethnographers) were impressed by Inuit structures. Franz Boas, in his description of snow houses, described them as “ingenious” because they afforded “the possibility of building a vault without a scaffold.” Both qarmait and igluvigait could be lined with a tupiq, which kept the insulating snow cold and the inside of the house dry. These houses usually included a porch, constructed either as a place to store food or as a shelter for qimmiit. A communal sleeping platform was usually constructed at the back of the house. Furnishings were generally limited to a few benches. Igluvigait could house multiple family groups, with a large main room attached to smaller rooms for individual families.

Across Qikiqtaaluk, regional variations existed in the sizes, materials, and groupings of houses, but the house units were all quick to construct

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using harvested materials. When the interior of iglavigait or qarmait became blackened with soot from the qulliq, the walls could be scraped clean. If a house was structurally unsound, a new one was built. Furthermore, Inuit houses could be adapted easily to the size of a family, the conditions of the weather, and the location where they settled for one or many seasons.

Even as Inuit engaged in the fur trade in the early twentieth century, they continued customary house forms, while also taking advantage of access to canvas, ropes, and salvaged wood to simplify the process of erecting and moving qarmait and tupiq. The alternative was a more permanent type of structure, known as an iglurjuaq, constructed of wood, concrete, or metal that could be heated, cleaned, and ventilated over a period of many years without being deconstructed and moved. Qallunaat RCMP, traders, missionaries, and teachers were normally provided with permanent wooden buildings, but Inuit coming into the new settlements to socialize or trade would set up a tupiq or build an iglavigaq. An Inuit family wanting to move to an enclave for any reason would have found it very difficult to build an iglurjuaq because everything had to be salvaged or ordered in advance—wood, furniture, appliances, shingles, and hardware.

## Government Involvement in Qikiqtammiut Housing

During the second half of the twentieth century, the Canadian government increased its presence in Qikiqtaaluk to meet three key objectives: to demonstrate its sovereignty in the region; to prepare the North for the development of natural resources; and to address the wide differences in the kinds of services that were available to residents in northern and southern Canada. Inuit were enticed, and often coerced, to move to government-supported

settlements—the thirteen communities in Qikiqtaaluk today—for employment, schooling, and health services. Promises made by the government about the quality and cost of housing was an important factor in convincing families that it might be worthwhile to move into a settlement to be closer to children in school, to have access to potential employment opportunities, and to get more regular access to medical services.

Bringing people closer to services was only part of the government's rationale for supplying houses. The linking of new housing to both health and education remained central to the rhetoric of housing policy and programs throughout the period, although the government itself put people at risk through inadequate preparation for housing. In one example, Inuit who had been relocated to Grise Fiord and Resolute were obliged to live in a tent in bitter cold because the snow was not suitable for building igluvigait. Sarah Amagoalik spoke in 1990 to the House of Commons standing committee investigating the relocations. She explained, "When spring came, we gathered wood scraps from the dump, the dump of the Qallunaat . . . Then when summer came around, they started to build houses from the wood from the dump." People also gathered coal as their only source of heat, but they had no light. When the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) went to film people in Resolute, Inuit had to go to the military base where it was possible to get electricity and light for filming.

By the early 1950s, in all parts of Qikiqtaaluk where military or government officials were to be found in any numbers, Qallunaat were consistently reporting that Inuit were winterizing tents by using scrap lumber for floors and reinforcing walls with wood, cardboard, and paper. Kerosene heating of homes left a residue of soot on the inside of houses and on clothes and bedding. When houses were crowded together, often near military bases, government officials and military personnel were quick to point out that health and sanitary conditions were being compromised. Good ventilation, low levels of humidity, and warm rooms were also noted as being essential to good health, and numerous sources advocated that houses equipped with

both electricity and natural light were a necessity for families with school-aged children.

The precedent of providing housing to other groups of Canadians also played a role. During World War II, the federal government introduced a wide-scale housing program, commonly known as the Wartime Housing program, to accommodate the workers flooding into urban centres to work in factories. The prefabricated houses were small and designed with inexpensive materials so that they could be constructed quickly and cheaply. At the time, these designs were believed to be suitable for construction anywhere in Canada. Wartime housing, which was also adapted for postwar programs, ranged in size from 600 to 800 square feet, included two entranceways and large windows.

While government agencies touted the benefits to Inuit of living in new houses, the historical record and the material evidence show that programs were created to meet one government goal, namely to ensure that the costs of administering the North were as low as possible. With Inuit living year-round in one location, it was easier to provide public services, especially schooling, and to bring Inuit into the wage economy. Housing programs also served as a convenient way to teach construction and business skills, while also justifying investments in power and transportation infrastructure. The government discovered very quickly, however, that it was not simply a matter of building houses where services were available. “All the extras—medical services, welfare, social services, the wage economy, community conveniences—go with a house.”

Some Inuit welcomed and sought out opportunities to live in new houses. When anthropologist Toshio Yatsushiro interviewed Inuit in Iqaluit in 1958, after the first prefabricated bungalows or “matchbox houses” had been introduced, he reported that 75% of the interviewees said they wanted to live in one. Other families were less interested in government-provided housing, but felt pressured to move. Gamalie Kilukshak of Pond Inlet told the QIA, “They wanted us to have houses that were matchbox houses. Some

of us didn't want to get a house but they insisted... We were being pressured to get into a house so we complied. That's what I remember. So we agreed to get into a house." The comfort of new houses, especially models that were larger and better constructed than matchbox houses, appealed to Inuit, of course. Peter Awa told the QIA, "We were told that we were going to live in houses, warm houses."

In 1958, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (NANR) said that it wanted to "design homes to suit [Inuit] budgets at the various stages of economic independence starting with a more healthful substitute for the iglu and tent." A decade later, the government used similar terminology, stating that the delivery of houses in northern communities would provide "a warm, dry, sanitary environment, [which] is of major importance during this critical transition from isolation to active participation in northern development."

The rhetoric was backed by policies and programs that were implemented on the ground by the RCMP, nurses, teachers, and Northern Services Officers to move Inuit into settlements where houses were supposed to be available. Alice Joamie, who moved from Pangnirtung to Apex as an adult, told the QTC that health concerns were cited as the reasoning behind the bulldozing of her family's qarmaq and their moving into a rigid-frame house:

The nurse that first came to us was with a teacher. We were not allowed to stay in the hut anymore because [my children] would get a cold at school. That is what we were told. They told us we would get housing. We didn't know who the government was but we weren't given any house. They took our house away [by bulldozing the qarmaq]. We had to go to our father-in-law to stay.

## Initial Government Housing Programs, 1955 to 1959

The federal government entered housing programs very tentatively, in part because it was uncertain about how much it wanted to encourage Inuit to engage fully in a wage-based economy. While some Inuit had been provided with housing or given access to building supplies on military bases and in some settlements, there was no formal program to address the difficulties that Inuit who were staying in settlements without permanent housing were facing. The confusion can be seen in the government's reactive approach to two separate situations. In 1955, three "temporary" dwellings for Inuit staff were sent to the new subdivision of Apex Hill in Iqaluit. In the next year, houses were sent directly to *ilagiit nunagivaktangit* in other places as a way of encouraging Inuit to remain on the land. Almost a decade later, in reference to Igloodik, an RCMP officer recommended that:

[Inuit] should be encouraged to remain in the camps. If the long-range plan is to provide every Eskimo family with a house, then they should be built in the camps where this is applicable. If a closer relationship between the Eskimo and the administrator is desired, then the administrator should visit the Eskimo in his camp. This not only applies to the administrator but to any other white person who has an occupation dealing with the people. The idea of keeping the people on the land would benefit them both in the area[s] of morale and economic[s].

Officials recognized from the outset that government support would be needed to get materials into the north and to supply houses for staff, both Qallunaat and Inuit, but it also intended to use housing to ameliorate what



it perceived to be substandard living conditions contributing to poor health outcomes.

Iqaluit proved to be an important catalyst for a federal housing initiative. In 1955, the community was divided into three distinct parts—the military base and airport, an informal and unserved Inuit neighbourhood called Ikhaluit where families lived in houses made from a combination of traditional and salvaged materials, and the newly planned Inuit village at Apex Hill built by the government. In this latter area, the government supplied several houses in 1955 and 1956 for government employees and people returning from southern medical facilities.

In the mid-1950s, the government also began examining options for permanent housing in the North more seriously through the National Research Council (NRC) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). It began experimenting with housing that combined Inuit and Euro-Canadian designs and materials—prototypes included a styrofoam igluvigaq built at Cape Dorset and Igloolik, and aluminum houses insulated with caribou moss. Although these models, estimated to cost between \$1,200 and \$1,800 in 1957, were expected to be significantly less expensive to produce than southern-style homes, they were soon discarded in favour of the prefabricated plywood bungalows. Wooden houses made of prefabricated members and standard-sized materials could be reconfigured into different sizes with various amenities, such as indoor water basins, heaters, and stoves.

The second catalyst was the building of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, a series of radar stations that stretched from Alaska to Greenland, with major stations at Hall Beach and Cape Dyer. As per an agreement with the United States, which was the primary funder and operator of the DEW Line, Canada planned to supply housing for Inuit employees. The first houses, scheduled to arrive in the summer of 1958, were only delivered at the beginning of the winter. A second batch arrived in 1959, consisting of flexible-walled Atwells and rigid-framed duplex units. Changes in the rules about who would receive housing and how much it would cost were difficult

for anyone, bureaucrats or Inuit, to understand and monitor. The major private-sector employer, Federal Electric, provided housing free of charge to employees and criticized the federal government for charging rent for its houses at \$78 per month, about 30% of the salary of an Inuit DEW Line employee. Government inspectors also found that the houses were deteriorating due to a lack of maintenance.

## Eskimo Housing Loan Program, 1959 to 1965

The first major housing initiative open to all eligible Inuit, whether employed by the government or not, was the Eskimo Housing Loan Program, launched in 1959. Bureaucrats feared that a fully subsidized housing program would make Inuit dependent on the government; as an alternative they developed a rent-to-own scheme that sought to encourage Inuit home ownership. In effect, they sought to insert southern real estate concepts into the North and to continue the “ideological construction that assumed [that] relief creates dependency.”

The program never accounted for multi-generational Inuit families, the instability of Inuit income, or the mixed economic system that existed in the North due to the heavy subsidization of most Qallunaat working there. The idea of paying for a house was neither intuitive nor rational in the context of Inuit life in the 1960s. As a government official stated in 1960, “many [Inuit], and particularly Easterners, have not yet swung around to the view that housing is something for which one pays money.” Inuit also found the idea of purchasing property from the government to be illogical—many Inuit held that “those with less have a right to share in the bounty of those with apparent plenty.” For Inuit, then, “the government’s wealth seemed

enormous and therefore the need to compensate that government was initially incomprehensible.”

It is also clear from comparing government documents and QTC testimonies that government officials and Inuit had very different priorities concerning housing. Government reports, for instance, discuss at length the buy-back program, an initiative whereby Inuit could upgrade their housing after paying off most of their loan or mortgage. In effect, the government expected Inuit to “want more,” as suburban Canadians did. The QTC testimonies and anecdotal evidence show that Inuit (at least in the 1960s and 1970s) rarely moved within communities. Static incomes and high building costs limited options for moving, but cultural factors might have also been important.

A contemporary lack of investment in communications was another important factor affecting the success of housing programs from all perspectives. Meaningful consultation to ensure that Inuit choices, expectations, and knowledge were considered in decision-making never happened. No one took time to explain to women and men how a housing program might be structured, what trade-offs could be made to keep house prices within the means of both government and Inuit, and how many houses would be needed in any settlement. Inuit were seldom informed about even basic government plans. As Emily Takatak told the QTC, “They didn’t inform us that they were building houses here for us to live in.” Once provided with housing, poor intercultural communication, as well as a general reluctance to complain to government officials who appeared to hold so much discretionary power in the community, impeded Inuit from expressing dissatisfaction with their homes.

The Eskimo Housing Loan Program was not the first government initiative that attempted to provide inexpensive housing to a large population in a short period of time with limited supplies. The rigid-frame houses shipped to the North by the government in the late 1950s and 1960s, however, were even smaller and cheaper than the wartime houses. The Department bought and built twelve hundred basic one-room “matchbox” houses, also

known as Style 370 (as it measured 370 square feet), across the Northwest Territories, and re-sold them to Inuit between 1959 and 1965. There was also a two-bedroom model used by both Inuit and Qallunaat called Style 512. Government administrators designed these units with the objective of keeping construction and heating costs as low as possible. Housing dimensions followed multiples of standard four-by-eight-foot plywood sheets so that construction was simple, with the exception of the angle cuts on the end walls for the gable roofs. By minimizing the square footage, less fuel would be required to heat the houses.

Different communities received these new houses at different times. The prefabricated houses were made largely from plywood, and were hailed as costing only 25% of conventional construction. There were also rigid-frame A-roofed plywood houses, which some government officials believed were good transition homes for Inuit used to living on the land, since they felt like big tents and were very simply designed, not even including bathrooms. Initially the government also budgeted \$500 to furnish each house—the furnishings were then to be rented to Inuit as part of their mortgage. These houses were constructed either by Inuit or by Qallunaat crews. It was difficult, however, for Inuit who were working long hours during the day to find time to construct their own homes.

Regardless of the government's attempts to keep housing costs low, the Eskimo Housing Loan Program failed to recognize the irregularity of employment for most Inuit. Wage employment was primarily seasonal and dependent on development activities related to government and the military. A 1960 estimate reported that only 6% of Inuit in all regions had ever experienced steady wage employment. Without consistent wages, Inuit could not be expected to make regular payments towards their housing.

Government officials appear to have assumed or hoped that Inuit would be absorbed into an ever-expanding northern economy of high-paying permanent jobs. An RCMP memo from 1961 cited the following wages for Inuit working for the government as: \$4,000–\$5,000 for labourers, \$5,000 for

interpreters, \$6,000 for truck drivers, \$6,400 for technical officers, and \$7,000 for foremen. For most Inuit, however, jobs paying this well were mostly available in Iqaluit or near military bases. In 1961 the NANR and the Department of Transport collectively employed approximately one hundred and thirty-eight of the approximately eight hundred Inuit residents in Iqaluit. In the Northwest Territories as a whole, however, the average per capita income of Inuit was estimated at \$400 for 1965.

The Eskimo Housing Loan Program was unaffordable to most Inuit who subsisted on hunting and seasonal employment. The fact that the amount of money needed to purchase a house kept increasing was also problematic. Initially, houses had cost \$400 to \$500; later matchbox houses cost \$1,500 for the model without a bathroom and \$1,800 for the model with a bathroom. Even with the limited income of many Inuit, it was conceivable to economists and bureaucrats that a family could purchase a house in small annual payments within a ten-year period. However, in the mid-1960s, policy-makers shifted their plans “away from the so-called ‘primitive’ housing of early experiments towards housing more comparable to what could be found in a middle-class southern neighbourhood.” Prices rose accordingly. Three-bedroom units, which became the norm for new construction, cost \$3,500 to own after a \$1,000 government subsidy, but were hardly in the same architectural category of typical “middle-class” houses found in the South.

The expense of owning a house was not limited to purchase price. Ancillary costs also increased; the fuel costs were higher than many Inuit could pay, even with heavy government subsidies. Indeed, many Inuit felt that the government had not been clear about the associated costs of fuel and other amenities when renting or buying a house. Elizabeth Kyak told the QTC, “The government promised [my family] housing but they didn’t get housing. Then they got housing and then they were told that they would never pay for power, utilities . . . The government made promises and didn’t keep these promises.” Juda Taqtu told the QIA, “At the time heating fuel

cost only \$20 per 45-gallon barrel. At first, prices . . . were low just at the time we started living in the community but then started getting higher before long.”

## Housing Co-operatives

Inuit did not necessarily have to shoulder the cost of buying and constructing a house alone—there was also the option of housing co-ops. The first housing co-op was formed in Iqaluit in 1961, when fifteen families came together to share the cost of acquiring three-bedroom houses, applying for the government subsidy of \$1,000 per house. The houses arrived in the fall of 1962, and the families built them that fall and winter, sharing labour. Accordingly the co-op was considered a success, and two more Iqaluit-based housing co-ops were formed in 1963. This co-op housing was only available to those who could afford a monthly cost of \$120 for mortgage and utilities. This was much higher than costs associated with government housing, and only families with steady employment could seriously consider joining. Other co-ops formed later in other communities.

For much of the study period, Qallunaat held most of the administrative and logistic control concerning the design, size, and location of houses. Within the Iqaluit housing co-op, for instance, construction could only take place on areas levelled and prepared by NANR, and thus determined by the government. In effect, permanent housing allowed the government to see, literally, where and how Inuit lived. This was true of non-co-op housing as well. Houses were set along streets laid out by the government on sites where construction equipment could manoeuvre over the land. Unlike the traditionally small groupings of dwellings that accommodated dozens of people, government officials planned for hundreds of people to live in communities. Houses were set side-by-side on roads laid out in patterns

similar to those in suburban developments. Often the roads radiated away from the water, inhibiting access to it for many residents. Inuit valued the water, especially as a means of transportation, and traditionally would have selected a site near the water for their dwelling.

Inuit were sometimes able to, and did, make suggestions for improving the government's initial housing designs, which in one case allowed Inuit to apply for loans for garage construction. Theoretically the various housing programs would provide the mechanisms for the desired transition for Inuit to better health and improved living conditions, but in practice the results were not so simple or successful.

## Eskimo Rental Housing Program, 1965 to 1968

The year 1964 “marked a critical point in the development of northern housing. By then everyone was aware that the previous policy, the Eskimo Housing Loan Program, had failed nurses, doctors, policemen, administrators, parliamentarians, and the Inuit themselves.” Inuit in Qikiqtaaluk did not have access to sufficient wages and savings to purchase houses, which were becoming larger and closer in amenities to southern housing. By 1965, 90% of Inuit who had been contracted to buy houses under the Eskimo Housing Loan Program failed to make payments. Government officials also noted that housing was not improving Inuit health as promised, but merely changing the form of the problem due to overcrowding, poor ventilation, and indirectly, to bringing more people into settlements where they often had less access to nutritious food.

As an alternative, the government set up a social housing program known as the Eskimo Rental Housing Program in 1965. It followed changes

to the National Housing Act in 1964 that extended federal government assistance for public housing. The rental program shipped about 1,500 houses north and had the added effect of adding to the presence of government in Inuit lives by literally opening the doors of Inuit homes to officials.

Monthly rent for a one-room house was initially set at around \$25, \$5 for furniture rental and \$10 for services like water and fuel. The government determined the rental price by employing a complex system based on income and housing type, with rent paid to the community's housing authority, later named the Housing Association. In this new system, the area administrator sorted Inuit in his jurisdiction into three categories. Category A was made up of families with steady, full-time employment income who did not rely on family allowance or social assistance; these families paid either 20% of their monthly income as rent, or the maximum rent for the house type, whichever was lower. Category B consisted of people in need of social assistance, whether for health or other reasons. These people received housing through a social assistance scheme and paid rent of \$2 per month. Category C was made up of those not permanently employed, usually seasonal hunters and part-time employees for the government. The government devised a special formula to adjust rent for people who fell into this category.

The federal government intended the local housing authorities to “give a real voice” to Inuit, although this intention often carried paternalistic overtones. As one government report stated, “We see these local housing authorities as possible embryos for municipal governments and therefore wish to encourage the transfer of real authority and responsibility to this group as quickly as they can demonstrate the ability to handle it.” Elijah Padluq told the QTC that housing associations held considerable power in the community: The association was “a group of people who wanted some control over the units and [to] design the units . . . They controlled the way the budget was being managed, how they were going to manage rent payments, and how to reconcile rent payments and budget.”



A report in the late 1960s by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) outlined the bylaw template for local housing authorities. They stated that members were to be elected to the housing association, composed of all renters in a community, but that the area administrator could choose the chairman and secretary. Decisions concerning the types of houses that would be available and the distribution of supplies remained under the control of Ottawa officials. This system meant that the government held de facto control of the group and its decisions. Inuit did become increasingly involved in housing issues in the 1970s.

Many Inuit who provided testimony to QIA or to the QTC rented houses under Category B. People said they were told that rent would not increase, but found out that this was not true. Ham Kudloo told the QIA, “the government said that they were going to help us and we were happy . . . but apparently we were cheated on—the rents [were] going higher and higher and it became very upsetting.” Johanasie Apak told the QIA, “We started renting at \$2 per month. Later on, after the community [of Clyde River] was moved to the present location, three-bedroom housing cost \$15 per month.”

Each family’s position within the income-based system was to be re-evaluated annually by the area administrator, but it is unclear who did the calculations and how families were notified. The government also intended for the maximum rent for Inuit rentals to rise in proportion to increases in rental costs for employee housing. Both of these factors could have contributed to the increase in rent that was experienced in the communities. However, it is evident from the testimonies that rules, as well as the equation that government used to determine rent, were not adequately explained to Inuit.

This lack of communication was acknowledged in the South, as was the need to resolve it. In a letter sent to NANR on May 11, 1966, Anglican Bishop Donald Marsh concluded, “There is a need of a written statement of policy of the Department on the question of housing, and this statement should lay down very clearly the responsibility of the Eskimo people and Government.” He added, “Misunderstandings are increasing in the North.”

It is important to note that despite widespread dissatisfaction, some people were content with government-provided housing. Julia Amaroalik told the QTC that she moved to Igloodik in 1969 and stayed with her parents. Moving into her own house was a relief. “When the buildings were built, they gave us housing . . . I liked the house that was given to us. I got tired of being with my parents. My children made too much noise . . . I wanted a house for so long. It was a good time when we got our own.”

Elijah Padluq told the QTC: “We moved into the matchboxes . . . It seemed so beautiful and so warm—I liked it. Yes, when they started establishing the housing association, we were moved to a larger unit with three bedrooms. It was a huge house. What a difference!”

Mary Battye told the QTC that she found her new house in Pangnirtung very large. “[At first] I got a slanted matchbox through social services . . . When they started building houses, they moved me to the other houses, to a three-bedroom house . . . I could hear an echo it was so big.” Moses Kasarnak told the QIA that he was pleased with his new house. “We were just very happy that we were going to get a house here . . . We were directly told that if we moved we would get a house and that it would have a table and dishes. It was like Christmas that we were going to get all these.” He continued, however: “After we had [the] house for quite a while, problems started to come up—we had to do everything ourselves.”

Yet problems persisted even with new initiatives. Housing distribution, for instance, remained uneven within and between communities in Qikiqtaaluk. Between 1965 and 1969, Inuit living in Qikiqtaaluk and Keewatin received a total of six hundred and fifty-five houses; one hundred of these went to Iqaluit, seventy-nine to Baker Lake, and the rest distributed among the other communities. More houses were scheduled to arrive over the next decade. Housing was largely allocated by the government during this period based on need and order of arrival into the community as well as income. Consequently, as housing types improved over the study period, people arriving in communities later often received bigger houses with more amenities.

## Continuing Challenges

Major challenges in the provision of government housing in Qikiqtaaluk were the inter-related problems of logistics and affordability—technical issues related to cold, wind, and even permafrost presented less significant difficulties. The government did not want to give the houses away to anyone, which meant that it was always trying to make them as cheap as possible to match the limited income of Inuit for rent and heating. All supplies—wood, nails, shingles, concrete forms, etc.—needed to come from the South. The materials needed for a three-bedroom house, for instance, weighed ten tonnes and cost about \$1,400 for shipping alone in the 1960s. The government’s demand to build and heat homes cheaply, coupled with the sheer volume of houses needed, drove down the quality of construction materials and the size of the houses. Meanwhile, other problems arose beyond volume and materials. Housing kits sometimes arrived with parts missing, in the wrong size, broken, or in some cases all three, as occurred with a shipment to Iqaluit in 1962. There were also problems with harsh working conditions and short construction seasons. The chronic shortage of materials also meant that Inuit trying to improve their homes by building porches, sheds, or garages, or by improving interior features were restricted to either materials ordered from the South at great expense, or to what they could find at the dump left over from other construction projects. Supplies for housing were sometimes scarce even in larger, more concentrated settlements. Elisapee Arreak told the QIA, “My husband built a small building for us to live in . . . There was hardly any wood to build a house so it was very small.”

A common theme expressed in QTC testimonies was the frequent delay in the government’s provision of prefabricated housing once a family moved to a community. While waiting for permanent housing, Inuit constructed houses with the materials available to them. Some people from *ilagiit nunagivaktangit* brought their one-room houses from campsites

and erected them pending construction of new dwellings. Some constructed qarmait or tents, while others used scrap material left over from the prefabricated houses, such as wood, canvas, and cardboard, to construct framed houses. These temporary houses were not always solidly constructed and did not resist the elements well. The effects that these living conditions had on Inuit health were dire and contributed to their mortality.

In many cases, Inuit spent months or even years living in tents, qarmaqs, and other temporary dwellings after they moved to permanent settlements. In testimony to the QTC, Leah Okadlak described the one-room house in Arctic Bay where she lived with her children and a large extended family until the mid-1960s as being “full of snow.” She added, “I think about the house sometimes and I cry . . . we were living in a house that was not healthy. We were able to get some fuel for the Primus stove. The floor was all wet. The inside became ice.”

Inuit were confused and hurt when they were told to move to a community with the promise of housing, and arrived to find nothing available for them. Elijah Padluq told the QTC, “There were some people who were asked to move [to Kimmirut] without housing [being] available . . . I think that this was the hardest part for people. There was no ready-made housing when we moved here.” Isaac Eyaituk told the QTC, “We didn’t get a house right away. I don’t remember who gave us a canvas tent but I remember it being erected by the church. [We waited to get a house for] almost a year, a whole year.” Aooloo Kautuk told the QTC that his parents moved to Hall Beach in May one year and “they lived in a tent even though it was very cold. They lived in a tent for eight months until Christmas. [My mother’s] leg was broken. She was staying in a tent with a broken leg. They . . . didn’t get a house until December.”

Heating these homes was a serious challenge. Markosie Sowdluapik told the QTC, “It was very cold when we pitched our tent. I had to stay up all night because I was worried that one of my children would freeze.”

Apphia Killiktee explained that a teacher came to her family's ilagiit nunavivaktangat near Pond Inlet and told her family that they were to send the children to school in the settlement. The family made the move, but found themselves without a place to live.

We ended up in a tent near the river. The whole winter we stayed in the tent. It was so difficult for us. We didn't have any food to eat. Every morning we woke up to everything frozen. It was so difficult for our parents and for us. At that time, I was in kindergarten . . . Our grandpa in the winter would try to pick up some cardboard boxes and put them in around and inside the tent, and when we had enough snow, he would build an iglu around the tent to keep us warm. It was difficult for us, not knowing, coming to the community like that and not having housing.

Leah Evic told the QTC:

We had to leave in March. The weather was very cold. We arrived with just our bedding . . . It was very hard. My older sister was living in Pangnirtung [and so we went there] because we didn't have any other place to go . . . In our camps, we had qarmait, but they're winterized. It was now hard to keep the children warm. There was only a Coleman stove. We put up a frame. We put some cardboard inside. It was very cold . . . Because we pitched our tent in a bad place we had to move our tent. It hurt us because we came from a qarmaq that was winterized to living in a tent . . . It was hurtful. We were hurt.

Overcrowding was a fundamental problem that continued as Inuit moved into permanent communities in the 1950s and 1960s. In Iqaluit, for example, the Inuit population quickly increased from two hundred and fifty in 1956 to eight hundred in 1960. Delivery of housing was delayed, in large

part due to bureaucratic programs and complex shipping and construction schedules. Overcrowding was noted as a major factor in high rates of tuberculosis, infant mortality, and even excessive alcohol consumption, although other factors were likely important as well. Quppirualuk Padluq noted that eighteen people lived in her house at one time, and Apphia Killiktee remembers there being around the same number in her matchbox house.

The government was aware that Inuit with permanent houses were disappointed with their homes. A 1966 report revealed veiled self-criticism about government delays, stating, “Many [Inuit] voiced their pleasure that the government was taking the trouble to explain things to them” and “When this was followed also by the houses actually arriving when we said they would, the effect in the settlements was electric. That the formulation of a different government image was in process was quite clear to everyone. Interestingly, government officials were also disappointed in the houses they inspected. In a 1967 survey by CMHC, inspectors recorded that “it was extremely uncomfortable to sit near an outside wall in which windows were located,” and that ventilation through chimneys caused a vacuum, sucking in snow from any crevice. They also reported a critical lack of storage space. Other government inspections found substandard stoves and pipes, and an “outstanding deficiency” in roof construction leading to widespread leaks. Official reports, with their use of technical and clinical terminology such as “deficiencies” and “discomfort,” only touched the edges of the truths experienced by Inuit.

New styles of houses were introduced to alleviate these problems. The one-room, slope-walled Angirraq style emphasized simplicity and low cost, although it appears that the structures were sent to the Arctic without sufficient testing of the stability of plastic elements in cold conditions. Other new styles included row houses, called Style 130, and three-bedroom houses. In the mid-1960s the federal government’s housing administration developed standards for the allocation of houses by family size: matchbox houses were for single adults or for couples without children, while two-bedroom houses were for one or two couples with up to one infant each, or

for parents with two young children. Three-bedroom houses went to larger families and extended families.

Still, the chronic shortage of houses continued. In 1965, the federal government reported that there were over twelve hundred people living in Qikiqtaaluk in qarmait or tupiit, with an average of more than six people per house, mostly in one-room or one-bedroom dwellings. A government report concluded that it would take thirteen years at the current pace of construction to house everyone, not factoring in population increases. The federal government aimed to fill a sixteen-hundred-house gap across the Arctic by 1967 in a massive production boost, but it only managed to ship two hundred homes to nine communities in Qikiqtaaluk. Cultural differences concerning housing needs were not resolved. The permanent houses then being introduced, for example, still did not take into account peoples' needs to cut and store meat or fix equipment.

## Gender Issues

Conventional housing also reinforced divisions in the roles of men, women, and children through distinct spaces that supported separate spheres of activity. When living on the land, Inuit women determined the location of the tupiq, qarmaq, or igluvigaq, and took care of the home while the family stayed there. This role changed when government officials began controlling the location of prefabricated houses, while at the same time encouraging Inuit women, once established in a permanent home, to fit the Qallunaat definition of a homemaker.

In southern suburbs, the three-bedroom bungalow mirrored expectations about domestic roles. The woman was expected to be responsible for the whole house, but especially the kitchen. The man ate in the dining room and retired to the living room after dinner. Children, girls in one bedroom

and boys in the other, stayed in their well-lit rooms to read books and study, unless they were outside playing. And, perhaps most importantly, a mother and father slept together in the same bedroom by themselves.

While the government did not describe the relationship between cultural norms and three-bedroom houses so starkly or honestly, it came close. In the *Q-Book, Quajivaallirutissat*, published by NANR in 1964, Inuit living in conventional houses in settlements were told that “many wives also enjoy being good housekeepers” and that a clean house would make women proud. Home economists, often wives of Qallunaat men working in Qikiqtaaluk, taught courses for Inuit women with varying degrees of cultural sensitivity and dedication. Among other duties, home economists taught women how to prepare meals using stoves and packaged or canned foods available at the HBC store. Some aspects of these new responsibilities clashed with traditional Inuit gender and social roles and were less likely to be adopted. For example, in discussing how to incorporate and prepare new foods, teachers overlooked the fact that men were traditionally in charge of bringing home food, including goods from the HBC store. Men, not women, determined which new foods, if any, would become part of the family’s diet. Lengthy, intensive food preparation also hindered a woman from engaging in other tasks, such as child-rearing and giving proper attention to visitors.

In other respects, such as in keeping houses clean or in developing personal styles and colour palettes, home economics teachers were more successful. In their book *Eskimo Townsmen*, a report on a 1950s study of Iqaluit, anthropologists John J. and Irma Honigmann indicated that Inuit women were in charge of choosing paint for co-op housing in Iqaluit in 1962. Women in co-op housing had electricity, a kitchen stove, and often a steady income in the family that they could invest in Qallunaat-style housing culture.

Still, many Inuit women were disappointed with the conditions of their permanent housing. Often the houses came with few amenities and no



furniture, and were of poor construction, cold, and cramped. Alicee Joamie told the QIA that her prefabricated house came without any of the promised furniture:

We lived in a very nice qarmaq in Apex. When the Government didn't want us to live in a qarmaq anymore, we had to move to a small house . . . There was no bed, and no furniture, only an oven. We slept there that night and we were given blankets. We slept there on the floor, my children and my husband, near the oven because there wasn't anything in there.

Emily Takatak had a similar experience. She told the QTC: "When the house was finished, the house had nothing in it, except an aluminum tub. That was the only thing that we had when we moved into that house . . . It consisted of a few plates and cups." Iqaluk Juralak told the QTC how disappointed she was with the state of her new house:

They took us to Apex to our house, a place where we were going to stay. When we went in to the place I was hurt to see what I entered because I was told that we were going to get a brand-new place or a house. That place had no furniture whatsoever—not one thing in it. The only thing that was in there was one of those wooden things that you use to do carpentry and a whole bunch of leftover wood from building the place or fixing up the place. There was leftover wood and sawdust in the house and that was about it. I have been waiting to express that for the longest time we were sure we were going to be put in to a place that was brand new and nice. But I was so hurt by what I saw. When we started living here there was no mattress—nothing to sleep on. We were fortunate enough to get some blankets and sleeping material from other families.

Leah Okadlak told the QTC:

After three years, my parents got their house. It was one of those little square ones, a Qallunaat house. It had a little stove. It had no furnace, and no bedroom, just one room. We lived there. My father had twelve kids and we were all living in there . . . My husband was also here. We were all together in this little square house, which had no bedrooms . . . I was looking after my sister's children and we were living in a house that was not healthy . . . The floor was all wet. The inside became ice. It was very hard to dry it up.

For these women, who were in charge of taking care of their homes, these inadequacies in housing presented significant and often insurmountable problems in their lives.

## Housing Differences

Some of the same officials who were advocating that Inuit should be content with their small houses were expecting much more for themselves. A January 1963 internal report to the Minister of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources about conditions in Resolute noted, “There is a house built by the Department for a Northern-Service officer at an alleged price of \$75,000. The house has been heated since October 6th, and is still to be lived in.” While this house was likely an extreme example of the difference in housing available to Inuit and Qallunaat in Qikiqtaaluk in the 1960s, the differences were regularly noted by observers. It is perhaps noteworthy that in the same report, the Minister was told that DEW Line employees “also feel that [Inuit] are not being given adequate care, especially in relation to housing facilities.” Staff wrote in the margin of the report, “Let them [presumably

Inuit] know about our housing program,” but it is unclear how or why single Inuit men or families temporarily employed at a DEW Line site for a few years could have used the housing program.

A very thorough critique of housing in the North was published as *Eskimo Housing as Planned Culture Change* in 1972. D.K. Thomas and C.T. Thompson pointed to numerous deficiencies and a lack of cultural sensitivity in the provision of housing. Anthropologist David Damas, who spent many years studying changes in Inuit communities, pointed out in his book *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers* that it was important to “be aware that perceptions of what constituted adequate housing for the Inuit changed profoundly” in the 1960s. “While there were errors in planning, the evaluation of thinking regarding housing in the North was rapid as the decade advanced.” It can also be noted that more Inuit became involved in the administration of housing in the 1970s, in particular.

## Northern Rental Purchase Program

Government housing for Inuit improved in the 1960s and early 70s in concert with improvements to community infrastructure, such as water supplies, generators, and fuel services, and with greater involvement of Inuit. The Eskimo Housing Loan Program was replaced in 1968 with the Northern Rental Purchase Program, an initiative that once again treated rental payments as mortgage payments. A year later, the housing program was transferred to the Government of the Northwest Territories.

By 1972 the Inuit population in communities had risen to the point that the federal bureaucrats recommended increasing the number of proposed new houses to be built by 1978 by over a hundred, just to try to keep up

with demand. In 1973 the territorial government set up the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NTHC) to manage public housing construction and operations. The following year, it built twenty-four new houses in Qikiqtaaluk, but this was far less than was needed. NWT councillor Leda Peterson decried the housing conditions for Inuit in Qikiqtaaluk and Central Arctic, while fellow councillor Bryan Pearson noted that most houses were still constructed in the South, imported to the North and assembled by Qallunaat, instead of capitalizing on local initiative and labour. Pearson argued that houses should at least be constructed from northern trees in the Western and Central Arctic, to encourage northern industry.

## Conclusion

Inuit and Qallunaat held fundamentally different expectations concerning housing and wealth. This in turn affected the process of implementing the government's housing initiatives. Inuit were very pragmatic—throughout their lives, they had been engaged in a trading economy that they understood very well. They had seen the value of their primary trading resource, fox furs, fluctuate wildly, and also understood the concept of debt. At any time, they either owed the HBC furs or a portion of their social benefits, or the HBC owed them goods. They supported themselves using earnings from trade and jobs to buy what they needed to make hunting more efficient, by conserving resources and constructing their dwellings with materials that were available to them without cost.

In 1958, in response to public comments about the lack of good housing in the North, the federal government had reported internally, and perhaps in preparation for media consumption, that:

It is the ambition of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources to make living in Northern Canada attractive.

Accordingly, for its servants it attempts to provide a standard of housing reasonably close to that which they would occupy in the more settled parts of Canada. For those it serves, the Eskimos, it endeavours to design homes to suit their budgets at various stages of economic independence, starting with a more healthful substitute for the iglu and tent.

In effect, the government was stating that socio-economic differences in access to housing that were so obvious in the South should be repeated in the North and that Inuit, no matter what their reasons for living in settlements, should begin with a house that was merely a “substitute” for a snowhouse or a canvas tent. Where a Qallunaat family might expect to be provided with a three-bedroom house, an Inuit family would only be provided with a one- or two-room structure. As late as 1975, Inuit in Iqaluit represented 70% of the population, but occupied only 35% of the housing. Qallunaat government employees, representing 30% of the population, lived in 65% of the housing, and the best housing at that. The health problems and cramped, damp living conditions persisted because many plywood prefabricated houses were still in use well into the 1970s. As many people told the QTC, frustrations continue about housing to this day.

Today, Qikiqtaaluk communities bear witness to contradictory conclusions that can be drawn from an examination of the history of pre-1975 housing programs. On one hand, houses in all communities provide evidence about an inferior building stock that was designed without input from the people who understood the environment and were destined to occupy the buildings. On the other, a substantial portion of everything that can be seen in the hamlets and city that make up Qikiqtaaluk today is the result of the labour of a generation of Inuit who took advantage of anything that was available to them to create permanent places where they could live, work, and raise families.

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- David Damas: Damas, *Arctic Migrants*, p. 122.

### Northern Rental Purchase Program

- NWT acquiring the housing program: see Tester “Iglutaasaavut (Our New Homes)”, pp.141-2.
- Housing construction in the 1970s: LAC, RG 85, Northern Affairs Program, Accession 1998-01713-3, Volume 21, File N-2626-I, pt. 12, Building Residential – Northern Rental Housing Program General, Treasury Board document re: Northern Rental Housing Program.
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### Conclusion

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**F**or many years, Inuit Elders in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) region have been haunted by a deep sense of loss as they remember how their lives changed in the decades after 1950.

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