

Reminiscences: AINA — 1979-86, a Time of Transition

PETER SCHLEDERMANN¹

ABSTRACT. Since its inception the Arctic Institute has experienced many difficult episodes, not the least of which was the upheaval caused by the move from Montreal to Calgary. In 1979 AINA became an institute of the University of Calgary and embarked upon yet another time of transition.

Key words: Arctic Institute of North America

RÉSUMÉ. Dès ses débuts, l'Institut arctique a connu bien des périodes difficiles. L'une d'entre elles, et non la moindre, a été le bouleversement dû au déménagement de l'Institut de Montréal à Calgary. En 1979, l'Institut arctique de l'Amérique du Nord est devenu un institut de l'Université de Calgary, et est entré dans une nouvelle époque de transition.

Mots clés: Institut arctique de l'Amérique du Nord

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My first direct involvement with the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA) took place in the fall of 1975. It is undoubtedly an understatement to say that the Institute was in a state of considerable turmoil following the recent move from Montreal to Calgary. It was in a small, temporary office on the ground level of the University of Calgary Library Tower that I first met Gerry Thompson, who, more than anyone else I can think of, has personified the personal dedication and commitment that has seen the Institute through many difficult times. Staff commitment has been instrumental for the survival of AINA throughout its history, particularly during this period of transition, and I am pleased to write this short essay, if for no other reason than to acknowledge that commitment.

Every director of the Arctic Institute has faced different challenges, although we have all probably shared one common element — a chronic lack of funding. It is precisely the unfortunate failure to establish from the outset a substantial, non-political endowment that periodically has caused the Institute to stray from its primary purposes, forcing it to react to events rather than provide the necessary input to shape such events.

I became a research associate of the Arctic Institute in the fall of 1976 and had the privilege of involving the Institute in a long-term archaeological research program in the Canadian High Arctic. With the strong and encouraging backing of my predecessor, John Tener, some very exciting field seasons were spent on Ellesmere Island between 1977 and 1982. With Tener's return to Ottawa in 1979, I accepted the position of acting director of AINA for one year and subsequently the job of executive director until 1986. In 1979 many difficult decisions had to be made and are now a matter of record. John Tener and Garry Clarke, in particular, had navigated the Institute through a series of tense episodes. The old Board of Governors was initially replaced by an Advisory Board, of which I was a member, and eventually by a Board of Directors, established in 1979. The Board was to guide the operations of the Canadian Corporation, as distinct from the U.S. Corporation, which still operated with a small Board of Governors out of Washington, D.C. The U.S. Corporation was in very poor shape financially and for all intents and purposes ceased to exist as an active organization. The eventual move of the U.S. Corporation headquarters to Fairbanks, Alaska, created the possibility of

renewed and active participation of the U.S. component of AINA. In Canada, the Board of Governors of the University of Calgary had assumed control and management of the Canadian Corporation, a legal position which was never easy to determine by either the University or the Arctic Institute.

Shortly after the move of the Institute from Montreal, the federal government funding, sad to say, was reduced to zero for reasons that need not be discussed here. The total operating budget provided by the Province of Alberta was \$160 000 to cover all facets of the Institute's activities. In addition, the University of Calgary provided substantial financial assistance through its Endowment Fund. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I can say that the University of Calgary was truly magnanimous in many ways. It possessed this peculiar organization, AINA, that thundered about independence and self-determination and yet was virtually dependent on the goodwill and considerable financial assistance of a university not particularly oriented toward northern studies. We had formed a northern studies group on campus only a year or so prior to the arrival of the Arctic Institute. The University of Calgary had graciously provided substantial space, as well as funding to cover the cost of badly needed restoration of the Institute's rare book collection.

One of the multitude of tasks facing us as an institute of the University of Calgary was the consolidation and advancement of northern interests on campus. Some of the more important initiatives in this direction were the establishment of a student chapter of AINA and a monthly lecture series. Since we were not allowed to offer credit courses, we developed a senior citizens course on Canada's North, which has now been fully booked for many years. Northern Scientific Training Programme grants, managed by AINA, provided a growing funding source for University of Calgary students, who were also encouraged to use the Institute's field facilities in the Yukon and on Devon Island. For several years the Archaeology Department conducted a summer field school near the Kluane Station.

The research stations continued to operate throughout this period of transition, although the scope of the base operations at Kluane had to be reduced because of severe budget restraints and the termination of one of the very successful and long-term programs, the High Altitude Physiology Studies on Mount Logan. Due principally to the concerted efforts of the present Kluane Station Users Committee and Gerry Thompson, it was

¹Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
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eventually possible to obtain an NSERC Infrastructure support grant for the Kluane operations. Activities at Truelove on Devon Island were gradually increased, and we were particularly pleased to support the summer activities of the Northern Heritage Society's archaeological and biological training program. Many attempts were made to involve the AINA research stations in a greater scheme of northern field facility cooperation. For a period of several years we faced the possibility of closing down one or both field facilities, and we owe much to the people who, because of their strong commitment to the Institute and the North, gave freely of their time in spite of these uncertainties. I am particularly grateful for the efforts of Don Patti at Truelove and Andy Williams and the late Phil Upton at Kluane.

Because of the rapidly changing times in the North and the greater northern focus in the South, we paid close attention to the long-established Institute objectives — dissemination of information about the North and the encouragement of northern studies. The fate of the library was of special concern. For many, the AINA library was the *raison d'être* of the Institute, the central focus around which everything else revolved. However, for many of us the business of information dissemination clearly called for an additional electronic database component that could form the centre of an efficient, fast and accurate on-line information system. It was Robert Faylor who pushed the initial idea, obtained the first financial support from the Arctic Petroleum Operators' Association, and hired Ross Goodwin, who subsequently has done an outstanding job as manager of the Arctic Science and Technology Information System (ASTIS). I felt, and still feel, very strongly committed to the whole notion of the development of a major, national on-line database for northern information and still believe that the Arctic Institute should play a leading role in such an effort. Goodwin and his staff produced many excellent works, particularly during our contract with the federal government's Environmental Studies Revolving Funds. The success of ASTIS is beyond argument, as is the basic assumption of the need for such a system. The political and financial will to support such a national information system is perhaps beyond the capacity of this country, but the objective remains unassailable. There may be a glimmer of hope for ASTIS if the much-debated Canadian Polar Institute initiative ever becomes a financially supported reality. This, however, will require strong national leadership committed to fair play and true cooperation.

The efforts of Len Hills and Claudette Reed Upton greatly enhanced the content and format of the Institute's flagship, the journal *Arctic*, the *Information North* newsletter and a reactivated technical paper series. Subsequent format and design changes were developed in consultation with the present editor, Gordon Hodgson, and production editor, Ona Stonkus. After many years of presenting what we thought to be convincing arguments, it was gratifying to finally receive financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for *Arctic*.

One initiative that worked well as long as we were financially able to sustain it was the sponsorship of AINA research fellowships. It was particularly encouraging that several of the fellowship recipients developed new AINA programs and initiatives, such as Frances Abele's Native Employment Training Study, supported by the Donner Canadian Foundation, and Richard C. Davis's Arctic Profiles series in the journal. People make things happen; they have always been the greatest asset of the Arctic Institute.

Throughout my tenure as director, I felt committed to making the Arctic Institute more responsive to the new realities of northern Canada. The Board of Directors gradually included nearly 50% northern representation and close ties were established with the new Science Institute of the Northwest Territories, whose present director, Robert Janes, is vice-chairman of the AINA Board. Our major research activities included the native employment study by Abele and the extensive investigations on Ellesmere Island into 4000 years of arctic prehistory under my own direction and that of Karen McCullough.

Stepping down from the director's position was not an easy decision. In spite of the long, hard road and the many battles, some of which we won, there had been progress. In 1985 the overall annual Institute budget topped the \$1 000 000 mark for the first time in many years. On the negative side, my own research efforts had been brought to a near standstill. It was time to return to active research duty and turn over the management role to fresh souls and new blood.

Over the years I had occasion to work with many fine people, sharing the good and the bad times. Keith Cooper, then vice-president (research), and the person to whom I reported as the director of a university institute, was extremely supportive during the often difficult discussions concerning the amalgamation of Institute goals and university operations. There were many rewarding experiences, particularly the pleasure of assisting young scholars, even in small and always appreciated ways. It is significant that the objectives of the Institute are as pertinent today as they were in 1945, perhaps even more so. Today, in this country we need an organization based on the same founding principles as those set forth at that time. It is a sad Canadian reality that in the seventies and eighties we have managed to fragment and regionalize our interests to the point of nearly complete stagnation. The northern "scene" has begun to change with the gradual development of self-determination and in the number of agencies, institutions and organizations focusing on solutions of its problems. The Arctic Institute has become the old kid on the block, its fate a disappointing reflection of our national inability to move beyond petty regional bickering, resulting in an inability to pursue long-range goals and support and sustain superb initiatives.

I would hope that the Arctic Institute has survived the worst and that we are truly entering a period of cooperation, where institutions in the North, in the South, East and West can work together and create a thriving network of centres of excellence.