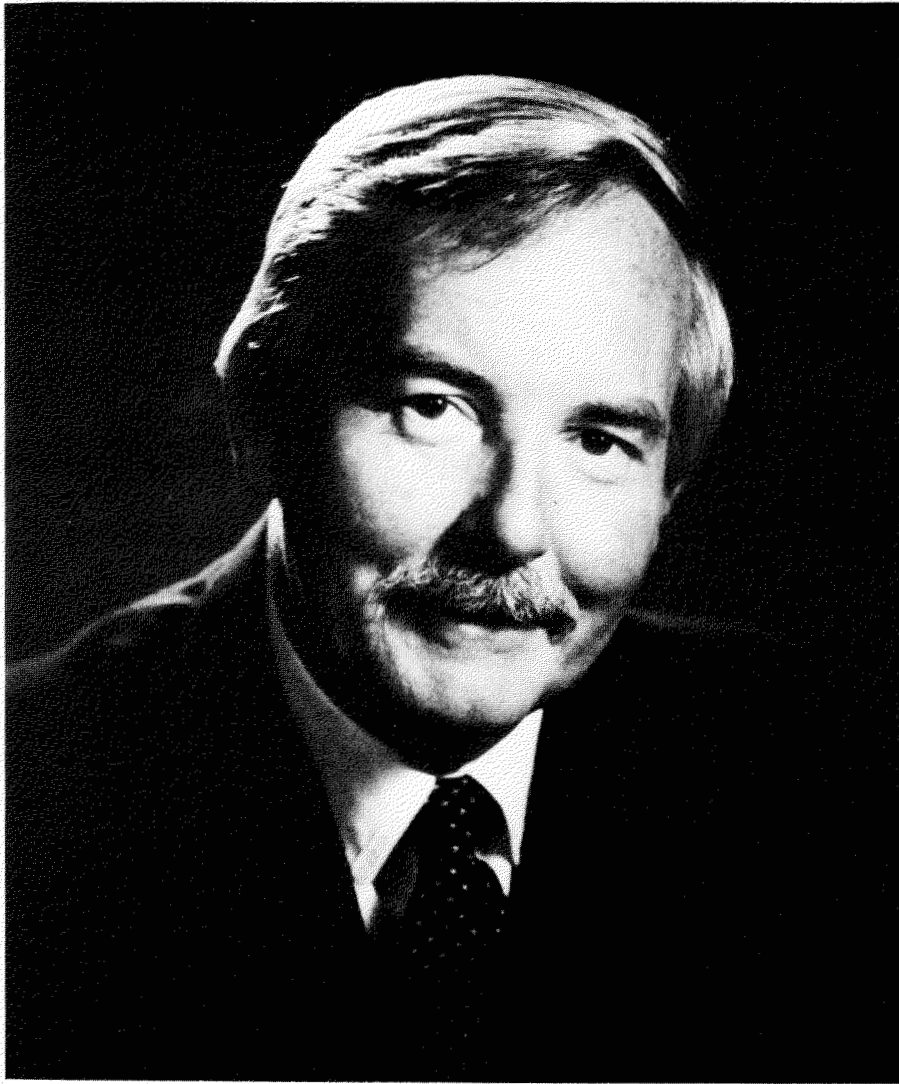


DONALD SNOWDEN  
1928-1984



Lane Photographics, St. John's, Newfoundland. Photo supplied by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

For those who knew Donald Snowden, it is hard to accept that a man so vibrantly alive can have died, as he did suddenly on 4 April 1984, across the seas and far from home in Hyderabad, in south-central India. The end came a month before his 56th birthday, with the characteristic swiftness and intensity with which he had lived. It was a hot day, and after an early-morning swim in a hotel pool he went into the dressing room and had a heart attack. It was all over in half a minute.

Many who now live in the Canadian North have never heard his name. But those who are old enough to remember how life was for the Inuit 30 years ago when they were caught by changing times in a spiral of unemployment, poverty, and slow starvation, will remember the big, laughing young man from the government who radiated joy and optimism and introduced them to the idea of cooperatives. And whether they remember him or not, every Inuit man, woman, and child who lives in the Northwest Territories, Labrador, or Arctic Québec

today leads a better life because of Don Snowden's vision and singular determination.

Snowden first came to the North in 1964 as an information officer for the Canadian government's then Department of Northern Affairs. Two years later, as the department's Chief of the Industrial Division, he was given the job of tackling the twin problems of poverty and unemployment in the North by providing some sort of economic system that would help to make the Inuit self-sufficient. He had a vision for the future of the North of an independent native population of Canadian citizens governing themselves. It was his firm belief that if people are given the right tools and shown how to use them, they can help themselves better than anyone else can, will make wiser decisions for themselves than others can make for them, and can make important contributions to society in doing so.

The tool that Snowden and his dedicated staff put into the In-

uit hands was the cooperative, because it seemed to fit into the Inuit way of living and sharing. He also saw the co-ops as a training ground where Inuit would learn to speak up and assume responsibility. He used to say, "I don't believe the government is infallible. The co-ops make it possible for the Eskimos to give us hell."

The Industrial Division's first move was to have studies made of renewable resources in the Arctic, and on the basis of what was learned Snowden organized fisheries, the production and marketing of Inuit art, and the N.W.T. Tourist Office. Twenty-five years later he could look back on a proliferation of 43 co-ops involved in a variety of business operations across the North. Many of today's Inuit leaders received early training and confidence in running their own affairs in their local cooperatives.

Don Snowden was the first to say that these astounding results in just 25 years were achieved not by any one person but by the dedicated efforts of many people: his superiors, his staff, but most of all the Inuit themselves. Whether people liked Don Snowden personally or not — and he was not afraid to make enemies — there is general agreement that without his driving energy and singleminded approach, it would have taken decades longer, if it had happened at all.

Don Snowden was born in Winnipeg on 9 May 1928, and after receiving a degree in journalism from Carleton University in Ottawa, he worked briefly as a newspaperman on the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He left to become Director of Tourism in Saskatchewan for four years, and then joined Northern Affairs. When a competition opened in the area of economic development in the Canadian Arctic he applied, and was selected over 300 other applicants. The North was his personal proving ground, where he learned what he could do and could exercise his particular genius for taking a mix of familiar ideas and weaving them into a new pattern. He had an extraordinary gift for persuading people to speak their minds, and was a good and thoughtful listener.

When he left Northern Affairs in 1964, he explained: "I love to be in on the beginning of things. Now that I know our program works, I have to go on to other places. I am a sort of a learner and some sort of a teacher, and desperately inside me, there is the need to keep both these things flowing all the time without interruption."

He went then to Newfoundland, where he made his home until his death, finding new frontiers as Director of Extension and Advisor to the President of Memorial University. He is credited with doing much to transform the lives of the rural populations of Newfoundland, bringing the University's education programs to the outports and to Labrador for the first time, and creating a fisheries cooperative program that attracted students from 25 countries.

In Newfoundland he devised (in association with the National Film Board) a new, unique method of communication called the Fogo Film Method, first used on Fogo Island. The provincial government was determined to move the islanders to the mainland where their needs could be more easily serviced, but the Fogo Island residents liked where they were. Snowden and his NFB colleagues went among the islanders

with portable videotape equipment, and recorded them talking among themselves about the threatened relocation. The tapes then were played for the government authorities who had proposed the move, and they replied on videotape, thus setting up a dialogue that led to greater understanding between the two groups. The Fogo Islanders were able to stay where they were, and formed fishing and boatbuilding cooperatives that gave them a fresh economic base.

Over the past 10 years Snowden took the Fogo Method to many parts of the world, including the Caribbean, Alaska, Africa, and India, training government and rural people in its use. One of the projects of which he was proudest was the making of 33 tapes bringing together government biologists, Inuit, and Indians in the Keewatin, all of whom were concerned about the welfare of the Kaminuriak caribou herd but who disagreed on management methods. The result was face-to-face management meetings and a greatly improved level of understanding.

Snowden served on many official bodies, including the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, the National Film Board, and the Royal Commission on Labrador, of which he was chairman. He had recently been invited to serve on the advisory board of the Dag Hammarskjold Institute in Sweden and participate in a world study of communication in development of Third World countries. He was to have attended the first meeting in May and had planned to host the second in September in Labrador. Don Snowden's wife, Mary, however, said shortly after his death, "Don was really happiest in the Arctic. He loved wherever he worked, but it was the Canadian North that he loved the most."

In April 1961, Snowden and two of his staff met with a small group of Inuit who had formed the first Inuit cooperative, at the George River, 12 miles from Ungava Bay. It was their second meeting, and the groundwork was laid then that put Canada's first Inuit co-op into business. Snowden kept the meetings going night and day until plans for a settlement, a fish freezer, a store, a handicraft industry and myriad other details were understood by all. At the end of the final meeting, George Annanack, the senior Inuit leader, said unexpectedly to Snowden in Inuktitut, "We will remember you forever and ever." This was followed by a spontaneous shout of "Nakommiik! Nakommiik!" (Thank you!) from all the Inuit participants. When these words were translated for Snowden, he remained silent, but a month later he wrote of that meeting:

There was never a moment in my life when I was so exposed or so close to understanding how beautiful it could be to be human. Do you suppose that they would ever understand that in that moment they were telling a man there had been some purpose in his having lived, and for that he owed them a debt impossible ever to repay? I will never forget that moment, or them, as long as a trace of awareness of people is with me.

*Edith Iglauer*