



Top—Sukkertoppen, a west Greenland settlement, is located on rocky terrain. It is the centre of a valuable sealing and cod-salting industry.

Bottom—Godthaab, capital of Greenland, was founded by the Danish missionary Hans Egede in 1721. This view shows the older part of the town including the hospital to the left.



THE GREENLANDER OF TODAY*

**By Eske Brun. The Greenland Administration,
Copenhagen, Denmark.**

I SHOULD like to begin by saying something about the first and most serious error generally made about Greenland, and the one which is, I think, the most difficult to eradicate: It is popularly believed that it is cold in Greenland, so cold that wherever and whenever you are there you are frozen stiff, and that there is nothing there but ice and snow. This idea of Greenland as an enormous lump of ice is largely due to the ice-cap. Five-sixths of Greenland's two million square kilometers are covered by this ice-cap. There is so much ice there that, if it melted, the oceans and seas all over the world would rise eight meters. The existence of the ice-cap is not due to any excessive cold in Greenland, but mainly to the considerable height of the country, the average height of the surface of the ice-cap being about 2000 meters, and to the heavy snowfall. Paradoxical as it may seem, the ice-cap is thicker in southern Greenland than in northern Greenland, because the snowfall is heavier in the south. The largest continuous tracts of land not covered with ice are to be found in Pearyland on the northern coast of the country.

In the second place, the idea of Greenland as a land of ice is bound up with the so-called "pack-ice," which is carried by the East Greenland Current from the Arctic Sea near the North Pole along the eastern coast of Greenland, around Cape Farewell and even a little way along the west coast. This pack-ice makes the navigation of East Greenland waters very difficult and is mentioned frequently in all accounts of voyages there. Usually such reports tend to emphasize the enormous quantities of ice met with in Greenland, as this gives a far more dramatic picture of the country than a more routine account.

The Climate of Greenland

In considering the climate of Greenland it is necessary to realize how large the country is. Greenland is really a miniature continent. From its northernmost point to its southern tip the distance is as far as from Norway to the Mediterranean. Just as the climate of Norway is different from that of the Mediterranean, so there are of course also differences between the climate of the most northerly part of Greenland and that of the far south. The northernmost point of Greenland is nearer to the North Pole than any other place in the world. Its southernmost

*This article is a translation of a broadcast over the Danish radio on April 18, 1948. It was originally printed in Danish in the journal *Grønlandsposten* (Vol. VII, No. 11), published at Godthaab. *Arctic* is indebted to Director Brun and the Editor of *Grønlandsposten* for permission to print this English version. The translation is largely the work of M. Fuglsang-Damgaard.



Hr. Eske Brun succeeded Knud Oldendow as Director of the Greenland Administration on January 1, 1949.

During the late war he was the senior government official at Godthaab and carried most of the responsibility for Greenland affairs, building up an efficient and progressive organization. Students of Danish administrative methods will watch with great interest the changes expected to be made in Greenland affairs following the discussions with a delegation from Greenland, now taking place in Copenhagen.

Director Eske Brun as seen by a Greenland artist.

(Cut by Kåle Rosing, from Gronlandsposten)

point is in the same latitude as Bergen and Oslo. The part of Greenland that can be considered fairly densely populated, i.e. the southern part of the west coast, has a winter climate which is not much colder than that of many places in Europe. Under normal conditions ships can call at the most important ports of West Greenland throughout the year, as the high tides and rough sea keep the water free from ice.

When our first ships are sent to Greenland in the spring, the problem is less how to get through the ice around Greenland, than how to get out of the ice around our own country. On the other hand, the Greenland winter lasts very long, and the summer is comparatively chilly owing to the raw and stormy weather at that time of the year. Consequently, nowhere in Greenland is there anything we would consider to be a wood. Yet you can have fine summer days in Greenland, when the sun is broiling hot, and people go swimming in the small mountain lakes, although they don't do it voluntarily in the sea.

Greenlanders are not Eskimos

Another common mistake about Greenland is that it is inhabited by Eskimos who live on blubber, train-oil, and polar bears, and who always

go around dressed in furs. This impression includes quite a number of separate misconceptions.

First of all the name "Eskimo" itself. This word is not used in Greenland, especially by the Greenlanders, who dislike being so called. The word gained wide circulation because the first book about these people was written by a Jesuit missionary among the North American Indians. He only knew about the people he was describing from the Indians, who called them "Eskimos," which was a term of abuse. There is, however, another and very important consideration. The original population of Greenland, which Hans Egede met there when he first started his work of colonization more than 200 years ago, has since received a large admixture of Danish blood. During the first 150 years of the colonization many Danish craftsmen, coopers, carpenters, smiths, and seamen were sent to Greenland. These people came from humble homes and had never been used to much comfort. They liked living in Greenland so much that they settled down there for life and never saw their native country again. As a rule they married Greenland girls and as was usual at that time had a lot of children. These children generally were given good homes as homes went in those days, and had enough to eat and a good upbringing. The descendants of those mixed marriages made their mark on the population during succeeding centuries, so that nowadays there are no pure-blooded Eskimos. When we say that the Greenlanders are our distant fellow-

(Cut by Kåte Rosing, from Gronlandsposten)



countrymen it is more than an empty phrase—it is a simple statement of fact.

Changes during the last 30 years

The next question to discuss is the Greenlander's mode of life. On coming back from Greenland people are frequently asked: "Do you like blubber?" It is almost impossible to convince people that in Greenland they do not hunt seals, eat the blubber, and wear the skins. It was of course so when our colonization began and remained largely so up to a generation ago, but during the last 30 years an enormous change has taken place. What has happened is that the climate in Greenland has begun to change and is getting warmer. This is true of the temperature of both the air and the sea. This is not peculiar to Greenland. The same thing has been noted in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia, in fact in all the countries around the North Pole. Scientists are very interested in this phenomenon, and have recently shown that similar changes are taking place in Europe and Africa and probably all over the world. An attempt is to be made this year to find out whether the same also holds good for the Antarctic. I shall not discuss these world-wide considerations in detail, but shall merely mention a few of the conclusions that have been reached. In Finland the growing season for grain is now a fortnight longer than it was a generation ago. In northern Sweden it has been learned from felling trees and examining their annual rings, that during the last 30 years the trees have suddenly grown more rapidly, so that the increased value of the lumber can be counted in tens of millions of kroner. In Norway it has been noticed that in the same period the large ice-fields have been reduced to half their former size. The Russians have started to use the Siberian rivers a great deal for transportation and also navigate into the Arctic Sea from the White Sea, on routes which were formerly practically unusable because of ice. Many other examples could be mentioned. In Greenland these changes have been tremendously important. The glaciers have begun to recede, the ice-cap has diminished, and, in particular, the warmer sea water has caused a complete change in the marine fauna.

Cod-fishing, Sheep-raising, and Agriculture

The animals which enabled the people of Greenland to make a living, the seals and small whales, have now become scarce except in the extreme northern districts, and if today the people had no alternative but the traditional seal-hunting, they would now be dying of starvation. However, coincident with the reduction in seal-hunting, new kinds of fish appeared in Greenland waters, outstanding among them being cod. The big Atlantic cod—*Kabliau'en*—which in the old days was so familiar near Iceland and on the Newfoundland Banks, but which was practically un-

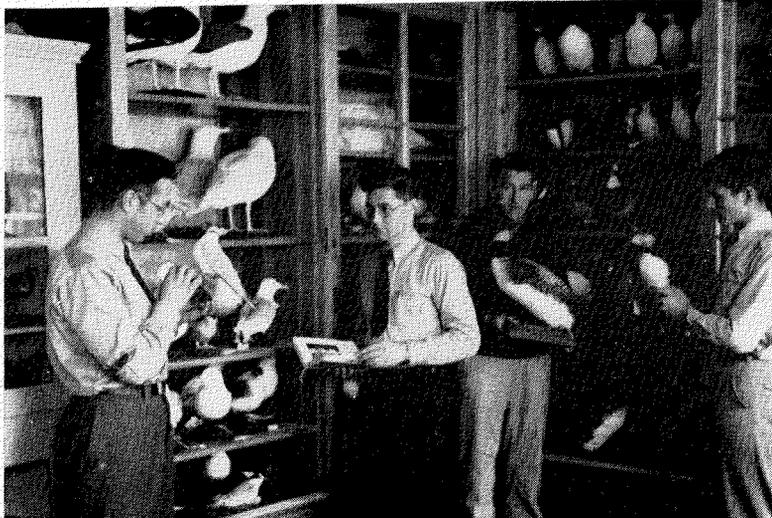
Children at a village school in Godthaab Fjord.



Part of a geography class at the Godthaab high school. All the students are native Greenlanders.



Greenland students at Godthaab Teachers' College use the school museum during a biology class.



(Photo: Trevor Lloyd)

known in Greenland, has now reached Greenland waters in enormous quantities. The establishment of a fishing industry has been so successful that it now provides a livelihood for the people who formerly depended on seals.

Other occupations have sprung up, the foremost being agriculture. However, our own Danish agriculture has no need to fear competition from Greenland. Grain will still not ripen there, and the soil is stony and sandy, but sheep-raising has made rapid progress in the southern part of the country. Greenland sheep-breeders in the Julianehaab district, which is the chief centre, now have about 20,000 ewes. In proportion to the population this is twice as many as there are in the Faroes.

These radical changes in the Greenlander's livelihood have naturally been followed by a change of mentality.

From Individualism to a Community

The seal-hunter of old was an out-and-out individualist. He was a hunter, with practically no other interest but hunting. He could make everything he wanted with his own hands. The seal supplied meat for him and his family; its blubber gave heat and light; from its skin could be made clothes, and a tent for the summer. Even his boats, his kayak and oomiak, were covered with sealskin. The only change brought about by colonization was that it enabled him to sell his surplus of blubber or skins and buy tobacco and gunpowder. He was content, at any rate if he was a skillful hunter able to get enough seals. When hunting conditions were unfavorable, he and his family starved with resignation; in good years they were perhaps the happiest people in the world. All that has now changed. The fisherman, who has replaced the hunter as the chief producer in a large part of Greenland, must sell practically his whole catch to obtain a house, clothes, food, and all the things he needs apart from fish. Consequently he now has to learn what it means to be a member of a community, to work with others.

Added to this, one of the things we have introduced in Greenland is a school system, not only elementary schools where every child is taught reading and writing, but also higher schools for older students where leaders can be trained. Moreover, we have endeavoured to introduce our



A small cannery for processing shrimps and fish is operated at Holsteinsborg, near the Arctic Circle in west Greenland.

(Photo:
Gunnar Seidenfaden)

own democratic system with the result that today the Greenlanders elect their own representatives. Hence it can easily be seen that policies which were good enough for Greenland in the 18th and 19th centuries under a paternalistic system, the chief purpose of which was to prevent the outside world from ruining the country, must now be replaced by some less restrictive system.

The Greenlander himself is fully aware of this. He has discovered that there is a world outside Greenland, a world which is very important to him and his livelihood, and he is eager to get to know that world and to introduce into his own country whatever benefits he finds there.

New times are approaching

The responsible Danish authorities realize that all this heralds a new time for Greenland. The Prime Minister, Mr. Hans Hedtoft, said at a meeting of the Greenland Society:

“Greenland affairs are in the melting-pot. Great reforms are on the way. If the work now being done to improve things in Greenland is to be successful, the people of Greenland must assist with it. On the whole I believe that Denmark’s future policies in Greenland must to some extent be based on new concepts. In the future, business activities in Greenland should not be exclusively the concern of the State. It will, no doubt, be beneficial to let Danish business participate in one way or another, and to emphasize—as has already been done to some extent—that this is a task for the whole nation. Denmark’s policy must still aim to retain Greenland for Denmark. How appropriate it will be to use Danish capital and Danish effort in this field! The details will of course need to be carefully considered and discussed with the people of Greenland. There will have to be a clear understanding that, as in the past, any changes will be made under government control with a guarantee to the Greenlanders that they will not in any way suffer or be exploited. On the contrary, the Greenlanders need to be won over to the idea which can not be practicable or successful without their approval and support. The Greenlanders must understand that new ideas must be put to the test, solely for *their* sakes and that of *Greenland*, so that firm and lasting relations can be maintained between Denmark and Greenland.”

Julianehaab in southwest Greenland is a thriving sheep-raising community. The wool and meat products are distributed throughout the country.

(Photo:
Gunnar Seidenfaden)



A social problem

The transition in Greenland from a subsistence economy to one based on money, and the many new adjustments among the Greenland people, mean that we are today confronted with a full-grown social problem there. The population is made up of workmen, farmers, and fishermen. They are satisfied or dissatisfied with their economic status as they see grounds for being so, and as conditions are not too good at present, they are not too pleased with them. In this respect their reactions are exactly like ours. The Greenland worker compares his position with that of Danish workers. He sees the economic advantages which the Danish worker has won, and he wants similar advantages for himself. The Greenland fisherman looks at his position and the prospects for production and prices, and is not going to be satisfied until his position is improved.

We must clearly understand that Greenland is at present a poor country, and poverty leaves its mark there in exactly the same way as elsewhere. Above all it results in bad houses, bad clothes, and bad food, which bring about poor health conditions. We have established a medical service in Greenland with doctors and hospitals. Some of the hospitals are good, others are bad, but we are striving to change them all into good ones.

Our attack on disease and, above all, on tuberculosis which has wrought havoc in the country (and which unlike many other diseases up there does not seem to be decreasing) must be concentrated first and foremost on raising the Greenlanders' standard of living.

Greenland is in the centre

The final and remarkably wide-spread error about Greenland is to think of it as being at the end of the world. In the old days, when we looked at the maps which hung in our class-rooms, this really seemed to be true. Greenland faded away at the upper edge of the map and was nothing but a large white smudge. A map of the world showed that the world was made up of two large land-masses, the American and the European-African-Asiatic, and that they were separated on one side by the Atlantic Ocean and on the other by the Pacific Ocean, and that all traffic had necessarily to take place across these two big oceans. This was true inasmuch as navigation in those days was not possible in Arctic waters on account of the ice. Today a new means of communication, aviation, has appeared, and has suddenly transformed the world.

If we look at the world on a globe instead of on one of the distorted flat maps, we shall notice with surprise some striking new things. To begin with, the Pacific Ocean does not separate Asia from America. Actually the western coast of America and the eastern coast of Asia are not opposite each other, but are an extension of one another, in a large arc around

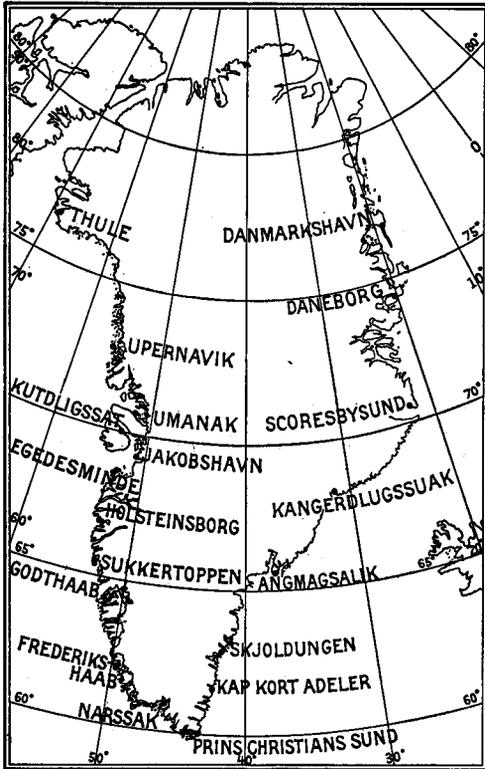


Fig. 1—Distribution of Danish meteorological stations in Greenland, December, 1947.

the northern part of the Pacific Ocean. The main land-masses, nine-tenths of the world's population, and practically ist whole productive potential are found within the northern hemisphere, in a land area made up of Asia, Europe, the greater part of Africa and North America. At the centre of this is the North Pole. Nowadays, the nearer a country is to the North Pole, the more central it is! This is, of course, something of an exaggeration, but it is a factor which will inevitably influence the future. Because Denmark possesses territory so centrally situated in relation to the main air routes of the future; it has suddenly been faced with quite new responsibilities in Greenland. When I say that Greenland will be of great importance to the aviation of the future, it

must not be forgotten that this is true both in peace and in war. We know that the main weapon of the future is expected to be a remote-controlled, jet-propelled missile which will follow the shortest course straight to the target.

These conditions impose on us new problems with regard to Greenland. The Greenland meteorological reports are of very great importance to air traffic across the North Atlantic Ocean and will, no doubt, in time be equally important to traffic over Greenland itself. As a matter of fact, we are now establishing an elaborate system of meteorological stations in Greenland, and similar undertakings will be begun in due course.

Wartime American bases

While speaking about Greenland and the obligations placed on us by our international relations, I would like to take the opportunity of clearing up the most recent misunderstanding. There is a widespread impression in Denmark that wherever you go in Greenland you will meet American soldiers, or at any rate you would have done so during the war, and that they have "Americanized" the Greenlanders.



Many Greenlanders have been trained as craftsmen in Denmark. All boys attending high school receive woodwork training in the Greenland schools. View shows part of a class at Godthaab.



(Photo: Trevor Lloyd)

Godthaab radio station maintains regular contact with all parts of Greenland, and with Denmark and North America. It is operated by Greenlanders.

The fact is, that during the war we took care that the American bases, at least the most important of them, were built in uninhabited places, and these localities were put out of bounds; nobody was allowed to leave them, and no Greenlander was allowed to enter them, so during the war the Greenlanders had very little contact with the Americans.

The Greenlanders must not be exploited

As to the best way of solving all these problems in the days that lie ahead there are many different opinions. There is, nevertheless, one essential which I should like to emphasize before I finish my talk. Ever since the beginning of Danish colonization in Greenland, it has been a fundamental principle that our right to Greenland is not based on force, and that it should not be used to exploit the Greenlanders. Whatever may be suggested in Denmark about new policies for Greenland, there is one thing that everybody takes for granted, and that is that our purpose there is to help the Greenlanders, not to exploit them. It is to aid them on their way forward and upward, so that they can in every way become the equals of other Danish subjects.

As long as we stick to that principle, I am certain that we shall be successful, and so long as we do I am convinced nothing can endanger the solidarity between Greenland and Denmark.

