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Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands
IAP Narrative
[11 23 2009]

This IAP Hostel Narrative summarizes documents that provide an over-view of the history and administration of the hostel and associated school.

NAME OF HOSTEL AND VARIANTS

Belcher Islands Pupil Residence [BES-000001]¹
Belcher Islands Hostel [BES-000145]

Years during which the hostel was operated solely or in part by the Federal Government as a residence for school age students

October 22, 1963 to June 1964 [BES-000001] [BES-000003]
(It is possible that some students stayed at the hostel until October or November 1964)
[BES-000011]

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

1959: Government correspondence describes the Belcher Islands as a location “where there are now enough children to support a school, but where the future of the settlement is sufficiently uncertain to make us pause at the thought of erecting permanent buildings.” It goes on to state that if a school were to be established on the Belchers it should be “of a prefabricated type which can be dismantled and relocated elsewhere in case of necessity.” [BES-000058]

In March 1959, a Northern Service Officer was tasked with locating a place to put a school on the Belcher Islands, to be opened in September 1960.² Correspondence states that money was available for the construction of a “school plant” on the Belchers consisting of a one classroom school, a two bedroom house for a teacher, a house for a janitor, and a powerhouse/warehouse with power generating plants and distribution lines. [RCN-005792] [RCN-008426]³

A memorandum from October 1959, notes that the school on the Belchers would need to be outfitted with a canoe and outboard motor for transportation and the movement of freight and, if necessary, students. [BES-000064]

¹ Documents with the prefix BLS are from the Belcher Islands small hostel documents collection. These are Crown-sourced documents.

² The Belcher archipelago is made up of some 1500 small islands in Hudson’s Bay. They sit about 150 miles off the coast of Quebec.

³ Documents with the prefix RCN are from the Northwest Territories-Nunavut General documents collection. These are Crown-sourced documents.

1960: On September 20, 1960, the Belcher Islands Federal Day School opened with 15 Inuit pupils. The school site was located near the southern tip of Flaherty Island in an area known locally as 'South Camp'. School was conducted in a prefabricated one room building with aluminum siding and asphalt shingles. [RCN-008644] [BES-000075]

Government correspondence notes that unless some type of accommodation for students were provided at or near the school site very few children would be able to attend on a regular basis. Owing to overcrowding and poor sanitation boarding children with families already living at South Camp was not an acceptable strategy, nor was encouraging the pupils' families to move to the area. One administrator stated, "it will be disastrous if all the people move to the school site as this is a poor hunting and trapping area. The seven families who stayed there last winter experienced starvation, having to eat their dogs...Due to last winters experience none of the families except the local catechist and school janitor plan to remain there this winter but they all wish their children to go to school. Without exception there was favorable response to the question of hostel accommodation." Subsequent correspondence noted that money would be made available for the construction of an eight bed hostel at South Camp during the 1961/62 fiscal year. [BES-000071] [RCN-008615]

The school building and grounds caretaker lived in a house on the school site. [BES-000085]

1961: Other than the caretaker, there was only one staff member at the Belcher Islands FDS. He served as principal and teacher. Correspondence notes that he would also be tasked with supervising the day to day operations of the student hostel when it opened. [BES-000103]

The Belcher Islands Federal Day School opened on September 26, 1961 with 13 pupils in attendance. [BES-000102] [BES-000004]

In October 1961, an elderly woman who lived very close to the school site at South Camp died of measles. [BES-000113]

In 1961, the Government commissioned a report regarding the possibility of centralizing the Inuit population on the Belcher Islands. The report came back negative. It pointed out that no single location on the Belchers had adequate food and water resources to support the whole population. This was problematic for public servants who viewed a sedentary rather than migratory pattern of life as favorable for modern economic and social development, and as a necessary precondition to education. [BES-000114] [BES-000084-0001] [BES-000116]

1962: The Belcher Islands Federal Day School opened on September 10, 1962 with 18 Students. All are identified as Day Pupils on the Enrolment Form. [BES-000127-0000] [BES-000005]

A Memorandum notes that the hostel remained unfinished and unoccupied, to be completed sometime during the 1963/64 fiscal year. [RCN-004467]

1963: By the end of January 1963, the Belcher Islands hostel was 95% complete. [RCN-004468]

A Memorandum notes that by mid March 1963, five welfare houses had been built near the school site at South Camp. [BES-000134]

In April 1963, the principal at the FDS estimated that at least six pupils would move into the hostel for the 1963/64 school year. [BES-000137-0002]

The Belcher Islands Federal Day School opened on September 25, 1963 with 14 students attending. Five students were living in the hostel. [BES-000144-0000] [BES-000006] [GWR-000201]⁴

Government correspondence notes that at least ten children from the Belcher Islands were attending school at Great Whale River rather than at the Belcher Islands School. [BES-000145]

The December 1963, Quarterly Return identifies six pupils living at the Belcher Islands Hostel. [BES-000001]

1964: Documents identify the hostel parents at South Camp and note that they worked under the supervision of the wife of the principal at the FDS. [BES-000146] [BES-000152]

In February of 1964, an unspecified number of boys left the Belcher Islands hostel without permission. They moved back in with their parents who had decided to remain at South Camp over the winter rather than moving to an outlying camp. The boys returned to the hostel after an unspecified number of days [BES-000146]

The March 1964, Quarterly Return identifies six pupils living in the Belcher Islands Hostel. [BES-000002]

The June 1964, Quarterly Return identifies five pupils living in the Belcher Islands Hostel. [BES-000003]

An Enrolment Form from the FDS identifies two pupils at the FDS as living in the hostel as of October 5, 1964. However, by November 24, 1964, the Belcher Islands Hostel was empty. [BES-000011] [BES-000036]

1966: A Report states that the Belcher Islands hostel was not utilized by the Department during the 1965/66 school year. [RCN-012148-0000]

⁴ Documents with the prefix GWR are from the Great Whale River documents collection. These are Crown-sourced documents.

1967: A Memorandum dated January 18, 1967, states “the hostel has not been opened for two years and it is unlikely that it will be opened next year.” [RCN-011093]

1968: A letter notes that the hostel remained empty and enquires whether it would be possible to make the bathing facilities in the hostel available to the children attending the FDS. Marginalia indicates that the request was approved. [BES-000186]

1969: A memorandum states that 21 children from the Belcher Islands were attending school in Great Whale River and at Port Harrison. [FGR-000036]⁵

1970: Correspondence indicates that over the summer in 1970 two portables were to be put in place at North Camp on Flaherty Island. One portable would serve as a school house the other was to serve as accommodation for staff. The school at North Camp was to open on or around September 15, 1970. Over the winter of 1970/71, the school facility at South Camp was to be moved from South Camp to North Camp, “thus consolidating our school services in the Belcher Islands. [BES-000205] [BES-000206]

MANAGEMENT OF HOSTEL

The Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands was conceived, developed, funded and operated by the Northern Affairs Branch of the Federal Government. As with other Small Hostels, the Federal Government hired and trained the people who worked in the Belcher Islands Hostel and provided food for its occupants.

"In connection with small hostels, our policy may be briefly stated as follows: small hostels with accommodation for 8 children in the 6 to 10 year age group will gradually be constructed at centers where day schools are already in operation, provided local boarding facilities are inadequate to take care of the children in this age group. The children admitted to these hostels will be those who normally reside beyond daily commuting distance of the school but within a radius of 50 to 100 miles. For this purpose 'daily commuting' means that the child cannot attend school at least 70% of the time with or without local transportation. As far as possible these hostels are to assimilate family units with the normal house atmosphere. Standards are to be as close as possible to those prevailing in the area and supervision, including cooking, laundry and so on is to be carried out under contract by an older Eskimo couple or widow who might otherwise require some form of government assistance. Local food resources are to be utilized to the greatest possible extent.” [RCN-004411-0000] [RCN-003483-0000] and [RCN-003483-0001]

Dates managed by Church

⁵ Documents with the prefix FGR are from the Federal Hostel at Great Whale River documents collection. These are Crown-sourced documents.

The management of the Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands was entirely secular with no Church involvement.

Dates managed by Government

The Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands operated from October 1963 until circa November 1964. It was conceived, developed, funded and operated by the Northern Affairs Branch of the Federal Government

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The 'school plant' at Belcher Islands consisted of a one room school, a house for the teacher/principal, a house for the caretaker, and, after 1963, an 8 bed student hostel.

A January 1961 survey of the Belcher Islands school site noted that all 4 buildings at the site suffered from the deteriorative action of the weather elements:

“The flooring of the school room has had to be nailed as the adhesive used for the tiles proved to be useless. Snow piles up in the school after a blizzard...under the conditions of high wind the drop in temperature and rise in intensity of the draught render the school house unfit for normal use...” In addition, “[n]o satisfactory arrangement was made for the convenience of a ready supply of water... [t]he heating capacity of the Findlay heater... is obviously inadequate for the 6,000 cu.ft. of the school house...the situation is aggravated by the southern – type wind non-proof windows and the gaps between the pre-fabricated wall panels.”

The report concludes that regarding the Belcher Islands school site, “there has been a sad lack of planning, imagination and supervision.” [BES-000084-0001]

A 1961 school report described the school as a wood frame building with a tin roof. It included a playground area with swings and teeter-totters. The toilets were of a bucket type and there was a sink with taps. The building was heated with an oil space heater. [BES-000085]

LAND

The Belcher Islands are an archipelago in the Qikiqtaaluk Region of Nunavut. Located in Hudson Bay, the Belcher Islands are spread out over almost 3,000 square kilometres. The hamlet of Sanikiluaq is on the north coast of Flaherty Island and is the southernmost in Nunavut.

In 1960 the school unit was off-loaded at Itialru on the southern tip of Flaherty Island. This area was chosen as the harbour there was adequate for off-loading and because ice

conditions were unsatisfactory in the northern part of Flaherty Island. The school site was approximately 70 miles south of the Hudson's Bay trading post at Eskimo Harbour.
[BES-000040-0000]

PHOTOS, PLANS AND OTHER MEDIA

Item #	Date	Description
BES-000043-0003	00/00/1961	This document is a picture of the Belcher archipelago. The school site is also marked.

GENERAL ENROLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME

Hostel enrolment

Year	Number of Students
1963/64	5
1964/65	2

STUDENTS FROM OTHER RESERVES

Students at the Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands were from the Belcher Islands.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The Belcher Islands Hostel was entirely secular. No religious groups or orders were involved in its operation or management.

WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

As a result of the Government running the Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands directly with no Church involvement, no operational agreements were signed with religious organizations.

DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO SCHOOL INCIDENTS

To date, we are unaware of any convictions for abuse at the Federal Hostel at Belcher Islands or of any convicted abusers present at the school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On October 13th, 1961 an outbreak of measles was reported at Belcher Islands. After flying into Belcher Islands on an inspection, the Northern Administrator reported three cases of measles at the school site and two cases of pneumonia. [BES-000113]

PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS

Name	Position	Tenure Dates
M.C. Hampson	Principal/Teacher	1960-1961
Douglas James Smith	Principal/Teacher	1961-1962
Peter H. Zacharias	Principal/Teacher	1962-1964
Mack Clyde Sutton	Principal/Teacher	1964-1966
Stanley Zazelenchuk	Principal/Teacher	1966 - 1967
John Cann	Principal/Teacher	1967-1969
Kenneth Sheppard	Principal/Teacher	1969 – at least 1970

Narrative Completed: October 28, 2008

Narrative Updated: November 23, 2009

The original school narrative document produced by Canada also contains a number of records that have been separated pending review.



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UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA