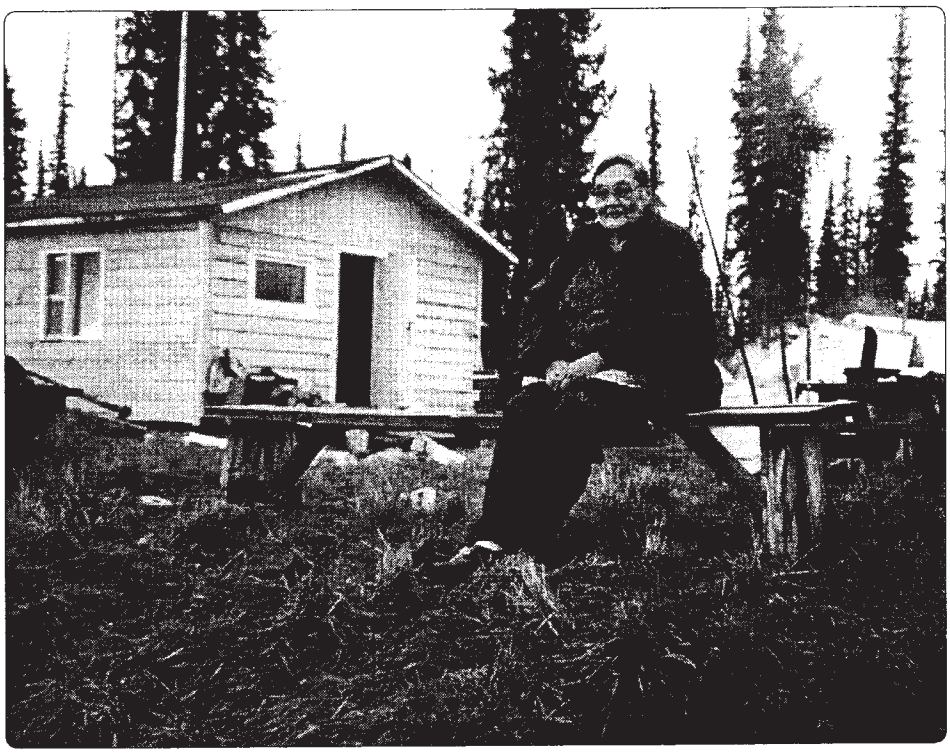
GWICH'IN TRIBAL COUNCIL

Annual Report 1998-1999

GWICH'IN LAND, CULTURE AND ECONOMY FOR A BETTER FUTURE

1) Gwich'in Ethno-botany Project

Ethno-botany is the study of the traditional use of plants for food, medicine, shelter and tools. For the past two years the GSCI in partnership with Gwich'in Elders and Alan Fehr of the Inuvik Research Center, carried out a Gwich'in ethno-botany project. This year the report was finalized. The report identifies 34 species of plants by their Gwich'in, Latin and local names and provides information on where the plants can be found and how they can be used. A few recipes are also included for making medicine. Dry-mounted displays of 30 of the plants were also prepared and kits containing the report and displays have been sent out to the 5 schools in the Gwich'in Settlement Area.



Sarah McLeod-Firth, Elder, at the 1998 Gwich'in Science Camp.

2) Gwich'in Dictionary Project

The dictionary project is a long-term project being carried out by the Gwichya Gwich'in and Teel'it Gwich'in elders, GSCI staff, Eleanor Mitchell (formerly with the Gwich'in Language Center), Andre Bourcier (a linguist from Lavel University) and Gwich'in Language Center staff. This year we published the 3rd edition of our Gwich'in noun dictionary. This version contains over 2,700 words in the Gwichya Gwich'in and Teetl'it Gwich'in dialects. Words and terms from previous oral history projects were added to this expanded version as were kinship terms and words related to traditional activities recorded during trips on the land and in workshops in Fort McPherson and in Tsiigehtchic last summer. A sound chart with explanatory notes was also included in this editon. The main goals of producing this dictionary are to:

1) Record the rich vocabulary of older fluent speakers that is most at risk of being lost.

2) Be a tool for present learners of Gwich'in helping them with unfamiliar vocabulary.

3) Provide a practical and easy-to-use reference that will standardize the way Gwich'in is written. The words in the dictionary have been entered into a database pro-

gram for easy access. Our long term goal is to produce a CD-ROM of the dictionary data-base which will include an oral component so that the words and phases in the dictionary can be heard and the CD used as a tool for those interested in learning the language.

3) Gwich'in Language Plan

One of our most recent initatives has been to develop a long- range language plan to revitalize the use of Gwich'in. Last year, the Government of the Northwest Territories approached the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Institute to develop this plan. This is part of an overall strategy by the Government to devolve funding and responsibility for language programs to the 7 aboriginal language groups in the Northwest Territories. The six other aboriginal groups are preparing their plans as well. As we began our consultation with the communities, it became clear that community programs alone would would not reverse the erosion of the Gwich'in Language. The language is now in the advanced stages of decline and requires action on a number of fronts. As a result, we have broadened our perspective to include all the areas that impact on the status of the Gwich'in language, including the administration of programs, language policy, education research and translation and interpretation services. The end result is a language plan that builds upon many of the initiatives that we are currently doing, but is a more comprehensive strategy to revitalize the Gwich'in language in the communities of the Gwitch'in settlement area. It outlines the roles that the Gwich'in leadership, Gwich'in organizations,the bands, schools, translators, the Gwich'in Language Center, the Institute and the communities will play in the next five years. It also includes many people's ideas for keeping the Gwich'in language alive. Some of these ideas include: language immersion camps on-the-land, classes for adults, developing a language curriculum and teaching materials targeted at different grade andlearning levels, a local strong teacher training program, radio lessons, and a preschool program similar to the Maori language nest which has been so successful in New Zealand.

4) Gwich'in Science Camp

The GSCI offered its fourth annual on-the-land traditional knowledge and western science camp for senior high school students. This year's camp was held at Rachal Reindeer Camp outside of Inuvik from September 9-17, 1998. Students from Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic worked with Gwich'in Elders, local community members knowledgable about Gwich'in history, culture and traditional knowledge, and scientists from the disciplines of anthropology, biology and geography who are currently on staff with Gwich'in organizations and co-managment boards, and the GNWT. Two high school credits were awarded to students who completed the camp. The camp addresses the widespread concern that youth in the Gwich'in Settlement area are not spending enough time on the land learning about Gwich'in culture and traditional knowledge. It also addresses the concern that students are dropping out of high school and therefore do not have the academic qualifications and skills needed to carry out many of the jobs needed to successfully implement the Gwich'in Land Claim, or to find other professional employment.

5) Teetl'it Gwich'in Place Names Project

This year, GSCI staff reviewed information collected during previous Teetl'it Gwich'in oral history projects and entered this information into a computerized database. The database now contains detailed oral history information on the area be-

tween Fort McPherson and the Wind River with an emphasis on sites along the Peel River. A draft report of this information was reviewed with Teetl'it Gwich'in Elders in late march 1999 in order to clarify questions and finalize the report. Further work will be carried out to clarify names and add oral history information for areas not covered to date, as funding becomes available.

6) Ehdiitat Gwich'in Place Names Project

Early in 1999, GSCI, in partnership with the community of Aklavik, began place names research in Aklavik. This is the beginning of a multi-year project. Sheila Greer and Annie B. Gordon interviewed Ehdiitat Gwich'in Elders about traditional names for geographic features of the Aklavik land use area, and recorded stories or legends associated with these names or the places referred to. Approximately 200 place names along with oral history information about many of these places were recorded. The research built upon previous work carried out by John Ritter with William Nerysoo, Robert Buckle and Valerie Furlong of Aklavik, and ongoing work carried out by GSCI in the Teetl'it Gwich'in area.

7) Gwichya Gwich'in National Historic Sites Project

Hyacinthe Andre, Elder of Tsiigehtchic.

Nagwichoonjik (the Mackenzie River) between Thunder River and Point Separation is of national historic significance due to its prominent position within the Gwichya Gwich'in cultural landscape. (Historic Sites and Monuments Board recommendation as approved by The Honourable Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage, January 1998)

GSCI, working with the community of Tsiigehtchic and Parks Canada, began to carry out commemorative activities along the stretch of the Mackenzie River that was designated a historic site in January 1998. The text for two plaques at the eastern and western boundaries of this stretch (Thunder River and Point Seperation) were written, and all of the major trailheads leading from the Mackenzie River inland were marked with traditional markers called njoh (lobsticks).

8) Land Use and Community History Book

In 1996, the GSI worked with the community of Tsiigehtchic to draft the first version of a land use and community history. This history is unique for the Gwich'in Settlement Area. It contains Gwich'in place names, words, stories and other oral history information documented during place name and ethno-archaeology projects carried out in the community from 1992-1995, plus information from archival and published sources. Upon reviewing this history, Elders in the community noted that there are more stories that they would like to have recorded, so that they could be included in the final version. Following the wishes of the elders, the Institute began to carry out this additional research in the 1998/1999 fiscal year. Also during the course of this work, we asked community members for permission to make copies of photographs from their personal collections, so that

these can also be included in the final version of the book. We are currently fundraising so that we can complete this book in the year 2000. This book will be the first of a series of land use and community histories that we will produce in the next five to ten years for the Gwich'in Settlement Area.

9) Peel River Archaeological Survey

This project was cancelled due to the number of deaths in the community of Fort McPherson during the summer of 1998. We are planning to carry out fieldwork in partnership with the Yukon Government Heritage Branch in the summer of 2000.

10) Tsiigehtchic Genealogy Project

Roman Catholic Church records from 1860 to 1935 were translated from French to English this past year by Bob Ansdell of Tsiigehtchic, so that we can continue building family tree charts for people now living in Tsiigehtchic. This work will benefit the Gwich'in Tribal Council for enrollment purposes. It will also provide family information for Gwichya Gwich'in members living both within and outside the Gwich'in Settlement area (i.e. Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Inuvik, Edmonton Calgary, Vancouver, etc.)

Responsibilities Related To Implementation of the Claim

11) Integrated Resource Management Plan

Since the passage of the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act in late December of 1998, the GSCI has reviewed land and water applications submitted to the Gwich'in Land and Water Board and provided advice on their possible impact on heritage resources.

12) Self-Government: Cultural, Language & Heritage Management Sub-Agreement

GSCI is continuing to advise the Beaufort-Delta Self-government office on matters related to the negotiation of a self-government office,GSCI, Inuvialuit Social Development Program, Federal Government and GNWT.

13) Teetl'it Gwich'in Burial Sites in the Yukon

Upon the request of the GTC, GSCI has taken part in discussions with the Yukon First Nations and the Yukon Government regarding the protection and management of Teetl'it Gwich'in Burial sites. Staff attended meetings in Whitehorse in October 1998 and March 1999. Guidelines dealing with the discovery of human remains and the First Nation burial sites in the Yukon, have been drafted and are currently being reviewed.

14) Gwich'in Land Use Plan

For the past 6 years, the GSCI has provided input into the development of the Gwich'in Land Use Plan in terms of heritage resources and land use classification areas. A final draft of the plan is now in the proccess of being reviewed. The GSCI also has provided a plain language version of Chapter 25, the heritage chapter of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. It is anticipated that a plain language summary of the agreement and a pamphlet will be available to beneficiaries and the general public in the summer of 1999.

16) Repatriation

Two years ago, GSCI under contract to the GNWT wrote a report based on a survey carried out two years previously, that identified which museums and archives outside of the Northwest Territories housed Northern Athabaskan (included Gwich'in) and Metis collections. This year, working in Partnership with the GNWT (Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center), we are in the initial stages of developing a plan to repatriate specific items of Gwich'in clothing in museums iden-

Mary Kendi of Fort McPherson with Alestine Andre.

tified in the 1997 report, to the NWT. We are also in the proccess of developing a proposal to solicit the PWHNS's assistance with the repatriation and the development of joint interpretive activities so that the clothing can be used as a vehicle to educate people about the value of history of the clothing, and to revitalize the knowledge surrounding the production of this clothing. Our goal is to recreate this and have examples on display along with interpretive materials in all four communities in the GSA.

Administration

17) Re- organization of Positons within GSCI, Additional Staff & GSCI Policy and Operations Manual

As of April 1, 1998, staff positions within the Institute were reorganized with Ingrid Kritsch (founding Executive Director as of 1993) assuming the position of research director and Alestine Andre (Cultural director since 1994) assuming the position of Executive Director. On April 1, 1998 Ruby Lennie was hired as our full-time administrative assistant trainee to work in the Tsiigehtchic office. We are currently drafting a GSCI policy and operations manual to replace the current policy and operations manual being used.