

MOOSE FACTORY: HERITAGE PLANNING IN A NORTHERN COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Situated on the southwestern shores of James Bay, Moose Factory is one of Ontario's oldest communities (see Plate 1). It is the second oldest Hudson's Bay Company settlement (Rupert House, Quebec predates it by five years). Partly because of its long and important association with the Hudson's Bay Company and partly because of Ontario government tourism promotion campaigns, Moose Factory is one of the best known northern Ontario fur trade settlements. Given the community's historic significance and its popularity with tourists, its heritage resources are very important not only for intrinsic reasons but for economic ones as well. This paper will focus on the problems of managing these resources and will consider the solutions that have been attempted and proposed to date. The discussion is based on the findings of the Moose Factory Community Heritage Survey that I directed for the Ontario government.

PRESENT-DAY COMMUNITY

The population of the present community consists of three fairly distinctive groups, the status Indians who are members of the Moose Band and occupy the eastern portion of the settlement, the non-status Native peoples who live off the reserve in the central portion of the community and the Euro-Canadians who live on the western edge of the settlement in the vicinity of the hospital. Generally, members of the latter group are employed in the hospital, in government offices and in the schools. The majority of the status and non-status Native people do not have fulltime employment. They derive most of their income from various government social assistance programmes. Additional income is earned by hunting and trapping, selling handicraft items to summer tourists, operating a canoe ferry service between the

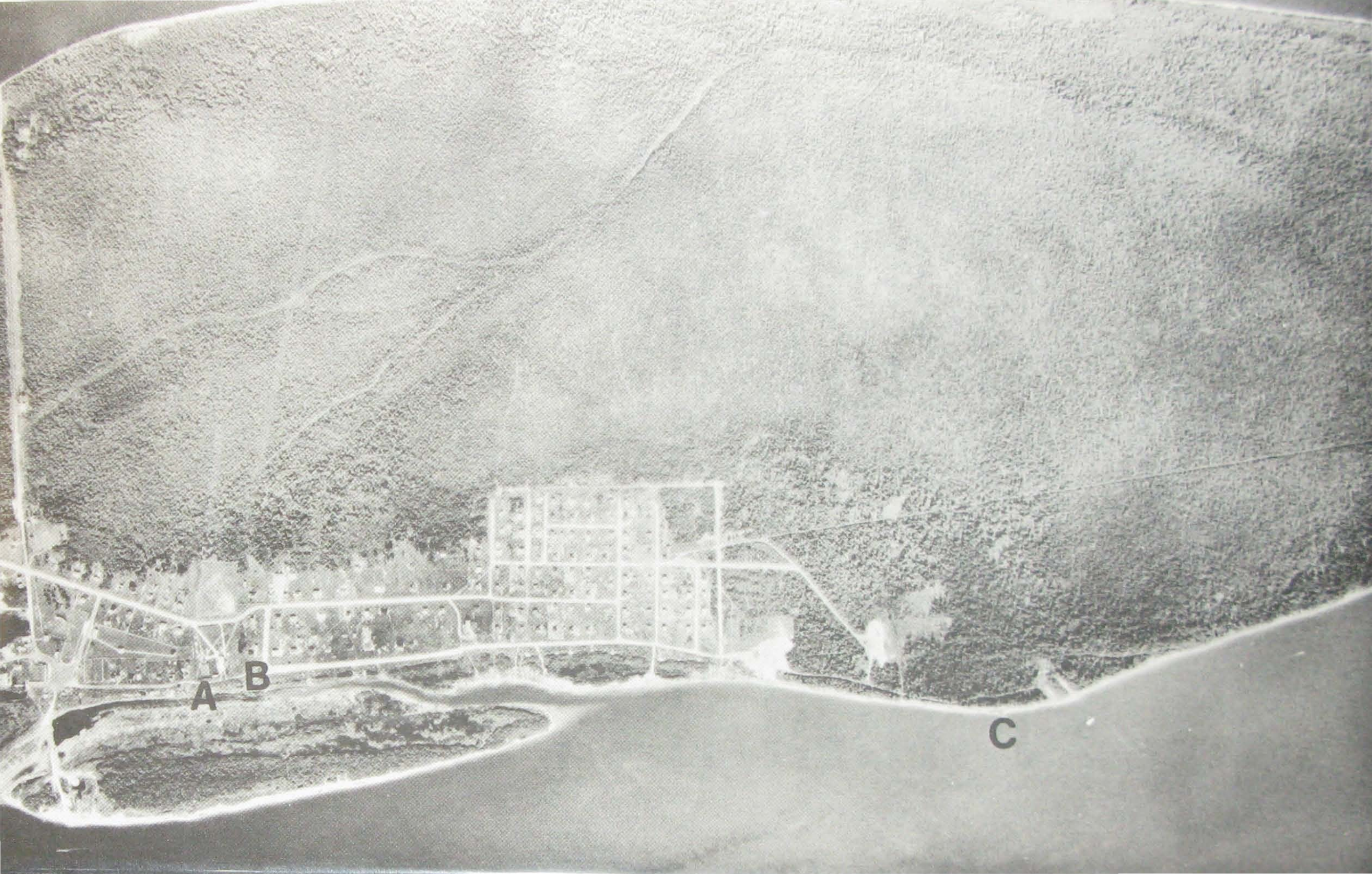


PLATE 1: Airphoto of Moose Factory at 6,000 feet: 1969

- A. Shows the site of present Staff House and general location of all of the factories built after 1733 (Moose Factory II and III)
- B. Shows the site of former Moose works.
- C. Shows the site of "Point of Pool," the probable location of Moose Factory I.

island and the mainland in summer, and by obtaining a variety of other summer jobs. Although Moose Factory is more prosperous than most of the other communities on the western shores of James Bay and Hudson Bay, there are not enough permanent or seasonal employment opportunities for the Native population.

The economic future of Moose Factory is not very bright. There are few natural resources in the immediate vicinity that are likely to be developed and significant industrial development is improbable. Over the past two decades the only viable industry in the community has been the summer tourist business. In the early 1960s the Ontario Government began to promote the Polar Bear Express train trip from Cochrane to Moosonee on the mainland opposite Moose Factory. Beginning with a ridership of approximately 5,000 per summer in 1965, the number of visitors increased steadily until 1972 when 31,913 people took the trip. Between 1973 and 1980 the number fluctuated between 18,100 and 34,108. As the economy softened after 1980 and intervening tourist attractions were developed in southwestern Ontario, the number of tourists visiting the southern James Bay area has declined.

Since interest in the region's history is one of the primary factors motivating people to visit the twin communities of Moosonee and Moose Factory, the Ontario government through the Ministry of Northern Affairs decided that the heritage resources of the community of Moose Factory should be examined comprehensively and a plan drafted for their preservation and development. This was to be done under the direction of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture which had the responsibility for heritage planning and preservation. It was under this latter ministry that the two-year Moose Factory Community Heritage Survey was launched in 1980. Given that the project would involve archaeological, archival, architectural, and oral history surveys, the ministry decided that it would be desirable to retain an historical geographer as director. I was approached because of my familiarity with Hudson's Bay Company and Native history.

PLANNING PROBLEMS

A visit to the community in the summer of 1980 and a survey of tourists served to identify a number of major problems that any heritage plan would have to address in order to achieve the twin objectives of bolstering the tourist business and fostering heritage conservation. At the outset the Native inhabitants of the community were cynical about the project. The community has been the focus of a variety of studies and the residents believed that they had not benefitted from any of them. They doubted that the Moose Factory Community Heritage Survey would be any different. Although there is considerable interest in the community about its past, initially there was a reluctance to discuss it or to show survey team members family photographs or artifacts held in private hands. In most instances this hesitancy was due to past experience in which family mementos had been loaned to academics who never returned them.

Besides having misgivings about the Heritage Survey Project, it was also clear that the Native people of Moose Factory had ambivalent attitudes toward tourists. While many of them directly benefitted from the tourism business through the sales of craft items or the operation of the taxi canoes, many Native residents do not appreciate having large numbers of visitors in their community. It was clear that any development proposals that significantly altered existing community life would be strongly opposed.

A survey of tourists, on the other hand, indicated that there were problems with the existing "heritage tour." It was not plaqued, there was no detailed guide map, tour guides did not accompany all groups, and there was no attempt to coordinate displays. Most visitors hoped to see a fort and many expected a factory since few people realize that historically the term "factory" is an old English word for a merchant company's foreign trading station. Unfortunately few vestiges of the company's long association with the community remain. They are limited to an old officers' quarters known as the Staff House, a forge, and a small powder magazine. None of these structures is remarkable in

its own right and similar types of landmarks can be seen at more accessible locations, such as Upper Canada Village, Fort York, Blackcreek Pioneer Village, Ste. Marie Among the Huron, Fort Penetanguishene and Fort William. At these other locations the structures are often better maintained and the displays are generally more up-to-date in terms of their design.

Indeed, the maintenance of displays and buildings is a major problem in the community. There are several reasons for this. The museum, the forge, and the powder magazine are closed for most of the year and are unheated during the winter. During the summer tourist season (July and August) these facilities, as well as the Staff House, are open. But, with the exception of the Staff House which is under the care of the Ontario Heritage Foundation, only minimal maintenance and cleaning are done. Security in the museum is not adequate and theft of display items has been a continuing problem. No staff were posted at the Powder Magazine and this building and its displays showed the effects of vandalism. Given the lack of sufficient part-time employment opportunities for students and minimal policing of properties in the community, vandalism will remain a serious problem which any heritage resource management programme will have to address.

The difficulties posed by this problem can be illustrated by considering the obstacles that were encountered initially when an effort was made to save some of the few surviving domestic dwellings that date to the last century. Throughout nineteenth century and the first half of this century, most of the Hudson's Bay Company's workers of Euro-Indian ancestry lived in one- or one-and-a-half-story log dwellings that were built in a manner that was apparently unique to Moose Factory (Plate 2). The construction technique used involved the use of drift pins to join courses of logs at the corners. During the last couple of decades these older log houses began to be replaced by prefabricated ATCO-type buildings. Abandoned houses were destroyed by the local fire department which used them for firefighting practice. When the fire chief was first asked to discontinue this activity so that some of the houses might be saved for heritage reasons he



PLATE 2: Abandoned servants' quarters, Moose Factory, ca. 1900 [Public Archives of Canada].

refused. He pointed out that abandoned buildings were a hazard to the community because children vandalized them. The lack of a patrol force precluded the prevention of this unfortunate activity. Furthermore, he believed that these dwellings were not as impressive or as important in heritage terms, as the Staff House (Plates 2, 3 and 4), the forge or the magazine so he could not see why they should be preserved.

The attitude of the firechief served to highlight another one of the shortcomings of the kind of heritage resource development that had gone on in the community until that time. Most of the existing displays focused on traditional Hudson's Bay Company themes, such as the chartering of the company, the evolution of the company over time, and the company's upper class of officers'. To outsiders, stressing the latter theme seemed to be very appropriate given that the most impressive surviving company building is the old officers' quarters. However, a large segment of the community of Moose Factory has trouble identifying with this traditional historical theme because it largely ignores the central contributions that Indian and mixed-bloods made to the Hudson's Bay Company and to northern development. Thus, the community felt somewhat alienated from the heritage displays that had been set up for outside visitors. Indeed, they were also suspicious of what outsiders were being told about their community's history by the tour guides who were trained by the provincial Ministry of Northern Affairs.

This identity problem was reflected in the ambivalent feelings that many residents displayed toward the Staff House that had been the focus of most government heritage expenditures before 1980. Although the ancestors of the non-status Native residents had built the structure, few of their relatives had ever been invited into the building afterward while it was used by the Hudson's Bay Company. Thus, the Staff House had never served an important role in the status and non-status Native community. If the government continued to focus its heritage conservation effort on this building it is clear that it would do so at the risk of having the building becoming a symbol of the fact that heritage

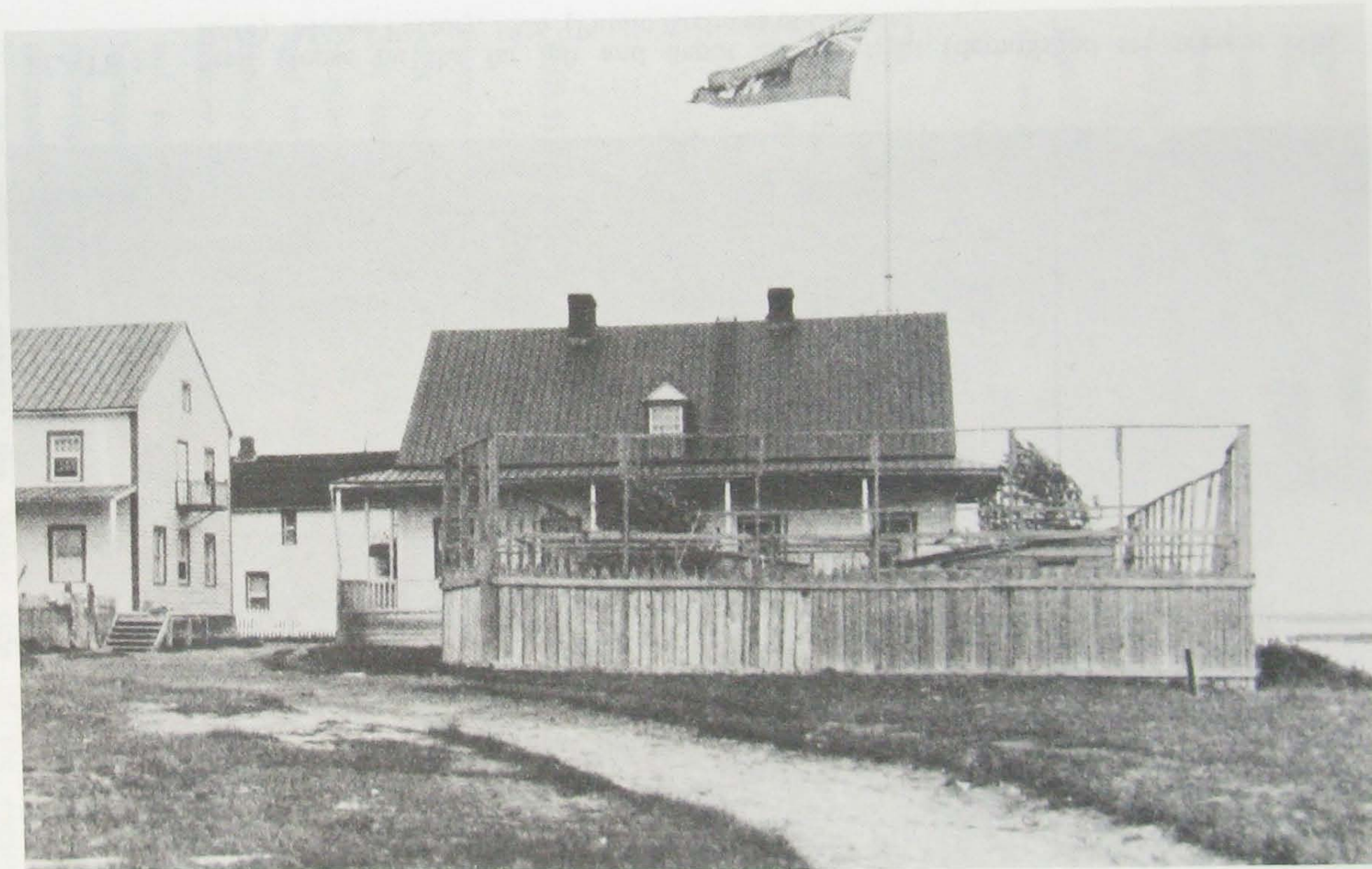


PLATE 3: Staff House on the left and Chief Factor's House on the right. Only the Staff House survives. Moose Factory, 1926 [Public Archives of Canada].

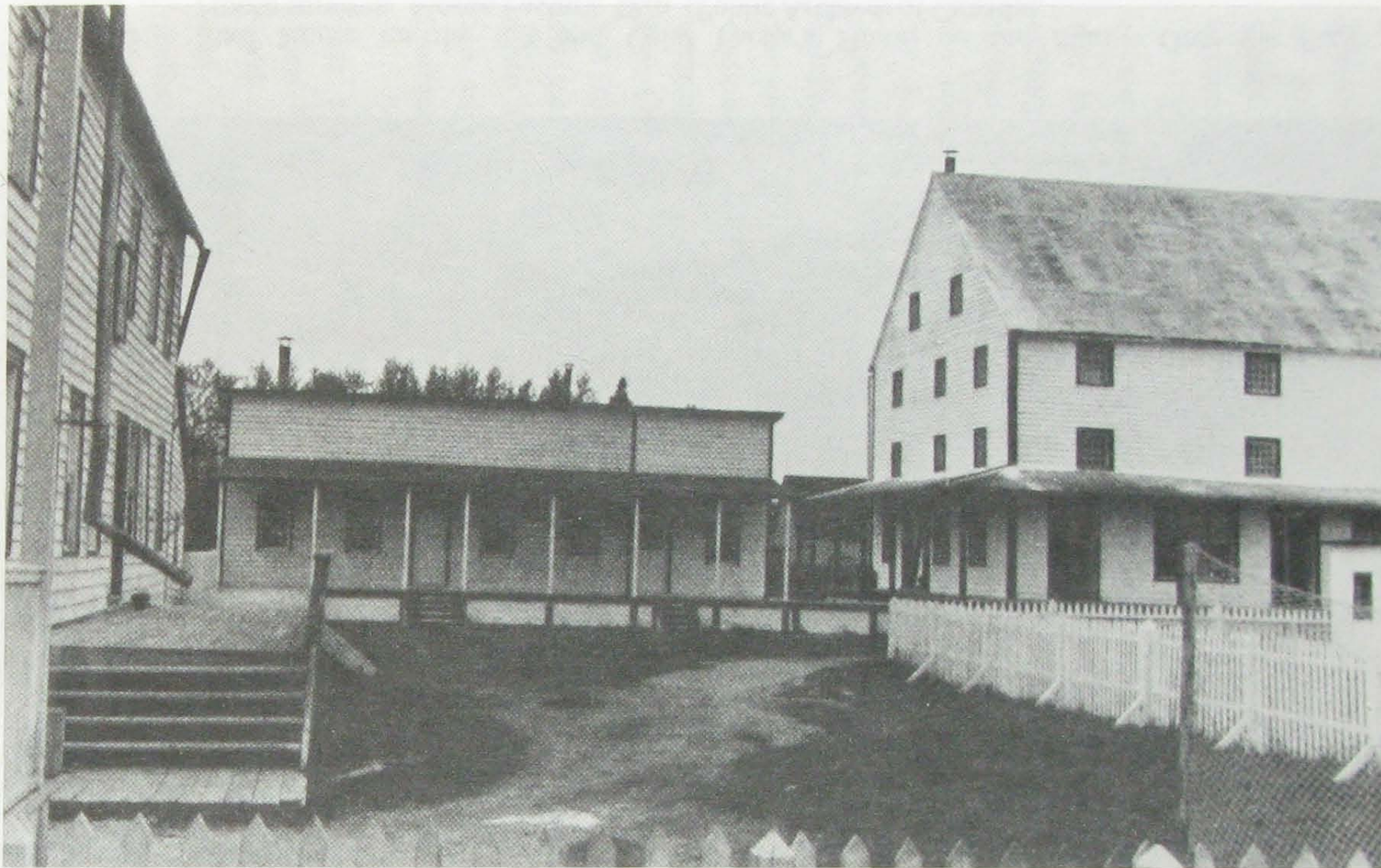


PLATE 4: Staff House on the far left and depot on the right (demolished for present HBC store). Moose Factory, 1926 [Public Archives of Canada].

concerns are really those of outsiders, "southerners," who, in the minds of the Native residents, did not have a sincere interest in the community's legacy. Such a belief would serve only to reinforce the attitudes, like those of the firechief, that there is little of importance or interest in the community worth preserving. And, the lack of community pride in its past history serves to aggravate the vandalism problem evident at heritage displays.

Given these diverse problems it was clear that heritage planning in Moose Factory would have to attempt to achieve the following basic objectives:

1. Concentrate on those aspects of the community's history that had relevance to the local Native population in order to bolster community pride, provide materials that could be used in its schools, and combat the problem of vandalism.
2. Develop themes and displays that are not available at more accessible locations in southern Ontario where most of the tourists who visit Moose Factory live.
3. Provide a comprehensive inventory of the community's heritage resources.

THE SURVEY

From the outset it appeared that the community's desire to have a more balanced picture of its past presented to the public was highly compatible with the tourists' desire to see something not available in southern Ontario. Considering the geographical location of Moose Factory and the fact that it has regular rail and air service, it is clear that it is the best suited of the former Hudson's Bay Company ports to portray the company's maritime history. This dimension of the Hudson's Bay Company's past has not received any systematic attention to date by historians or heritage planners. Thus, Moose Factory has the prospect of offering heritage attractions that are very meaningful to the community and unavailable elsewhere.

An effort to present the Native side of the community's history also presented some very attractive possibilities. By

focusing on the labour and social history of the community's Native ancestors, heritage attractions at Moose Factory could offer displays that reflect the newer interests in fur trade history, focus on Native involvement, and show the development of a fur trade society. Also, it meant that an important use could be found for some of the remaining Native log residences. They could be used to present aspects of domestic life of the labouring classes at different times and thereby complement displays dealing with the officer class that are best dealt with in the Staff House.

With these broad objectives in mind, we began a multifaceted survey of the heritage resources of the community. Using two students trained in architectural recording, we surveyed the island, focussing attention on identifying and recording the surviving log dwellings as well as doing drawings of the forge and powder magazine. At the time, the community was involved in a restoration project dealing with St. Thomas Church, another nineteenth-century log building, and at their request we provided them with as-found drawings of the steeple (Plate 5 and 6).

As the historical research into the community progressed it became clear that shipbuilding had been an important activity at Moose Factory until about 1920. It was therefore decided that it would be desirable for possible reconstruction purposes to develop a set of drawings of the boathouse that had formerly existed in the settlement. This was accomplished by combining information taken from old photographs, company insurance maps located in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and oral testimony.

The archaeological survey had two primary objectives. One involved a continuation of the search for the early forts that had been built on the island. The other involved searching for the remains of other structures that had been built by the Hudson's Bay Company. In both instances the work was guided by an airphotographic survey and a landuse history of the island. The latter had been prepared from research done in the company's archives. This research revealed that earlier searches for Moose Factory I had been conducted in the wrong locations. However, survey work in the vicinity of the old anchorage, the most

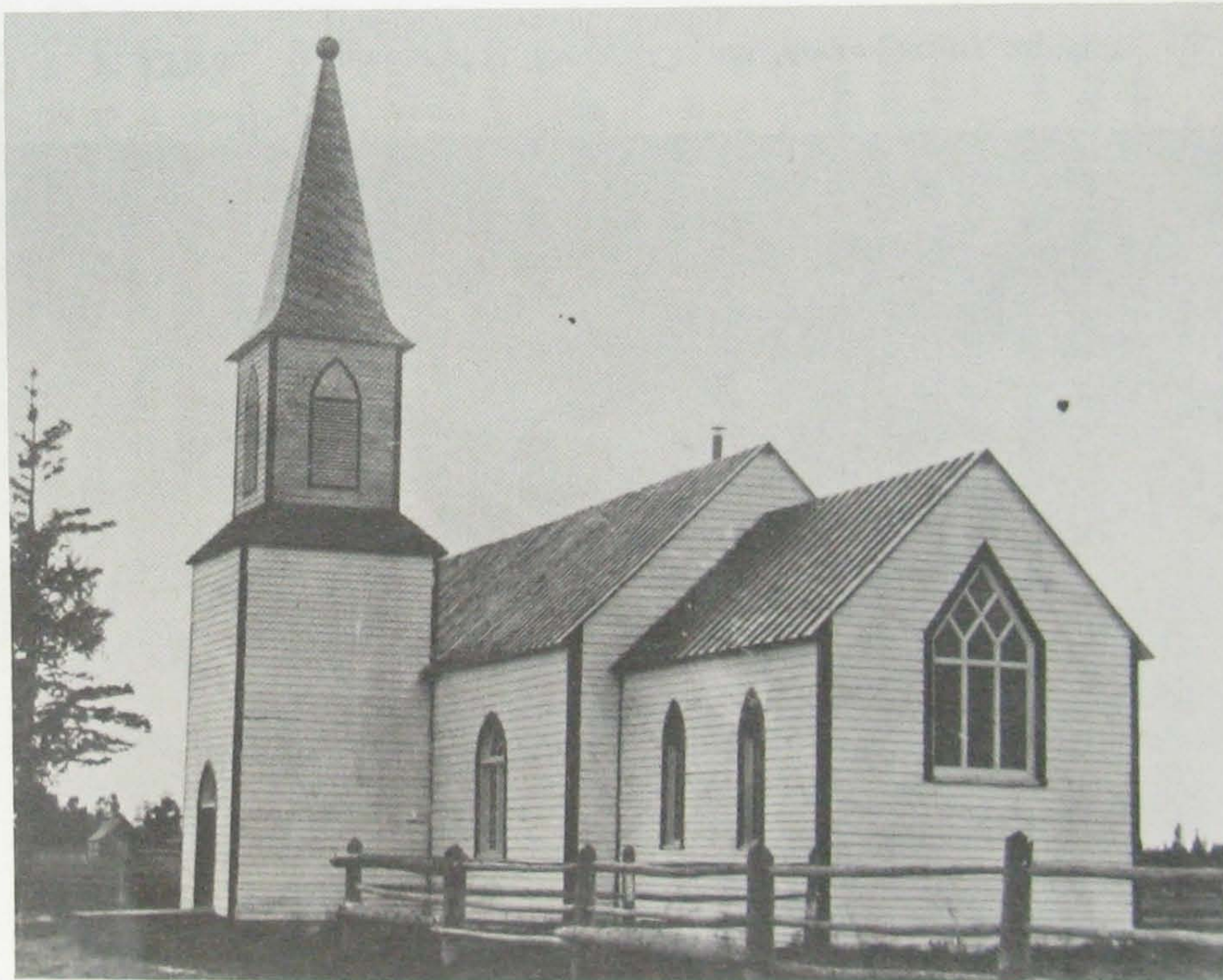


PLATE 5: St. Thomas Church, Moose Factory, ca 1890-1900
[Public Archives of Canada].



PLATE 6: Interior of St. Thomas Church, Moose Factory, ca. 1900,
[Public Archives of Canada].

probable location of the original fort, has not been fruitful to date. The initial reconnaissance suggested that the area was sterile of cultural remains. However, subsequent work has indicated that this is not the case and remains of an early twentieth-century dock were found. This discovery is helpful because it will enable us to determine the rate of bank erosion in the vicinity, thereby determining the probability that the late seventeenth-century site has been destroyed. The airphoto survey indicated that the old anchorage is one of the few places on the island shoreline where erosion is taking place.

The search for remains of other structures has been equally fruitless with the exception of Moose Factory III. Archival research indicated that few buildings had basements or masonry foundations. When buildings reached the end of their useful lives, they were cannibalized for reusable parts and the remaining wood was used for kindling (Plate 7). Also, it was a common practice to relocate smaller buildings in the winter by pulling them on skids. The end result of these various practices is that there are few significant archaeological remains in Moose Factory in spite of the fact that the community has a history that spans three centuries. The historical research has been more productive. It was pursued along three main avenues. As indicated above, the first study was intended to provide a landuse history of the island to guide future research and aid in identifying archaeologically important areas for heritage planning and preservation purposes. It identified four historical landuse areas on the island. These are the 1) original anchorage and probable site of Moose Factory I, 2) the old warehousing area south of the present powder magazine, 3) the factory complex where Moose Factories II and III as well as the former industrial complex known as the "Moose Works" all were built, and 4) the old missionary grounds.

The second thrust of historical research dealt with the maritime history of Moose Factory. This economic study revealed that Moose Factory was a trading centre during its first century. Thereafter, beginning with the inland expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company, it became primarily a port town where ship building

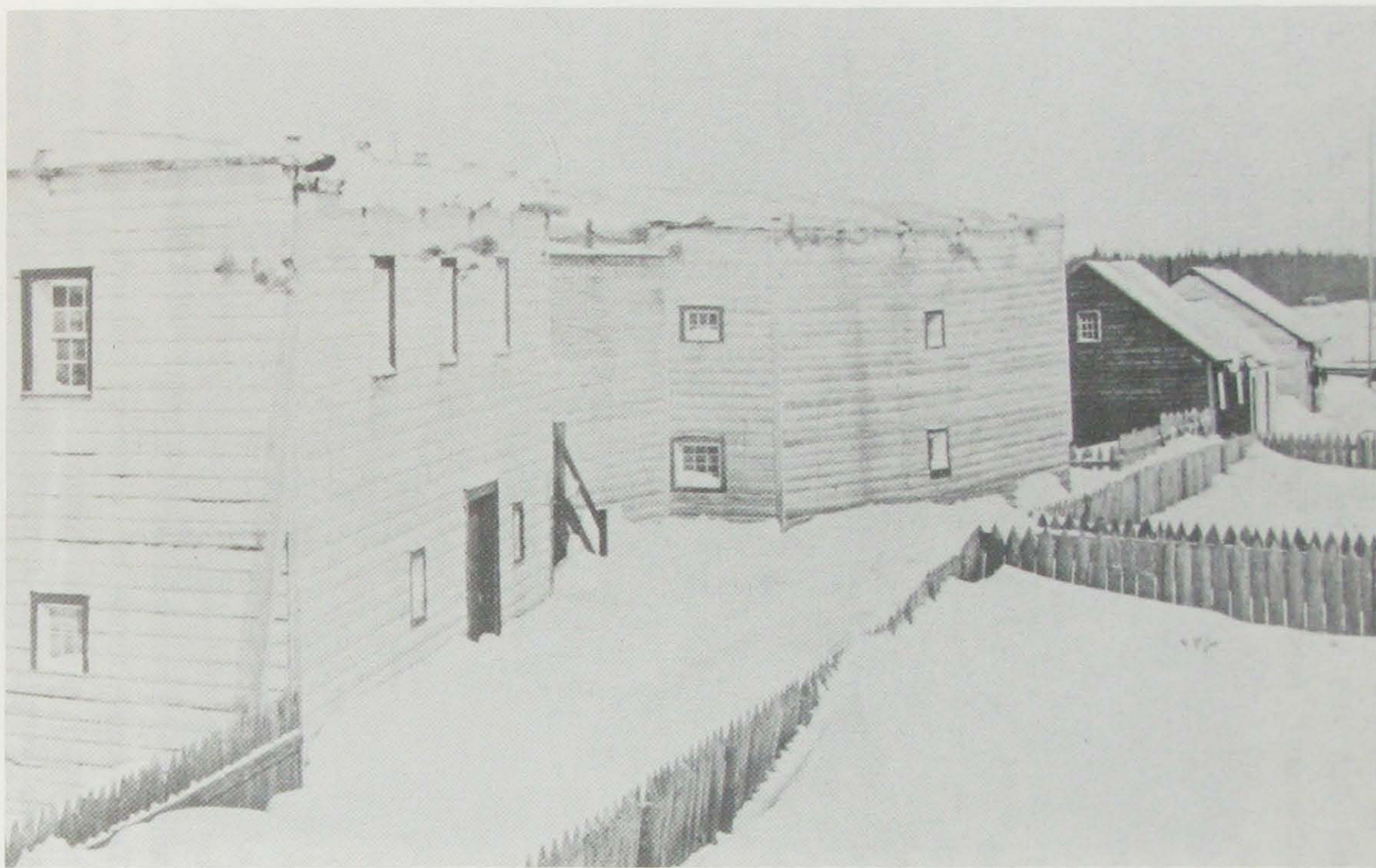


PLATE 7: Moose Factory II, old flanker fort, 1866. Parts from these buildings were used for new buildings [Public Archives of Canada].

and repair and warehousing were important. Indeed, shipbuilding dated back to the early 1740s when the first sloop was built using local materials. By 1900 the Moose Works, which was heavily devoted to these activities, was capitalized at \$250,000 by the Hudson's Bay Company and it was entirely manned and directed by local mixed-bloods (Plates 8 and 9). The last three schooners were designed and built by these men in the second decade of this century. Company records further revealed that by 1900 the Indians and the mixed-bloods derived most of their incomes from annual and seasonal wage labour for the company rather than from trapping activities. Clearly this aspect of the community's history needs to be highlighted in future heritage development planning. By developing this theme it will be possible to take advantage of one of the preconceptions that visitors have of the community. It turns out that, in a sense, Moose Factory had a "factory" after all that was operated by the local Native population who had acquired considerable skills. They operated the oldest boatbuilding centre in Ontario.

Social history was the other focus of the archival and oral research that was undertaken. It has served to flesh out what life was like in the community for the Indians and mixed-bloods and has outlined the major dimensions of the evolution of the community that developed on the island. Work on this and the other facets of the community's history revealed that one of the richest heritage resources that have survived is the photographic records. The community has always been one of the most accessible northern settlements and it would appear that virtually every northern traveller has been there and photographed it. Photographic collections in public institutions and in private hands cover virtually every aspect of community life from the earliest days of photography. To some extent, this rich source compensates for the meager archaeological heritage.

HERITAGE PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering heritage planning problems that the community

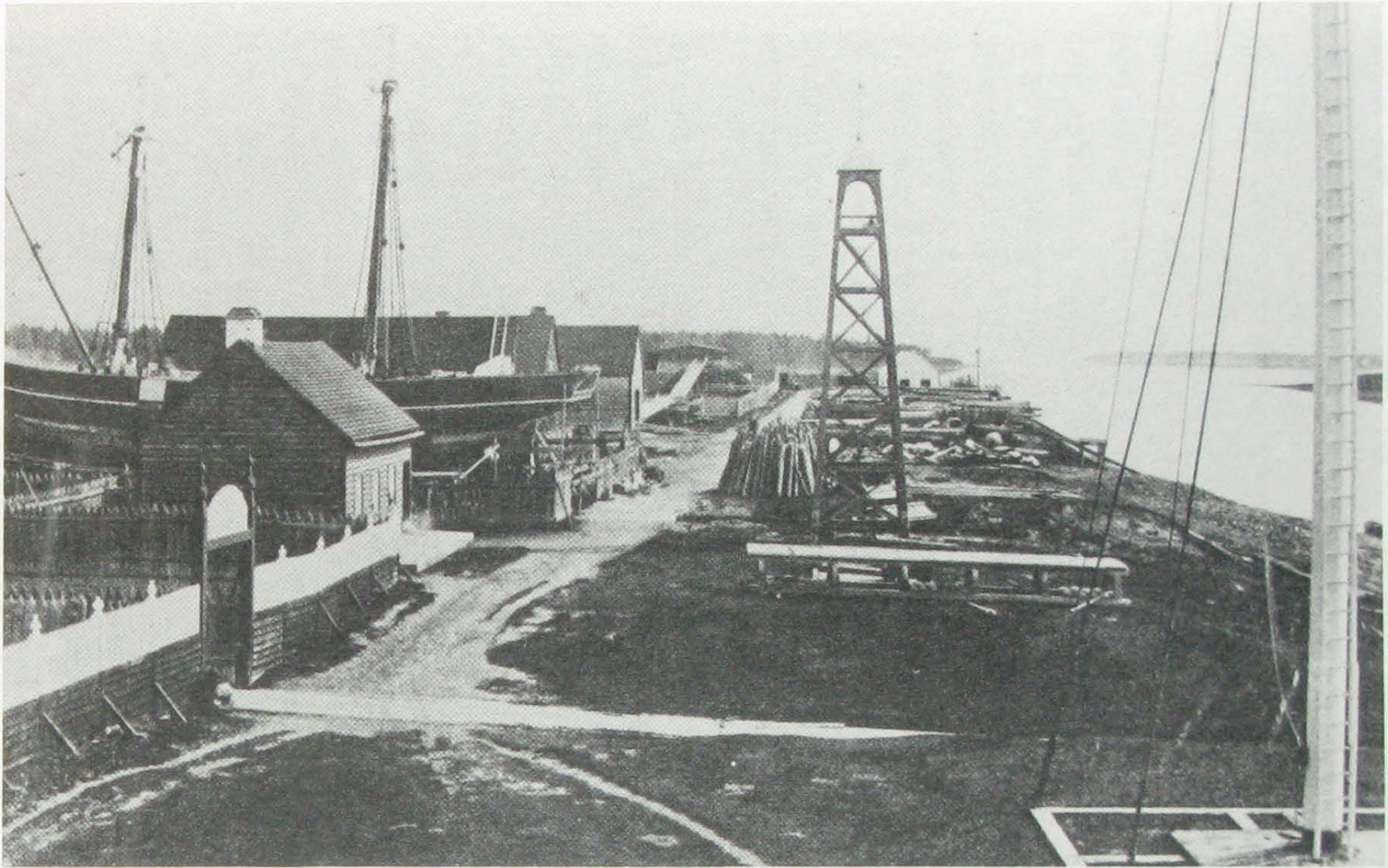


PLATE 8: "Moose works" at Moose Factory, n.d. Metis shipbuilding complex in early twentieth century. Boatbuilding shed is behind the schooner. The last schooners to be built at Moose Factory were designed and constructed by the Metis at the close of World War I [Public Archives of Canada].

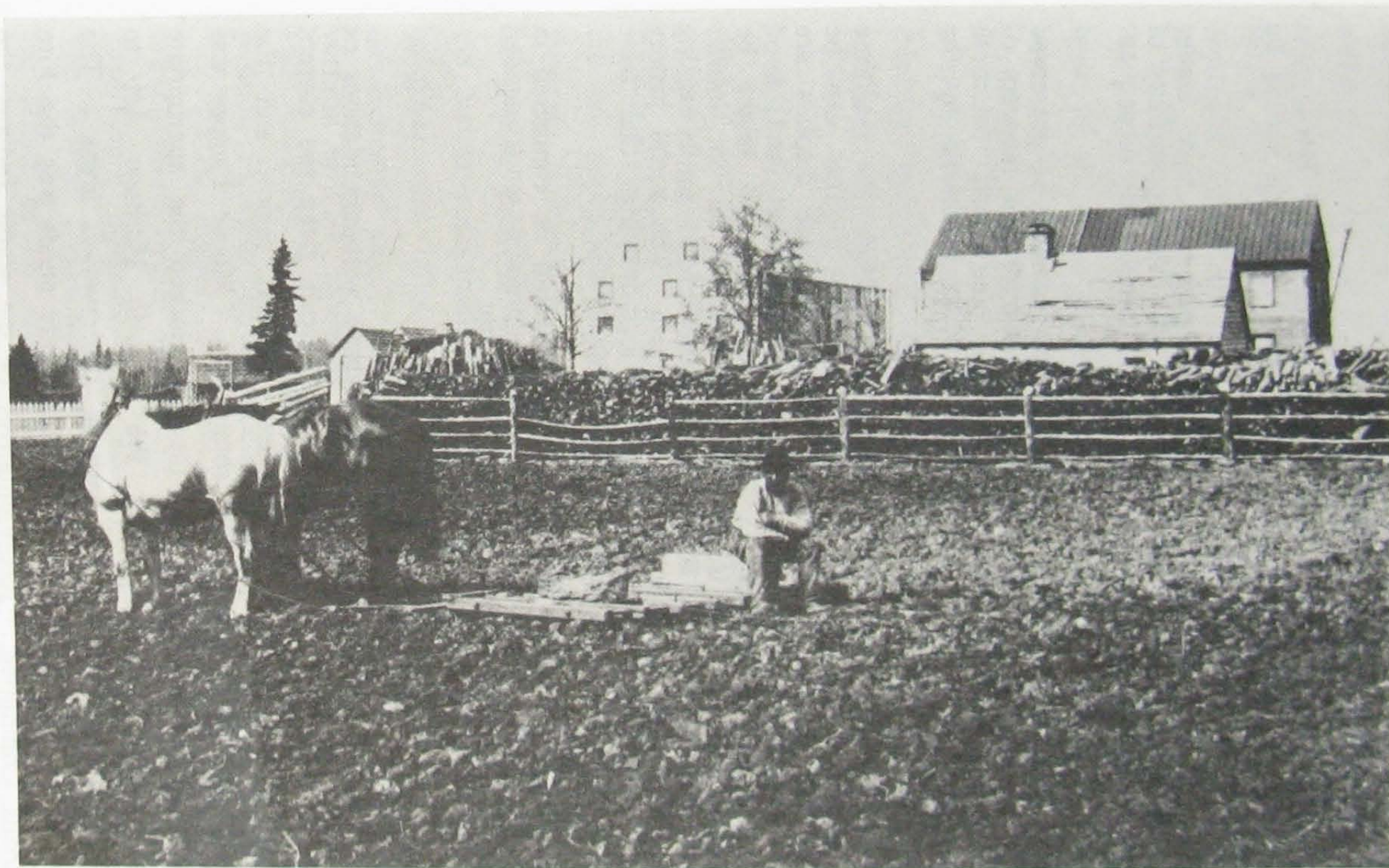


PLATE 9: Farm at Moose works, ca. 1890. Until the completion of the James Bay Railroad, the Company had the largest farm in the Subarctic and most of the work was done by the Metis [Public Archives of Canada].

faced in 1980 and the results of our various surveys, we made the following basic recommendations:

1. The existing "heritage tour" should be plaqued and guide map developed. This has been done.
2. Displays at Saint Thomas Church, the Staff House, the Museum, the Forge and the Powder Magazine should be coordinated to minimize duplication.
3. A guide book should be developed for tour leader training. The community should have the opportunity of meaningful input into its development and subsequent revisions.
4. One or two of the old log dwellings should be preserved to display the daily life of the mixed-blood laborers of the company in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two dwellings have been purchased by the Ontario Heritage Foundation.
5. Displays should be developed that highlight the maritime and social history of Moose Factory. This can be achieved using the existing museum whose displays are dated in terms of content and design and need upgrading anyway. Alternatively, thought might be given to reconstructing the boathouse on its former site. However, this is not recommended until existing structures are adequately maintained. The social history best will be portrayed in the log dwellings that have been obtained and moved to Centennial Park.
6. The search for Moose Factory I should be continued in the old anchorage area. The additional work needed here will not be time consuming or costly.

HERITAGE ADMINISTRATION

At the time, implementation of the above recommendations or any others that might be proposed, was difficult given the current government administration arrangements in the region and the fragmented nature of the Native community. Moose Factory was not an organized settlement and therefore lacked the appropriate political bodies required under the Ontario Heritage Act to designate historic buildings or heritage conservation areas. The only body that existed to deal with community needs was the Fire and Roads Committee. Representatives of the status Indians, the non-status Native people, the Hudson's Bay Company and other

Euro-Canadians served on this committee. After the heritage survey began, the Fire and Roads Committee encouraged the formation of the Moose Factory Historical Society with the objective of having the society look after heritage concerns in the settlement. Subsequently the society was founded and in the spring of 1981 it was given a contract by the Ontario Ministry of Northern Affairs to manage the heritage attractions on the island that were the responsibility of the ministry. For a variety of reasons, this effort to turn some heritage management activity over to the local community was ill-fated and within two weeks the contract with the historical society was cancelled. Unfortunately, the incident added to the climate of distrust. The community doubted the sincerity of the government and the ministry questioned the ability of the society to assume any significant management responsibilities.

An additional problem in the area related to the fact rivalries existed between the communities of Moosonee and Moose Factory and the different interest groups found within each. A small number of Euro-Canadians living in Moosonee have a considerable vested interest in the summer tourism business. They did not appear to favour heavy government involvement in Moose Factory, particularly if this intervention was directed towards developing facilities that largely were to be operated by and for the Native population. These Euro-Canadians were well connected to government officials. Therefore, it seemed unlikely that major developments would occur without their support. Clearly, the current divided nature of the Native community into the status and non-status blocks had served only to perpetuate the strong position of the small Euro-Canadian group.

At a higher administrative level heritage planning and management were complicated by the fact that numerous government agencies were actively involved in the community. The federal Department of Indian Affairs is strongly involved in the affairs of the Moose Band. The Archaeology and Heritage Planning section of the Ontario Ministry of the Citizenship and Culture had the responsibility for heritage planning in the

province while the Heritage Trust section of this ministry looked after heritage properties such as the Staff House. What further complicated the situation at Moose Factory was the fact that the provincial Ministry of Northern Affairs leased Centennial Park where the Museum, Forge and Powder Magazine are located. Therefore, it operates these heritage attractions. Also, this ministry operated the Ontario Northland Railway and its Polar Bear Express. As a result, the Ministry of Northern Affairs also hired all of the heritage tour guides. The goals and aspirations of these various ministries and their subdivisions were often in conflict and in turn frequently were not in harmony with all of the interest groups in the area.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has attempted to outline the major problems in heritage planning that we confronted at Moose Factory, Ontario. Any major developments or conservation schemes had to involve the Moose Factory Historical Society, the Fire and Roads Committee, the Moose Band Council, the Archaeology and Heritage Planning as well as the Heritage Trust sections of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, and the Ministry of Northern Affairs. Hopefully, this complex kind of arrangement is typical of northern communities. It can be overcome in a way that permits the community in the future to play a more central role in the planning process. The Moose Factory Heritage Survey highlighted the fact that the community has a very rich heritage and an important story to tell. A proper heritage conservation and development programme will serve to contribute a great deal to the community's sense of pride and to its economic well being. Also, the solution to heritage planning problems at Moose Factory may point the way for other northern Native communities which face very similar problems.

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