

# Gospel Selections: The First Book in Inuktitut Syllabics

## Sélections des Évangiles : le premier livre en inuktitut et en syllabaire

Kenn Harper

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Résumé de l'article

Le système d'écriture syllabique inventé pour les Cris a été introduit pour la première fois aux Inuit en 1855 par le révérend Edwin A. Watkins (1827-1907) à Fort George et Petite rivière de la Baleine sur les côtes de la baie James et de la baie d'Hudson respectivement. Cette année-là, Watkins, qui travaillait à Fort George, rédigea avec l'aide d'un jeune Inuk, Peter Okakterook (vers 1836–1858), un petit livre d'extraits des évangiles en syllabaire inuktitut. Il envoya le manuscrit au révérend John Horden (1828–1893) à Moose Factory qui l'imprima sur la presse acquise pour sa mission, en 1855. L'impression a été achevée en 1856. Ce livret est l'un des premiers ouvrages tirés sur la presse de Horden, et le seul en inuktitut. L'unique exemplaire connu à avoir survécu se trouve à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada où il est catalogué sous le titre *Selections From the Gospels in the Dialect of the Inuit of Little Whale River*. Le volume de huit pages, destiné à être utilisé par les Inuit du Nunavik, a été translittéré en syllabique à partir de publications moraves écrites en alphabet latin et préparées pour l'Inuttut de la côte du Labrador dans l'actuel Nunatsiavut. Bien qu'il ait été rédigé en syllabique en employant ce que l'on considère aujourd'hui être des symboles finaux du syllabaire des cris de l'Ouest, le texte est lisible et compréhensible pour un lectorat inuit moderne. Cet article examine les efforts des premiers missionnaires pour développer l'alphabetisation à des fins évangéliques chez les Inuit, y compris l'impression et la distribution de ce petit volume.

# Gospel Selections: The First Book in Inuktitut Syllabics

Ken Harper<sup>i</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The syllabic writing system invented for the Cree was first introduced to Inuit in 1855 by Rev. Edwin A. Watkins (1827–1907) at Fort George and Little Whale River on the James Bay and Hudson Bay coasts, respectively. That same year at Fort George, Watkins prepared a small book of gospel selections in Inuktitut syllabics with the help of a young Inuk, Peter Okakterook (circa 1836–1858), and sent it to Rev. John Horden (1828–1893) in Moose Factory, who printed it on the press he had acquired for his mission. This small book is one of the earliest items printed on Horden's press, and the only one printed in Inuktitut. Only one copy is known to have survived, at Library and Archives Canada, where it is catalogued under the title *Selections from the Gospels in the Dialect of the Inuit of Little Whale River*. The small volume of eight pages, transliterated into syllabics from Moravian publications prepared in the roman orthography used for Inuttut on the Labrador coast in present-day Nunatsiavut, was intended for use by Inuit in Nunavik. Although printed in syllabics using what are today seen as western Cree syllable-final symbols, the text is readable by and understandable to modern Inuit readers. This paper examines early missionary efforts to develop literacy for mission purposes among Inuit, including the printing and distribution of this small volume.

## KEYWORDS

Inuktitut, Inuttut, syllabic(s), Horden, Watkins, Okakterook, Fort George, Little Whale River, Moose Factory, Moravian, transliteration

## RÉSUMÉ

### Sélections des Évangiles : Le premier livre en inuktitut et en syllabaire

Le système d'écriture syllabique inventé pour les Cris a été introduit pour la première fois aux Inuit en 1855 par le révérend Edwin A. Watkins (1827-1907) à Fort George et Petite rivière de la Baleine sur les côtes de la baie James et de la baie d'Hudson respectivement. Cette année-là, Watkins, qui travaillait à Fort George, rédigea avec l'aide d'un jeune Inuk, Peter Okakterook (vers 1836–1858), un petit livre d'extraits des évangiles en syllabaire inuktitut. Il envoya le manuscrit au révérend John Horden (1828–1893) à Moose Factory qui l'imprima sur la presse acquise pour sa mission, en 1855. L'impression a été achevée en 1856. Ce livret est l'un des premiers ouvrages tirés sur la presse de Horden, et le seul en inuktitut. L'unique exemplaire

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i. Independent Scholar, Ottawa, ON, Canada. kennharper@hotmail.com

connu à avoir survécu se trouve à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada où il est catalogué sous le titre *Selections From the Gospels in the Dialect of the Inuit of Little Whale River*. Le volume de huit pages, destiné à être utilisé par les Inuit du Nunavik, a été translittéré en syllabique à partir de publications moraves écrites en alphabet latin et préparées pour l'Inuttut de la côte du Labrador dans l'actuel Nunatsiavut. Bien qu'il ait été rédigé en syllabique en employant ce que l'on considère aujourd'hui être des symboles finaux du syllabaire des cris de l'Ouest, le texte est lisible et compréhensible pour un lectorat inuit moderne. Cet article examine les efforts des premiers missionnaires pour développer l'alphabétisation à des fins évangéliques chez les Inuit, y compris l'impression et la distribution de ce petit volume.

## MOTS-CLÉS

Inuktitut, Inuttut, syllabique, Horden, Watkins, Okakterook, Fort George, Petite rivière de la Baleine, Moose Factory, Moravian, translitération

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**I**n 1851, John Horden, a school teacher, arrived with his wife in Moose Factory to take up a position as an unordained minister with the Church Missionary Society (CMS). His voyage across the Atlantic, he later wrote, had given him “leisure for the acquisition of the syllabic system” (Horden 1853a, 70), a method of writing the language of the Indians to whom he would minister.

The syllabic system was created by James Evans, a Wesleyan missionary, to write Cree. Some scholars believe that he had developed an earlier version of it while working among the Ojibway at a mission station in Ontario during the 1830s, but that his mission board had denied him permission to use it, wanting him instead to use an alphabetic system as a readier method of acculturating his congregation. Evans transferred to Norway House in Manitoba in 1840 and there, far from the prying eyes of his superiors, he developed a syllabic orthography (either an adaptation of earlier work or a completely new system), taught it to the Cree, and eventually began to print items in their language on a crude homemade printing press adapted from a fur press. Evans left the mission field in 1846 and was succeeded by Reverend William Mason who continued to publish in syllabics (Harper 1985).

In 1849, David Anderson was consecrated as first bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land, a vast diocese stretching from the East Main—as the eastern coast of James Bay was called—to the Rocky Mountains and from the American border to the Arctic Ocean. Most missionary activity, however, focused on the area between Red River and Moose Factory. In 1849, a few months before Anderson's consecration, the CMS's honorary secretary, Henry Venn, had decreed in a letter to him that “the primary object” in the

diocese would be “the translation of the Scriptures into Indian languages and the printing and dispersing of them” (Banks 1983, 12). Not all Indians in the diocese were Cree, but most understood the Cree language, which had long been the trade language there. As a result, almost all translations made for use in Rupert’s Land between 1849 and 1864 were made into that language.

At the time of his consecration, Anderson was a strong critic of Evans’s syllabic system. Like Evans’s earlier mission board, he thought that an alphabetic system would enable a quicker acculturation of the Indians. He wrote, “The Wesleyans... have, very unfortunately... adopted a new character, the invention of the late Mr. Evans... He used, if I am rightly informed, four leading characters. By turning these to the right hand or the left, or placing them upwards or downwards, they made sixteen letters: these, with some points and accents, complete the alphabet. A few of the Indians can read by means of these syllabic characters; but if they had only been taught to read their own language in our letters, it would have been one step towards the acquisition of the English tongue” (Anderson 1849, 176). Anderson may have been correct in this assessment, as the areas where the Cree and Inuktitut languages remain the strongest are those where syllabics is the preferred writing system.

The Methodists had also been active in Moose Factory between 1840 and 1847 in the person of missionary George Barnley (Long 1986). Initially, Barnley had attempted to create his own orthography for Cree, but when two Indians from Fort Severn on western Hudson Bay brought examples of Evans’s work to Moose Factory in 1842, he abandoned his own rudimentary system and became a wholehearted supporter of Evans’s syllabics. The powerful Henry Venn was also a strong supporter of the syllabic writing system. Knowing of Barnley’s work, Venn arranged for Horden to meet Barnley, who had returned to England after seven years in the field, before Horden left for Moose Factory. As a result, when Horden arrived in James Bay, he was already an admirer of the syllabic system and familiar with its principles. Moreover, he found a somewhat literate Indian population living and trading there.

Horden’s first request, in his first letter to Henry Venn, was for a printing press. He did not get it immediately, however, for it had been CMS’s plan that he not remain at Moose Factory for the long term. Rather, he was to transfer to Red River after one year to prepare for ordination under the Bishop’s supervision and be replaced at Moose Factory by a married and already-ordained priest. In addition, Anderson remained opposed to the use of syllabics and did not want to encourage printing in that mode.

In 1852, all those plans changed. Horden had made such rapid progress in learning to speak Cree that Anderson decided to leave him at Moose Factory. Indeed, Anderson was so impressed with Horden’s accomplishments that he ordained him deacon on August 22 of that year, and only two days

later ordained him as a priest. The man who had arrived with the intention of replacing him at Moose Factory, Reverend Edwin Arthur Watkins, was sent with his wife to Fort George on the eastern coast of James Bay, where Anderson was anxious to have a missionary stationed to keep Roman Catholic missionaries from gaining influence (Long 1985).

But the biggest change was in Bishop Anderson's attitude toward the syllabic script. That same year he wrote, "At Albany I had full opportunity of judging how much of progress Mr. Horden had made in the language, and how successful he had been... in teaching them [the Indians] to read and write in their syllabic system, as all of them had their books ready to produce and read before me" (Anderson 1852, 281). He also noted that "...in the use of the syllabic system he [Horden] has been most successful, and I must confess that, in raising the Indians, and carrying them rapidly onwards, I have not yet found an engine so effective..." (ibid.). From that point on, Anderson was a staunch supporter of syllabic writing as the means of bringing the gospel to Indigenous populations.

In August of 1853, Horden received his printing press. It was an Albion typographical press consisting of a platen that measured 18  $\frac{3}{4}$  by 13  $\frac{3}{4}$ , with a fount of 14 pt. syllabic character types called "Cree no. 1 (English)" by its developer, William Mavor Watts of London. This press has been described as "a good choice for the mission field. Its light weight was a decided advantage when shipping such great distances. Easy to pull, speedy and simple, with few parts, it could be operated by one man and required little maintenance" (Banks 1984, 72).

Horden had no experience in printing, but his lack of experience was countered by his enthusiasm. On November 5, 1853, he began to compose his first book (Horden 1853b), a Cree prayer book of 32 leaves, for printing on November 26, and had completed printing 450 copies by February 2, 1854. By spring, all copies were bound, ready for presentation to all the Indians who could read.

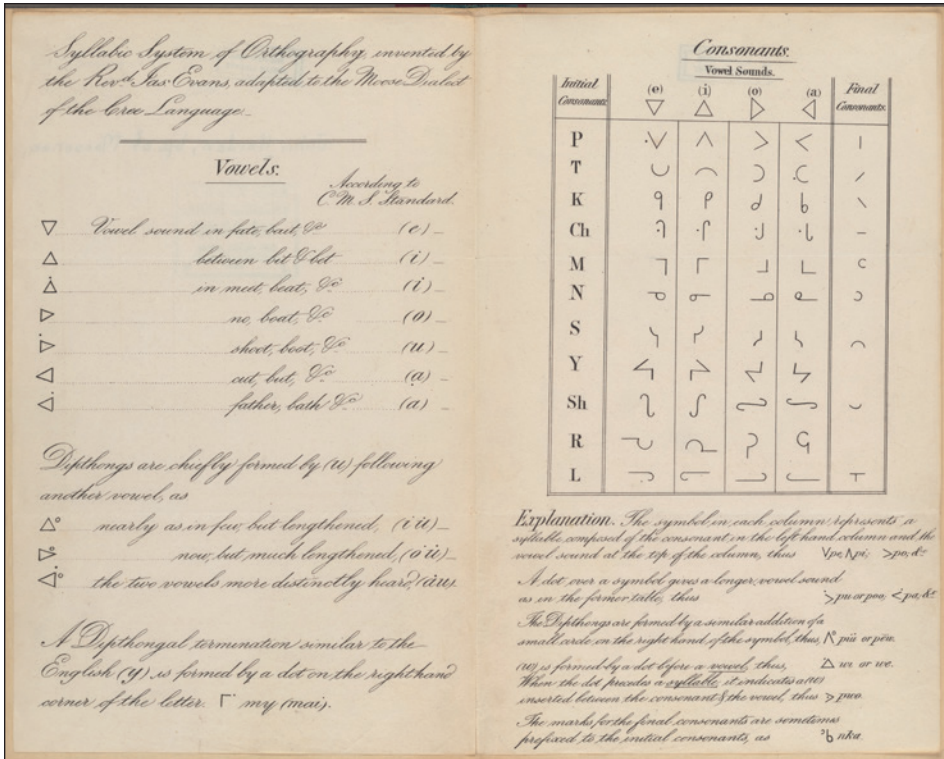
## **Watkins's Ministry at Fort George**

At Fort George on the East Main, Watkins ministered to the Cree population and eventually to the very few Inuit he encountered. Anderson's instructions to him regarding his work among the Inuit were to "...secure one or two young Eskimos, to learn the language from them, and teach them the gospel in return, that they may go hereafter as pioneers among their countrymen..." (Anderson 1852, 283).

Few Inuit came to Fort George to trade. By the mid-1840s, some from farther north had relocated to offshore islands near the trading post, but there was no resident Inuit population at the post. Nonetheless, Horden thought it important that Watkins study the Inuit language, and sent him some books to help in his studies; among them, the Admiralty's Inuktitut vocabulary for use in the Franklin search (Washington 1850) and some Moravian translations of the Bible. It was not until April 29, 1853 that Watkins met his first group of Inuit, four men arriving to trade. One was a young man of about 17 named Peter Okakterook (Trudel 1990). His surname in today's standard roman orthography would probably be Uqaqtijuq—in the Itivimiut dialect of the Hudson Bay and James Bay coasts, the phoneme written as /j/ in standard orthography is pronounced as “ǰ”, a palatalized voiced continuant. He had been employed by Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) at the post perhaps as early as 1848, performing routine tasks, as well as teaching Inuktitut to Rupert Spencer, son of the factor, and learning English himself. In 1852, he was working for the company farther north at Little Whale River; the following spring, he transported furs for the company from that post to Fort George. There, Watkins met him and convinced the young man to remain at the post with him; the factor, John Spencer, agreed. Watkins explained in a letter that “[m]y plan is to spend an hour each day with him, teaching him to read his own language and striving to gain some insight into it myself” (Watkins 1853a).

Watkins did not like the syllabic orthography. He voiced his complaints in a letter to CMS, in which he said, “In teaching the Indians I have uniformly adhered to the syllabic characters invented by Mr. Evans, though I cannot say that further acquaintance has given me any high opinion of their value; indeed, it is a question in my own mind whether it would not be better altogether to abandon them, and introduce a system of letters in their stead. The Syllabic system as I have it is certainly very defective... and as my wish to discontinue its use may perhaps be thought to indicate prejudice or a want of perseverance, I will state some of its defects” (ibid.). He described what were, in his view, the drawbacks of the orthography and concluded by saying, “When these things are considered, I think it will be allowed either that there should be considerable additions made to the System, or that it should be altogether dispensed with and a better substituted...” (ibid.).

Despite his lack of enthusiasm for the method, the syllabic writing system was the CMS officially-sanctioned orthography for use among the Cree (Fig.1). Watkins had no choice but to use it in his work with the Indians. But in his initial work with Inuit, he used a roman orthography, his own adaptation of the CMS alphabetic standard.



**Figure 1.** *The Syllabic System of Orthography as adapted to the Moose Dialect of the Cree Language*, by John Horden, published in London, 1852. Credit: “Syllabic system of orthography.” Call number \*KF 1852 (Horden, J. Syllabic system of orthography). Rare Book Division. The New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1852.

In the summer of 1853, Watkins paid a visit to Moose Factory where he and Horden consulted on a number of matters. One of the items on their agenda was Watkins’s opinion of syllabics, and Horden did his best to convince him of the value of that script, at least for the Cree. On September 8, Horden reported to Henry Venn that he and Watkins had “consulted together respecting the Syllabic System, Standard of Orthography to be used in translations... I am happy to state that after a little explanation, Mr. Watkins’s views have been greatly modified, and are now in several particulars very different from those expressed in his letter to the Committee” (Horden 1853c). This was all well and good, as far as Cree was concerned. However, they had not decided to use syllabics for rendering Inuktitut in print. It is not clear whether it was even discussed. In the same letter to Venn, Horden simply reported, “We have agreed to a slight modification of the CMS Standard Orthography, when using the English letters in translations to enable him [Watkins] to adopt it in writing the Esquimaux” (ibid.).

Watkins returned to Fort George and continued his Cree work using the syllabic orthography and his Inuit work using the CMS standard roman orthography. On December 19, 1853, he wrote to CMS, telling them that he had “examined a considerable number of texts in the Esquimaux Bible” and that Peter Okakterook could understand “a very great proportion of the words” (Watkins 1853b). The New Testament he was using was probably that published in 1840 by the Moravian brethren in the Labrador dialect (British and Foreign Bible Society 1840). Watkins’s copy of the volume is in the General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada in Toronto and is identified by his initials EAW. With his letter, he sent to London “a copy of the commandments, Lord’s Prayer and a few verses” and asked that the Committee have his submission “printed in small books... and forward by the earliest opportunity” (ibid.). The inclusion of the commandments indicates that Watkins was also working with a text, probably Moravian, other than the New Testament, probably *Mosesib Aglangit* (British and Foreign Bible Society 1841). He noted that he would be happy to receive 100 or 200 copies. The following year, on October 10, a supply vessel arrived from Moose Factory, bringing the books which Watkins had requested be printed. This publication, in roman orthography, was the first book to be printed for Inuit in what is now Canada, outside of Labrador. No copies are known to have survived.

## **Producing the First Book in Inuktitut Syllabics**

Watkins’s diaries paint a generally bleak picture of life at Fort George. Uncharacteristically, however, he began the new year of 1855 with a positive outlook, writing about the Inuit on January 1: “I feel my heart very strongly drawn towards these people and should be truly delighted to live entirely amongst them” (Watkins 1855a). That year marked his apparently voluntary decision to introduce syllabics to the Inuit population. In March, he showed the script to Inuit visiting his mission, although they must surely already have seen it in use among the Cree. He decided “after a great deal of hesitation” (Watkins 1855b) to begin using syllabics in his Inuit work and prepared a small book in that orthography. Instead of sending it to CMS in London for production, however, he sent it to Horden to produce copies on his Moose Press.

On August 30, 1855, Horden wrote to CMS: “Mr. Watkins has introduced the Syllabic characters among the Esquimaux and I now have a book in that language to print for him” (Horden 1855). Now it was Horden’s turn to have doubts as to the suitability of the syllabic script for rendering Inuktitut in print, for he wrote, “It is certainly a very great strain on the system, as the syllables are in a large proportion short syllables, many ending with two consonants; however by the introduction of a few new characters, I think it



can be managed tolerably, as the words of some six or seven syllables and thirty letters will not when written in the syllabic characters present that formidable appearance which they do in the Roman Characters” (ibid.).

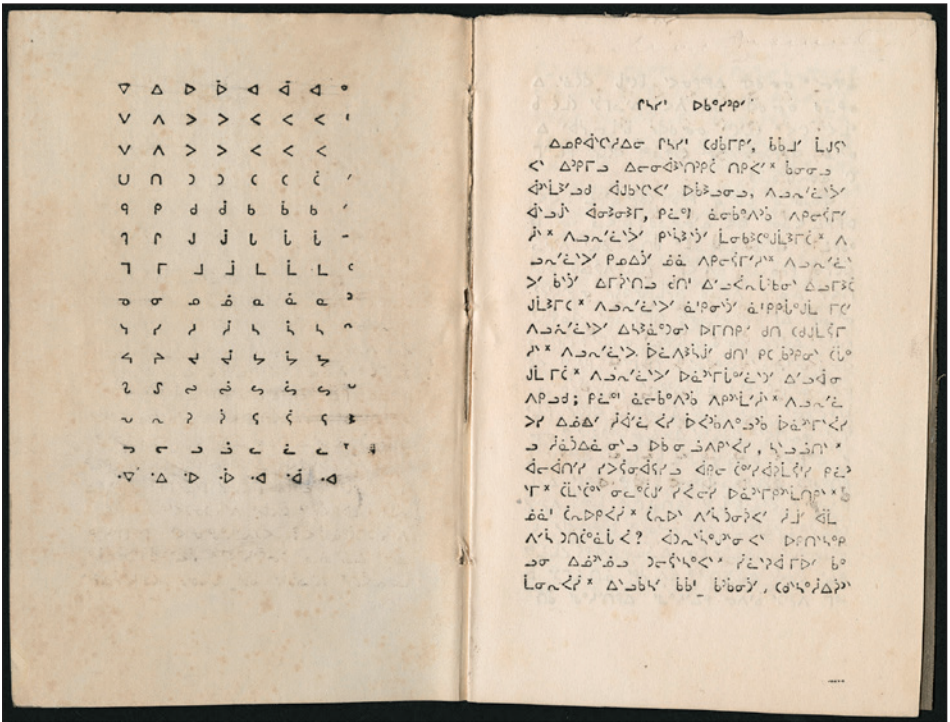
Horden began printing the Inuktitut book on November 1, 1855, but he had insufficient type for the whole text and therefore printed only part of Watkins’s text. There is no record of what parts he omitted, but Watkins noted, “The books... do not contain the whole text I had written out” (Watkins 1856). Horden was still working on it on January 3, but had finished it by January 12. There is no accounting of how many copies he printed, but it is estimated to be about 200 copies (Banks 1988, 177). Watkins received the books on March 3, 1856 and wrote in his journal, “I received... from Moose some selections from the Gospels in Esquimaux, printed in the Syllabic character” (Watkins 1856). He too noted some problems in the orthography, writing, “...the deficiency of type for many of the final consonantal sounds will cause some trouble to be taken with the pen, but far less time will be consumed than would be required for writing out the whole” (ibid.). (“Writing out the whole” is a reference to the habit of tediously copying out manuscripts longhand for the Indigenous population, in the absence of printed texts to give them.) In the known surviving copy, there are no hand-written modifications.

Seven Inuit visited Fort George on March 9 and Watkins gave them copies of the book. In August, he distributed more copies, along with home-made syllabic manuscripts. Inuit could read his book, but with considerable difficulty. Naively, Watkins hoped that the Indians they met would instruct them on the use of the orthography. He hoped also, more realistically, that Inuit would teach other Inuit to read the text.

In 1858, John Horden visited Little Whale River and Great Whale River. Concerning the few Inuit he met, he found that “they receive instruction with delight and during the few days I have been here have made great progress in reading” (Horden 1858). Although he does not mention the syllabic book explicitly, Horden would undoubtedly have retained some copies of his printing at Moose Factory and taken copies along with him on such a trip. The following year, Reverend T. Hamilton Fleming spent four months at Little Whale River, where his intent was “to teach them [the Inuit] to read the syllabic characters, which in so short a time are learned...” (Fleming 1860, 133). He noted a meeting with two Inuit women in which he was “very much pleased to find how correctly they had remembered what Mr. Watkins and Mr. Horden taught them. One of them was able to repeat the Lord’s Prayer very correctly and the other knew a good deal about the Syllabic characters” (Fleming 1859). Knowing that he would meet Inuit, Fleming would likely have travelled with copies of the little book of gospel selections for distribution. His reference to a woman knowing the syllabic characters probably indicates her familiarity with Watkins’s book.

## Analyzing the First Syllabic Text

For many years, it was assumed that no copies of this little publication had survived; then in 1993, Library and Archives Canada (LAC, then the National Library of Canada) acquired a copy from Richard Spafford, an antiquarian book dealer in Saskatchewan. That is the only copy known to exist. It is comprised of three sheets of paper plus a brown paper cover. The first sheet is glued to the cover, so that the whole still comprises three sheets. The sheets are folded, resulting in 6 leaves, if one counts the cover; 4 leaves excluding the cover, held together with a string. The book is unpaginated; LAC describes it as containing 8 pages, that is to say, the first sheet is not counted in the pagination, although the inside front cover is printed with a syllabarium. The book is small in size, measuring 11 cm in width and 16.5 cm in height. Although it bears no title, someone has written in longhand on the cover *Eskimo Manual*. For cataloguing purposes, LAC has assigned it the title of *Selections from the Gospels in the Dialect of the Inuit of Little Whale River* (Watkins and Okakterook 1856) (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** Syllabarium and first page of text of *Selections from the Gospels in the Dialect of the Inuit of Little Whale River*, 1856. The text is the first part of The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5.

Assigning an Inuktitut dialect to the text is problematic. Inuit of James Bay and the east coast of Hudson Bay (except the far northern communities on that coast) speak the Itivimiut dialect of Nunavik, the dialect used by Peter Okakterook, who assisted Watkins with his “translation.” It was not, however, a translation, but rather a transliteration from the Labrador dialect (now called the Nunatsiavut dialect, and also known as Inuttut or Labrador Inuttitut) used by the Moravian missionaries and Inuit on the Labrador coast. Indeed, a study of the syllables used in combination with certain diacritics led Michael Conor Cook, a linguist with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, to conclude that some combinations were an attempt by the transliterators to represent a voiceless lateral fricative (sometimes called the voiceless “l”), a sound that does not occur in Nunavik dialects but does occur in Labrador dialects, although Cook was not aware of the translator’s source document and therefore of its Labrador origin. Perhaps a more accurate (though cumbersome) designation for the item would be “Selections from the Gospels for the Inuit of the lower east coast of Hudson Bay and James Bay, transliterated into syllabic orthography and modified from the Labrador dialect.”

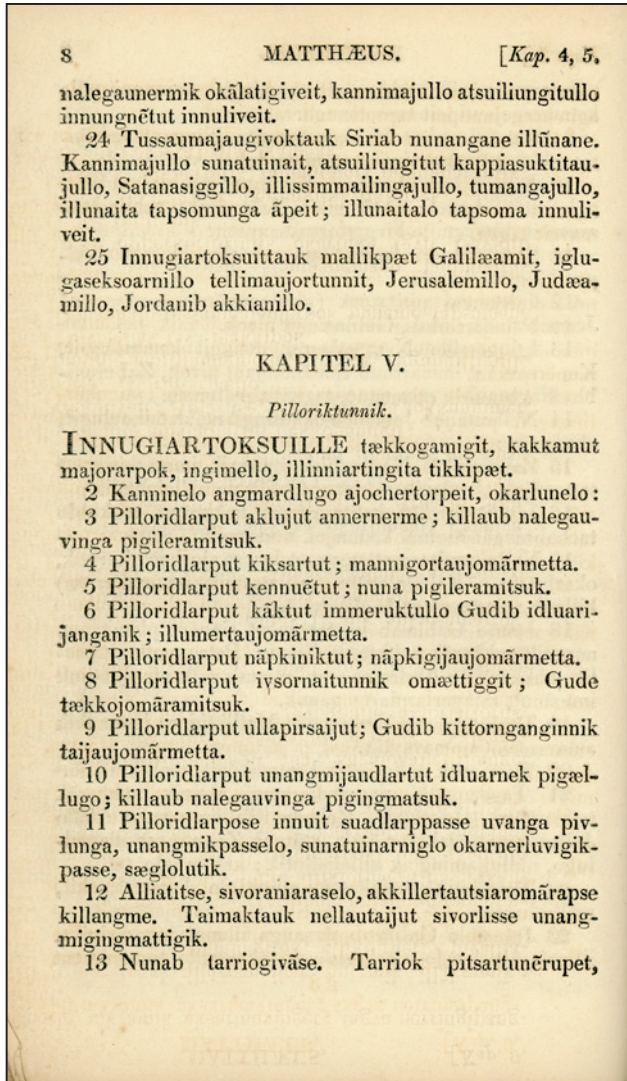
The contents of the book are, as the assigned title suggests, selections from the gospels. The unpaginated inside front cover contains a syllabarium. The rest of the book is comprised of selections from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The selections are presented as continuous text, broken only by titles or solid lines, with no reference to the Biblical sources. Page 1 begins with the title in syllabics, “Jisusip uqausingit” (my transliteration; the words of Jesus), followed by Matthew 5:1–16, the part of the Sermon on the Mount containing the Beatitudes, which continues on page 2; it is followed on pages 2 and 3 by Matthew 6:24–33 (God and Possessions), and on pages 3 and 4 by Matthew 7:7–14 (Ask, Seek, Knock; and The Narrow Gate). The next section on page 4 is from Matthew 9:1–8 (Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man). The next section, starting near the bottom of page 4 and continuing to page 6, is Luke 10:25–37 (The Parable of the Good Samaritan). The rest of page 6 is from Luke 13:10–17 (Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman on the Sabbath). Page 7 contains Luke 18:35–43 (Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar). Page 8 is blank, as is the inside back cover. Not all selections are individually titled in syllabics. For purposes of identification, I have used selection titles as given in the Good News Bible (1993).<sup>1</sup>

Although Watkins had mastered Cree and compiled a major dictionary of that language (Watkins 1865), he had a poor grasp of Inuktitut. When one compares the Moravian and the Watkins versions of verses, it is readily apparent that the work is an almost exact transliteration from the earlier Moravian alphabetic texts, augmented by the insertion of very few additional

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1. I am grateful for the assistance of the Reverend Mike Gardiner, formerly of Iqaluit, in identifying the passages.

words (Fig. 3). Thus, the difficulties Inuit experienced in understanding the work were threefold: a lack of religious context against which to understand the text even if they could read it; a lack of knowledge of the syllabic system combined with a lack of opportunity to learn it; and the fact that the text was in a dialect different from their own.

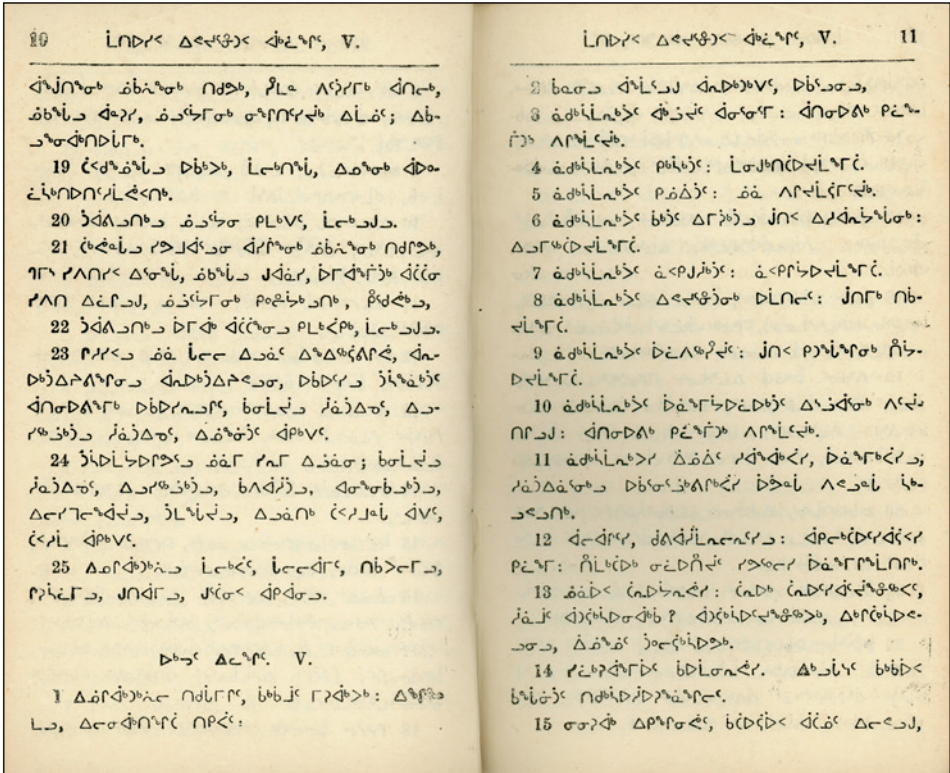


**Figure 3.** The beginning of Matthew 5, from the Moravian publication of 1840 (*TestamentetaK Tamedsa...*). Watkins and Okakterook used this volume in their transliteration into syllabics.

The syllabic system had indeed been stretched. Our understanding of the syllabarium on the inside front cover is hampered by the fact that no alphabetic equivalents are included as an explanation. The syllabarium includes three rows of symbols that CMS had added to Evans's original Cree system in 1851 to represent the consonants “sh”, “r”, and “l”, in combination with vowels; this revision became the “Approved Church Missionary Society Syllabarium” for Cree (Horden 1852). The Inuktitut syllabarium in the book of gospel selections presents seven columns of main characters plus a column of syllable-final consonants that Inuit today see as being “Cree” finals, inexplicably adds a second row for the consonant “p”, which appears to be identical to the preceding row, and adds another row at the bottom representing “w” in combination with vowels.

The earliest form of the Cree syllabic orthography created by Evans in 1840—the syllabary itself was first published in 1841—showed each symbol twice, the first in solid lines, the second as lines broken by a space, the latter being used to indicate “long” vowel sounds. The broken line column was printed beside the solid line column, resulting in a Cree syllabary of eight columns. In later printings on Evans's Rossville press, this convention was replaced by representing the symbols containing long vowels by thicker characters. In Moose Factory, Horden innovated and simplified the system for Cree of the James Bay area with the simple expedient of placing a dot over a symbol to indicate a “long” vowel. This convention was adopted by CMS in 1852 as part of its standard orthography for Moose Cree. It meant that the syllabarium could be reduced to four columns, as indeed CMS's published version of it was, although in practical terms Horden continued to present it as a seven-column system. This is the reason why Watkins presented a seven-column syllabarium—in which some of the columns showed “long” vowels using dots—on the inside front cover of the Inuktitut book. Some columns are duplicated, with the only difference being the addition of dots, although not over all syllables.

Inuktitut has three vowels (a, i, u) and vocalic length is phonemic. In using dots over some symbols, the CMS missionaries were attempting to represent their understanding of the difference between vowel sounds which they recognized as similar to those in English. In some cases, this was the difference between long and short vowels, as understood in English (as, for example, the different “a” sounds in “mat” and “mate”); in other cases, it was simply a difference in the quality of the vowel (for example, the vowel sound they heard in English “cut” was seen as “short” when compared with that in “father,” a sound which in Cree and Inuktitut required a dot). In reality, this is a difference in the quality of the vowel and is irrelevant in Inuktitut. What matters is the length of time that the vowel sound is held. A long vowel truly means that the vowel sound is held for a longer time. Nevertheless, Horden's convention, misunderstood and misused, remained the Anglican church standard for representing “long” vowel sounds until the 1960s (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** A portion of Matthew 5 as presented by Rev. Edmund James Peck in *The Four Gospels* in 1897. Peck’s version uses syllable-final symbols as revised for use in Inuktitut in 1865, but otherwise differs little from the version of Watkins and Okakterook, 1856.

Watkins represented syllable-final consonants in the same manner as had Horden in his Moose Cree syllabarium, which differs from Evans’s arbitrary system only in the addition of three main symbols and their finals. (The difference between Horden and Watkins in the final for the “k” series may be a printer’s error in the Watkins item.) It was not until 1865 that a revised system of finals was adopted by CMS for Inuktitut and Moose Cree.

Within the text, commas are used where they are used in Labrador source material. However, Watkins did not end sentences with a full stop, as did the Labrador authors, but rather with a superscript “x” (<sup>x</sup>).

This first effort at printing gospel text in Inuktitut must be considered very much an experiment. The syllable-final consonants are those used for Cree. The modifications necessary for representing finals, later used by Rev. Edmund James Peck after 1876, had not yet been adopted. As the use of finals is often ignored by fluent Inuit readers, who rely on context to clarify any ambiguities that might result, Inuit today can read the 1856 publication, but with less ease than they can Peck’s later work; they do comment on the

peculiar finals. When shown copies of the book some years ago, the late Mary Panigusiq Cousins and the late Elisapee Ootoova, both from Pond Inlet, Nunavut, were able to read the text, but with some difficulty. It is perhaps significant that Inuit of their generation often ignored finals. Other Inuit readers who have seen the book also reported that they could read and understand it, but with some difficulty. Perhaps, rather than seeing the Cree finals as a problem, they simply ignored them as well. Perhaps, too, Inuit ability to read passages was enhanced by their familiarity with the selections of the Bible that Watkins chose to include.

Edwin Watkins left Fort George and his mission with Inuit in 1857 because of HBC's intention to close its trading post there. "I very much regret a removal from this neighbourhood," he wrote, "as it will prevent my having any further intercourse with the poor Esquimaux to whom I feel deeply attached..." (Watkins 1857). He transferred to St. Andrews parish in the Red River colony and took Peter Okakterook with him. Peter died there in February of the following year. Watkins left the mission field in 1863 and returned permanently to England. John Horden continued to operate his printing press at Moose Factory until 1859, producing 23 known titles. This small Inuktitut publication was the ninth title produced, and the only one in the Inuit language. It introduced literacy to Inuit. The next work known with certainty to have been published in Inuktitut syllabics, *Watts's First Catechism, In Esquimaux* (Horden [1868 or 1869]) did not appear for over a decade.

In 2020, the small book of gospel selections compiled by Watkins and Okakterook was added to the Canada Memory of the World Register, a UNESCO initiative that recognizes significant items in the nation's documentary heritage.

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