

Building from the ground up: Reconstructing visions of community in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

Bâtir à partir de la base: reconstruire la vision de ce qu'est une communauté à Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

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Article abstract

The Inuit *qalgiq*, or gathering house, once served as a forum for bringing communities together through acts of storytelling, drum dancing, shamanism, and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. While the specific traditions associated with these structures have varied over time and space, they have remained of central importance to the affirmation of group identity and communal decision-making. In 2008, the excavation of an early Thule *qalgiq* near the Nunavut hamlet of Cambridge Bay provided a team of local participants and University of Toronto archaeologists with an opportunity to interpret the social position of the *qalgiq* in the context of a contemporary Inuit population currently struggling with issues of collective identity. This article presents a project originally designed to reconstruct a *qalgiq* as a museum exhibit with a structure drawn primarily from archaeological findings. By embedding the project in local understandings of history as a source for community wellness and revival, however, a different course was taken. While combining archaeological blueprints with contemporary realities and beliefs, the *qalgiq* was ultimately re-imagined as a venue in which ideas about community, both past and present, can be voiced.

Building from the ground up: Reconstructing visions of community in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

Brendan Griebel*, Kitikmeot Heritage Society**

Résumé: Bâtir à partir de la base: reconstruire la vision de ce qu'est une communauté à Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

Le *qalgiq*, ou maison communautaire inuit, servait de forum pour rassembler les communautés lors d'activités liées à des récits, des danses du tambour, du chamanisme et du transfert intergénérationnel des connaissances. Alors que les traditions spécifiques associées à ces structures ont varié avec les époques, elles sont restées cruciales pour l'affirmation de l'identité du groupe et la prise de décision commune. En 2008, une fouille archéologique d'un *qalgiq* du début du Thuléen près du hameau de Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, a été l'occasion pour une équipe de participants locaux et d'archéologues de l'Université de Toronto d'interpréter la position sociale du *qalgiq* dans le contexte d'une population inuit contemporaine aux prises avec des questions d'identité collective. Cet article présente un projet conçu à l'origine pour reconstruire un *qalgiq* dans un musée avec une structure dessinée principalement à partir de découvertes archéologiques. Toutefois, en intégrant le projet dans la vision locale de l'histoire comme source de bien-être de la communauté et de renouveau, une autre voie a été prise. En combinant des plans archéologiques avec les réalités et les croyances contemporaines, le *qalgiq* a été finalement réimaginé comme un lieu où les idées sur la communauté, passée et du présente, peuvent être exprimées.

Abstract: Building from the ground up: Reconstructing visions of community in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

The Inuit *qalgiq*, or gathering house, once served as a forum for bringing communities together through acts of storytelling, drum dancing, shamanism, and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. While the specific traditions associated with these structures have varied over time and space, they have remained of central importance to the affirmation of group identity and communal decision-making. In 2008, the excavation of an early Thule *qalgiq* near the Nunavut hamlet of Cambridge Bay provided a team of local participants and University of Toronto archaeologists with an opportunity to interpret the social position of the *qalgiq* in the context of a contemporary Inuit population currently struggling with issues of collective identity. This article presents a project originally designed to reconstruct a *qalgiq* as a museum exhibit with a structure drawn primarily from archaeological findings. By embedding the project in local understandings of history as a source for community wellness and revival, however, a different course was taken.

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While combining archaeological blueprints with contemporary realities and beliefs, the *qalgiq* was ultimately re-imagined as a venue in which ideas about community, both past and present, can be voiced.

Introduction

The Thule gathering house—variously known through different northern dialects (and phonetic spellings thereof) as *kazigi*, *karigi*, *kashim*, *keshagem*, *qaggiq*, *qargi*, and *qalgiq*¹—verges on being an enigma in Arctic archaeology. Although the structure was adopted by nearly every Inuit society from Alaska to Greenland (Taylor 1990: 51), the origin and nature of collective rituals that took place in its early manifestations remain largely a matter of speculation. The acts associated with the structure’s role of community gathering, and presumably the building of collective identity, left few material remains behind.

It became possible to examine these social and cultural roles with the 2008 excavation of an early Thule *qalgiq* at the Pembroke site (NgNc-2) near Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. The importance of collective gathering is highlighted by the elaborate *qalgiq*’s presence in a temporary, low-occupancy seasonal camp. For the contemporary residents of Cambridge Bay, the importance of “community” looms equally large. In recent years, the town’s population has expanded to approximately 1,400 people, with almost 30% of them being under 15 years old (Statistics Canada 2011).² With gaps rapidly widening between families and generations in their adherence to traditional skills, values, and interests, there is a conscious effort to restore a sense of balance and coherence to the town’s population. As detailed in this article, the interpretation and eventual reconstruction of a 600-year-old *qalgiq* provided a unique situation in which ideas of community, both past and present, could be explored in unison.

The study of the Pembroke *qalgiq* emerged as part of an ongoing archaeological program in partnership between University of Toronto archaeologists Max Friesen and Brendan Griebel and the Kitikmeot Heritage Society (KHS)—an Inuit elder-directed heritage society located in Cambridge Bay.³ This program has sought to explore new

¹ As Taylor catalogues (1990: 51), an equally wide variation in terminology for the structure exists in the English language. Archaeological literature tends to favour the term *karigi* for communal structures based on an Alaskan variant of the term. In deference to Cambridge Bay’s use of the Inuinnaqtun language, this article will employ the local term *qalgiq* (plur. *qalgiit*) to refer to such structures, save in the case of direct citation. The term *qalgiq*, it should be noted, linguistically designates ‘a place where gathering occurs.’

² While survey statistics indicate a 2011 population of 1,400 people, popular knowledge has the numbers closer to 1,600 people.

³ Since its inception in 1995, the KHS has assumed the mandate of documenting and preserving Inuinnaqtun language and heritage throughout Nunavut’s Kitikmeot region. The non-profit organization oversees the May Hakongak Cultural Centre—a library, museum, and archives in Cambridge Bay—and regularly hosts programs designed to increase cultural awareness and elder and youth interaction.

directions in the theory and practice of community archaeology in Nunavut, emphasising both the creation of analogies for the archaeological record through contemporary cultural interaction (Friesen 2002) and the use of ancient material artifacts to stimulate new understandings of community, identity, and history in contemporary populations (Griebel 2010, 2013). In the latter case, Griebel's approach to community archaeology reconsiders the concept of "community" as a "desired state" articulated through critical reflection on the past and its links to present-day society.

In the process of sharing archaeological results of the Pembroke site with individuals living in the nearby town of Cambridge Bay, the presence of the *qalgiq* became a focus of local interest. The tradition of community gathering remains strong in Cambridge Bay, although the practice has become visibly altered to meet the requirements of urban settlement. Elaborate municipally-coordinated events, including community hall meetings, the springtime Frolics Festival, beer dances, and holiday game nights, have come to replace traditional gatherings hosted in humble structures of snow, sod, and stone. Nonetheless, there remains a certain sense of nostalgia and longing for the coming together of Inuit in spontaneous celebrations of identity, unhindered by perceived complications of alcohol, strangers, funding, administration, and expectation of prizes. Speaking about the excavated *qalgiq* with Cambridge Bay residents seemed to fuel this longing, igniting curiosity about its original use and what it possibly meant to the small group of families who once built it. The presence of this rare structure initiated a two-year-long discussion that eventually led to a decision to recreate it as a forum for bringing together local and archaeological visions of the past in a manner that celebrated the idea of community gathering.

This article describes the collaborative process of reconstructing the Pembroke *qalgiq*. Due to the local symbolism of the *qalgiq* as a "source of community," the negotiation of the structure's form and meaning took on a deep significance. The reconstruction was accordingly tempered not only by various individuals' beliefs about its physical appearance and function in the past, but also by their expectations as to what a community is, and what a community-oriented structure should therefore look like. While initially conceived through an archaeological lens of historical accuracy and authenticity, the resulting structure gradually became shaped by local priorities that accentuated broader goals of functionality, learning, and wellness. We would like to consider this completed installation as a monument not only to archaeology's ability to engage with distinctly contemporary themes, but also to the overwhelming role that community desire (and desired community) plays in creating visions of the past. With the structure's somewhat unsettling conflation of scientific detail, social desire, archaeological authenticity, and post-modern abstraction, we feel that some balance has been achieved between Arctic history as material remains and Arctic history as an ongoing and changing discussion about what it means to belong to a northern community.

***Qalgiq* structures in the archaeological and ethnographic records**

Descriptions of *qalgiit* are relatively rare in the archaeological literature and primarily encompass examples from historic and recent pre-contact periods in Alaska (e.g., Irving 1962; Lutz 1973; Oswalt and VanStone 1967; VanStone 1968, 1970). These *qalgiit* typically distinguish themselves as extremely large structures. The remains of several early Thule gathering houses have also been recorded in the Central and Eastern Arctic (e.g., McCullough 1989; Mouël and Mouël 2002; Savelle and Habu 2004). Unlike later *qalgiit*, early Thule examples were usually built as semi-subterranean terrestrial structures that were insulated for cold weather and multiple-season occupation. The identification of these archaeological features as *qalgiit* is often tenuous because they differ only marginally in terms of structure size and artifact composition from other contemporaneous dwellings. A structure is typically identified as a *qalgiq* if it has seating benches that are too narrow for sleeping, a positioning of these same benches around the structure's entire margin rather than just opposite the entrance, no cooking remains (Irving 1962), and an unusually high number of unfinished artifacts and carving debris that suggest tool manufacture and maintenance (Savelle and Habu 2004: 217).

In the ethnographic record, the design and dimensions of *qalgiit* could vary greatly. In southwestern Alaska, Edward Nelson (1899: 245-46) reported that the rooms of a *kashim* were traditionally 4 by 8 metres square. A huge expenditure of energy and materials was required to build these *qalgiit*, testifying to their importance within communities and their frequent daily use as social gathering centres. The structures were sufficiently intrinsic to western Inuit understandings of “cultural space” that expedient versions were often erected as substitutes in situations where more formal *qalgiit* were not available (Lee and Reinhardt 2003: 110) (Figure 1).

Significantly different construction methods governed the building of early Thule *qalgiit* in the Central and Eastern Arctic, where the sites were above the tree line and thus compelled builders to use available wood more sparingly. An early example from Somerset Island was constructed using bowhead whalebone supports and baleen (Savelle and Habu 2004); examples from regions without bowhead whales relied on more quotidian materials of stone, hide, sod, and scavenged wood.

When temporary snowhouses on the sea ice replaced terrestrial winter houses during the Post-Classic Thule phase (A.D. 1400 - European Contact), *qalgiq* construction materials changed accordingly.⁴ The use of snow as a construction material allowed Inuit to obtain *qalgiq* sizes comparable to those seen in Alaska. First-hand accounts indicate that outside walls could range from 5 to 8 metres in diameter

⁴ The Little Ice Age of the Neo-Boreal episode, beginning roughly between A.D. 1400 and 1600., is generally deemed responsible for this transition in lifestyle (e.g., Maxwell 1985: 304-306). A decline in open-water bowhead hunting is evident from A.D. 1400 onwards, accompanied by a retreat of populations from the High Arctic. The strategy of winter seal-breathing-hole hunting—which required individuals to live at various locations on the sea ice—was increasingly adopted as a seasonal way of life.

(Boas 1888: 600; Fleming 1956: 218; Lister 1777). As many as 60 people (Rasmussen 1932: 19; Stefansson 1914: 62), and even upwards of 100 people (Birket-Smith 1959: 126) have been recorded in a Central Arctic *qalgiit* at a single time.

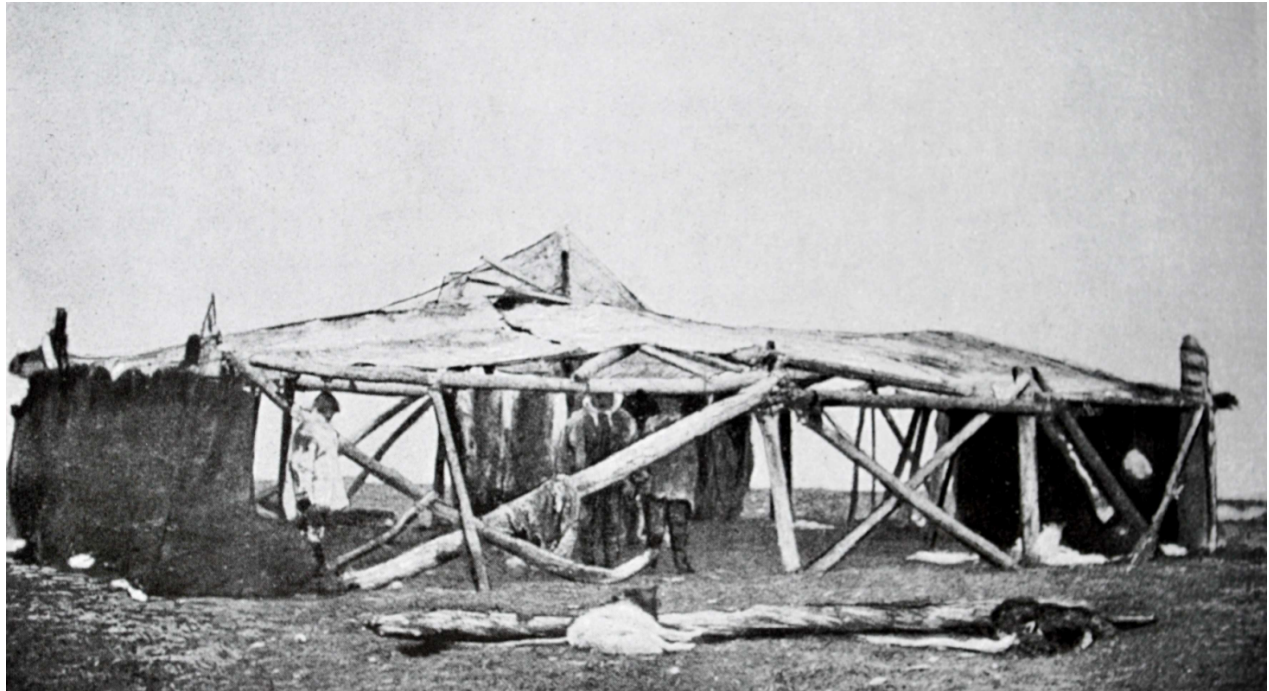


Figure 1. A temporary north Alaskan *karigi* (*qalgiq*) consisting primarily of unmodified driftwood. Source: Cantwell (1889: 84). The three individuals visible inside the structure indicate scale.

These domed snow *qalgiit* had a fairly uniform basic structure across the Arctic, being built larger than but in much the same way as the snow *igluit* in which families spent their winters. Arctic missionary Julian Bilby records Baffin region *qalgiit* as being:

Generally built upon the usual round plan of the igloo, sometimes three being grouped together, apse and transept fashion, with a common entrance (nave). The company disposes itself in concentric rings round the house, married women by the wall, spinsters in front of them, and a ring of men to the front. Children are grouped on either side of the door, and the singer or dancer, stripped to the waist, takes his stand amid them and remains on the one spot all the time (Bilby 1923: 217-218).

While multi-domed structures were not unknown in the Eastern Arctic (e.g., Mathiassen 1927: 131), the architectural ideal tended towards a single chamber with a front entry porch. Central Arctic traditions of *qalgiq* building, by contrast, often involved the use of multiple snowhouse units. Conjoined snowhouses were favoured by the Copper Inuit groups that traditionally occupied the region around Cambridge Bay. These *qalgiit* could take on multiple forms through an adjoining of smaller residential units to a central larger domed dance house (Figure 3). An increase in the number of adjoined residential houses required a corresponding increase in the size of the central dance house dome; as a result, two- and three-lobed dance houses were fairly common,

while four-lobed structures were known of, but rare (Jenness 1922: 71). Connecting these structures allowed individuals to conserve fuel by sharing the heat and light from soapstone lamps.

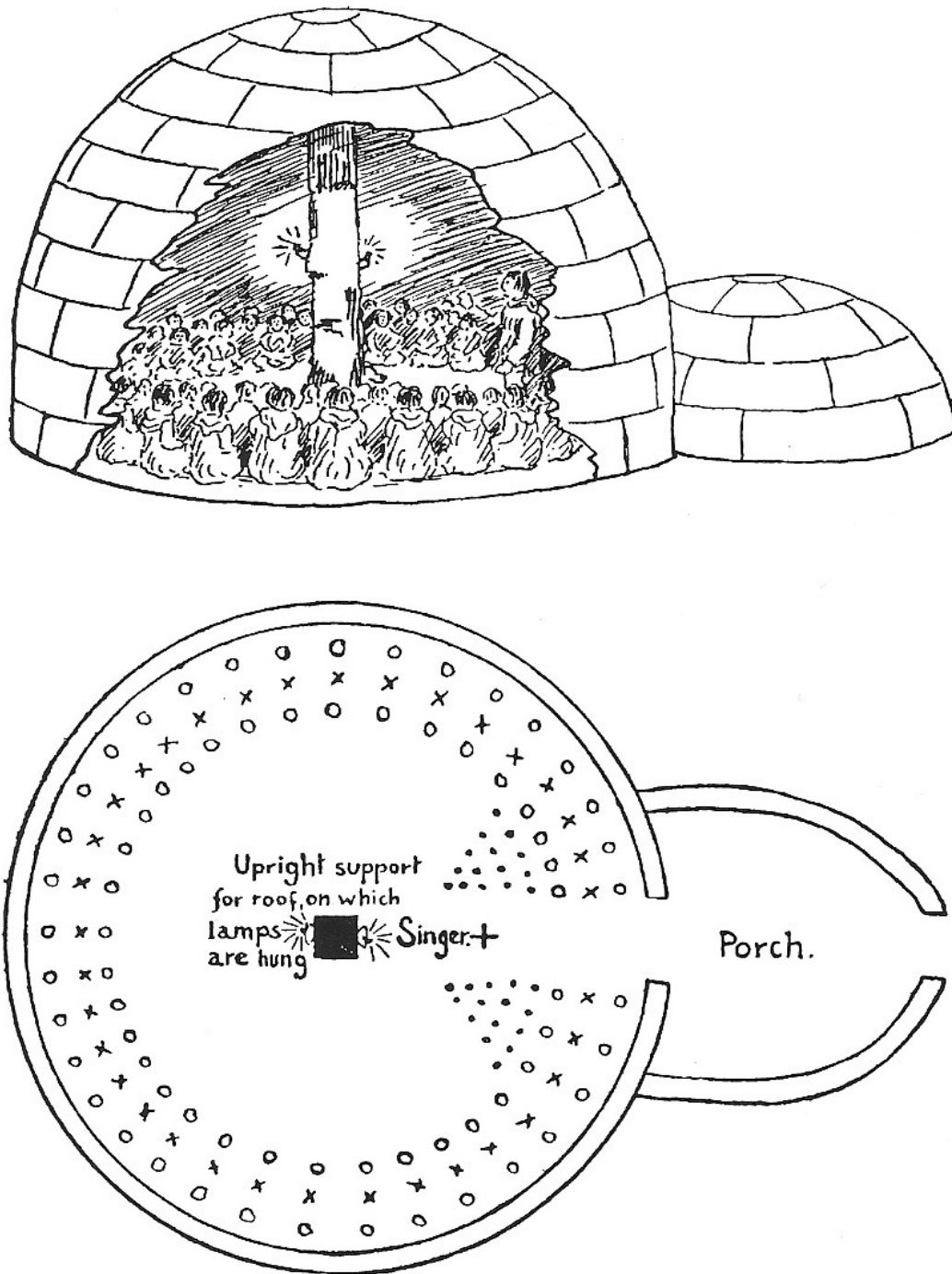


Figure 2. A side and plan view of a Baffin Island *qalgiq* with a central snow pillar to provide lamplight and structural support. Source: Bilby (1923: 218-219).

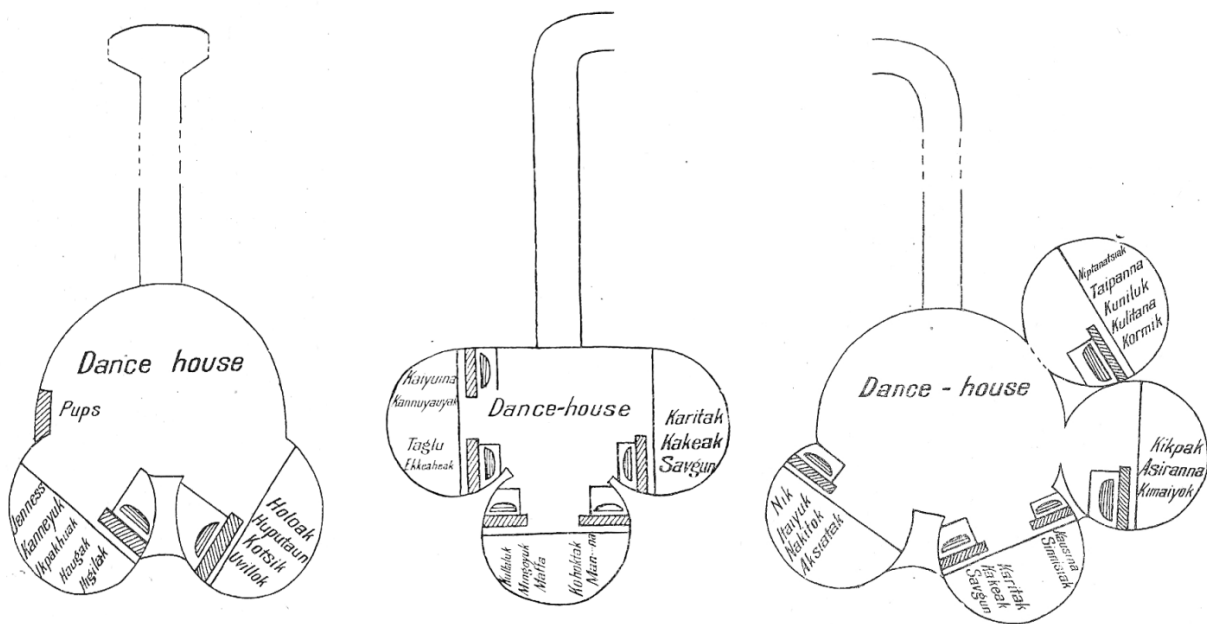


Figure 3. Various Copper Inuit *qalgiit*, as mapped by Diamond Jenness (1922: 71, 74, 75). Written names represent the individuals sleeping in the residential domes at the time of his stay.

***Qalgiq* use and ritual**

The use of gathering houses by Inuit of the Central and Eastern Arctic likely stems from an early north Alaskan tradition of men’s houses associated with bowhead whaling. Male teams of whale hunters would regularly assemble in large semi-subterranean structures known as *kariyiit* (sing. *kariqi*). These whaling “clubhouses” served both practical and ritual purposes. Ethnographic accounts from the Barrow region have them positioned on the highest point of land so that one could better observe the ocean for signs of whales (Simpson 1855: 933). The occupants would remain in this house throughout the day (Murdoch 1892: 80), using their time to repair tools, exchange knowledge, and socialise younger generations of men (Lee and Reinhardt 2003: 110). These structures were also the site of ceremonial rituals designed to ensure success and safety during the hunt.

As early Thule Inuit groups migrated from Alaska eastwards across the Arctic around the 13th century, it appears that they brought a modified version of the gathering house (McCullough 1989: 245-248). Unlike their Alaskan counterparts, the historic-era *qalgiit* of the Central and Eastern Arctic were rarely gender-exclusive (Lee and Reinhardt 2003: 67; Taylor 1990). They would accommodate large gatherings of individuals for dancing, games, and feasting, as well as shamanic performances to assess future hunting prospects or determine the reasons behind local misfortune (Jenness 1922: 220-222; Taylor 1990). As ethnographically documented by Diamond Jenness (1922: 222), singing and drum dancing were the principal activities of the Central Arctic *qalgiq*.

As indicated by historical accounts (see sources compiled in Taylor 1990), the *qalgiq* often played a social role in relieving interpersonal tensions and minimising group conflict through dispute resolution, spiritual intervention, or competitive activities. As Garth Taylor points out (1990: 58), “conflict was a special problem in larger settlements because there was no effective mechanism for settling disputes above the level of the winter household.” Murder and blood feuds were historically common across the Arctic. Taylor (ibid: 64) points out that the *qalgiq* not only served to defuse frictions within the immediate winter settlement community but were also an “important integrative force,” bringing together and forging bonds between hosts and visitors from other settlements and regions through feasting and entertainment.

The Pembroke *qalgiq*

In 2008, a community archaeology excavation was arranged as a partnership between the University of Toronto and Kitikmeot Heritage Society at Pembroke (NgNc-2), an archaeological site located approximately 3 km northwest of Cambridge Bay, Nunavut (Friesen 2009) (Figure 4). In addition to researching the archaeological record of the Pembroke site, the project explored the potential of “community archaeology” for bridging academic interests and those held by local populations. This was accomplished through a variety of programs to facilitate inclusion of local participation, public programming, and elder interpretations into the process of excavation. In recent years, the burgeoning practice of community archaeology has struggled to define itself as a singular approach.

While practitioners have sought coherence through guidelines for shared project control (Marshall 2002) or explicit methodological practices (Moser et al. 2002; Tully 2007), many researchers have ultimately stressed the need for community archaeologists to shift their focus away from normative engagements—namely, excavating, conserving, and managing material remains—towards a more in-depth investigation of contemporary psychological, political, and narrative connections to the past (Moshenska and Dhanjal 2011; Simpson 2008). The strength of the community approach in this regard lies in its potential for creating practices that can accommodate and address issues of contemporary identity and relevance. As research in the Canadian Arctic becomes more embedded in local community concerns and knowledge, there has correspondingly been more attention given to community-oriented programs about the region’s archaeology (e.g., Dawson et al. 2011; Friesen 2002; Griebel 2010, 2013; Lyons 2007; Lyons et al. 2010).

Arctic archaeologist William Taylor first mapped the Pembroke site in 1963 during an extensive archaeological survey between Cape Perry and Cambridge Bay (Taylor 1972). The Pembroke site was partially excavated over the course of two field seasons in 1963 and 1965 (Taylor 1964, 1967). Taylor and his team identified 12 structural features (hereafter referred to as “F”) at the site, five of which—including two semi-subterranean winter houses (F1, F4) and three tent rings (F7, F11, F12)—were fully excavated by Taylor’s team. A further four features were excavated during Friesen’s

2008 field season, including two semi-subterranean houses (F2, F5), one tent ring (F9), and one structure identified as a *qalgiq* (F8) due to its size, internal layout, lack of cooking debris, and frequency of antler fragments, debitage, and tools, which befit a structure whose use existed outside the domestic sphere (Figure 5).



Figure 4. An overview of the Pembroke site (viewer facing south). The parallel stone lines indicate an old branch of the road that ran over the top of the hill. Photo: Max Friesen, 2008.

Although the site's yield of temporally diagnostic artifacts was low, Taylor (1967, 1972) judged it to be among the original Thule occupations in the region. A single radiocarbon date obtained by Taylor suggested a date calibrating to roughly A.D. 1100-1300. Based on six radiocarbon dates taken from the site during the 2008 excavation, a later date of around A.D. 1400-1450 has been estimated for the site (Friesen pers. comm. 2012). Given the small number of artifacts and relative paucity of faunal remains, it was likely that this site represented only a brief occupation by a small group of families migrating through the area (Norman and Friesen 2012).

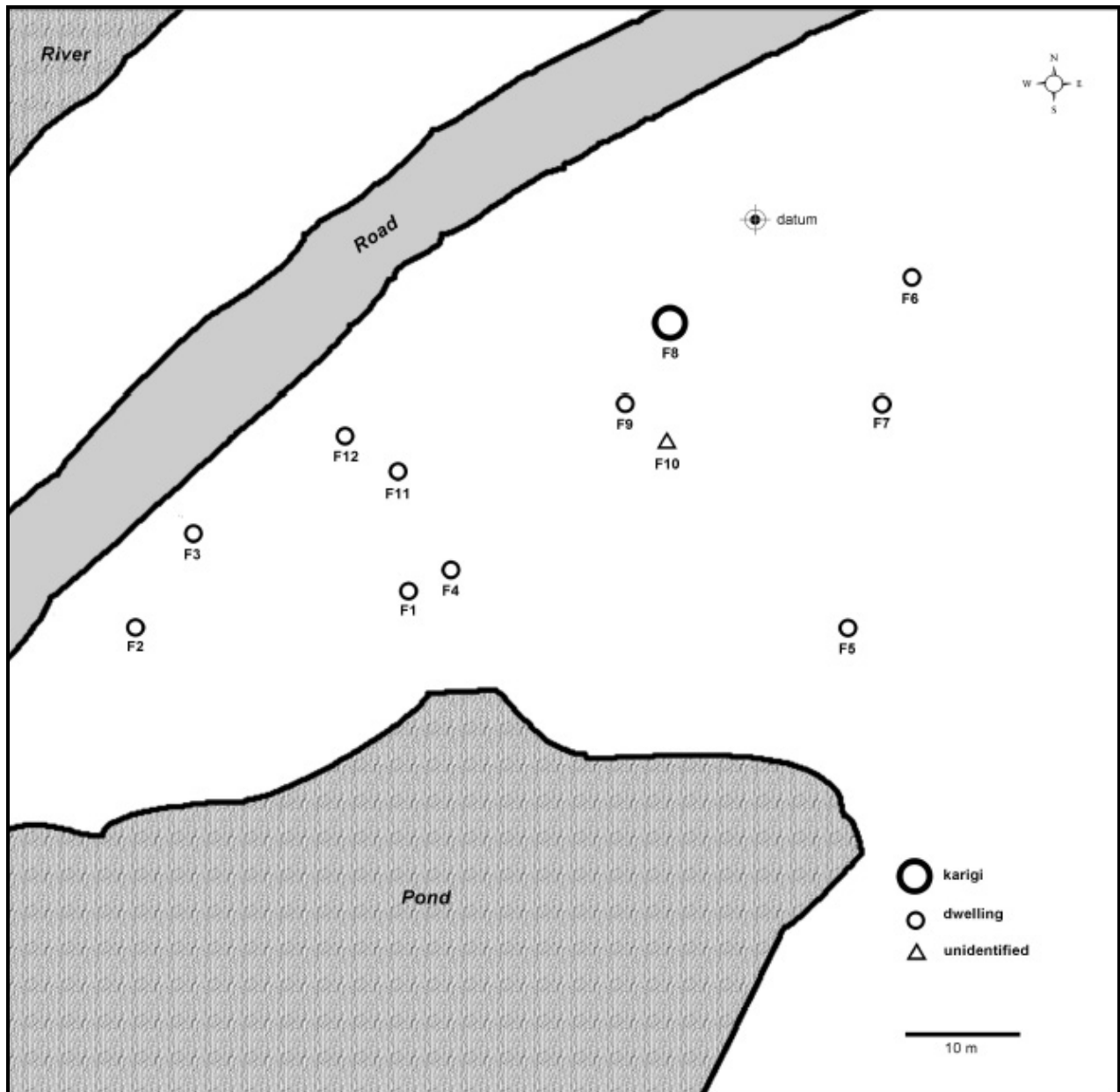


Figure 5. A map of the Pembroke site (NgNc-2) and associated features. Source: Friesen (2009: 5). The datum marks the highest elevation of the hill, which gradually slopes down towards the pond. More robust winter houses (F1-F5) are located towards the base of the hill, whereas warmer-weather tent rings (F6, F7, F9, F11, F12) are situated midway up. The *qalgiq* (here identified as *karigi* or F8) is visible at the top of the hill.

***Qalgiq* reconstruction**

Over the course of a year following the Pembroke excavations, a significant effort was made to maintain a dialogue with Cambridge Bay residents about the nature and importance of the site. Throughout this period, Brendan Griebel⁵ resided full-time in the town to work with various groups (including high school and college students,

⁵ Then working on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto.

heritage organisation members, local elders, and residents interested in history) who expressed a desire to take part in public presentations and practical workshops designed to reinterpret the meaning of various artifacts and ideas raised during the excavation. Meetings with the KHS' board of elders were held on multiple occasions to review project progress and consider new directions for engagement. Throughout this process, the existence of the *qalgiq* spoke strongly to many of these elders through its presence as a "community gathering centre."

Rather than echoing the archaeological team's understanding of the *qalgiq* as an isolated historical phenomenon, however, their discussions of the structure related it directly to how Inuit live together today. Questions were asked as to how a population "back then" would come together as a group, and how this coming together might be different from the ways in which people gather today. Of particular interest in these conversations was the linking of the *qalgiq* to issues of "wellness." Many individuals in Cambridge Bay envision concepts of "community" and "wellness" as direct correlates. Wellness, in this sense, is often understood in terms of strong interpersonal relationships, values, and ways of life practised by Inuit prior to settlement in towns. During a series of KHS interviews with Cambridge Bay elders on the topic of how Inuit life has changed since settlement in towns, the themes of alienation and declining group wellness emerged again and again. Moses Koihok, an elder who moved to Cambridge Bay from the Bathurst Inlet region in 1959, spoke of substance abuse as the biggest contemporary challenge to living properly, highlighting its influence in isolating people from each other and from traditional values:

In my time, I remember that people often gathered to celebrate through drum dancing. Although they smoked [cigarettes] back then it did not bother them. They would celebrate by drum dancing and getting together. [The cigarettes] did not harm them because they were together and celebrating. In the old days people were often helpful. They would help each other, supplying food for other families. They did not think about alcohol or tobacco as much [...]. I find that today the people are a lot different compared to what it was like back then [...]. It seems like they are more isolated and segregate others, whereas often times [in the past] they would help each other (Moses Koihok in KHS 2011).

Conversations about traditional meanings of *qalgiit* for community wellness were often accompanied by a voiced desire to see such a building reconstructed in Cambridge Bay. In the autumn of 2009, it was decided by the KHS that the Pembroke *qalgiq* would be re-imagined as a new exhibit for Cambridge Bay's May Hakongak Cultural Centre. An exhibit storyline team of roughly 15 members was assembled from an assortment of heritage professionals—including KHS staff, two University of Toronto archaeologists, a contracted exhibit designer, and a panel of local Inuit elders—as well as a revolving roster of other local volunteers and interested adults from the town. During a large focus group meeting held in December 2009, we began to tease apart some of these ideas and combine them into a blueprint for a physical structure. Due to the geographic dispersal of the group, further communication subsequently took place through smaller group gatherings and email or telephone communication. Ben Shook, an innovative architect and Polar enthusiast, was brought

in throughout the summer of 2010 to guide technical elements involved in the design and rebuilding of the *qalgiq*.

Despite the collaborative nature of the project, it quickly became evident that the team was divided into two distinct groups with differing approaches to the *qalgiq* as both an interpretive and educational tool. One group (consisting of participating academics) was composed of those individuals who felt that the *qalgiq*'s message was mainly one of representing the past in a manner suggested by the preponderance of material evidence. The other group (primarily Inuit adults and elders) did not object to the *qalgiq* being a venue for communicating “factual” knowledge about the past, so long as it was tied to the advancement of their contemporary community. Julia Ogina (pers. comm. 2010), a local cultural advocate who took part in discussions about the *qalgiq*, pointed out to Griebel that the *qalgiq* is important precisely because it reflects on modern identity: “when I hear back from the talk about this exhibit about the *qalgiq*, that’s really exciting to me because that’s a big part of our history here [...] and that’s part of our identity. This is what happened here.”

The physical nature of the Pembroke site’s *qalgiq* structure extended beyond the collective memory of participating Cambridge Bay elders.⁶ While numerous memories remain about the construction and use of snow dance houses, traditions of permanent stone *qalgiit* have been lost to time. As a result, the *qalgiq*'s physical reconstruction initially proceeded according to a distinctly scientific logic, in which Pembroke’s material evidence was reviewed alongside archaeological literature about *qalgiit* and systematically assessed to find the most likely analogy for reconstruction. The mapped blueprint of the Pembroke *qalgiq* provided the basis for dimensions, indicating an interior diameter of roughly 3.25 metres and what is likely a raised seating bench of flat stones surrounding the inside perimeter (Figure 6). The limited quantity of stone surrounding the structure indicated that a framed cover was most likely erected over a low stone foundation, rather than the structure being designed as a higher-walled and roofless stone windbreak, which is also found throughout the Eastern Arctic.

Little is currently known about the design of permanent dwellings during the early phases of Thule expansion. While stone rings representing the structures’ foundations remain detectable, the design and materials once used in erecting structures over these foundations have largely vanished (Park 1988). Based on evidence from an early Thule site known as Co-op, Jean-François and Maryke Le Mouél (2002: 174) conclude that early semi-subterranean structures were most likely fitted with a “panel roof” in which “a lintel is apparently fixed to two long vertical poles about halfway up [...] [and]

⁶ While spatial organisation within Inuit dwellings has been relatively constant through the earliest Thule times to modern tent arrangements (Le Mouél and Le Mouél 2002: 185), building structures have greatly changed. Since early historic times, Copper Inuit have been highly mobile, and this mobility has favoured a lifestyle that transitions from winter snowhouses on the sea ice to combined snow and tent structures during warmer spring weather, and a variety of tent designs during summer and fall months (Jenness 1922: 56-82). With the exception of the semi-subterranean *qarmat*—defined as “autumn houses with skin roofs” (Mathiassen 1927: 133)—permanent, multi-season terrestrial structures were generally not used.

forms a frontal portico that supports the front ends of two to five very long poles, placed either parallel to each other or fanning out.”⁷ Like Le Mouël and Le Mouël, the academics on our team favoured an architectural analogy from an early 20th-century Greenlandic tent documented by Birket-Smith (1924: 154-156) (Figure 7). Known as an *erqulik* (‘the one with the rear’), or double arch tent, this style is believed to have originated in the Central Arctic, only to be adopted by north Greenlandic Inughuit people during a visit by Baffin Islanders in 1856 (Lee and Reinhardt 2003: 24). Unlike many historical-era Inuit tent structures, the framework of this tent could maximise floor area and ceiling height without using a traditional tipi or steeply-sloped shape. The Inuit elders on our team agreed that this form would physically allow for the same activities that had been traditionally performed within the snowhouses of their direct memory. The large upright beams ensured a suitably high ceiling and maximum length of vertical walls to allow for sufficient performance space.

The academic members on our team brought up another point: the technical constraints that would have been imposed by resource availability. Although little is known about early Thule strategies for resource acquisition, historic Copper Inuit groups possessed extensive trade networks and were known to travel great distances to obtain raw resources (Morrison 1991). As the area in question afforded no access to bowhead whale hunting (Ryan 2003: 104), it was assumed that wood would have been the solely available material for framework construction.

With a rough archaeological vision in place for the *qalgiq*, we began to work at fleshing out the surface details of the structure. It is at this stage that the team’s strict reliance on archaeological notions of authenticity began to quaver. Seven Inuit elders from our team took over responsibility for building the *qalgiq*’s skeletal structure. In contrast to previous efforts to align the building’s construction with what was understood to be the most empirically accurate representation of materials and styles used in the past, the elders seemed to feel little fidelity to the idea of duplicating a history they did not know. While they continued to speak about their desire to “get the *qalgiq* right,” the statement took on new connotations of maintaining standards appropriate to their own experiential knowledge, including task sequence and material patterning (insisting that canvas pieces used to line the *qalgiq* be first sewn into seal shapes in order to interlock properly) and educational priorities (having at least one young person present to learn how to cut and sew the skins). These actions were not driven by a desire for visual conformity to past models, a fact accentuated by the elders’ indifference to canvas lining being used to replace the skins (“just paint it like skins”) or to staples, nails, and screws being used to hold the structure together. As elder Anna Nahogaloak pointed out, why stitch 50 metres of wall material by hand when a sewing machine is readily available?

⁷ The precision of the authors’ description is based on an image of similar dwellings depicted in a carving on a walrus-tusk bow-drill handle from the early Classic Thule period found on north Baffin Island (Mary-Rousselière 1960: 12-13).

NgNc-2 Pembroke Feature 8



Figure 6. The *qalgiq* stone substructure as mapped during the 2008 excavations. The darkened stones represent flat rocks and support stones likely used for bench seating. Source: Friesen (2009: 15).

Several additional layers of interpretive tools were conceived and designed by the academic members of the team to complete the structure's educational message. Two mannequins depicting a man and a child were installed in one corner of the exhibit to illustrate the structure's origins as a site for teaching and socialising youth. Text panels about historic *qalgiq* use and the Pembroke excavations were mounted on the external

side of the exhibit (Figure 8). Replicas of artifacts from Pembroke were also included to better illustrate material components of the site.



Figure 7. The structural frame of an *erqulik*, or double-arch tent. Source: Birket-Smith (1924: fig. 119).

Despite the lack of outward conflict between the academic and Inuit members of our team, it was relatively clear that a profound gap existed between two different understandings of the *qalgiq*. The rhetoric of community archaeology inspires the idea of shared control as a profound and active struggle to define positions of power and voice. Yet, in this case, subtlety reigned to the extent that lack of conflict was often assumed to imply collaborative consent. As the carpenter hired to actualise our group's vision, Ben Shook felt that a hidden contradiction lay within the structure. In a reflexive online journal entry describing the building process, he notes:

When we asked the elders about what it [the *qalgiq*] would have looked like, or how the skins would have been oriented, they kind of scratched their heads. One said, "Well, it wouldn't have been inside." Like, it just doesn't compute that this thing would be placed indoors. So I ask myself, who is this for? This community is 95% native; this Heritage Centre is for the community. Why are we building a replica of the old way that no one under the age of 65 understands [...] and those older are just baffled anyway (Shook 2010)?

As the project progressed, it became increasingly clear that the structure as an archaeological time capsule would not be productive in ways desired by local people. A series of interviews was accordingly held with elders to reorient and deepen our

group's understanding of the *qalgiq* as a "source of community." Using memories from their childhood, elders responded with experiences of gathering, vivid recollections of drumming, dancing, and the joy of people coming together to celebrate life. To emulate this sense of community and history as a visceral phenomenon, the *qalgiq* needed to become animated through collective performance, whether it be the entertainment of storytelling and drum dancing, the education of young people, or other processes through which individuals describe who they are and how they belong to a community. As our team's translator and collaborator Emily Angulalik pointed out, Inuit have a special term to designate such spaces: *unipkaarviit* or 'places where stories reside.' It was around this point of time that the idea of transforming the *qalgiq* into a theatre was born.

Since 2009, Cambridge Bay has developed an affinity for film. That year saw a KHS initiative to foster awareness of local culture and history through the medium of documentary video. InsightShare, a UK-based participatory video non-profit, donated audiovisual equipment and a week of video training to an initial group of 10 high school students selected for their interest in media technology. These students were encouraged to record their experiences of both historical and present events. It did not take long before the program and its media skills caught on, with students showing others how to use the media equipment to voice their concerns and opinions. Within the year, even Cambridge Bay elders were recording their own interviews and actively documenting traditional knowledge workshops.

The role of film is increasingly being explored in the context of the Inuit struggle to manage their collective identity as something both deeply historical and resoundingly adaptive to modern realities (e.g., Evans 2010; Robinson 2008). As Nunavut actress Micheline Ammaq indicates, there is no contradiction to learning to be Inuit from a television screen:

Yes, we learn just by watching and listening. We learn more by watching than just by listening. Maybe by television—if it is a learning scene I would like that and I think it would be a good learning scene [...]. For example, if your grandfather tells you to go seal hunting in spring, you would not answer, "I can't do it." Maybe some would answer that, but an Inuk, a real Inuk, always does what an older person tells them to do. If you have seen the videos, you go to a seal hole and you stand beside it. When you want to learn something you see some things in the films (in Kunuk 2004: 23-24).

The decision to construct the *qalgiq* as a community cinema seemed to echo this sentiment. While many of the videos are interviews with elders about traditional methods of tool making, hunting, or skill application, young people in the community have taken it upon themselves to explore how these methods can be translated into contemporary circumstances. A video by Cambridge Bay resident Pam Gross, for example, uses footage from a kayak-building camp to focus on the environmental changes that challenge a return to traditional ways: pollutant accumulation in wild animals, unpredictability in seasonal cycle, and the impacts that accompany social desire for imported rather than local materials. Awareness of this change, Gross seems

to suggest, is a new form of Inuit knowledge, that draws from, and remains equally relevant to, the old form.



Figure 8. The exterior (top photo) and interior (bottom photo) of the completed *qalgiq* in the May Hakongak Cultural Centre. Top photo: by Brendan Griebel, 2012; bottom photo: Ben Shook, 2011.

In a collective decision to depart from more standard models of museum exhibit development, our team considered ways to integrate these videos into the *qalgiq*'s design. The best way to represent the story of the *qalgiq*, it was ultimately decided, was to highlight the structure's statement on history and community as an open question rather than as a definitive set of conclusions. Video projects from Cambridge Bay were collected from anyone wishing to showcase their work and stored in a single video library. A large-scale viewing screen was wired into the *qalgiq* wall. Working between local elders and a computer programmer, a separate touch screen system for browsing through the database and selecting videos was designed and installed.

As of February 2013, roughly 50 videos have been installed in the *qalgiq*. Many of these videos are in the Inuinnaqtun language and depict elders urging people to remember their past. A locally filmed movie from the 1960s has been digitised from archival film reels, providing a retrospective on a modern community in the making. Delving even further back, a local student film documents her experience at an archaeological field season, the lens of her camera probing into trenches and in search of something recognisable. Perhaps most importantly, the messages in these videos are not just passively consumed. They intermingle with the voices and actions resulting from the *qalgiq*'s daily use—as a reading room, a meeting centre, and workshop space—during which people actively try to build these perspectives of the past into their contemporary identities and lives.

Conclusion

The technology of [Cambridge Bay] is schizophrenic. People are curious about the old ways. The kids are in some way proud of the old ways. They are also enamored of the West. A skidoo that goes 70 miles an hour on the sea is pretty cool. The construction of the *qalgiq* has brought me to realize I have not participated in making a *qalgiq*, but have further enunciated the bifurcation of these two worlds. We have made a replica. Of course it is positive to aid the imagination and to bring youth into the presence of history. But what is it for (Shook 2010)?

The rebuilding of a Thule *qalgiq* has arguably done little to solve questions about the structure's social function and visual appearance in the past. The issue of the Pembroke *qalgiq* as a modern source for community, however, gains clarification through a fascinating discussion between northern researcher Janet McGrath and Kivalliq elder Aupilaarjuk about desired directions in Inuktitut epistemology and knowledge renewal (McGrath 2012). While detailing traditional ways of building and living in *igluit* (snowhouses), Aupilaarjuk pens a diagram of a *qalgiq* (identified in his dialect as a *qaggiq*), explaining that the large community snowhouse “gains its strength and height by way of being built on older *igluit*” (ibid: 237). The underlying metaphor of this building is not lost on McGrath:

In that moment I immediately saw the significance of the *qaggiq* in terms of renewal. *Qaggiq* is a space for gathering, renewing relationships, refreshing skills through games, a place where stories and songs are shared, and community is affirmed. If there are tensions,

they will be brought out appropriately because the wellbeing of the group relies on harmony. In that sense, *qaggiq* is a renewal of community. It is a source of strengthening of relationships and knowledge of homeland, language, living histories and ceremony. The other thing that is significant about the *qaggiq* is that it is a new structure made over old structures to support renewal of the community. *Qaggiq* in its very architecture is an innovation that incorporates the old to make the new or renewed. Nothing was “wrong” with the old *igluit*, it was just late winter and their time was done (McGrath 2012: 239).

Archaeologist Anna Agbe-Davies (2010: 385) has argued that it is only when archaeologists “participate in the making of ‘communities’ that our discipline’s work most effectively ‘serves’ them.” The reconstructed Pembroke *qalgiq*—a conglomerate of ideas, people, technologies, and temporalities—accordingly gains coherence only as a conceptual place for community renewal. Despite serious scientific consideration of how the original structure may have been built, the final product makes it clear that the “old” is only a foundation to support the “new.” The “old,” in this case, becomes most relevant as an emblem (cf. Briggs 1997) upon which modern interpretations of tradition, identity, and wellness can be built. As Jean Briggs (1997: 230) points out, “it is not even necessary for the majority of Inuit to have once participated in traditional activities [...]. What is necessary is that people be able to create chains of association and lines of reasoning that link the behaviors cognitively and emotionally with the half-remembered, half-imagined past.”

According to anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1971: 14), it is significant that Inuit possess no direct words for the actions of “creating” and “making”: “Their closest term means ‘to work on.’ The carver never attempts to force the ivory into uncharacteristic forms but responds to the material as it tries to be itself, and thus the carving is continually modified as the ivory has its say.” We would ultimately like to conclude this article by considering the *qalgiq* project as an indicator of the negotiation that must take place if archaeological projects are to contribute to local understandings of history and community. When carrying out these projects, as when carving the ivory described above, one should avoid forcing things into a preconceived form. To adhere rigidly to empirical facts or to assumed functions of past objects is to challenge a community’s right to define, to create and, simply, “to try and be itself.”

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