

Obituary

John Aito Pihlainen (1926-1964)

JOHN AITO PIHLAINEN, civil engineer and a Fellow of the Arctic Institute since 1960, died suddenly in Ottawa in January of this year. He was born in Finland and emigrated to Canada with his parents in 1928. In 1950 he obtained his B.Eng. degree at McGill University and his M.Sc. at Purdue University two years later.

He joined the Division of Building Research of the National Research Council in 1950 and pioneered the Division's investigations of permafrost and associated construction problems in northern Canada, beginning with a survey in 1950 of the construction and performance of buildings in the Mackenzie River valley. The following year he worked again in the Mackenzie Valley with an expedition examining the applicability of air photo interpretation methods for engineering site surveys in permafrost areas. In 1952 he established the Division's Northern Research Station at Norman Wells, N.W.T. from which numerous permafrost field projects were carried out in the Mackenzie Valley over a number of years.

The Aklavik Relocation Survey of 1954 took him and his colleagues to the Mackenzie Delta where he was in charge of permafrost investigations to select a new townsite. For the next few years he was closely associated with the varied and comprehensive permafrost engineering studies being carried out by the Division of Building Research at Inuvik using this new town as a field laboratory.

He also carried out field investigations in other parts of Canada's permafrost region and during his ten years with the National Research Council he became widely known for his broad knowledge of permafrost and associated engineering problems, and development of the philosophy of carefully executed site investigations prior to construction.

In December 1960 he left the National Research Council and entered into private practice as an arctic consulting engineer based in Ottawa. During the three years prior to his death he was engaged in various engineering projects throughout northern Canada. Through his field work and many published papers he made notable contributions to the advancement of engineering site investigations and construction in permafrost areas.

John Pihlainen was universally liked and respected for his practical approach mixed with an unusual sense of good humour. By many people living in the North, he was affectionately known as "Johnny Permafrost". His unexpected and tragic death cut short a successful career which had promised to add many more notable contributions to the development of Canada's permafrost region.

ROGER J. E. BROWN

Samuel Kleinschmidt

Erik Holtved

One hundred and fifty years ago, on February 27, 1814, Samuel Kleinschmidt, the eminent Greenlandic linguist, was born in Lichtenau in southern Greenland. His father, Konrad Kleinschmidt, was a German belonging to the Moravian Brethren, who had sent him to Greenland as missionary in 1793. In 1812 Konrad lost his wife, but in the following year, during a stay in Scotland, he married a Danish woman, Christen Petersen, who became the mother of Samuel.

Learning Greenlandic from his play fellows from birth Samuel became familiar with three languages. In addition, his father took a great interest in the Greenlandic language and his translations of the Holy Script were later mentioned with great respect by his son, who rated them considerably higher than most other translations made by the missionaries. Thus was laid in early childhood the germ for his future work that was destined to be of such great importance for the Greenlanders and their intellectual and social culture.

When about 10 years old Samuel was sent to Germany where he spent three years and a half in the boys' school of the Moravian Brethren in Kleinwelka. In spite of his apparent gifts, however, he was not given a higher education, because he stuttered, it is said. Instead, he was apprenticed to a pharmacist in Zeist in Holland. Only little is known about this, but in 1836 we meet him, 22 years old, in Christiansfeld in South Jutland as a teacher in the Brethren's school for boys there. One of his fellow teachers was the linguistically gifted Jäschke, who was later sent to the western Himalayas. There is thus good reason to believe that Samuel's linguistic interests were further developing during these years. Furthermore, he is said to have shown very good pedagogical abilities. All this was no doubt well known to the Moravian authorities, who finally sent Samuel back to Greenland in 1841, where he was destined to remain for the rest of his life.

The first 5 years he spent again in Lichtenau as assistant in the missionary work, with the special task of studying the Greenlandic language. This he did with great zeal, which sometimes brought him into conflict with his superiors because he refused to perform some of the more trivial duties, as gardening, gathering of wood, beer brewing, etc. No doubt he worked hard, as can be deduced from the fact that the manuscript of his fundamental grammatical work, "Grammatik der grönländischen Sprache", printed in Berlin in 1851, was in all essentials finished as early as 1846. This is a splendid piece of work, especially when one considers that for 18 years he had had no opportunity to hear Greenlandic spoken. After returning to Greenland, however, he associated with the native Greenlanders as much as possible and thus became intimately acquainted not only with their language but also with their daily life and way of thinking. In the course of time this however gave rise to continuous controversies, particularly with the older missionaries, whose ways of treating the Greenlandic language, as well as their lack of understanding of the Greenlanders' mind, was sometimes rather sharply criticized by the young Kleinschmidt.

After a 2-year stay in Lichtenfels, another mission station, Kleinschmidt finally moved to Ny Herrnhut, the Moravian Brethren's main settlement near Godthåb. There the controversies became more serious still, because Kleinschmidt openly opposed also the strict religious discipline that the missionaries maintained, more often than not in a narrow-minded way and in total disregard of the old customs and feelings of the Greenlanders. In spite of many sincere efforts by the Brethren a mutual understanding proved to be impossible. Kleinschmidt was even invited to Germany by the highest Moravian authorities to plead for himself, but he only answered with the words: "One remains in Greenland!". The unavoidable consequence was that he was finally dismissed from his service with the Moravian Mission, although apparently with regret. This happened in 1859 and Kleinschmidt moved over to the Danes in Godthåb where from then on he was employed at the training college (seminarium) for Greenlandic catechists. This, however, did not mean a complete break with his former colleagues. On the contrary, their relations soon improved and he remained a member of the Moravian Brethren until his death.

In Godthåb Kleinschmidt found at once a more satisfactory field of action. He was very much concerned over the decline of the Greenlandic society that was then taking place in many respects and it became a matter of faith to him to exert all his strength to re-establish the old morale and self-reliance of the

Greenlanders. These good intentions he shared with other members of a small intellectual circle in Godthåb, to which belonged men like H. Rink, N. E. Balle, R. Berthelsen, and others. These men differed much in character, but in their combined efforts to raise the Greenlanders from their state of weakness and fatalism they co-operated and supplemented one another in a most effective manner. In this connection the respect for the Greenlandic language in particular was felt by Kleinschmidt as something extremely important. He fully understood the close connection between language, way of thinking, and culture in general and he studied indefatigably the Greenlandic language with deep penetration to find what he called "its true nature". In the course of these studies he established the Greenlandic phonemic system, long before the concept of a phoneme had found its place in linguistic thinking, and on this he based his new orthography, which the ensuing hundred years have not been able to shake. The new and consequent orthography was used in the Greenlandic periodical *atuagagdliutit*, which has appeared uninterruptedly since 1861, as well as in schoolbooks written by Kleinschmidt himself, in literature and, first and foremost, in the new translation of the Bible, which Kleinschmidt no doubt felt to be his most important task. He based his translation on the original texts and managed in an admirable way to find expressions understandable to the Greenlanders for the many phenomena and ideas that were totally foreign to the native mind. Finally his mature linguistic results appeared in his Greenlandic dictionary "Den grønlandske Ordbog" in 1871, which, together with his grammar is basic for our understanding of the Greenlandic language.

Although Kleinschmidt intellectually belonged to the European world with which he endeavoured to make the Greenlanders acquainted, yet he felt himself a Greenlander, born in Greenland and entirely conversant with the native mentality. This he also showed in outward appearance, wearing always Greenlandic skin clothing. Moreover, he possessed the more practical qualities of the Greenlanders. Thus he built himself a small house in Godthåb, where among other things he had a small printing press on which he printed his books, assisted by a young Greenlander. Sometimes he even bound the books himself. Always fully occupied by his work, he had his day strictly partitioned and anybody who wanted to speak to him could do so only at a certain fixed hour of the day. He began work usually at four o'clock in the morning.

Kleinschmidt never married and no doubt he assumed many of a bachelor's small peculiarities, which among the Greenlanders gave rise to several anecdotes. He has been called a character, and such he was in the best sense of the word, loved and respected by the Greenlanders, to whose welfare he devoted his life. When he died in 1886, after a few years of feebleness, the whole population of Godthåb followed his coffin when he was carried to Ny Herrnhut to be buried in the churchyard of the Moravian Brethren. The burial took place in a most severe blizzard but, as the Greenlanders put it, "a remarkable man deserves a remarkable funeral." His remains were later transferred to Godthåb, where he now rests near his closest fellow workers N. E. Balle and R. Berthelsen, and where a monument has been erected to his memory.

Note: The most detailed information about Kleinschmidt is to be found in: Theodor Bechler, "Samuel Kleinschmidt, der Sprachmeister Grönlands", Herrnhuter Missionsstudien Nr. 26, 1930.