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### Nanook and the North

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## Nanook and the North

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## Paul Rotha with the assistance of Basil Wright

### PART I\*

Let a giant among men and a sultan of storytellers speak first:

Odysseus made his journeys and then Homer wrote about them. To discover and to reveal—that is the way every artist sets about his business. All art is, I suppose, a kind of exploring. Whether or not it's true of art, that's the way I started filmmaking. I was an explorer first and a filmmaker a long way after.

Even in my youth I was always exploring new country. My father was a mining-engineer and, in a manner of speaking, we were a nomad family. We moved from one gold-mining camp to another in various parts of Canada. I was then about 12 years of age. I learnt to track and hunt rabbits from the Indians and I had an Indian dog-team and toboggan. It was a frontier country where the Indians were much more primitive than they are now. There used to be Indian dances near our camp. I also used to trade with the Indians in a small way. I couldn't speak Indian but knew a few words of a sort of patois.

They taught me many things. Hunting, for example. Hunting rabbits in the tamarack swamps. If you picked up the trails, you put your dog on one. He begins following the trail and chases the rabbit. All you had to do was to stand on another part of the same trail. The rabbit would come around to where you were because the trail was always in a circle. You had to be patient and wait, and then the rabbit would come loping along and you got him. This was in the depths of the cold winter, when there was deep snow on the ground and the rabbits couldn't burrow.

As I grew up, even in my teens, I went on prospecting expeditions with my father, or with his men, often for months at a time, travelling by canoe in summer and by snow-shoe in winter. It was sometimes new country, country that hadn't been seen before, the then little-known hinterland of Northern Ontario. We mapped it and explored it, or at least my father and his men did. I was just an extra.

Most of this country was to the west and north of Lake Superior, forest land with a great many lakes. More water than land, really. The lakes were interconnected by streams, so that you could canoe for hundreds and hundreds of miles. Sometimes I went on prospecting expeditions with just one Indian in a birch-bark canoe for as long as two months at a time.

On one expedition, I remember, we went north of Lake Superior and were away for two months. The expedition was headed by an English mining-engineer, Mr. H. E. Knobel<sup>1</sup>.

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*Basil Wright, concerned, along with John Grierson, since 1929 with the development of the documentary film, is the director of *Song of Ceylon* and many other films. He also is the author of *The Long View*, an international study of the film.*

He had been one of the Jameson raiders in South Africa. We went up north of Lake Nipigon, wonderful lake about a hundred miles long, then up one of the rivers running into it to the Height of Land, where the water divides roughly going south into the St. Lawrence and north into Hudson Bay. As we were crossing this Height of Land, the stream was very small—the beginnings of these streams were mere trickles—and we finally came into a lake called Little Long Lake. It was about twenty miles long. Knobel was in his usual position in the bow of the canoe. He'd do his mapping as we went along with a cross-section book and a little compass—a sort of mariner's paper compass.

Suddenly his compass began to turn around very quickly, more and more furiously as we went on. Then it stopped dead. We knew at once what was happening. We were passing over a body of magnetic iron-ore under us in the lake. So with that little compass, we located a large range of iron-ore. We staked out about five thousand acres of land covering several veins of this ore. They were not opened up until many years later. They were very far away and were simply held as a reserve. Thirty-five years later someone else went there and found gold.

There is a saying among prospectors—"Go out looking for one thing, that's all you'll ever find." We were exploring only for iron-ore at that time.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Flaherty was born in 1884. He was the eldest of a family of seven children of Robert Henry Flaherty and Susan Kloeckner Flaherty. Robert Henry's father had emigrated from Ireland by way of Quebec in the mid-nineteenth century. Both father and son were Irish Protestants. Susan Kloeckner was a German Catholic from Coblenz.

In 1957 David Flaherty recalled how his mother, known as the Angel of Port Arthur, went to mass each day at six in the morning. "Maybe," says David, "my mother didn't know about music and such things, as my father did, but she loved people dearly and had a great and deep compassion."<sup>3</sup>

Flaherty himself remembers the "poverty stricken country in which we lived" in Michigan, and how his father left the family to explore the little-known frontier country where gold had been discovered (Griffith 1953:xvii-xviii).

Several attempts were made to give the young Flaherty a formal education. "The boy learned with ease," writes Robert Lewis Taylor in a *New Yorker* Profile (June 11, 1949), "far outstripping his tractable colleagues, but he refused to observe the rules. His visits to the classroom were spasmodic. When the humor was upon him, he would turn up every day for a week or so, but he was likely to lounge in around eleven o'clock smoking a cigar. He would verify that the capital of South Dakota was Pierre rather than Bismarck, parse a sentence, exhibit a working knowledge of long division, and leave for the mid-afternoon fishing."

We should note here that although Mr. Taylor's Profile of Flaherty is both amusing and readable, it is not to be taken too seriously. It is fanciful and, in places, inaccurate. Nevertheless, at the time it was published Flaherty did not refute anything it said, even if it did tend to picture him as something of a clown and playboy, which he certainly was not.

In 1896, when Bob was 12, his father took a job as manager at the Golden Star Mine, in the Rainy Lake area of Canada, and the boy went along too. Mrs. Flaherty remained in Michigan to take care of the three younger children, two sons and a daughter. The population at the mine was a tough assortment of some 2,000 miners from all parts of the world—South Africa, Australia, the United States, and Canada itself. Schooling of the orthodox kind was unknown. Bob and his father lived in a cabin but ate at a boardinghouse. And it was here that Flaherty's love for the primitive, the unsophisticated, and the rough ways of "uncivilized" life began to ripen. Also, somewhere during his youth, he was taught to play the violin, maybe by his father; it was an accomplishment he retained all through his life and from which he derived great satisfaction.

They stayed at Rainy Lake for almost two years. Then the ore gave out and they moved to Burleigh Mine, in the Lake of the Woods country, where they were joined by the rest of the family. Here young Flaherty's education was given serious attention. His parents decided to send him to Upper Canada College, in Toronto. There is a firsthand memory of him there: About the year 1897 Sir Edward Peacock, then a master at the College, was one of those who attempted to educate this "tousle-headed boy who had little idea of the ways of civilisation."<sup>4</sup> He noted that this strong, healthy, self-reliant child found a knife by itself easier to use at table than a knife and fork. He was popular with the other boys.

Flaherty's own memories were of a public school, "something like English public schools with English masters. They played cricket and football. I never learnt cricket. We also played lacrosse, which is a Canadian game, and this I liked very much. It was originally an Indian game" (BBC Talks, June 14, 1949).

But at 14 Bob went back with his father—"to the frontier, to the magic land of Indians, unknown lakes, tangled forests and mysteriously winding streams" (Griffith 1953:xviii). This was how it was for the next two years.

In 1900, Robert Flaherty, Sr., joined the U.S. Steel Corporation. He and his family moved to Port Arthur, which was to be their home for a number of years. In a final attempt to educate their self-educated youngster, they sent him to the Michigan College of Mines, thus bringing him again into the United States, But he did not stay there long enough even to graduate. Griffith tells us that the college authorities soon made up their minds that Flaherty had none of the qualifications considered necessary for an academic mineralogist and "bluntly fired him" (Griffith 1953:xvii). Actually, his stay there lasted just over

seven months, during which time, according to some reports, he took to sleeping out in the woods. When he was expelled, his father wrote wishing him the best of luck in whatever he elected to do on his own in the future (Taylor 1949, June 11).

Flaherty's brief education at the Michigan College of Mines may not have enriched his intellect but it did enable him to meet the girl who was to be his wife and lifelong collaborator, Frances J. Hubbard. Her father, Dr. Lucius L. Hubbard, was a man of academic distinction: philatelist, bibliophile, ornithologist, mineralogist, and geologist. In those days Boston, where he lived, was the main financial source for Middle Western mining operations. Dr. Hubbard was State Geologist of Michigan; when he retired he began the development of new copper mines in the Upper Peninsula, and here he and his family settled down.

Although Frances had a normal middle-class education, including Bryn Mawr and "finishing" in Europe, she also had the unusual advantage when still very young of going with her father on a number of expeditions in which he charted for the first time great areas of the forests of Maine. This profoundly influenced her, and when they settled in Michigan, she took to wandering again.

"I used to go off alone every day on my horse," she remembers, "following the faint, overgrown trails of the old logging days. I would pick out on the map one of the tiny lakes or ponds hidden in the woods and set off to find it. Sometimes I got lost, or darkness fell before I could reach home and I would spend the night in one of the deserted lumber camps that the forests had swallowed up. What I liked best was to wander all night on the shore by the lake by moonlight. I thought no one cared about these things but me" (Griffith 1953: xix-xx).

But young Bob Flaherty came in one day for Sunday dinner, and everything he said seemed to her an answer to all she wanted to know about the wilds. He was without formal education while she had had the best; his upbringing and experience were at the opposite pole from hers; but she quickly realized that he represented all she wanted from life. "I thought, when we were married, we would go and live in the woods," she said.

But a very great deal was to happen before these two young people were to be married. It seems that young Flaherty elected to go and work for a time with some Finns in a Michigan copper mine. After this, his father, now with U.S. Steel, took him off on several explorations for iron ore, and he linked up with Mr. Knobel, as he has already told us. Later, it is said, he was taken on by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, which wanted a survey made of its territory, as it was expanding in competition with the Canadian Pacific. He took the commission of a wide survey literally, and once, when the railroad officials believed him to be in the vicinity of Winnipeg, he contacted them from British Columbia, giving them the reason that he wanted to see what the west side of Vancouver Island was like.

Mrs. Frances Flaherty, however, in later years did not remember Bob's ever working for the Grand Trunk Pacific, but she did confirm his prospecting for marble along the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1906. She did, in fact, spend a couple of months with him there on the Tahsish Inlet in the Rupert District. A Mr. H. T. Curtis, a retired mining engineer, later remembered meeting Flaherty fortuitously about November 1906 at the Balmoral Hotel, Victoria. Curtis, who was assistant to the resident engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Island Division), found the young man "a most likeable soul, kind-hearted, generous, but improvident."<sup>5</sup> He appears to have had some sort of allowance from his mother, but although he paid the hotel bills, he spent all the rest on things like books, fancy ties, and socks. He and Curtis used to go on canoeing trips, in which Bob was expert and altogether in his element, though he showed no enthusiasm for fishing.

Curtis introduced him to various people in Victoria, among them a well-known local architect, Sam MacClure, whose wife was musical. As Flaherty already had his famous violin, he often went to the MacClure house, and as a result he and Curtis got to know the conductor of the local Musical Society, a Mr. Russell. This acquaintanceship resulted in Flaherty and Curtis's sharing a house with Russell and his brother. "We more or less mucked in together," said Curtis, "and Bob filled the role of house-boy."

On Christmas Day, 1906, Bob and Curtis went canoeing toward the Indian settlement on the other side of Victoria Inlet. Flaherty was captivated by the Indians' music and songs. Mr. Curtis added, "He talked at one time of going to Alaska when the spring set in, but to do what I don't remember. He never needed to have any specific aims as to occupation or employment. In fact, work in my idea and experience was right out of his ken. However, I learned in later years of his success as a film-maker, etc. I left British Columbia at Easter, 1907, to follow my profession and had the occasional breezy note from Bob but finally lost contact."

Between 1907 and 1910, Flaherty worked as a prospector for a small mining syndicate above Lake Huron. Then he switched his services to a bigger concern and headed north to the Mattagami River over a route that had not been used for 150 years. He may have been, in Mr. Curtis's word, "improvident," but for a young man in his early twenties he certainly knew how to find his way about the wilderness. He discovered some iron ore deposits, staked a claim for his employers, and went south to Toronto. There an event took place which was to shape the remainder of his life:

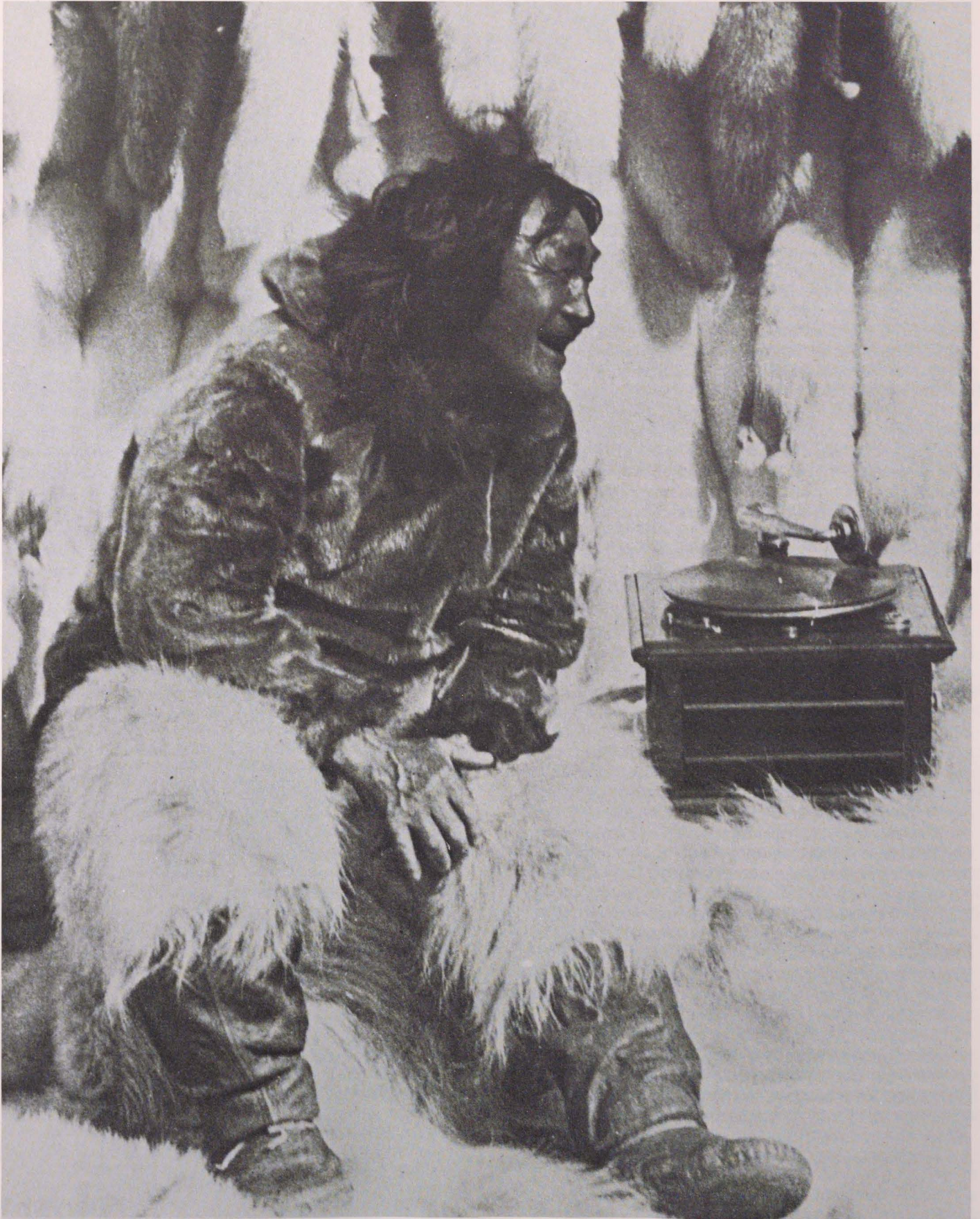
A turning point in my life came when I first met up with Sir William Mackenzie, who in his life-time was the Cecil Rhodes of Canada. He was building a great railway across Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was to be the Canadian Northern, now the Canadian National Railway. Mackenzie had heard that there might be iron-ore and other mineral deposits along the sub-Arctic east coast of Hudson Bay on a little-known group of islands called the Nast of Gulf Hazard. He asked me if I'd like to go up there and explore and then make a report to him. That was in August, 1910. [BBC Talks, July 24, 1949]

Flaherty first met Mackenzie through his father who, after 10 years with U.S. Steel, had switched his services as a consulting engineer to the firm of Mackenzie and Mann, in Toronto. It is not for us here to describe the tremendous part played by this firm in general and Sir William Mackenzie in particular in developing Canada at that time; we will only note that it was Mackenzie's judgment of men which helped to launch Bob Flaherty on his career. Nor do we propose to give detailed accounts of each of Flaherty's several expeditions for Mackenzie because they can be found better written in his own words in his book *My Eskimo Friends* (1924), his articles in the *Geographical Review* (1918), and in his diaries <sup>6</sup> now in the Robert Flaherty Papers housed at the Butler Library of Columbia University. But the simple account he himself made at a later date must not be omitted (BBC Talks, June 14 and July 24, 1949):

I jumped off with one companion named Crundell, an Englishman, from the temporary railway frontier at Ground Hog in Northern Ontario. By small canoe we paddled down the Ground Hog River, the big Mattagami and the swift Moose to the great fur stronghold of the North, two-and-a-half centuries old, Moose Factory, at the southern end of James Bay. From Moose Factory we travelled by open "York" sailing-boat some 70 miles to Charlton Island, and from Charlton took a schooner to Fort George, a little post on the east coast of James Bay. Because of the head-winds, the journey of less than 200 miles from Charlton to Fort George took ten days. At Fort George, hardly half-way to our final destination, the Nastapoke Island, we were caught by winter.

My companion returned south. When the sea-ice had formed, I went on by sledge with a party of Indians as far as the last northern trees, at Cape Jones. The Indian country always ends where the trees end, and there is the beginning of the Eskimo country. The Indians left me at Cape Jones, from whence I was at the Eskimo camp at Great Whale, the last northern post. I spent the night in a tent. All the Eskimos were in *igloos*. During the night a terrific storm came up and in the morning I found my tent had collapsed. I was covered with canvas and an awful lot of snow, but I was able to breathe. The Eskimos came around and with much laughter they pulled off the canvas and took me into one of their *igloos*. I could speak only a few words of their language, about a hundred words or so out of a vocabulary: Is it cold? Is it far? I am hungry—that sort of thing.

Their language is not a very extensive one but it is very difficult to learn, much more difficult than the Northern In-



**Figure 1**

Cat. No. 100

vintage photogravure, on loan from FSCC (see No. 29).

N 370

8½" × 5½" / 21.5 × 14.2 cm

subject: photograph of Allakariallak (Nanook) at Port Harrison post, with record player, 1920–1921, Inoucdjouac.

identification: *Nanook. The Grammophone.* Flaherty 9.

*A VOICE FROM A STRANGE WORLD: Nanook, "The Bear," Chief of the Ikivimuits, is famous throughout Ungava as a great hunter, skilled in the ways of the North, and learned in all the lore of the Arctic wilds; but the white man's box in which singing and talking is so miraculously imprisoned is a greater mystery than any of which he has ever dreamed. Fascinated by its strangeness he studies it with eager curiosity in a vain attempt to discover the origin of the voice. Accustomed to the traders' canned goods, he suspects that this music is canned also.* Flaherty 6.

note: the above caption contradicts even Flaherty's own writings on the sophisticated response of the Inuit to new technologies. Flaherty apparently relied on the Inuits' technical expertise to repair his photographic equipment.

dian languages. But I could always make myself understood. One can do a great many signs. And the white man has a way of expression. His face reveals so much to a native. He can read your face like a book, while his face remains impassive.

It was a long haul with a 12-dog team over 250 miles but at last I reached the Nastopone Islands with my Eskimo companion, whose name was Nero. He could speak a little pidgin-English.

When I surveyed the islands (Taylor and Gillies) which Sir William Mackenzie had sent me to examine, I found there was iron-ore there all right but it wasn't very important—not economically important. It was what we call "lean" ore. The island which had the largest deposits was only about 12 miles long and about half-a-mile wide. It lay along parallel to and about a mile off the coast. It was crested with snow-covered rocks. We were in the sub-Arctic in the middle of winter. It was bitterly cold. A complete desolation. And I had to face the fact that the long journey had been for nothing.

At the south end of the island I saw a monument sticking up near some slabs of rock. It was about 6 ft. high, what they call an American Man in that country, for what reason I don't know. I think it is an old raider term. I noticed how the moss was encrusted in fractures of the stone, apparently very old, and it had obviously been up there a long, long time.

To show how different is the Eskimo idea of figures from our own, when I said to Nero, "This is very old, isn't it?" he said, "Oh, yes, very." "How old would you think it would be?" I asked him. "Oh," he says, "maybe a t'ousand years." "How would you know it's a thousand years old?" "Oh," he says, "I see it when I am small boy." A thousand years doesn't mean anything to an Eskimo. . . .

It was on this trip, my first for Mackenzie, that Nero, my Eskimo friend, told me something that greatly interested me. He saw that far out to sea, perhaps a hundred miles out to the west, there was another group of islands which was very big. I had noted these islands dotted in tentatively on the Admiralty charts. They were called the Belcher Islands. No white man had ever landed there. They had been put on the map by a Captain W. Coates, a shipmaster of the Hudson's Bay Company in the early eighteenth century. The company had established its first post in the Bay in 1670. They've had ships coming in once a year from England ever since.

When the Eskimos told me that this was "big land," I could hardly believe it. They were only little bits of dots on the map. However, when I saw more Eskimos along the coast, they told me the same story. I asked them to make sketch-maps for me, and they all more or less coincided although drawn by different Eskimos.<sup>7</sup>

I asked Nero how far off the islands were. He said something like a hundred miles but I mistrusted his idea of figures. So in order to find out the size of the largest of the islands, I asked him, "How many sleeps would it take to sledge from this end of the island to that end of the island?" He said, "Two sleeps." So I knew that, if he spoke the truth, it was a big piece of land. He added also that there was a long narrow lake on the biggest island, so long that it was like the sea. What he meant was that looking from one end of it to the other, you could not see land. And he also told me that the cliffs of these islands looked as if they were bleeding when you scratched them.

Now one of the most important types of iron-ore, hematite, looks blue but when it is scratched, it leaves a blood-red streak. So at this point I became really interested in the Belcher Islands. I had by now picked up so much information about them from so many Eskimos that I felt sure there must be something in the story. And when I finally returned to Lower Canada from this expedition in the autumn of 1910 and reported my findings to Sir William Mackenzie, he became as excited about the idea as I was. He asked me to make up another expedition and go back.

The second trip in 1911 took nineteen months and we got wrecked on the way trying to get out to the Belchers.<sup>8</sup> So I waited many, many months at Great Whale River Post until the winter came. When we were about to cross over the sea-ice, it broke the evening before our departure. It had been frozen 125 miles right across to the islands but now it began to drift. Sometimes the Eskimos got caught on big floes of ice this way. They may be adrift at large on the sea for a year or more. They may drift as far as a thousand miles. The ice doesn't melt. As the summer gets on, the ice works north and begins to go through Hudson Strait, which is the discharge of Hudson Bay into the North Atlantic Ocean. Hudson Bay itself is 1200 miles long—an inland sea connected with the North Atlantic by a strait that is 500 miles long and over 100 miles wide. So the ice that gets through into the ocean doesn't begin to melt until it reaches down towards the Gulf Stream away east of Newfoundland.

When Eskimos have been caught like this, maybe a family has been separated and they have not met up again for years afterwards and then perhaps hundreds of miles away. There have been cases of an Eskimo family camping on the sea-ice when it has broken during the night. The igloo has been cut in half just as you'd slice an orange. One part of the family went one way on the drifting ice and the other half went the other, not to meet up again maybe for many months.<sup>9</sup>

So, after the ice had broken, I decided not to wait and make another attempt to reach the Belcher Islands because almost a year had gone by. Instead, I made a survey of the Ungava Peninsula by sledge with an Eskimo. Also during this next summer (1912), I made two equidistant cross-sections of an area almost the size of Germany in the Barren Lands, about 125,000 square miles.<sup>10</sup>

This modest statement gives no indication of the hazards of these journeys or the degree of the achievement. Two previous attempts had been made to cross the Barren of Ungava, one by A. P. Low and the other by the Reverend E. J. Peck. Both had failed because of the failure to discover game to supplement the rations carried by sledge.

Flaherty's expedition was not better supplied. But whereas Peck had turned back with a heavy heart after 11 days rather than face starvation, Flaherty took the risk and won through after a journey lasting over a month. He took with him four Eskimos. His favorite was Nero, a celebrated Great Whale hunter with a smattering of English, who engaged to take them as far as Lake Minto and then return. Omarolluk and Charlie came for the deer they hoped to slay on the journey, and Wetunik was supposed to know the country between Lake Minto and Fort Chimo on the Atlantic coast of the Ungava Peninsula. Extracts from Flaherty's diary of the journey give a graphic account of the traveling conditions (see Griffith 1953:8-15).

Flaherty ended the journey across the Barrens of Fort Chimo with his Eskimo companions. But when he returned to Lower Canada in the autumn of 1912 and reported his findings to Mackenzie, he found what he himself had feared, that from the geological or mineral point of view his surveys were not important. By the fifties, however, the big iron ore deposits he discovered in both Ungava and the Belchers were being very gainfully worked by the Cyrus Eaton Company, "bringing in untold wealth to the New World."<sup>11</sup>

Despite Flaherty's failure to find deposits which at the time would have been economical to work, Sir William Mackenzie insisted that he go north again to the Belcher Islands, this time by proper ship. He was still impressed by Flaherty's report of what the Eskimos had told him about the size of these islands and by the maps that had been drawn. So he bought for Flaherty a topsail schooner called *The Laddie*, 83-ton register, from an uncle of the famous Captain Bob Bartlett, who had been Admiral Peary's skipper on his North Polar expeditions.

*The Laddie*, which had been built in 1893 at Fogo, Newfoundland, was rigged at St. John's, and a crew of eight Newfoundland seamen was engaged under the command of Captain H. Bartlett. She was specially equipped for ice-breaking and was outfitted for an 18-month expedition. All was set for departure on August 14, 1913. But there was as yet one very important piece of equipment missing.

Whether it was Flaherty's own idea to take a motion picture camera with him on this, his third, expedition or whether it was Sir William Mackenzie's suggestion is difficult to determine. Richard Griffith, whose book was written mainly under the eye of Flaherty and the bulk of it read by him before his death, gives the impression that it was his own idea. "When Flaherty excitedly declaimed his enthusiasm for Eskimo life to his employer, the ever-receptive Sir William *agreed* [our italics] that he should take a movie-camera along with him on his next expedition" (Griffith 1953:36). Flaherty himself, on the other hand, says:

Just as I was leaving, Sir William said to me casually, "Why don't you get one of these new-fangled things called a motion picture camera?" So I bought one but with no other thought really than of taking notes on our exploration. We were going into interesting country, we'd see interesting people. I had no thought of making a film for the theatres. I knew nothing whatsoever about films. [BBC Talks, June 14 and July 24, 1949]

The fact remains that Flaherty went down to Rochester, took a three-week course in motion picture photography from the Eastman Company, bought one of the earliest models of the Bell and Howell movie camera, and made some tests which were not very successful. He also bought a portable developing and printing machine, some modest lighting equipment, and, presumably, a fair amount of film.<sup>12</sup>

They sailed *The Laddie* a thousand miles northward round the Labrador Coast through the Hudson Strait to Baffin Land. Too late to have a winter base in the Bay itself, they put into Adadjuak Bay and with the help of some forty Eskimos set up a winter camp. In the last week of September *The Laddie* sailed back south, just before the ice began to form, so that she could be wintered in Newfoundland. Flaherty and three of the crew settled in for the 10 months of winter. There were 2,000 miles of sledging to be done along the coast and island to the great lake of Adadjuak—and there was the filming. But Flaherty did not get around to using his new possession until early the next year, 1914. He tells us:



February came, cold but glowingly clear and calm. Then we began our films. We did not want for cooperation. The women vied with one another to be starred. Igloo building, conjuring, dances, sledging and seal-hunting were run off as the sunlit days of February and March wore on. Of course there was occasional bickering, but only among the women—jealousy, usually, of what they thought was the over-prominence of some rival in the film. . . . On June 10, I prepared for our long-planned deer-filming expedition, and on the following day, with camera and retorts of film<sup>13</sup> and food for 20 days, Annunglung and I left for the deer-grounds of the interior. Through those long June days we travelled far. . . .

We were picking out a course when Annunglung pointed to what seemed to be so many boulders in a valley far below. The boulders moved. "Tooktoo!" Annunglung whispered. We mounted camera and tripped on the sledge. Dragging his six-fathom [sic] whip ready to cow the dogs before they gave tongue, Annunglung went on before the team. He swung in behind the shoulder of an intervening hill. When we rounded it we were almost among them. The team lunged. The deer, all but three, galloped to right and left up the slope. The three kept to the valley. On we sped, the camera rocking like the mast of a ship at sea. From the galloping dogs to the deer not 200 ft. beyond, I filmed and filmed and filmed. Yard by yard we began closing in. The dogs, sure of victory, gave tongue. Then something happened. All that I know is that I fell headlong into a deep drift of snow. The sledge was belly-up. And across the traces of the bitterly disappointed dog-team Annunglung was doubled up with laughter. Within two days we swung back for camp, jubilant over what I was sure was the film of films. But within 12 miles of the journey's end, crossing the rotten ice of a stream, the sledge broke through. Exit film. [Flaherty 1924:124–125]

Thus Flaherty describes with characteristic understatement the total loss of some of his first efforts at filmmaking.

The summer of 1914 was nearly over when the *The Laddie* sailed back from the south. Flaherty and his men were ready to leave within a week, bound at long last for the elusive Belcher Islands.

This time the expedition was a complete success. They discovered—or rather rediscovered—the islands and mapped them. They proved to be even larger than Flaherty had imagined. The Eskimo maps, moreover, were wonderfully accurate. A rectangle drawn around them would have enclosed an area of some 5,000 square miles. The longest island was over 70 miles in length. It had a fresh-water lake on it, as the Eskimos had said. There, too, were the blood-red cliffs, just as Nero had forecast. But when Flaherty reported on the area later, it was with the same result: he did not consider them of sufficiently high grade to warrant their operation at so remote a latitude.

Flaherty did, nevertheless, have two rewards for his expedition. The Canadian government subsequently decided to name the largest of the Belcher Islands after him. He had also in his possession a certain amount of exposed cinematograph film.

While at Great Whale River Post, on the way back, Flaherty first learned that war had broken out in Europe. It was October 1914. His father had been sent up to the Belchers to verify Bob's findings, and Bob records the meeting:

When we landed I glimpsed several forms flitting past the window lights and dissolving in the darkness. Puzzled, we climbed to the cabin and strode into a lighted but deserted room. Nearly half-an-hour we waited there, our surprise and curiosity mounting the while, when at last the familiar, long, lanky form of old Harold (the Post's half-Indian, half-Swedish interpreter) stood halting in the doorway. Recognising me in a moment, his fear-beclouded face became wreathed in smiles. He reached out for my hand, exclaiming, "My God, sir, I t'ote you was the Germans!" And so it was that we first heard of the great World War. [Flaherty 1924:43]

Flaherty's expeditions to the North had by now lengthened his engagement to Frances Hubbard to 10 years—and it was an engagement conducted, by force of circumstances, mainly by correspondence. But at last, on November 12, 1914, they were married. The ceremony took place at the home of one of the bride's cousins in New York City. Flaherty was not, it seems, too flush with money at the time; Frances bought the wedding ring and also took him round to City Hall to get the license.

But it would seem—and after so many years these things can be told—that Miss Hubbard was not the only young lady to whom the young explorer had been paying attention. Mrs. Evelyn Lyon-Fellowes, of Toronto, writes:

I met Mr. Robert J. Flaherty a number of times when he appeared to be courting my chum, Miss Olive Caven. It was between his Arctic trips and his marriage. I chaperoned them once at lunch at the old Queen's Hotel [now demolished]. On this occasion he gave me a wonderful photo of a husky dog, taken I understand in an igloo. He gave Miss Caven many beautiful presents including a white-fox fur, and numerous photos of Eskimos which she accepted as she admired him very much. On his last return from Hudson Bay, he spent the first evening with her and left that night for the United States. A few days later he arrived back in Toronto with his bride, Frances, and asked poor surprised Olive to help them find a house to live in—which she did. She had not known of his engagement. She eventually recovered from the shock and married most happily and well. She died over a year ago.<sup>14</sup>

When the Flahertys were married, remembers Ernestine Evans, a very old friend of theirs, the Hubbard family announced that they were seeking a Ford agency post for the bridegroom, assuming naturally that he would now settle down (Evans 1951). But the newly married explorer was to disappoint them.

During that winter of 1914–1915, Flaherty put his film into some sort of shape. It was too crude to be interesting. But he was planning to go north again in the spring, this time to explore and winter on the Belcher Islands; and he was determined to attempt a better film (Flaherty 1924:126). Thus, even at this early stage, Flaherty expressed himself dissatisfied with his work as a cinematographer although he was still no more than an amateur.

So in the summer of 1915, Bob and his new wife, together with Mr. Flaherty, Sr., Margaret Thurston, a Bryn Mawr schoolmate of Frances, and David Flaherty, journeyed by canoe with Indian guides from the railhead in Northern Ontario down the Ground Hog, Mattagami, and Moose Rivers to Moose Factory on James Bay. There they boarded *The Laddie*. At Charlton Island, in James Bay, all the party camped for several weeks except Bob, who, with *The Laddie* and her crew, headed for the Belcher Islands once more. The others stayed on the island which David Flaherty described as being “carpeted with springy white moss covered with delicious wild currants and cranberries. We caught trout in the streams and shot yellow-legs along the shore. Frost was already in the air when in late September the once-a-year Hudson’s Bay Company steamer *Nascopie* picked us up.”<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, now on his fourth expedition, Flaherty had reached his destination and had set about more filming. This included a sequence of Mukpollo, an Eskimo, harpooning a big bull-walrus which Flaherty “filmed and filmed and filmed until the last inch was ground away.” He wrote:

During the winter, we compiled a series of motion pictures showing the primitive life, crafts, and modes of hunting and travelling of the islanders—an improved version of the film we had previously made on the Baffin Island expedition. With a portable projector bought for the purpose, we showed the islanders a copy of the Baffin Island film, purposing in this way to inspire them with that spirit of emulation so necessary to the success of our filming. Nor were we disappointed. Enthusiastic audiences crowded the hut. Their “Ayees” and “Ah’s” at the ways of these their kindred that were strange to them were such as none of the strange and wonderful ways of the *kablunak* (white man) ever called forth. The deer especially (*Tooktoo!* they cried), mythical to all but the eldest among them, held them spellbound. [Flaherty 1918:456]

Many years later Flaherty was to tell a story of how he was taught the rudiments of motion picture photography by a missionary whom he met on one of his expeditions and how later the missionary was found hanging by his neck in a hut that Flaherty had converted into a darkroom. We regard this story as almost certainly apocryphal, but Flaherty told it to at least three people.<sup>16</sup>

This expedition was also an adventurous experience. *The Laddie* had to be abandoned during the winter and its timbers used for fuel piece by piece. “Everything had to be left behind,” Flaherty wrote, “saving the clothes we

wore, some three week’s food, notes, maps, specimens and the film—two boxes covered by the Eskimos with water-proofing of sealskin carefully sewn” (Flaherty 1924:132).<sup>17</sup> Eventually they reached Lower Canada again.

Flaherty now had in all some 70,000 feet of film in Toronto which had been taken during two expeditions. Encouraged by his wife, he spent some months in 1916 putting a print (taken from the negative) into some kind of continuity order. For an unexplained reason, fortunate in the light of what was to happen, this assembled print was sent to Harvard, presumably to be screened by someone there. Later, while Flaherty was packing the 70,000 feet of negative in his cutting room in Toronto, ready for dispatch to New York, “much to my shame and sorrow I dropped a cigarette-end in it.” The complete negative, of course, went up in a sheet of flame and Flaherty, having tried to put out the fire without success, narrowly escaped losing his life; he was hospitalized for several weeks. Grierson refers to Flaherty’s having carried scars on his hands from this fire all his life, but others, including the authors, do not remember them.

There remained, however, the positive print which had been sent to Harvard. Flaherty hopefully sent this to New York to a laboratory which might be able to make a new negative from the print, but it seems that this process, so common today, was not possible at that time. Thus he had only one copy of his film, which would, of course, get scratched and deteriorate every time it was screened. He did show it a good deal, nevertheless—at the American Geographic Society, at the Explorers’ Club in New York, and to sundry friends at his home in New Canaan, Connecticut.

“People were polite!” he said, “but I could see that what interest they took in the film was the friendly one of wanting to see where I had been and what I had done. That wasn’t what I wanted at all. I wanted to show the *Innu*it (Eskimo). And I wanted to show them, not from the civilised point of view, but as they saw themselves, as ‘we, the people.’ I realised then that I must go to work in an entirely different way.” [Griffith 1953:36]

And later he added, “It was utterly inept, simply a scene of this and a scene of that, no relation, no thread of a story or continuity whatever, and it must have bored the audience to distraction. Certainly it bored me.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus the “Harvard print,” as we might call it, the only example of Flaherty’s first efforts with a film camera, no longer exists. There is no doubt that he himself was only too glad to have it forgotten. His close friend and admirer

**Figure 2**

Cat. No. 93

modern print, from original glass plate, by NPC, on loan from FSCC.

N 158

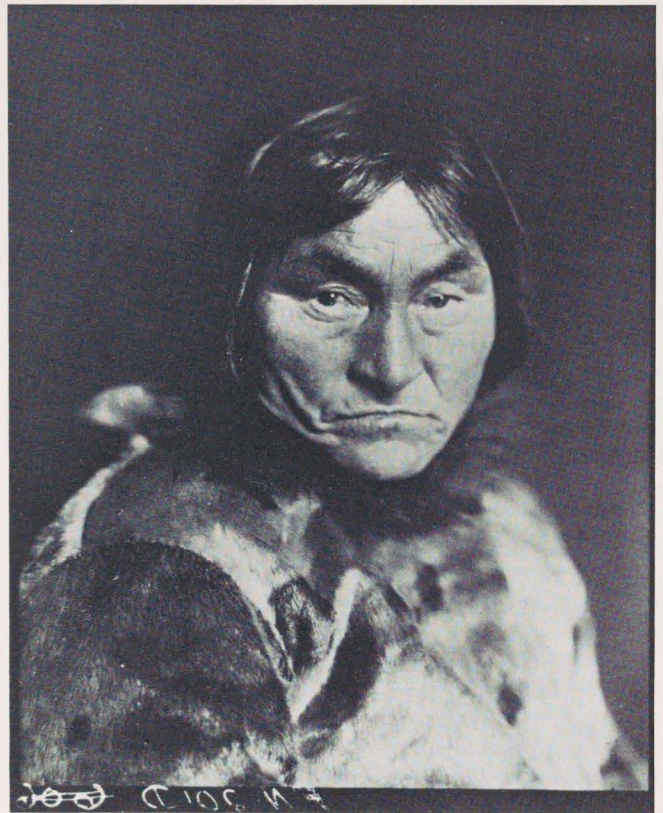
10" × 8" / 25.4 × 20.3 cm

subject: portrait of Allakariallak, who played the title role of *Nanook*, 1920–1921, Inoucdjouac.

John Grierson, who later described himself as his "self-appointed attorney,"<sup>19</sup> saw a good part of the print, and confirms Flaherty's poor opinion of it. He never mentioned it to him because "it was not in his thought or memory that anything survived." Grierson felt, however, that this first effort was important historically, for it meant that Flaherty was struggling to evolve what eventually became *Nanook of the North* over a period of eight solid years (1913–1921).

It would be fair to state that Flaherty had no intention of making a film which would professionally stand comparison with other films of the period. He stressed all along that he merely took the movie camera with him to make visual notes, so to speak, of what he saw. We do not even know if he was familiar with the cinema of that time, let alone with the numerous travel films that had been routine fare almost since the motion picture was born. But there is no doubt that his dissatisfaction with the results of his first attempt opened his eyes to the possibilities of the movie camera as an instrument of expression and not merely as a means of recording. He could very understandably have put aside all thought of future filmmaking. He was an explorer and mineralogist by profession, not a cinematographer. Yet, as we have seen, correcting his early mistakes in filmmaking became an obsession. In his own words:

My wife and I thought it over for a long time. At last we realised why the film was bad, and we began to get a glimmer that perhaps if I went back to the North, where I had lived for eight years and knew the people intimately, I could make a film that this time would go. Why not take, we said to each other, a typical Eskimo and his family and make a biography of their lives through the year? What biography of any man could be more interesting? Here is a man who has less resources than any other man in the world. He lives in a desolation that no other race could possibly survive. His life is a constant fight against starvation. Nothing grows; he must depend utterly on what he can kill; and all of this against the most terrifying of tyrants—the bitter climate of the North, the bitterest climate in the world. Surely this story could be interesting. [Flaherty 1950]

**PART II**

At this time, it should be remembered, most of the world was occupied with what was, until then, the biggest and bloodiest war in history. It was hardly a good time to find financing for a filmmaking expedition into the Canadian North. After the 70,000 feet of film had gone up in flames, Sir William Mackenzie was unlikely to sponsor yet another film adventure.

So for the next four years Flaherty and his wife spent some time with her parents in Houghton, Michigan, and later moved east to Connecticut, living for the most part in Silvermine and New Canaan. During this period Flaherty began to write. He labored on his two detailed articles for the *Geographical Review*, and he also (in 1923) wrote a series for the magazine *World's Work*. Flaherty never found writing easy, but with the help of his wife he began on his book *My Eskimo Friends*, which was not published until 1924. For this he drew on the very full diaries which he had kept on his various expeditions. All this time he was trying to raise money for the film he was determined to make, but he had no success. The Flahertys' three daughters—Barbara, Frances, and Monica—were born during these years.

It was not until well after the war (in which he took no part) had ended that Flaherty came upon a source of financing which would enable him to realize his cherished film expedition. In 1920, and by now he was 36, he chanced to meet a Captain Thierry Mallett, of Revillon Frères, the well-known French firm of furriers which at that time was extending its trade in the North. They met, so the story goes, at a cocktail party, and Flaherty so inspired Captain Mallett with his enthralling tales of the Arctic that a day or two later the Revillon Company agreed to finance him to make his film at one of their trading posts, Port Harrison, on Cape Dufferin, on the northeastern coast of Hudson Bay. This was actually in the sub-Arctic, but to get there would take two months by schooner and canoe.

In return for backing the venture, Captain Mallett and Mr. John Revillon required that the opening titles of the film carry the phrase "Revillon Frères presents," to which Flaherty readily agreed. He was quite unaware that the film trade generally was strongly opposed to such gratuitous screen advertizing. The actual reported cost of the film varies, but we do not believe it to have exceeded \$53,000, an exceedingly small sum even in those days.

That entertaining but not too reliable reporter of early movie years, Terry Ramsaye, comments about the venture: "The expedition was underwritten by Revillon Frères, the great fur-house, which coincidentally was an important advertiser in the smart traffic of Fifth Avenue. So it came that Mr. Flaherty became a frequent guest at the Coffee House Club, frequented also by such as Frank Crowninshield of Conde Nast slick-class magazine affiliations" (Ramsaye 1951). This was presumably Flaherty's first introduction to the haunt with which in later years he was to be so closely associated. It lies near Times Square, and its atmosphere and furnishings have for an English visitor the Olde Worlde quality which is more English than the English.

Flaherty selected his equipment with care. "I took two Akeley motion picture cameras. The Akeley then was the best camera to operate in extreme cold, since it required graphite, instead of oil or grease, for lubrication. These cameras fascinated me," he said, "because they were the first cameras ever made to have a gyro-movement in the tripod-head whereby one could tilt and pan the camera without the slightest distracting jar or jerk or vibration" [Flaherty 1950:13].

Camera movements are today so commonplace that it is worth emphasizing how little they were used in those early days of cinema. D. W. Griffiths had pioneered the pan (sideways movement of the camera on its own axis) and had used other daring camera movements, but panning and at the same time tilting the camera (a tilt being a vertical up or down pan) was a great problem because the two movements had to be carried out by winding two separate geared handles; this not only restricted speed of movement but also tended to become so jerky that the

scene would be unusable. The invention of the gyro movement, operated by one single arm, was therefore an important technical innovation.

Flaherty could rightly claim to be a pioneer in the use of the gyro tripod, and although *Nanook* does not in fact contain many examples of pans or tilts, they are an important, indeed a vital, feature of all his subsequent work. He continues:

I also took the materials and chemicals to develop the film, and equipment to print and project it. My lighting equipment had to be extremely light because I had to go by canoe nearly 200 miles down river before I got to Hudson Bay. This meant portages, and portages meant packing the equipment on my back and on those of the Indians I took along for the river trip. And God knows, there were some long portages on that route—one of them took us two days to pack across. [Flaherty, 1950:13]

Still conscious of his slight knowledge about making motion pictures, he is alleged to have made at least one tentative inquiry before leaving New York. According to Terry Ramsaye, he went to the Craftsman Laboratories in midtown where Ramsaye and Martin Johnson were "trying to sort out an adventure feature from several miles of Martin's often unrelated film recordings. Bob wanted some advice. He said he wanted to do in the Arctic what Martin was doing in the tropics. Irked with problems, I puzzled one and offended the other by saying, 'Please don't!'"<sup>20</sup>

Happily, Flaherty did not take this inane advice. Instead he departed for the North:

On August 15, 1920, we let go anchor in the mouth of the Innusuk River, and the five gaunt and melancholy-looking buildings which make up the post at Port Harrison stood out on a boulder-ridden slope less than half-a-mile away. Of the Eskimos who were known to the post, a dozen all told were selected for the film. Of these *Nanook* (The Bear), a character famous in the country, I chose as my chief man. Besides him, and much to his approval, I took on three younger men as helpers. This also meant their wives and families, and dogs to the number of 25, sledges, *kayaks* and hunting implements." [Flaherty 1924:133]

As in 1913, the Eastman Kodak Company had supplied the processing equipment and had taught Flaherty the rudiments of its use. The printing machine was an old English Williamson, which he screwed to the wall of the hut. He soon found that when printing the film by the printer, the light from his little electric plant fluctuated so much that he had to abandon it. Instead, he used daylight by letting in an inlet of light just the size of a motion picture frame (in those days, approximately 1 by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches) through the window. He controlled this daylight by adding or removing pieces of muslin from the front of the printing aperture of the printer.

The biggest problem, however, was not printing the film or developing it, but washing and drying it. The enemy was the freezing cold. Flaherty had to erect an annex to the hut in which he spent the winter to make a drying room. The only heating he could obtain for drying the film was a coal-burning stove. Film in those days, as Flaherty knew to his cost, was highly inflammable, but this time no catastrophe took place. When he ran short of fuel before a reel of film had dried, he had to send his Eskimos out to scour the seacoast for driftwood to keep his stove alight.

Washing the film presented an even worse problem. The Eskimos had to keep a hole chiseled through 6 feet of ice all through the winter without its freezing up and then haul the water in barrels on a sledge with a dog team up to the hut. Once there, they all used their hands to clear the ice out of the water before it could be poured for the required washes over the film. The deer hair falling off the Eskimos' clothes into the water worried Flaherty almost as much as the ice did.

This setting-up and operating of his own laboratory equipment, and especially his training of the Eskimos to help him, are a very important part of the whole story of Flaherty's approach to his medium. He laid emphasis on the fact that such participation by his film subjects, so to speak, in the actual making of the film itself was a contributory factor to its ultimate success and sincerity. It is historically as well as technically significant to recognize that Flaherty was never just a director-cameraman who dispatched his negative back to civilization for processing under ideal conditions. Flaherty, and we say it strongly and at the risk of repetition, made his films, or at least his early films, the hard way:

It has always been most important for me to see my rushes—it is the only way I can make a film.<sup>21</sup> But another reason for developing the film in the north was to project it to the Eskimos so that they would accept and understand what I was doing and work together with me as partners.

They were amazed when I first came with all this equipment, and they would ask me what I was going to do. When I told them that I had come to spend a year among them to make a film of them—pictures in which they moved—they roared with laughter. To begin with, some of my Eskimos could not even read a still-photograph. I made stills of several of them as preliminary tests.<sup>22</sup> When I showed them the photograph as often as not they would look at it upside down. I'd have to take the photograph out of their hands and lead them to the mirror in my hut, then have them look at themselves and the photograph beside their heads before, suddenly with a smile that spread from ear to ear, they would understand.<sup>23</sup>

Among the equipment Flaherty had taken was a portable gramophone—the old wooden square type with a horn—and this he kept playing continuously with such records as Harry Lauder's "Stop Your Ticklin' Jock" and examples of Caruso, Farrar, Riccardo Martin, McCormack, Al Jolson, and the Jazz King Orchestra. Caruso's

rendering of the *Pagliacci* prologue with its tragic finale was the comedy success of the selection. Nanook on one occasion tried to eat one of the records, an incident which Flaherty filmed and included in the picture. Oddly enough, in his *New Yorker* Profile, Mr. Taylor makes the unfortunate error of saying that Flaherty stopped filming just before Nanook bit the record; he had no doubt not seen the film.

In this way the little hut became a rendezvous for all the Eskimos, and Flaherty was able to command their complete friendship and understanding. There was always a 5-gallon pail of tea brewing on the stove and sea-biscuit in a barrel when the weather conditions prevented filming. He also had his violin with him, and he frequently played it to his Eskimo audience.

The first sequence to be shot for the film was one of the most ambitious—the walrus hunt. From Nanook, Flaherty had heard of Walrus Island, a rock, surf-bound island 25 miles out in the bay. On its south end there were, Nanook had been told by other Eskimos, many walrus in the summer months. The surf round the island made it dangerous for landing kayaks, but Nanook believed that, if the seas were smooth, Flaherty's whaleboat could make the crossing and a safe landing. Some weeks later, Nanook brought to Flaherty the Eskimo who knew at firsthand about the walrus on the island. "Suppose we go," Flaherty said to him. "Do you know that you and your men may have to give up making a kill if it interferes with my filming? Will you remember that it is the picture of you hunting the *iviuk* (walrus) that I want, and not their meat?"

"Yes, yes, the *aggie* [picture] will come first," the man assured him. "Not a man will stir, not a harpoon will be thrown until you give the sign. It is my word" (Flaherty 1924:126). They shook hands and agreed to start in the morning. What happened is best told in Flaherty's own diary entry:

But for three days we lay along the coast, before the big seas died down. The wind began blowing off the land. We broke out our leg o'mutton. Before the day was half-done, a film of gray far out in the west told us we were in sight of Walrus Island. We looked about for a landing. Just beyond the shoulder of a little cove, "*Iviuk! Iviuk!*" called Nanook, and sure enough, on the gleaming black surf-worn rocks lay a great herd sprawled out asleep.

Down wind we went, careful as to muffled oars, and landed waist deep in the surf. Nanook went off alone toward the sleeping herd; he returned, saying they were undisturbed. However, it was much too dark for pictures; we would have to wait until morning.

"Yes," said Nanook, in answer to my fears, "if the wind holds in the same quarter they will not get our scent." Not daring to build a drift-wood fire, we made our evening meal on raw bacon, sea-biscuit and cold water.

As luck would have it, the wind did hold. With harpoon set and a stout seal-line carefully coiled, and my motion picture camera and film retorts in hand, off we crawled for the walrus

ground. The herd lay sleeping—20 great hulks guarded by two big bulls. At about minute intervals they raised their heads over the snoring and swinishly grunting herd and slowly looked round, then sank to sleep again. Slowly I snaked up to the sheltering screen of a big boulder, and Nanook, the end of his harpoon-line lashed round the boulder, snaked more slowly still out towards them. Once in the open he could move only when the sentinels dropped their heads in sleep.

Hours passed, it seemed, but finally he had crawled close in. The sentinels became suspicious and stupidly started toward him. Slowly they turned their slobbering heads to and fro; Nanook swung his own head in lugubrious unison. They rolled on their sides to scratch themselves; Nanook grotesquely did the same. Finally, the sentinels seemed satisfied; their heads drooped in sleep once more. Now only a dozen feet intervened; quickly Nanook closed in. As I signalled, he rose to his feet, and with his harpoon held high, like lightning he struck down at the nearest bull. A bellow and a roar, and 20 great walrus rolled with incredible speed down the wave-washed slope of rocks to the sea.

By night all my stock of film was exposed. The whaleboat was full of walrus-meat and ivory. Nanook had never had such walrus hunting and never had I such filming as that on Walrus Island.<sup>24</sup>

The postscript to the walrus hunt is told better elsewhere than in the diaries:

When I developed and printed the scenes and was ready to project them, I wondered if the Eskimos would be able to understand them. What would these flickering scenes projected on a Hudson Bay blanket hung up on the wall of the hut mean to them? When at last I told them I was ready to begin the show, they crammed my little 15 by 20 hut to the point of suffocation. I started up the little electric-light plant, turned out the lights in the room, and turned on the switch of the projector. A beam of light shot out, filled the blanket and the show began. At first they kept looking back at the source of light in the projector as much as they did at the screen. I was sure the show would flop. Suddenly someone shouted, "*Iviuk!*" There they were—the school of them—lying backing on the beach. In the foreground could be seen Nanook and his crew, harpoons in hand, stalking on their bellies towards them. Suddenly the walrus take alarm; they begin to tumble into the water. There was one agonising shriek from the audience, until Nanook leaping to his feet thrust his harpoon. In the ensuing tug-of-war between the walrus now in the water and Nanook and his men holding desperately to the harpoon-line, pandemonium broke loose; every last man, woman and child in the room was fighting that walrus, no surer than Nanook was at the time that the walrus would not get away. "Hold him!" they yelled, "Hold him!" [Flaherty 1950:14–15]

"The fame of the film spread far up and down the coast," writes Flaherty in his book. "Every strange Eskimo that came into the post Nanook brought before me and begged that he be shown the *iviuk aggie* (walrus pictures). . . ." He continues:

One of Nanook's problems was to construct an *igloo* large enough for the filming of the interior scenes. The average Eskimo *igloo*, about 12 ft. in diameter, was much too small. On the dimensions I laid out for him, a diameter of 25 ft. Nanook and his companions started in to build the biggest *igloo* of their lives. For two days they worked, the women and children helping them. Then came the hard part—to cut insets for the five large slab-ice windows without weakening the dome. They had hardly begun when the dome fell in pieces to the ground. "Never mind," said Nanook, "I can do it next time."

For two more days they worked, but again with the same result; as soon as they began setting in the ice-windows their structure fell to the ground. It was a huge joke by this time, and holding their sides they laughed their misfortune away. Again Nanook began on the "big *aggie igloo*," but this time the women and children hauled barrels of water on sledges from the water-hole and iced the walls as they went up. Finally the *igloo* was finished and they stood eyeing it as satisfied as so many children over a house of blocks. The light from the ice-windows proved inadequate, however, and when the interiors were finally filmed the dome's half just over the camera had to be cut away, so Nanook and his family went to sleep and awakened with all the cold of out-of-doors pouring in.

To "Harry Lauder" [one of the Eskimos christened after the gramophone record] I deputed the care of my camera. Bringing them from the cold outside into contact with the warm air of the base often frosted them inside and out, which necessitated taking them apart and carefully drying them piece by piece. With the motion picture camera there was no difficulty, but with my Graflex, a still-camera, I found to my sorrow such a complication of parts that I could not get it together again. For several days its "innards" lay strewn on my work-table. "Harry Lauder" finally volunteered for the task of putting it together, and through a long evening before a flickering candle and with a crowd of Eskimos around ejaculating their "Aye's" and "Ah's," he managed to succeed where I had failed.<sup>25</sup>

The walrus-hunting having proved successful, Nanook aspired to bigger game—a bear-hunt, no less, at Cape Sir Thomas Smith, some 200 miles northward. "Here," said Nanook, "is where the she-bear den in the winter, and it seems to me that we might get the big, big *aggie* there."

He went on to describe how in early December the she-bear dens in huge drift-banks of snow. There is nothing to mark the den save a tiny vent, or airhole, which is melted open by the animal's body heat. Nanook's companions would remain at either side of me, rifles in hand, whilst he with his snow-knife would open the den, block by block. The dogs in the meantime would all be unleashed and like wolves circle the opening. Mrs. Bear's door opened, Nanook, with nothing but his harpoon, would be poised and waiting. The dogs baiting the quarry—some of them with her lightning paws the bear would send hurtling through the air; himself dancing here and there—he pantomimed the scene on my cabin floor, using my fiddle-bow for a harpoon—waiting to dart in for a close-up throw; this, he felt sure, would be a big, big picture (*aggie pauerulluk*). I agreed with him. "With good going, ten days will see us there. Ten days for hunting on the Cape, ten days for coming home again. But throw in another ten days for bad weather, and let's see (counting on his fingers) that makes four times my finger—more than enough to see us through."

"All right," I said, "We'll go." And Nanook, his eyes shining, went off to spread the news. [Flaherty 1924:136 ff]

On January 17, 1921, Flaherty, "Harry Lauder," and Nanook set out on their bear hunt for the big scene of the film. They were away for 8 weeks and traveled 600 miles. The going was tough. Two dogs were lost through starvation.

We were breaking camp before the sun had cleared the horizon. The dogs fought like wolves as they wedged in through the door of the *igloo* we had just vacated; the crew tried vainly by grasping legs and tails to drag them out for harnessing; Nanook, his arms round the master-dog, carried him bodily to the sledge. I unlimbered the Akeley, hoping to get a few feet of it all on film. But, to my dismay, as soon as I started grinding, so brittle was the film that it broke into bits, like so much wafer-glass. The thermometer read 37 degrees below. . . . We went back into camp.

By keeping the film retorts in the *igloo*, I found that within the hour they took on its temperature. The film regained its ductility. I told Nanook to bury the film retorts and camera in his deerskin robe henceforth when we broke camp in the morning. The crew were convulsed over what they called the "babies" for which he had to care.

But still no bear. They were getting near the limits of endurance.

For the next three days what food sustained the dog-team was the *igloo* scraps and crumbs. When night came, crossbars from the sledge and four 200 ft. rolls of film was the makeshift that boiled our tea.

Finally, they reached Port Harrison, their base. "What, no bear?" said Stewart, the post trader; "Too bad, too bad, an' just to think that a week come Friday two huskies got a she-bear an' two cubs in a cave. 'Twould have made a fine *aggie*, they said, what with the fightin' an' all—throwin' the dogs through the air an' chargin' here an' chargin' there, an' all this less'n a day away" (Flaherty 1924:136ff).

Flaherty remained on his location until August 1921. He had been at it for 16 months. He used up his last few feet of film on a whale hunt made by the Eskimos in a fleet of *kayaks*, but nothing of this appears in the final film. It was Nanook's last big *aggie*, although he tried hard to persuade Flaherty to stay on for another year, talking of the wonderful things that could be filmed. Eventually the once-a-year little schooner arrived and Flaherty "was aboard and the *Annie's* nose was headed south. Nanook followed in his *kayak* until the ship gathered speed and gradually drew away."

"Less than two years later," says Flaherty, "I received word by the once-a-year mail that comes out of the north that Nanook was dead. He died from starvation on a hunting-trip."

By that time the film *Nanook of the North* had been shown in many parts of the world. Ten years later, Mrs. Flaherty bought an "Eskimo Pie" in the Tiergarten in Berlin. It was called a "Nauk," and Nanook's face smiled at her from the paper wrapper.<sup>26</sup>

### PART III

"Films," said Flaherty many years later, "are a very simple form and a very narrow form in many ways. You can't say as much in a film as you can in writing, but what you can say, you can say with great conviction. For this reason, they are very well suited to portraying the lives of primitive people whose lives are simply lived and who feel strongly, but whose activities are external and dramatic rather than internal and complicated. I don't think you could make a good film of the love affairs of an Eskimo . . . because they never show much feeling in their faces, but you can make a very good film of Eskimos spearing a walrus."

"*Nanook*," he went on, "is the story of a man living in a place where no other kind of people would want to live. The tyrant is the climate, the natural protagonist in the film. It's a dramatic country and there are dramatic ingredients in it—snow, wind, ice and starvation. The life there is a constant hunt for food so that among all Eskimos all food is common. It has to be—an Eskimo family on its own would starve. If I went into an Eskimo *igloo*, whatever food they had would be mine. They have no word in their vocabulary for Thank You. That is something that never arose between us. . . . These people, with less resources than any other people on the earth, are the happiest people I have ever known" (BBC Talks, July 24, 1949).

The subtitles of the film, written by Carl Stearns Clancy, presumably in close association with Flaherty, are simple and informative. At the start we are told that the film was made at Hopewell Sound, northern Ungava. We are introduced at once to Nanook, the hunter, and his family emerging in surprising numbers from their *kayak*. We are told they use moss for fuel. They carry a large boat down to the water (the launching is not shown). They go to a trading post. Nanook, a title tells us, kills polar bears with his harpoon only. He hangs out his fox and bear skins, which are bartered for beads and knives (the trading post itself is not seen except in the far distance). While there, Nanook plays the old wooden gramophone and tries to bite the record. One of the children is given castor oil and swallows it with relish.

Nanook then goes off on the floating ice to catch fish. For bait he uses two pieces of ivory on a seal-string line. He also spears salmon with a three-pronged weapon and kills them with his teeth. News is then brought of walrus, and Nanook joins the hunters in their fleet of *kayaks*. They meet with rough seas. The walrus are sighted. One of them is harpooned by Nanook and dragged in by line from the sea to the shore. There is a great struggle. It weighs, a title says, 2 tons. After it has been killed, the hunters carve it up and begin eating it on the spot, using their ivory knives. The flesh is shown in close-up.

Winter sets in and a snow-blizzard envelops the trading post. Nanook now goes hunting with his family. The dog team drags the sledge with difficulty over the rough ice crags. Nanook stalks and traps a white fox. There follows



**Figure 3**

Cat. No. 102

vintage photogravure, on loan from FSCC (see No. 29).

N 153

6½" × 8½" / 16.7 × 21.5 cm

subject: photograph of man (probably Allakariallak/Nanook) with boy (probably Phillipposie), 1920–1921, Inoucdjouac.

identification: *Youthful Hunter*. Flaherty 9, 12.

note: a letter written by S. M. Hodgson (former Commissioner of the North West Territories) to Dudley Copland, dated April 24, 1978 states:

*I should tell you that Phillipposie, who was a little boy in the film, is still living at Grise Fiord. Phillipposie's father was teaching him how to shoot a bow and arrow.*

Further research is presently under way to confirm this statement.



the building of an igloo, Nanook carving it out of the blocks of frozen snow with his walrus-ivory knife, licking its blade so that it will freeze and make a cutting edge. The children play at sliding, and one of them has a miniature sledge. Everyone is gay and smiling. Nanook makes the window for the igloo with great care and skill out of a block of ice. He fixes a wedge of snow to reflect the light through the window. The family then occupies the *igloo* with their meager belongings. Nanook later shows his small child how to use a bow and arrow with a small bear made out of snow as the target.

Morning comes and the family gets up. Nanook's wife, Nyla, chews his boots to soften the leather while Nanook rubs his bare toes. Then he eats his breakfast, smiling all the time. Nyla washes the smallest child with saliva. Presently they all prepare to set off for the seal grounds. They glaze the runners of the sledge with ice. There is some savage scrapping among the dogs before the family finally departs across the snowfield.

Nanook finds a hole in the ice and down it thrusts his spear. Then ensues a long struggle between Nanook, hauling on his line, and the unseen seal under the ice in the water. At one point Nanook loses his balance and falls, head over heels. Finally the other members of the family arrive on the scene and help their father to pull out the seal. (It is obviously dead.) They cut it up, and scraps are flung to the dogs, who fight among themselves over them. The dog traces get tangled, and this causes a delay in the departure for home.

They come upon a deserted igloo and take refuge in it. The snow drifts round outside, and the dogs become covered and hardly recognizable. Some small pups have had a special miniature igloo made for them. Inside, the family beds down for the night, naked inside their furs and hide blanket bags. Outside the blizzard rages. And the film ends on a close-up of the sleeping Nanook.

Described thus bluntly, the film sounds naive and disjointed, and in some ways it is both. Its continuity is rough and there are many unexplained interruptions. The passing of time is either clumsily handled or deliberately ignored. Technically, it is almost an amateur's work. These, however, are minor flaws when compared with the overall conception that the film gives of this Eskimo family living what we are told is its normal everyday existence. Some sequences, such as the now-famous, carefully depicted building of the igloo and the carving of its window, and the howling dogs being covered by the drifting snow, will always be memorable in the history of the cinema.

It is also important to note that the spearing of the seal is the first example of Flaherty's use of the "suspense element" in his work: Nanook struggles to drag the creature up through the ice hole out of the water for a seemingly endless time, but not until he finally succeeds can the audience see that it is a seal. This element of suspense—keeping the audience guessing, and revealing the secret only at the last moment—was to play a significant part in Flaherty's future films.

The photography, made on the long-since obsolete orthochromatic film stock, has to this day some lovely moments, such as the sledge scenes across the vast snowscapes, and here and there appears a hint of Flaherty's skill for moving his camera on the gyro-head tripod of which he was so fond.<sup>27</sup> There is a tilt-shot down on to Nanook in his kayak, for example, and a left-to-right pan-shot along the walrus heads peering up from the waves. The dragging of the dead walrus up the beach is shown in greater detail than would have been found in any other film of the period; that is to say, it is broken down into several shots from different angles, and the same is true, of course, of the igloo-building.

But more important than these technical points is the fact that the film conveys the sheer struggle for existence of these people and their carefree acceptance of their fight for survival. It is true, no doubt, that Flaherty does not show any of the amenities of the trading post. Neither is any reference made to the fact that the use of guns and traps for hunting was common long before the time when the film was made, nor is any reference made to such things as the sexual life or marriage customs of the Eskimo. It can be said that the film has little real anthropological value.

This raises an issue which has come up many times in regard to all Flaherty's films and will recur when we examine the many criticisms of his work: Did he intend us to accept *Nanook* as an accurate picture of Eskimo life at the time when he made the film, or did he intend it to be a picture of Eskimo life *as it used to be*, as seen through his—Flaherty's—eyes? Was he concerned with creating the living present in terms of the film medium, or was he trying to create an impression of life as it was lived by the father or grandfather of Nanook? What concerns us now is that in *Nanook*, for the first time in film history, a motion picture camera was used to do more than just record what it finds before its lens. This is the larger significance of *Nanook*.

In 1913, Flaherty had not been the first explorer to equip himself with a film camera. Travel films, or "scenics" as the trade called them, had been popular since the turn of the century, beginning with what might best be described as moving picture postcards of familiar places in one's own or a neighboring country, which gave way in time to scenes in more distant and exotic lands. The word "travelogue" was actually in use as early as 1907 by Burton Holmes in the United States. In her absorbing history of early British cinema, Rachel Low tells us:

The fashion whereby explorers and big-game hunters took cinematographers with them on their expeditions seems to have begun when Cherry Kearton left England in 1908 to accompany Theodore Roosevelt on his African hunting-trip, and spent the next five years travelling in India, Africa, Borneo and America. . . . In the summer of 1909, Lieutenant Shackleton showed some of the 4000 ft. of film exposed during his

recent expedition in the Antarctic. Probably the most important of the big-game films was the 6000 ft. record of the Carnegie Museum Expedition in Alaska and Siberia, led by Captain F. E. Kleinschmidt. The expedition was organized in 1909, and during the two years it took to make the film some 10,000 ft. were exposed. . . . Soon a cinematographer was regarded as a normal part of an explorer's equipment, although his films were not always originally intended for commercial distribution. [Low 1949:153–155]

Of all these travel and exploration films, Rachel Low very rightly claims that Herbert G. Ponting's record of Captain Scott's expedition to the Antarctic in 1910–1911 was quite the most important.<sup>28</sup> She calls it, in fact, "one of the really great achievements, if not the greatest, of British cinematography during this unhappy period."

But there were certain vital differences between Flaherty and these other early cinematographers. First, he combined the talents of trained explorer and mineralogist with those of a filmmaker. He learned the technique of cinematography for himself, the hard way, in order to express what he himself found among the people on his expedition. Second, he was familiar with and had had 8 years' knowledge of the Eskimos and the land where they lived and where he was going to make his film. He knew his subject at first-hand, a tenet that was to become an integral part of every Flaherty film. And third, perhaps most important of all, his abortive first attempts at filming, in 1913 and again in 1915, had shown him clearly that just to set up his camera and record scenes in a strange country was not sufficient to dramatize the struggle for survival of his friends the Eskimo. Flaherty knew that something fundamental was lacking in his early efforts; he knew when he went north again in 1920 that it was not just to remake what he had lost in the flames at Toronto.

As Walker Evans, the distinguished American photographer, puts it: ". . . you learn that he [Flaherty] shot a lot of movie footage on exploration trips previous to the time of *Nanook*. You find that this led him to one of the best experiences a young artist can have: he got sore at himself for his own lack of originality. These first reels of his evidently looked just like the asphyxiating stuff ground out by any ass who's seen an Indian squaw or some mountain goats. Anger, almost certainly, gave Flaherty his first artistic drive" (Evans 1953). This evaluation is totally confirmed by Grierson's description of the first Harvard print of the abortive *Nanook*.

In *Nanook*, as Flaherty gave it to the world in 1922, there were the seeds of what was described later as "the creative treatment of actuality," John Grierson's often-quoted definition of the documentary approach to filmmaking (Grierson 1946:11). And here is Grierson's own assessment of Flaherty's film:

*Nanook of the North* took the theme of hunger and the fight for food and built its drama from the actual event, and, as it turned out, from actual hunger. The blizzards were real and the gestures of human exhaustion came from life. Many years before, Ponting had made his famous picture of the Scott expedition to the South Pole, with just such material; but here the sketch came to life and the journalistic survey turned to drama. Flaherty's theory that the camera has an affection for the spontaneous and the traditional, and all that time has worn smooth, stands the test of twenty years, and *Nanook*, of all the films that I have ever seen—I wish I could say the same for my own—is least dated today. The bubble is in it and it is, plain to see, a true bubble. This film, which had to find its finance from a fur company and was turned down by every renter on Broadway, has outlived them all. [Davy 1937:146]

To quote Walker Evans again:

No one will ever forget the stunning freshness of *Nanook of the North*. The mere sight of a few stills from the production has the power to bring it all back. Here is happy, feral little Nanook, seated beside the hole he has cut in the ice; his face hidden in fur; his bent-over figure shielded by that cunningly built ice-block shelter; waiting, with that steady ready knife; waiting for his seal. Here is the harpoon picture. Nanook drawing back for the throw: just the deadliness of these half-lowered eyes on the aim can drain the lining of your stomach again as it did in the theatre. Add to this the sheer line of that particular photograph: the diagonal shaft of the weapon, the sweep of the cord looping to Nanook's raised hand, then coiling in black calligraphy against the sky. . . . The core of Flaherty's whole career is in the solitary, passionate filming of *Nanook of the North*. [Evans 1953]

In a survey in 1923 of the best films of the previous year, Robert E. Sherwood, the critic and playwright, wrote:

There are few surprises, few revolutionary stars and directors of established reputation. *Nanook of the North* was the one notable exception. It came from a hitherto unheard-of source, and it was entirely original in form. . . . There have been many fine travel pictures, many gorgeous "scenics," but there has been only one that deserves to be called great. That one is *Nanook of the North*. It stands alone, literally in a class by itself. Indeed, no list of the best pictures of this year or of all years in the brief history of the movies, could be considered complete without it. . . . Here was drama rendered far more vital than any trumped-up drama could ever be by the fact that it was all *real*. *Nanook* was no playboy enacting a part which could be forgotten as soon as the greasepaint had been rubbed off; he was himself an Eskimo struggling to survive. The North was no mechanical affair of wind-machines and paper snow; it was the North, cruel and incredibly strong. [Sherwood 1923]

On the other hand, that usually discerning critic of the arts Gilbert Seldes, in his book *The Seven Lively Arts*, dismisses the film: ". . . what can you make of the circumstances that one of the very greatest successes, in America and abroad, was *Nanook of the North*, a spectacle film to which the producer and the artistic director

contributed nothing (*sic!*), for it was a picture of actualities, made, according to rumor, in the interests of a fur-trading company?" (Seldes 1924:332). Flaherty is not mentioned by name anywhere in the book, which purports to be a survey of the American arts in the early 1920s.

The first suggestion that *Nanook* was not authentic, so far as we can trace, appeared briefly in Iris Barry's book *Let's Go to the Pictures* (1926:185), in which she quoted Professor Stefansson as saying that it "is a most inexact picture of the Eskimo's life. . . ." She did not, however, give a reference for the source of her quotation.<sup>29</sup> Many years later, when *Nanook* was reissued (with sound track and narration) in 1947, this accusation, again involving Professor Stefansson, was once more ventilated.

Under the heading "Is Nanook a Fake?" the late Campbell Dixon, who had received the film a day or so before, contributed the following column:

Is Flaherty's *Nanook* the classic documentary it has passed for this quarter of a century, or is it an elaborate fake, as Mr. Geoffrey D. M. Block, M.A., quoting Stefansson's *The Standardisation of Error*, invites me to believe? He writes: "To put it mildly, *Nanook* is a phoney. As Stefansson is a pretty well-known explorer, his view can be accepted as final. I can still remember with what delight I came across Stefansson's exposure of the impostor. . . . I am prepared to accept your

judgment of Flaherty's poetic vision—yes, he showed plenty of that—but 'integrity?' No, I am afraid I can no more swallow that than I could swallow the bucketfuls of blubber that old fabricator Nanook allegedly gulped down for breakfast." [Dixon 1947]

Campbell Dixon goes on:

Stefansson is an accepted authority; but his favourite line—The Friendly Arctic and so forth—is dismissed by many others as a Technicolor dream, an expression of he-man rejoicing that he can flourish where weaklings go under. . . . Mr. Block ridicules the shot showing Eskimos eating blubber. Dr. Stefansson flatly declares that no human-being can contain oil—this apropos of a shot of a child swallowing castor oil with relish. The film does not suggest that the child so tippled all day long. . . .

. . . *Nanook*, I would add, is not a White Paper. I daresay Flaherty took liberties with his material, arranging, foreshortening and colouring, as every artist must do. This, surely, hardly justifies a charge of wholesale faking against a man whose honesty in *Man of Aran* and other classics has never been seriously challenged, and who parted company on just such issues with his fellow-director of *White Shadows in the South Seas*. [Dixon 1947]<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 4**

Cat. No. 103

vintage photogravure, on loan from FSCC (see No. 29).

N 262

6½" × 8½" / 16.7 × 21.5 cm

subject: photograph of Allakariallak (Nanook), 1920–1921, Inoucdjouac.

identification: *Nanook The Harpooner*. Flaherty 9, 12.

This challenge by Stefansson to Flaherty's authenticity in *Nanook* cannot be lightly disregarded. We will give in full, therefore, exactly what he did write, and it will be found that it does not add up to quite the denigration that Mr. Block suggested.

Under the subheading "Teaching through Educational Movies" in his book *The Standardisation of Error* (1928:86-92) Stefansson writes:

While our love for children makes us conceal from them anything that may be injurious to their welfare, the same affection leads us to strive for their instruction in whatever we consider beneficial. But in this field we are sometimes misled. I have in mind a special case—parents who were greatly incensed at a movie called *Nanook of the North* which, although not true to the native life of the Eskimos, had been shown in their children's school and recommended as true. But these parents were quite in the wrong, as will appear.

To begin with, the *Nanook* story was at least as true as that of Santa Claus which those parents approved. It was the same sort of partial truthfulness, only greater. Real as well as Santa reindeer have horns, four legs and are driven before sleighs in harness, though not such sleighs, quite, nor in such harness as the ordinary Christmas pictures show. . . . Thus the Santa story, while fiction in a way, does represent truths.

Similarly, with the movie *Nanook*. There are Eskimos in Hudson Bay where the picture was taken, and the people you see on the screen are Eskimos, which is more realism right from the start than you ever had in a Santa Claus picture. The country you see, too, is the real Hudson Bay. True enough, not even the coldest month up there averages as cold as *Nanook* tells you the whole year averages (35 degrees below zero) but then you must have something exceptional in a movie or it would not impress. You are told, too, that the Hudson Bay Eskimos still hunt with their primitive weapons, and this is justified. For it would spoil the unity of the picture to tell the truth about the weapons, though it is an interesting fact in itself that the forefathers of the Eskimos shown on the screen have had guns for generations, as the Hudson Bay Company has been trading in the Bay since 1670. Moreover, the titles do not actually say that the Bay Eskimos hunt with primitive weapons *only*, so you can take it any way you like. Doubtless the producer meant nothing more than to say that the children (who are certainly Eskimos) still play at hunting (which would be hunting of a sort) with bows and arrows.

No real Eskimos, in my belief, ever hunted seals through the ice in the manner shown in the picture, nor do I think that a seal could be killed by that method unless he were a defective. But it is true that certain Eskimos in other parts of the Arctic (about half of all there are) do know how seals can be killed through ice. That the Hudson Bay Eskimos with whom our producer had to deal did not know such methods was no fault of his, and he would have been deficient in resource if he had allowed that to stop him. Neither are there libraries in Hudson Bay where he might have borrowed a book that described the method so that he could have studied it up and taught it to the local natives. There they were, the picture had to be taken, and audiences in the South would demand to be shown what they had heard of—Eskimos sealing through ice. And so a method was developed (perhaps by the Eskimos themselves along lines roughly indicated by the director)

which photographs beautifully and gives as much feeling of enlightenment to an audience as if it showed the real technique that does secure seals.

I have gone to *Nanook* many times for the purpose of observing the audiences. In several cases some movie-fan has noticed that the seal ostensibly speared in the picture is stiff and dead, clearly planted there. But that, it seems to me, is all the realism you could expect in a play. You would not demand that Fairbanks really kill all his adversaries, though you do appreciate seeing a bit of good swordsmanship. And in *Nanook*, what seal but a dead one could possibly be expected to allow himself to be speared in the manner shown?

Another thing I have overheard *Nanook* audiences complain about is that they have heard somewhere that Eskimo snowhouses are warm and comfortable inside, while the *Nanook* picture shows the occupants shivering as they strip for going to bed, and there are clouds of steam puffing from their mouths and nostrils. These erudite fans are still more troubled when they see the movie title which says that the Eskimos must always keep their snowhouse interiors below freezing to prevent them from melting, for they have read a book by someone who has lived in a snowhouse and who has explained the principles of physics by which, when the weather is cold enough outside (and no weather was ever quite so cold as the *Nanook* country was supposed to be), the snow does not melt though it is comfortably warm inside—say, as warm as the average British or Continental living-room in winter. But the answer is simple, and the producer is quite justified by it. An Eskimo snowhouse is too small for the inside photography and the light might not be good enough. So to get the best light and plenty of room for the cameraman, half the house was cut away (like the 'sets' you see in the movie studios) and the poor Eskimos were disrobing and going to bed out-of-doors. But it would have spoiled the picture to have introduced such technical details. Hence the producer had to explain the shivering people and their visible breathing by the harmless pretence that snowhouse interiors have to be colder than freezing to prevent the roof and walls from thawing.<sup>31</sup>

And so on for the whole picture.

It was the very fact just stated and others like them which made my friends angry. That many have been because the realities of the picture were not so charitably interpreted to them as we have done above. It is possible to make the same fact look a deal worse if you try.

This criticism of Flaherty's deliberate falsification of material things as he found them was not ignored by Flaherty. His brother David records him as saying on more than one occasion, "Sometimes you have to lie to get over the truth,"<sup>32</sup> and in *The New Yorker* Profile, Robert Lewis Taylor (1949) quoted Flaherty's own words: "One often has to distort a thing in order to catch its true spirit," he says, voicing one of his main tenets of artistic creation.

It is relevant that in writing about restaging and reenactment in his famous film *Potemkin*, Eisenstein also defended such acts of contrivance, summoning up Goethe: "For the sake of truthfulness one can afford to defy the truth" (Eisenstein 1959:23). It is the divergence in ways of defining and serving "truthfulness" that matters, and that is where, of course, Eisenstein, Flaherty, and some of the other great realist filmmakers part company with the world's commercial producers in Hollywood,

**Figure 5**

Cat. No. 92  
 modern print, from  
 original glass plate, by  
 NPC, on loan from FSCC.  
 N 2385  
 5" × 4" / 12.7 × 10.2 cm  
 subject: portrait of Alice  
 (?) Nuvalinga (Nyla) and  
 child, 1920–1921,  
 Inoucdjouac.

England, and elsewhere. Of *Nanook*, Eisenstein himself said, "We Russians learned more from *Nanook of the North* than from any other foreign film. We wore it out, studying it. That was in a way our beginning."<sup>33</sup>

But Flaherty's conception in *Nanook* has been challenged on other and more important grounds than whether its material content was falsified and contrived. Flaherty, it was said, ignored the social problems and realities of the people among whom he made his films. In regard to *Nanook*, the following comment has its rightful place here:

When Flaherty tells you that it is a devilish noble thing to fight for food in a wilderness, you may, with some justice, observe that you are more concerned with the problem of people fighting for food in the midst of plenty. When he draws your atten-

tion to the fact that Nanook's spear is grave in its upheld angle, and finely rigid in its downpointing bravery, you may, with some justice, observe that no spear, held however bravely by the individual, will master the crazy walrus of international finance. Indeed, you may feel that in individualism is a yahoo tradition largely responsible for our present anarchy, and deny at once both the hero of decent heroics (Flaherty) and the hero of indecent ones (the studios). [Hardy 1946:82]

The fact is, of course, that the social-realist documentary movement which Grierson founded in Britain in 1929 represented a wholly different conception of the use of the cinema from that held by Flaherty, although the British group was deeply indebted for all it learned from Flaherty's method of filmmaking and always acknowledged the fact. They always respected his superb visual sense.



**Figure 6**

Cat. No. 97

modern print, from original glass plate, by NPC, on loan from FSCC.

N 309

4" × 5" / 10.2 × 12.7 cm

subject: the personages of *Nanook of the North* in umiak, 1920–1921, Inoucdjouac.

*identification: AN ESKIMO UMIAK: These boats, built, as are the kayacks, of skins stretched over a framework, are much larger than their smaller cousins and are capable of carrying a whole family and many hundredweight of freight. Flaherty 7. (caption for long distance photograph of same subject).*

note: see also No.99, N 304.

## PART IV

To have made the film *Nanook* singlehanded was in itself a heroic achievement. To get it shown to the public, however, called for another struggle of a different kind. As before, Flaherty tells the story in his own words:

When I got back to New York, it took the better part of a winter to edit the film. [He hired a technician to help him called Charlie Gelb, who, Frances Flaherty recalls, "Bob picked up around the place."] When it was ready to be shown I started to make the rounds of the distributors in New York with the hope that one of them would be kind enough to give it distribution. Naturally I took it to the biggest of the distributors first. This was Paramount. The projection-room was filled with their staff and it was blue with smoke before the film was over. When the film ended they all pulled themselves together and got up in a rather dull way, I thought, and silently left the room. The manager came up to me and very kindly put his arm round my shoulders and told me that he was terribly sorry, but it was a film that just couldn't be shown to the public. [Flaherty 1950:16, 17]

Only slightly discouraged, Flaherty proceeded to show it to First National, another big distributor, and ". . . they didn't even answer the phone to me after seeing the film." He had to go round to the projection room and apologetically ask to take the film away. Finally, after more setbacks, *Nanook of the North* found a distributor more by coincidence than by its own merits, a not uncommon event in the film industry.

Flaherty screened it to the Pathé Company in New York, which in those days was an important distribution organization and was still controlled by the parent Pathé Company in Paris. He hoped that, as both Revillon Frères and Pathé were French in origin, some magic might arise and they'd get together on the film. At first Pathé thought it was, at any rate, an "interesting" picture but that it could not be put out into the public theaters as a feature on its own account. (It was actually 5 reels, approximately 75 minutes long.) They suggested that it be broken down into a series of short educational films.

A day or two later, however, when Flaherty was running his film again at the Pathé projection room, Madame Brunet, the wife of the president of the company, was present, as well as an old friend of Flaherty's, a journalist who was with Pathé and was the only member of the company who asked to see the picture a second time. "They caught fire," explains Flaherty. And it was their enthusiasm for the film which finally induced Pathé to take it and, moreover, to put it out in its original uncut form to the general public. Flaherty recalls:

The problem then was to get one of the big theatres to show it. Now the biggest theatre in New York then was the Capitol, run by a great film exhibitor, Roxy.<sup>34</sup> But we knew very well that to show it to Roxy cold was to invite failure. Said Pathé, "We'll have to salt it." The sister of the publicity head of Pathé was a great friend of Roxy's. So it was arranged to show it first to her and some of her friends and tell them where to applaud through the picture, and then they would come along to the showing to Roxy in his very elaborate projection-room at the Capitol. We also told them never to talk directly to Roxy about the film but to talk to each other across him as if he were not in the room. Well, by the time the film was over, Roxy was tearing his hair. He used such words as "epic," "masterpiece," and the like. He booked it. But even then Pathé were not too trusting, and they decided to "tin-can" it (block book was the common trade phrase)—that is to tie it to *Grandma's Boy*, Harold Lloyd's first big feature film which every theatre in New York was scrambling for. Roxy could have *Grandma's Boy*, but he'd have to take *Nanook* too!

A few days later when Major Bowes, the managing-director of the Capitol, saw the film he threatened to throw Roxy out. His rage knew no bounds. Desperately, poor Roxy tried to get out of the contract, but no—No *Nanook*, no *Grandma's Boy*. [Flaherty 1950:17]

So *Nanook* opened as a second feature on Broadway, during a hot spell, where it did only middling business. Robert Sherwood records it as playing one week and taking in \$43,000, but he does not say if this was *Nanook's* share of the double bill with *Grandma's Boy* or if it was the gross for the two pictures (Sherwood 1929). Terry Ramsaye records that its total gross was about \$350,000, which, if correct, represented at least a modest profit eventually to Revillon Frères on what really had been an advertising investment (Ramsaye 1951).

In spite of the account by Flaherty himself, David Flaherty went on record with the following statement: "*Nanook* did not share a double-bill with *Grandma's Boy* at the Capitol. It opened there on Sunday, June 11, 1922, as the sole feature, ran a week, like other pictures, and, according to *Variety*, did 36,000 dollars business, which was considered good. It was a 7,000 dollar increase on the previous week's 29,000 dollars take" (notes to the authors, January 4, 1960).

This inauspicious beginning, accompanied as it was by lukewarm or cautious reviews by the critics, was in fact no guide to what the final impact of the film would be. As time went on, *Nanook* began to attract press com-

ments very different from those of the trade or fan papers whose interest was only in Hollywood. Editors and columnists drew attention to it as something new in films, as something which was doing what the movies ought to do but never did. Similarly, it attracted a different sort of audience to the cinemas in which it was shown—often people who were not filmgoers but were attracted by the idea of a realistic yet tender approach to far-off places and people.

In Europe, too, it had a wide success. The New Gallery, in London, opened with it in September 1922, and it ran for 6 months. It had a Royal Command performance at Balmoral. It ran for 6 months at the Gaumont in Paris. In Rome, Berlin, Copenhagen, and other capitals it was similarly successful. In Germany especially it had long runs everywhere and was frequently revived in subsequent years. These reactions slowly filtered back to America and must to some degree have affected the attitude of the film business toward it, though it must be admitted that few of the serious writers on film paid it much attention. This, however, may be due to the fact that film itself had hardly yet been recognized as an art form. Later generations of writers were to make amends.

If Flaherty was to learn anything from his experience with *Nanook*, and he learned much and afterward stated, it was that it is one thing to overcome all the obstacles to making a film but quite another to get the finished film shown. All through his life, with the exception of the hybrid *Elephant Boy*, Flaherty had to fight and fight hard to get adequate distribution for his films. He came to grasp that to put a film across showmanship was essential, not to the public itself but to the film-trade machinery that stands between the completed film and the public which goes in millions to the cinema theaters. It is also clear that Flaherty had sensible and imaginative ideas of his own about film distribution methods, ideas that in subsequent years proved practicable and shrewd.

*Nanook's* release date in the United States was June 11, 1922. It may be of interest to note what other American films were being made and shown about the same time. D. W. Griffith, one of the great masters, had made a spectacular of the French Revolution in *Orphans of the Storm*, Chaplin had recently shown *The Kid*, and Rudolph Valentino had burst upon the public in Rex Ingram's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. In the same year as *Nanook*, Fairbanks presented *Robin Hood*, Nazimova appeared in *Salome*, and Cecil B. De Mille gave us his "Swimming Pool Masked Ball" in *Saturday Night*. One remembers with affection that another Arctic film also appeared that year: Buster Keaton's *The Frozen North*. It would have made a wonderful double bill with *Nanook*. Thus Flaherty's film predated *The Covered Wagon*, *Down to the Sea in Ships*, and *The Iron Horse*, all films with a minimum of studio fabrication.

In Europe, the German cinema was entering its famous Golden Period of studio craftsmanship. The year 1922 saw *Warning Shadows*, *Vanina*, and *Nosferatu (Dracula)*.

In France, Delluc had made *Fièvre* and Gance his locomotive film, *La Roué*. In England, Bruce Woolfe and produced a reenactment of the war exploit, *Zeebrugge*. In the U.S.S.R. Dziga-Vertov was issuing a monthly newsfilm called *Kino-Truth* and thinking up his theories about "catching life unawares"; Eisenstein was still working in the theater.

None of these films can be compared in any way with what Flaherty tried to do in *Nanook*. Yet of all those we have mentioned, only Chaplin and Flaherty have stood the test of time. Only *Nanook* was to stand a reissue, 25 years after its first release, in July 1947. It was reissued by United Artists and ran 50 minutes, with a narration written by Ralph Schoolman and spoken by Berny Kroeger and music composed by Rudolph Schramen. Its title was displayed in 20-foot-high neon letters above the canopy of the London Pavilion, one the West End's main theaters, in Piccadilly Circus, sometimes called the Hub of the World. It was generally acclaimed by the London critics as the "film of the week." In New York, it played at the Sutton Theatre shortly before the premiere of *Louisiana Story* in the late summer of 1948. In 1950-1951 this sound version was made available for 16 mm distribution, and it is still being shown widely in several foreign-language versions as well as in its original English. It has been televised in both the United States and Great Britain, with considerable success, as well as in West Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia.

#### Figure 7

Cat. No. 115

modern print, from original glass plate, by NPC, on loan from FSCC.

N 378

5" × 4" / 12.7 × 10.7 cm

subject: photograph of Allakariallak (Nanook), Alice (?) Nuvalinga (Nyla) and Bob Stewart, factor of the Revillon Frères post, 1920-1921, Inoucdjouac.

note: Stewart is securely identified by Copland who met him in 1925-1926. Stewart was originally a sailor on the whaler *Active* from Dundee, Scotland. He sailed with Captains John and Alex Murray during the notorious voyage of the *Active* when they were forced to winter in Murray Harbour, the Ottawa Islands, where Alex Murray died. Flaherty noted meeting the *Active* September 1-4, 1914.

Although he does not mention Stewart by name, it is probable that they met at this time. Soon after, Stewart was recruited by Revillon Frères and became factor at the Port Harrison (Inoucdjouac) post where Flaherty filmed *Nanook of the North*. Stewart both assisted Flaherty in the production and starred in the film, playing himself (post factor). See *Filmography*. Stewart developed great interest in photography and owned a Graflex (possibly Flaherty's) in 1925-1926. It is possible that he took the photographs attributed to Flaherty in the Coward album. (See No.28).





The timeless quality of *Nanook* has many times been stressed, but these undisputed facts about its reissue after so many years are the great tribute to its maker. Yet, at the time of its premiere in 1922, the reviews by the New York critics were not remarkable. "The notices were mixed," records Flaherty himself; "One critic damned it with faint praise, but then wrote a better review a few weeks later." Richard Griffith says, "They had nothing but their own tastes to guide them, and those whose mouths were set for romantic make-believe called it a 'novelty' and let it go at that. Some others cautiously opined that it was more than a novelty in the usual sense, that *Nanook* was indeed something new under the sun: a dramatic and human pattern, not contrived from paint and plaster and machinery, but elicited from life itself" [Griffith 1953:49].

More importantly, Griffith rightly points out that "the picture began to gather itself a Press entirely different from the trade and fan publications which attend feverishly upon the phenomena of Hollywood. Columnists and editorial writers praised it as the sort of thing people had always thought the movies ought to do, and now it was plain they could. And as it made its way through the theatres, it seemed to draw an unusual audience, an audience of people who didn't often go to ordinary movies but who liked adventure, or travel, or just simple beauty" [Griffith 1953:49].

Because of *Nanook*'s wide success in Europe, positive reactions slowly filtered back to America, and perhaps some people looked at the film differently as a result. And yet, when it comes to research, it is odd to find that neither Flaherty nor *Nanook* occupies much space in the serious literature that was growing up around the cinema in the 1920s and early 1930s. Among English-language books, for example, no reference whatsoever to the film occurs in Elliott's *Anatomy of Motion Picture Art* (1928), Messel's *This Film Business* (1928), L'Estrange Fawcett's *Films: Facts, Facts and Forecasts* (1927), or Arnheim's *Film* (1933), nor is it included in the German edition of *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924) by Bela Balazs, the distinguished Hungarian critic. In the two massive volumes of Terry Ramsaye's well-known *A Million and One Nights* (1926), *Nanook* is given one line (p. 600) as against a luscious build-up of Martin Johnson and his lurid adventure films.

From its first issue in July 1927 until August 1928, in that little mine of information and theory *Close-Up*, the only significant reference to *Nanook* was as a substitute (*sic!*) for *Under Arctic Skies* ("which gives a good idea of northern life and links up, via Siberia, with Asia") in a suggested list of films for children. Bryher, the associate editor of the journal, adds, "I have always missed this picture," meaning *Nanook* [*Close-up* 3(2):20].

But Caroline Lejeune at least pays tribute. In a eulogy for *The Covered Wagon*, she adds, "There had been earlier films with an impersonal theme—Flaherty's *Nanook*—the greatest of them all, with a sheer statement of drama that has never been equalled to this day. But *Nanook* did not impinge closely enough on emotion to win the suffrage of the public; its theme was too pure, too remote from audience psychology. It had successors; it was not sterile. . . . But it was *The Covered Wagon* that opened the picture-houses to the impersonal film" (1931:179–180). Even in Lewis Jacobs's commodious and valuable work, *The Rise of the American Film* (1939), *Nanook* scores only a bare half page, with a brief mention elsewhere. It was, in truth, left to those of the British documentary group who were writers as well as filmmakers in the late 1920s and the 1930s to make a full assessment of accord and recognition to Flaherty and his *Nanook* (Rotha 1930, 1931, 1936). In France, too, Flaherty made a deep impact on critics like Moussinac and Delluc, who were quick to point out what they called the *pureté* of *Nanook*.

In 1925, a book appeared with the title *Nanook of the North*, in which a Publisher's Note stated:

For several years the name "Nanook" (The Bear), as that of an Eskimo hunter, has been widely familiar in England and America, since *Nanook of the North* was the title of a cinematograph film produced by Mr. R. G. (sic) Flaherty, and exhibited by Messrs. Revillon Frères and Messrs. Pathé. In that film was told the life-story of a certain Eskimo who chanced to bear the common Eskimo name—Nanook. Mr. Flaherty, in a chapter in his book *My Eskimo Friends*, has described how these pictures were taken. The present volume gives in words the life-story of a typical Eskimo—as the cinematography film gave it in pictures; but it makes no claim that this is the history of the Eskimo named Nanook who was known to Mr. Flaherty. On the other hand, the illustrations in this volume are reproduced, some from the film (by kind permission of Messrs. Revillon Frères and Messrs. Pathé) and others from photographs taken at the same time as the film; so that many of them contain portraits of the most celebrated bearer of the name. [Bilby 1925]

Of 29 illustrations, 18 are credited to the film; they are not "stills" from it in the accepted sense but photographs taken at the same time, presumably by Flaherty. Some of them show incidents which are not in the film.

## PART V

In writing about *The World of Robert Flaherty*, Walker Evans reminds us that Flaherty was roughly of Sherwood Anderson's generation and not Hemingway's. "He certainly had one foot in an age of innocence," wrote Evans (1953). He was, above all, as we have seen, self-educated and self-discovered as an artist. Moreover, he was an artist who had found for himself a new medium. At that time, film was only beginning to be recognized as a new art form.

But if Flaherty belonged to Sherwood Anderson's generation, he was not creatively a part of it. Nor was he ever a part of the new spirit of revolt that flared up when Greenwich Village was established as the new Bohemia around 1913 or so, in the days of the birth of the *New Masses*, the *New Republic*, and *The Seven Arts*. At that time, Flaherty was getting himself wrecked on the Belchers, or wintering among his Eskimo friends at Amadjuak Bay. While the Socialist writer John Macy was saying in his *Spirit of American Literature* (1913) that "the whole country is crying out for those who will record it, satirize it, chant it" (quoted in Kazin, 1943:178), Flaherty was in fact doing just the first and last of these tasks. While Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis were becoming the new realists with *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and *Main Street* (1920)—very soon to be challenged by, on the one hand, the bitterly cynical writing of Cummings, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, and on the other, by the new decadents and smart stylists like Van Vechten, Thomas Beer, and the middle-aged Cabell—Robert Flaherty, a poet with a new visual perception, had produced and placed on Broadway for all to see who cared to see one of the first masterpieces in a new medium which was revolutionizing all media of expression. And he had done it, we repeat, singlehanded. His first work, born out of anger and frustration at his early failure, was destined to live a good deal longer and be understood by a great many more people throughout the world than all but a handful of the literary products of the early postwar years in America.

Out of the tangled wilderness of Northern Canada and out of the barren ice of Hudson Bay had come a man who, on the one hand, challenged the whole art of the cinema as it had been gropingly developed up until then, and on the other, struggled against the whole industrially organized machinery of the film trade. It is impossible to overrate the magnitude of this challenge and the courage of the man who made it. But it would be wrong to think that Flaherty was part of the American cultural tradition.

The span of years spent by Flaherty in the Canadian North were not only to find consummation in his film in 1922, but they were to have a profound and indelible effect on his outlook for the rest of his life. It may have been emptiness, the expanse, the cold—the very loneliness of this barren snow-and-ice world where the wind seems never to cease—that gave him time to con-

template and compose his thoughts. The small black figures on a vast white landscape, the drift snow in the wind, the huge distances to be traversed with a minimum of equipment and comfort, all these bit deeply into a man whose very eyes—an intense sort of china blue—reflected his experience.

The truth of the North that Flaherty found out was that when people were liable at any moment to suffer disaster, they depended absolutely on each other. Thus there existed "an atmosphere of loving kindness and forgiveness of sins"—the words are Grierson's—which was quite extraordinary. Whatever was to happen later—in the South Seas, in the Aran Islands, in Mysore, and in the United States itself—Flaherty the artist and poet and explorer was already developed and mature at the age of 38, the year in which he finished *Nanook*.

In his book *Eskimo* (1959), Edmund Carpenter writes of the acuteness of observation of the Eskimo, of their ability to recognize the identity of objects or animals at great distances. He does not suggest that their eyes are optically superior to ours but that supersensitive observation is vitally important to those who live in such barren surroundings. Over years they have unconsciously trained their eyes to observe accurately and meaningfully. "Moreover," he adds, "they enter into an experience, not as an observer but as a participant."

Writing about their art—a word which does not occur in their language—he makes the significant point that the carver of a piece of ivory will hold it unworked in his hand, turning it around and saying to himself, "Who are you?" and "Who hides there?" Only after some thought will he decide to carve out of it a seal or a fox. He tries to discover its hidden form from within, and if that is not forthcoming, he will carve at the ivory cautiously until a form suggests itself. "Seal, hidden, emerges. It was always there, he didn't create it; he released it. . . . 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." This attitude is reached only by long experience and contemplation.

It is our belief that in these two Eskimo qualities—the acute power of observation and the allowing of material to shape its own meaning—there is something which is also an integral part of Flaherty's art as a filmmaker. His training from early youth as an explorer and mining surveyor must have taught him to use his eyes more acutely than most men, but his many years of living in close contact with the Eskimo people and his love of them must also in turn have taught him even more about keenness of observation. We know, too, that he made a close study of their carvings and took many fine examples back home with him. He must have fully understood their attitude toward such craftsmanship.



**Figure 8**

Cat. No. 96

modern print, from  
original glass plate, by  
NPC, on loan from FSCC.

N 313

4" × 5" / 10.2 × 12.7 cm

subject: photograph of  
the personages of the  
film *Nanook of the North*  
on the horizon,  
1920–1921.

Professor Carpenter confirms this belief. He writes:

I am sure you understand that what I said [in the book *Eskimo*] about discovering the form within the ivory is just a minor illustration of an attitude towards life that pervades Eskimo thought and especially Eskimo human relations. Flaherty must have been very close to these people, as few Westerners have been; there are insights, observations in his writings that could only have come from the most intimate contact. His writings are so casual in style that someone unfamiliar with the Eskimo might regard them as happy travel stories, nothing more, and conclude that his relations with the Eskimo were fleeting. This could not be the case; one tale alone refutes it: that short story about the family marooned on an island and finally escaping via a crude craft. So it may not be unreasonable to suppose that Flaherty was influenced by the Eskimo, or at least found their attitudes understandable and congenial to his own temperament. His writing might mislead readers into also supposing that his northern trips were without grim ordeals. Actually, he must have had some rough times. [Carpenter 1959]

We discuss elsewhere an important side of Flaherty's filmmaking—the actual filming of raw material in real surroundings, then the subsequent assembling of such material into a shape or form fit to be presented to spectators—and it is apparent that an analogy can be found with the method of the Eskimo carvers. Both these points are brought up and emphasized here because they may well emerge from Flaherty's close association with the Eskimo people and their environment over almost a decade.

"Bob was forever always telling me," said Frances Flaherty, "that he wanted to go back to the North. 'I go to come back' he would say. He wanted to go back to dwell in his mind, to find a refuge. The memory of the North never left him. But Bob never did go back."<sup>35</sup>

As Flaherty himself began this paper, so let him end it:

You ask me what I think the film can do to make large audiences feel intimate with distant peoples? Well, *Nanook* is an instance of this. People who read books on the north are, after all, not many, but millions of people have seen this film in the last 26 years—it has gone round the world. And what they have seen is not a freak, but a real person after all, facing the perils of a desperate life and yet always happy. When Nanook died of starvation two years later, the news of his death came out in the Press all over the world—even as far away as China.

The urge that I had to make *Nanook* came from the way I felt about these people, my admiration for them; I wanted to tell others about them. This was my whole reason for making the film. In so many travelogues you see, the film-maker looks down on and never up to his subject. He is always the big man from New York or from London.

But I had been dependent on these people, alone with them for months at a time, travelling with them and living with them. They had warmed my feet when they were cold, lit my cigarette when my hands were too numb to do it myself; they had taken care of me on three or four expeditions over a period of eight years. My work had been built up along with them; I couldn't have done anything without them. In the end it is all a question of human relationship. [Flaherty 1950:18, 19]

## Notes

- 1 "Knobel had studied at Heidelberg and was now a recluse who loved to live alone in the wilds. Wherever he lived, he took his piano with him into the wilderness and was particularly fond of playing Chopin. He died years ago of pneumonia. He was in his 80s." David Flaherty, in a letter to the authors, August 21, 1959.
- 2 This account is a synthesis of two prerecorded radio talks (transcribed from telediphone records) made for the BBC in London, on June 14 and July 24, 1949, in which Flaherty was interviewed by Eileen Molony. Referred to hereafter as BBC Talks.
- 3 In an interview, August 15, 1957.
- 4 Transcribed from *Portrait of Robert Flaherty*, a radio program comprising the recorded memories of his friends, devised and written by Oliver Lawson Dick, produced by W. R. Rogers, broadcast by the BBC on September 2, 1952.
- 5 Excerpts from letters to the author, dated April 5 and 10, 1958.
- 6 Extracts from these diaries can be found in Griffith (1953).
- 7 Eskimos have a reputation for remarkably accurate mapmaking. When compared with modern maps prepared as a result of aerial survey, the old Eskimo ones are astonishingly correct. Professor Edmund Carpenter lays special emphasis on this in his fascinating book *Eskimo* (1959). Thus, when Flaherty eventually reached the Belcher Islands, he found that the maps given him earlier were far more accurate than the vague dots on the Admiralty maps, especially those drawn by the Eskimo named Wetalltok (Flaherty 1918:44).
- 8 He had been provided with a 36-foot sailing craft quite unsuitable for this type of navigation. It is in keeping with Flaherty's ideas about art to find a dramatic event like being wrecked thrown away in a single sentence.
- 9 This kind of incident is elaborated at length in Flaherty's *The Captain's Chair* (1938).
- 10 A fascinating detailed account of these two hardy and remarkable Eskimo expeditions by Flaherty will be found in *My Arctic Friends* and in two articles in the *Geographic Review* already mentioned. They are also described by Mr. W. E. Greening, of Montreal, in an unpublished manuscript of the life of Sir William Mackenzie to which we have kindly been given access by the author.
- 11 Professor Edmund Carpenter, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, in a letter to the authors, May 24, 1959.
- 12 David Flaherty, in a letter to the authors, June 29, 1959.
- 13 Presumably what would now be called camera-magazines.
- 14 Evelyn Lyon-Fellows, in a letter to the authors, January 27, 1958.
- 15 David Flaherty, in a letter to the authors, August 21, 1959.
- 16 John Taylor and John Goldman, who worked as assistant and editor respectively on the film *Man of Aran* in 1932-1934. Richard Griffith also recalls the story.
- 17 By specimens we presume that he refers to the examples of Eskimo carving and drawing which he brought back from his journeys. His collection of 360 pieces, said to be one of the best in existence, was acquired by Sir William Mackenzie and donated to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1933. Some photographs of them appeared in Professor Edmund Carpenter's book *Eskimo* (1959). Flaherty himself published in 1915 *The Drawings of Enooesweetok of the Sikoslingmint Tribe of the Eskimo, Fox Land, Baffin Island*, subtitled "These Drawings were Made at Amadjuak Bay, Fox Land, the Winter Quarters of Sir William Mackenzie's Expedition to Baffin Land and Hudson Bay, 1913-14." These drawings were donated by Mrs. Flaherty to join the carvings in the Royal Ontario Museum. A half-hour film was made by Lawrence Productions (Canada) in 1959.
- 18 In "Robert Flaherty Talking," an article in *The Cinema*, 1950, edited by Roger Manvell (Pelican Books). It also appeared in *Theatre Arts* magazine (New York, May 1951), and a slightly different version was printed in the magazine of the Screen Directors Guild (January 1951) under the title "Film: Language of the Eye."
- 19 Grierson (1951) gives the information that, when in Toronto in 1930, he was invited to the house of an old ex-film distributor who had turned furrier. He had his own private projection room. There he screened for Grierson what can only have been the Harvard print of the original *Nanook*. (In an interview by the authors, January 13, 1960.)
- 20 (Ramsaye 1951). Martin Johnson was a big-game and adventure filmmaker, whose approach to the cinema was the exact antithesis to that developed by Flaherty over the years.
- 21 The "rushes" are the first print made from the developed negative so that the filmmaker can see the result of his work projected onto a screen. In the United States they are called "dailies." Every filmmaker naturally wants to screen his rushes as soon as they are available.
- 22 Flaherty pursued this method of taking preliminary, still photographs of types, architecture, landscapes, etc., on all his subsequent films. Often they were made by his wife. They have sometimes at a later date been confused with stills from the actual films.
- 23 (Flaherty 1950:13, 14). Taylor in his *New Yorker* Profile (1949) says that Flaherty explained the reason for an Eskimo's holding a photograph upside down was that previously he had only seen his reflection in a pool of water.
- 24 For this and subsequent diary extracts we are indebted to Richard Griffith, who included them fully in *The World of Robert Flaherty* (1953) by permission of Mrs. Frances Flaherty. The complete diaries have not been published but we have noted that extracts used by Griffith coincide exactly, word for word, with the accounts in *My Eskimo Friends* (1924), which must therefore have been partly transcribed from the original diaries although the book does not state this.
- 25 "The Aivilik Eskimos are first-class mechanics. They delight in stripping down and reassembling engines, watches, all machinery. I have watched them repair instruments which American mechanics, flown into the Arctic for this purpose, have abandoned in despair." Professor Edmund Carpenter in *Eskimo* (1950).
- 26 In lecture notes by Frances Flaherty, used on many occasions by her in North America and Europe, accompanied by extracts from her husband's films. (The lectures became a book, *Odyssey of a Filmmaker*, in 1960.)
- 27 The copy screened for us by the National Film Archive, London, was black-and-white, but our memories tell us that when first seen the final night sequence, at least, was printed on blue-tinted stock. This was a common practice at the time; sequences were often printed on amber, red, or blue stock as thought appropriate to the story.
- 28 *With Captain Scott to the South Pole* was directed and photographed by Ponting and issued in two parts by the Gaumont Company in Britain, 1911-12. In the early 1930s it was reedited, a sound track was added, and it was given the title *Ninety Degrees South*. A copy of this version is preserved in the National Film Archive, London, which also has the negative of the original films. An instructive comparison in method can also be made between *Nanook* with its primitive methods of production and the later Ealing Studios film, *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948), with its elaborate studio fabrication.
- 29 Miss Barry, later to become the Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library (1935-1951), was at that time film critic of the London *Daily Mail*, and she also performed some secretarial duties for the distinguished expert on Arctic matters Professor Vilhjalmur Stefansson, then Director of Arctic Studies at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.
- 30 We are surprised that in the last sentence Mr. Dixon shows no knowledge of the much-publicized arguments over the authenticity and integrity of *Man of Aran*. They took place some 13 years before he wrote the above.
- 31 Flaherty had himself already described how the igloo was specially built in *My Eskimo Friends*, which was published in 1924, four years before Professor Stefansson's above-quoted remarks.
- 32 David Flaherty, in a letter to the authors, June 29, 1959.
- 33 Quoted by Ernestine Evans in "New Movies," *National Board of Review Magazine* (New York, January 1943) in an issue published as a Salute to Robert Flaherty. Miss Evans had met Eisenstein in Moscow, in the summer of 1928.

- 34** Geboren, Rothapfel, anglicized to Rothafel. Roxy, as he was known, was one of the great early showmen in the United States. He introduced the 3-console electric organ to cinemas, and when he re-vamped the Victoria Cinema in New York into the Rialto, he announced it as "A Temple of Motion Pictures: A Shrine of Music and the Allied Arts." He died in 1936.
- 35** Frances Flaherty, in an interview at Black Mountain Farm, Brattleboro, Vermont, August 17–23, 1957.

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