

THE LOST WESTERN SETTLEMENT OF GREENLAND, 1342

(Part 3)

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Chapter 6

INTO THE NEW WORLD?

Many historians have been adamant that the Greenlanders survived in the Canadian Arctic as the bearded, red-haired, and light-eyed hybridized Inuit called Tunnit, Tournit, Tunnek, Tunit, or a term coined by Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, “Blond Eskimos.” Inuit legends in northern Labrador, Baffin Island, and the central Arctic supported the tradition that the Western Settlement went to America, even calling them “Greenlanders.” Further sightings of European-looking Inuit with full beards, red or curly brown hair, and light eyes came from explorers seeking the Northwest Passage.¹⁷²

Collected by Henry Rink in 1875, the natives of Labrador told stories to early missionaries of large individuals, called both Tunnit and Grönlaender [Greenlander]. The Tunneks or Tunnits were outnumbered, and “fled from fear of our people, who used to drill holes in their foreheads while yet alive.”¹⁷³ They reportedly left for Killinek at Cape Chudleigh, which was the northernmost tip of Labrador. They were stronger than the Inuit: “Huge blocks of stone are still to be seen which they were able to move. Some ruins of their houses are also to be found here and there in our country, chiefly upon the islands, having been built of stones, and differing from the abodes of our

¹⁷² Searchers for Sir John Franklin’s 1845 expedition did the first mapping of the Canadian Arctic.

¹⁷³ Rink, 469. Spelling usually varied between Tunnit, Tunit, Tunnek, or Tornit.

people.¹⁷⁴ The local Inuit thought it was “incongruous” for people to live on islands.¹⁷⁵

Visiting Northern Labrador in 1922, G. M. Gathorne-Hardy also heard stories about the “Tunnit” race, said to be extinct, and of non-Inuit origin. The Tunnit were rated as non-Inuit due to their greater strength and size, and low population compared to the Inuit. The earliest missionaries to the region mixed the word “Greenlanders” with the word Tunnit.¹⁷⁶ The name was derogatory, meaning a very dirty man, as they lacked skill in dressing sealskin, leaving the smelly blubber attached.¹⁷⁷ Legend said the Tunnit came to the islands of Labrador directly from overseas, and were driven up the coast toward Baffin Island after stealing Inuit kayaks.¹⁷⁸ Addressing the London Geographical Society, Holand discounted the Tunnit being an Inuit tribe: “All along the Labrador coast, where several different Eskimo tribes existed, the Tunnit are constantly treated by tradition as something not Eskimo, but contrasted with that race.”¹⁷⁹

Franz Boas collected Inuit stories of the Tornits for the Smithsonian Institution in 1888, describing them at Cumberland Sound: “The Tornit were much taller than the Inuit and had very long legs and arms.”¹⁸⁰ The Tornit played too roughly in games of ball, hurting the Inuit. They also stole kayaks, prompting their departure after an Inuit

¹⁷⁴ Rink, 469-70.

¹⁷⁵ Rink, 479.

¹⁷⁶ Gathorne-Hardy, 162.

¹⁷⁷ Gathorne-Hardy, 162. The term was equivalent to “Hun.” Author’s comment was: “if they struck heathen Eskimo as dirty they must have been the last word in squalor.”

¹⁷⁸ Gathorne-Hardy, 166-67.

¹⁷⁹ Holand, 128.

¹⁸⁰ Boas, 226. Blear eyed could mean bleary, but could also denote a duller or lighter color.

stabbed a sleeping Tunnit in the base of his neck.¹⁸¹ Boas related a distinctive group hunting style, which also demonstrated the great strength of the Tunnit:

Their method of hunting deer was remarkable. In a deer pass, where the game could not escape, they erected a file of cairns across the valley and connected them by ropes. Some of the hunters hid behind the cairns, while others drove the deer toward them. As the animals were unable to pass the rope they fled along it, looking for an exit, and while attempting to pass a cairn were lanced by the waiting hunter, who seized the body by the hind legs and drew it behind the line.¹⁸²

Modern support came from James Robert Enterline who believed the Norse left for the High Arctic to hunt caribou as the Tunit people. Inuit legend held that the Tunit also hunted musk oxen in the central Arctic. From the range below, they were not available on the west coast of Greenland at the time of the Norse Settlements; however, they were on Ellesmere and Devon Islands, which showed signs of Norse visitation.¹⁸³ Of the Arctic animals, these beasts tasted the most similar to domestic beef, an attraction for the Tunit. As "bold bear hunters," they were different from the Thule or earlier Dorset; these earlier groups avoided bears when they could, as did the Inuit.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Boas, 227-28. The Inuit were afraid to confront the Tornit due to their much larger size.

¹⁸² Boas, 227. The Norse built similar cairns in the hunting areas of Greenland.

¹⁸³ *National Geographic*, "Musk-Ox: *Ovibos moschatus*," <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/musk-ox/> (accessed 11 November, 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Enterline, 130-132. The larger Norse farms preferred beef and caribou to seal and goat meat.

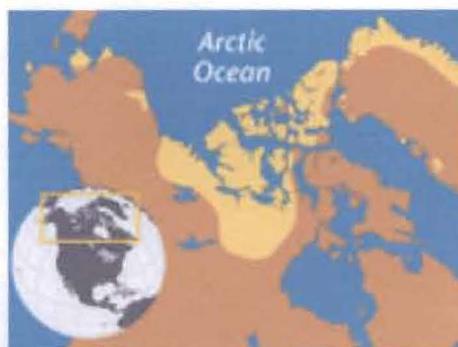


Figure 10: Modern Range of Musk Ox¹⁸⁵

An interesting point came from the Netsilik natives who sheltered Roald Amundsen on his Northwest Passage of 1903-06 for two winters at Gjøa Haven. They were on King William Island, the next island east from Stefánsson's "Blond Eskimos," and described the Tunit as loving to sail: "In contrast to the present population [as well as the previous Thule or Dorset populations], they loved the sea when it was not covered with ice."¹⁸⁶ The Inuit preferred ice on the sea for transportation with dog sleds and easy seal hunting at breathing holes, much like polar bears. A final point was that the Tunit dialect differed from that of the Central Arctic Inuit, resembling the dialect of Greenland and suggesting that the Norse learned to speak a Thule dialect similar to Inuit before leaving Greenland, perhaps while out hunting in small groups in winter.¹⁸⁷

In 1919, Vilhjálmur Stefánsson described "Blond Eskimos" living on Victoria Island in the central Canadian Arctic. Some members of this group had blue eyes, light-brown beards, rusty-red hair, and other European features. With ten or more having

¹⁸⁵ *National Geographic*, "Musk-Ox." Color of map is blue for oceans, tan for Canada and Greenland, cream for musk ox range in eastern Greenland, and high northeast and central Canadian Arctic. While a modern map, no reference to musk ox occurred in accounts of the Greenland settlements.

¹⁸⁶ Enterline, 139-40. Author's note in brackets.

¹⁸⁷ Enterline, 140. One question might be, were there Norse words remaining in the dialect?

blue eyes out of a thousand, he stated: "No full-blooded Eskimo has a right to blue eyes, as far as we know - his eyes should be as brown and his hair as black as those of the typical Chinaman."¹⁸⁸ Stefánsson concluded: "If the reason that the Victoria Island Eskimo are European-like is that they are of European blood, then the Scandinavian colony in Greenland furnishes not only an explanation, but the only explanation."¹⁸⁹



Prince Albert Sound Group, all of whom show blond tendencies

Figure 11: "Blond Eskimos" at Prince Albert Sound¹⁹⁰

Genetic characteristics easily divide into dominant and recessive traits.

Dominant traits include brown eyes, dark hair, non-red hair, curly hair, full head of hair,

¹⁸⁸ Stefánsson, 194.

¹⁸⁹ Stefánsson, 173, 194-95, 200. Blue eyes are a characteristic of Norwegians. In my class of 40 at Nes Gymnas in Årnes, Norway, in 1966-67, 37 of 40 students had blue eyes. I was American and of French descent, one female student was Jewish, and one male student had the looks of the Black Irish.

¹⁹⁰ Stefánsson, 194. Note facial hair, baldness, height, and length of legs as different than the Inuit. This has been a controversial theory, with discussion in the 1920s and research lately.

and widow's peak, while recessive traits include grey, green, hazel, or blue eyes, blonde, light, or red hair, straight hair, baldness, and normal hairline.¹⁹¹ Inuit have very little baldness, a recessive trait.¹⁹² They also lack facial hair, which “keeps ice and condensation from building up from the breathing,” according to an Inuit source.¹⁹³



Figure 12: Inuit family, about 100 years ago.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ “Dominant and Recessive Characteristics,” <http://www.blinn.edu/socialscience/ldthomas/feldman/handouts/0203hand.htm> (accessed 11 November, 2011).

¹⁹² “Ethnicity and Androgenic Alopecia: Why Eskimos Don’t Go Bald!” <http://www.top-hair-loss-remedy.com/androgenic-alopecia.html> (accessed 11 November, 2011).

¹⁹³ *Essay Pride*, “Inuit Eskimos,” http://www.essaypride.com/essays.php?free_essay=2638350&title=Inuit-Eskimos (accessed 11 November 2011).

¹⁹⁴ Frank E. Kleinschmidt, “Photograph of Inuit Family about 100 years ago,” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs. http://www.windows2universe.org/earth/polar/inuit_image_gallery.html (accessed 11 November 2011). Showing that personality traits transcend cultures, one member had no desire to be photographed (on floor to right).

The Inuit also had a distinct head shape, “narrow of skull and wide of face. . . his face is wider than his head,” with specifications accepted by the American Museum of Natural History; the head form of the “Blond Eskimos” matched persons of mixed Inuit and white lineage.¹⁹⁵ The picture above showed lack of facial hair, straight dark hair, and wideness of face in an Inuit family of the previous century. From the Inuit, “a flat face and small extremities are easier to keep warm. . . the very tough jaw comes from the very tough diet, which regularly includes raw, frozen meat or walrus hide.”¹⁹⁶

A. W. Greeley charted sightings of hybridized Inuits with European features found across the Arctic (next map). He shared the belief of Fridtjof Nansen that the Norse absorbed into the Inuit lifestyle, with some taller and with fairer complexions. He also based this on linguistic similarities of dialects from the east:

That the admixture of alien blood among the hybrid natives of Victoria Land originated in regions to the eastward seems assured from the greater homogeneity of the language and of the customs of the blond Eskimo with those of eastern tribes than with the tribal characteristics of their Inuit brethren to the west.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Stefánsson, 194-95.

¹⁹⁶ *Essay Pride*, “Inuit Eskimos.”

¹⁹⁷ Greeley, 1229-1238.

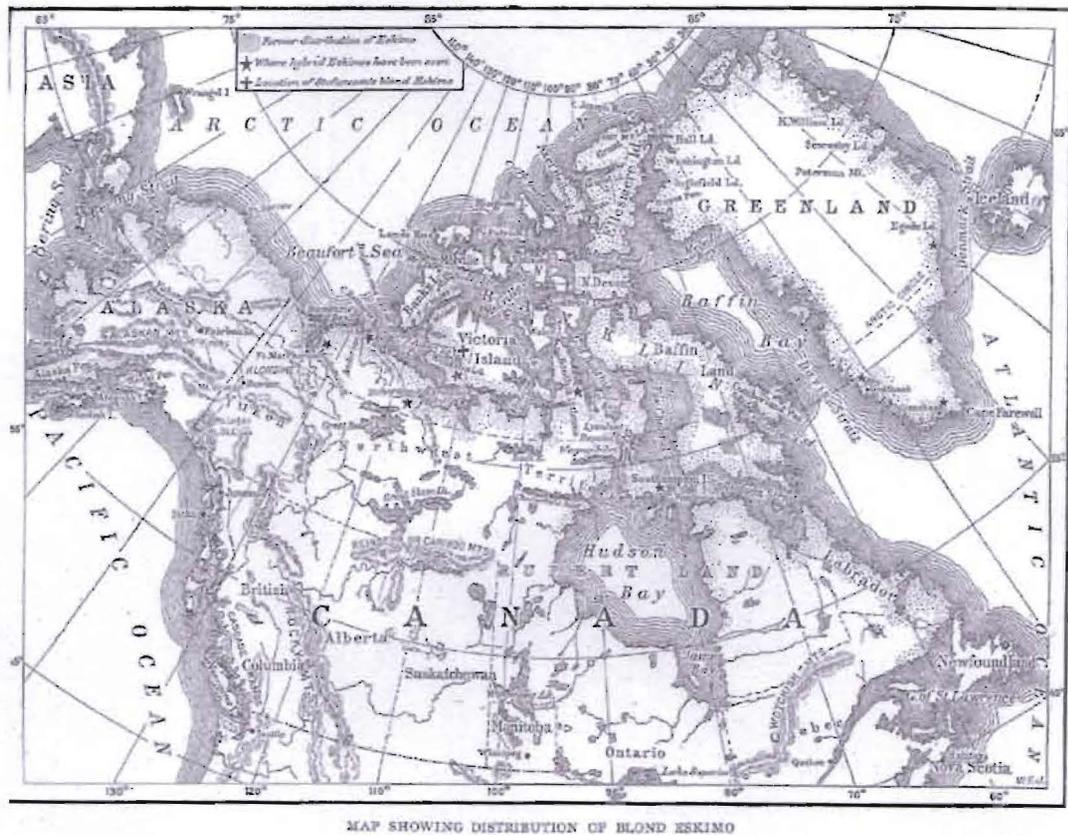


Figure 13: Map Showing Distribution of “Blond Eskimos.”¹⁹⁸

Explorers in the Davis Strait between Baffin Island and in the high Canadian Arctic reported many sightings of European-looking Inuit. Originally reported by Cesar de Rochefort, one of the earliest reports was in 1656 from Flemish Captain Nicholas Tunes at 72 degrees north on Baffin Island in the Davis Strait:

In regard to the inhabitants we saw two kinds, who lived together on the most friendly terms. Of these one kind is very tall, well built, rather fair complexion, and very swift of foot. The others were very much smaller, of olive complexion, and tolerably well proportioned, except that their legs are short and thick. The former kind delight in hunting, for which

¹⁹⁸ Greeley, 1224. See Appendix B for larger map. Stars mark sightings of “Blond Eskimos.” Victoria Island with a cross was the location of Stefánsson’s “Blond Eskimos,” and had been marked as uninhabited before Stefánsson visited the island. (Greeley, 1225).

they are suited by their agility and natural disposition, whereas the latter occupy themselves in fishing.¹⁹⁹

From the writings of A. W. Greeley came the following descriptions. Captain B. Back described an Inuit at Back River in 1833 with a very luxuriant beard. Sir John Franklin wrote of an Inuit near the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1921: "His complexion was very fresh and red, and he had a longer beard than I had ever seen on an aboriginal inhabitant of America." Sir Edward Parry wrote of natives on the shores of Lyon Inlet in 1821: "We could scarcely believe them to be Eskimo. . . Several children had complexions nearly as fair as Europeans." Capt. G. F. Lyon described natives near Cape Pembroke, Southampton Island in 1824: "The face of the woman was as perfect an oval as that of an European girl, with regular and even pretty features. . . The other women had the usual broad, flat faces and high cheek bones."²⁰⁰

Given the European characteristics found by Stefánsson, William Hovgaard noted that European women as well as men were part of ethnic mixing with the Inuit.²⁰¹ This fit with genetic information about recessive genes: if one parent had the dominant gene, and the other had the recessive gene, the child had the dominant gene, but could pass on the recessive gene to offspring. If the recessive gene appeared, both parents carried the recessive gene, although they might show the dominant gene themselves.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Greeley, 1229. While Greeley inserted Greenland in the text, Stefánsson did not, and Holand gave the reference as Baffin Island, the far more logical choice between Baffin Island and Greenland.

²⁰⁰ Greeley, 1229-30. The girl's mother was with her and had the same appearance.

²⁰¹ Hovgaard, 46-48, 50.

²⁰² *JRank Articles*, "Genetics - Dominant and Recessive Traits," <http://science.jrank.org/pages/2988/Genetics-Dominant-recessive-traits.html> (accessed 11 November, 2011). As an example, my dark haired, dark-eyed brother and sister-in-law produced two children with red hair and blue eyes due to a red-headed, blue-eyed maternal grandfather, and a blond-haired blue eyed paternal grandmother.

In conclusion, extensive evidence suggested that the Western Settlement went into the Canadian Arctic. From Inuit legend and European sightings, the settlers probably went to Labrador, then Baffin Island, and finally to an uninhabited area of the Canadian Arctic at Victoria Island. Modern knowledge of genetics suggested that the red-haired and light-eyed hybridized Inuit called Tunnit, Tournit, Tunnek, Tunit, or “Blond Eskimos” had recessive European traits from both parents. Facial hair in full beards and baldness were also non-Inuit characteristics. The dialect and customs of this hybridized Inuit came from eastern regions, not the central Arctic where they settled to hunt musk ox, and suggested that the newcomers learned the dialect before leaving Greenland. Finally, early missionaries heard the term “Greenlanders” freely mixed with the derogatory term about the new tribe that could not clean sealskin properly. The evidence clearly supported the Western Settlement as moving throughout the Canadian Arctic after leaving Greenland.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

While the Western Settlement was initially prosperous and free from outside restrictions, these factors disappeared with a cooling climate, competition with the Thule, and restrictions from the Norwegian monarchy and Catholic Church. The Norse eventually saw the handwriting on the wall, and evacuated their settlement while they still had the boats and physical strength to do so.

Physically the Norse faced risks to their survival and prosperity. Longer winters were harder on the slowly-dying smaller Norse cows. More sea ice made breathing holes difficult for the ring-neck seal, which the Thule followed down the coast. Peaceful interactions between the Thule and Norse disappeared in competition for hunting grounds, particularly in the slaughter of Norse domestic animals by the Thule. Archeologists found a deadly skirmish at one farm, which prompted the Norse to break out of their bottle-necked fjord system before another attack from the Thule.

Economically, the Norse faced equally important conflicts. Restrictions on shipping from the Norwegian crown diminished their ability to ship trade goods, except to the Eastern Settlement, which used the profit to support an extensive ecclesiastical building program, at odds with Viking values. The Roman Catholic Church wanted the best farmland and ownership of privately-built churches. The Norse paid their last of increasing taxes and tithes in 1327, with no priests, no sacraments, and no desire to support a system that ignored them. They gave more than they got, and left.

Leaving Greenland meant the third move by the Norse away from civilization to a western new world in less than 500 years. In the 870s, they left Norway for Iceland, fleeing the violence of a new king. Icelanders never voted for another king, and remain the world's oldest democracy. In 986, Erik the Red led twenty-five ships to Greenland, seeking new land for farms, but also freedom from the blood feuds of Iceland. Finally, in the 1340s, the Western Settlement left civilization for the new world, never to return or be heard from again. They had a communal system and rapidly mounted a full scale evacuation of the core of the settlement, taking the fastest, safest sailing route across Davis Strait. The Eastern Settlement was part of the problem, and they did not notify them of their departure, or where they were going. Inuit legends placed them first in Labrador, then north on Baffin Island, and finally inland to the central High Arctic, where they either learned to behave themselves or picked up the social skills to intermingle in an Inuit culture. The reddish beards and light-colored eyes in the north were a sign of non-native blood long before European explorers entered the region.

In summary, the Norse probably left the Christian world according to the note rebuilt by Bishop Gisle Oddsson, traveling to the New World. His date of 1342 made historical sense based on sailing dates from Norway. Feeling threatened both physically by the Thule and climate change, and economically by the Norwegian crown, the Roman Catholic Church, and the highly Europeanized Eastern Settlement, the Norse in the Western Settlement voluntarily left en masse for the new world, probably in 1342.

APPENDIX A

Epilogue: Losing and Finding Greenland

The last official contact with the Greenland settlements was a wedding at Hvalsøfjord Church in the Eastern Settlement on September 16, 1408, attended by both Greenlanders and Icelanders. While the last recorded ship left Greenland in 1410, the Eastern Settlement probably survived until the end of the 1400s.²⁰³ However, Norwegian kings had already abandoned the Greenland colonies, with the last royal ship (nicknamed the “knarren”) sinking in 1369. Norway could not feed itself due to bad harvests and climate cooling before the Black Death of 1349 killed about half its population.²⁰⁴ Monastic problems led to the Kalmar Union in 1397 joining Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. While Norway slowly lost interest in the colonies due to its own problems from climate cooling and the Black Death, Danish monarch dominating this union had no interest in Greenland and other Atlantic islands from the start, focusing instead on the Baltic region and Germany.²⁰⁵ In 1393 and 1428, pirates destroyed Bergen, with a bloodbath of seamen erasing memory of the sailing routes to the Greenland colonies.²⁰⁶ In 1379, the Thule attacked the Eastern Settlement, killing 18 people, and carrying off two boys into slavery.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Poul Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde ved Verdens Ende: Skildringer fra Grønlands Middelalder [The Old Norse Colonies at the End of the World: Stories from Greenland's Middle Ages]* (København: Udvalget for Folkeoplysning Fremme, 1934), 133. Another source says September 14th.

²⁰⁴ Nansen, 98-99. Rates varied from one third to two thirds of the population dead, with Bergen crushed by “special virulence.”

²⁰⁵ Anthony Tuck, “Some Evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian Relations at the End of the Fourteenth Century,” *Medieval Scandinavia* 5, 1972, 75-76.

²⁰⁶ Ingstad, 99, keep looking for the better reference.

²⁰⁷ Gad, *Grønland*, 72.

While many thought to assist Greenland, help did not arrive. Pope Nicolaus V asked bishops nearest to Greenland to help the settlers in 1448, citing problems with pirates taking away colonists from the Eastern settlement.²⁰⁸ A Danish-Norwegian State Expedition of 1472-73 skipped a visit to the Norse settlements, helping King Alfonso V of Portugal look for new land to the west.²⁰⁹ In 1492, Pope Alexander VI optimistically appointed Mads Knudsen as the Bishop of Gardar at the end of the world in Greenland.²¹⁰ Archbishop Erik Walchendorff assembled records about Greenland during his term at Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim (1510-1521), and was the first to place both the Eastern and Western Settlement on the east coast of Greenland, nearest to Iceland.²¹¹

In 1585, Englishman John Davis sailed into Gilbert Sound near Godthaabsfjorden (near the Western Settlement) as the first official European visit in modern times. Fishermen or whalers from other nations had been there before him, as he found many bodies buried on an island in 1586.²¹² Frederik II thought of sending a ship in 1568 to Greenland, but ended up in a war with Sweden instead. Kristian IV sent a total of three expeditions to the Greenlandic West Coast in 1605-07, without finding the settlements.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Lindegaard, 121.

²⁰⁹ Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 135.

²¹⁰ Lindegaard, 33. The island lacked bread, wine, and oil, and lived on dried fish and milk. Ships could only sail there in August according to this account.

²¹¹ Graah, 7; Fyllingsnes, 37. Alternate spelling Valkendorf.

²¹² Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 145. Covered only with sealskin with a cross on top, these were not the Norse but European fishermen of unknown nationality.

²¹³ Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 145. Many other expeditions seeking the Northwest Passage noted European-looking Inuits, but failed to find the colonies in Greenland.

The Western Settlement remained lost until 1721 when Norwegian missionary Hans Egede founded Godthaab (now Nuuk). While hoping to find the Norse settlers and bring them back into the Christian faith, he saw instead the ruins of the Western Settlement that the Inuit showed him.²¹⁴ In 1723, he wrote of the badly collapsed church ruin at Ujaragssuit near Godthaab: "I have since asked the savages if they had destroyed this stone building, but they answered that the Norwegians themselves did it when they left the country; that is all they know about this." Deeply disappointed about never finding the Eastern Settlement, he sailed unknowingly by these ruins in 1723.²¹⁵ In 1729, the newly appointed Governor of Greenland, Major Claus Enevold Paars, tried unsuccessfully to take an expedition over the icecap from Austmannadalen to find the settlers on the east coast.²¹⁶

When repeated expeditions failed to reach the ice-bound eastern coast of Greenland, H. P. von Eggers looked at medieval writings in 1792, and concluded that the Eastern Settlement was at Julianehaab on the west coast.²¹⁷ W. A. Graah dug up the Hvalsey Church (visited earlier by Egede), and verified the west coast location of the Eastern Settlement in 1828.²¹⁸ In 1884, when explorers thoroughly explored Greenland's East Coast, the dream of finding live settlers from the Norse colonies finally died.

²¹⁴ Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 145-46. Egede was successful as a missionary, earning the title as the "Apostle of the Inuits."

²¹⁵ Poul Nørlund, *Viking Settlers in Greenland and their descendants during Five Hundred Years* (New York: Krause Reprint Co., 1971, Reprint, original Copenhagen: G. E. Gads Forlag, 1936), 139.

²¹⁶ Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 145-46. Paars left from the bottom of the Ameralikfjord within sight of the largest Sandnes farm of the Western Settlement.

²¹⁷ Nørlund, *De Gamle Nordbobygde*, 147.

²¹⁸ Seaver, *The Last Vikings*, 200.

APPENDIX B

Pictures from Sandnes Farm, Western Settlement



Figure 14: Sandnes Farm from boat, August 20, 2011



Figure 15: From beach, looking back up fjord



Figure 16: Norse excavations at Sandnes Farm, church under water



Figure 17: Caribou horns, hunting in mountains

Best caribou hunting in Greenland is in mountains behind Western Settlement. Many hunters have abandoned horns here and at the beach. Excavation junk is in foreground.



Figure 18: Cairn, tall grass, river in background



Figure 19: Across fjord, Austmannadal to left

The grass was tall, waving in the wind. It was a beautiful peaceful setting, with mild weather on August 20, 2011. Norse used cairns for directional markers and for hunting.

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