

# Going Home to Tasiujaq

The end of the HBC Post era

by David F. Pelly

**A**nnie Tatty, 81 years old, spry and engaged as ever, leaned in close to the tiny window of our single-otter chartered plane as we passed low over the cliffs that line the southern edge of Ukkusiksalik, Wager Bay. It's a dramatic moment on the flight from Rankin Inlet north to the most magnificent fiord in western Hudson Bay, when the view below suddenly opens up over the waters of this inland sea. For Tatty, the drama had an extra edge of emotion, as she peered eastward toward her childhood home at Piqsimaniq, beside a cascading river mouth on the north side of Ukkusiksalik.

The Old HBC post  
at Tasiujaq.





**Iqungajuq, aka Wager Dick or Native Dick, manager of the HBC Post at Tasiujaq 1933-45, and the adoptive father of Robert Tatty.**

The waters of Ukkusiksalik sparkle benignly on this calm sunny day in late July, 2010. There is next to no ice left in the bay. The hills rising up behind us are green. It's as inviting a scene as one could want for a return home. With Annie Tatty on the plane are a few members of her family, who share her physical and spiritual connection to this land in a way that the rest of us can only imagine, though the beauty and allure of the place is clear to everyone.

After our plane landed, and we settled into camp, Annie began to reminisce.

"I really liked living here. It is beautiful in Ukkusiksalik. Maybe because I was a child, it has always seemed to be beautiful at that time. We were usually alone. My father always tried to be where there were fewer people around because the food could run out early if there were too many people."

Annie Tatty was adopted at birth, in 1929, by Joseph Kakak and Paula Angnaujuq, who lived near present-day Repulse Bay. They later moved down to Piqsimaniq because the hunting for caribou and seals, and the fishing for Arctic char, provided such a reliable source of food.

"The animals that we eat were the only food that we had at that time so we had to keep on moving in order to survive. We would travel inland to hunt caribou. We would cache the meat so that they can get them in wintertime. [In September] we would start hunting seals because we would have to use the *qulliq* to make water, boiled meat and tea. We would travel where the seals were closer, to hunt, and we would have a camp there, at Tikiraarjuk. We had a huge iglu, [so big] we had to use four *qulliq*. The *qulliq* was the only thing that can make heat either in summertime or winter. The ringed seals and the caribou were hunted most often. When it was springtime and summer we

used to catch many fish, with those fish spears, *kakivak*, and sometimes we would use nets – the ones that Inuit made."

Annie remembers her father leaving their camp at Piqsimaniq or Tikiraarjuk to take his fox skins to the trading post, either at Repulse Bay or at Tasiujaq, at the very western (inland) extremity of Ukkusiksalik. Sometimes she went along. She knew the people who lived there – Iqungajuq, who eventually became the post manager, his daughter Tuinnaq, and his son Tatty – but she never imagined then that she would one day marry into that family, and live at the post. As she relates it, "Inuit used to make plans who is who that will marry," meaning it was an arranged marriage, put into effect when she was not quite 16 years old.

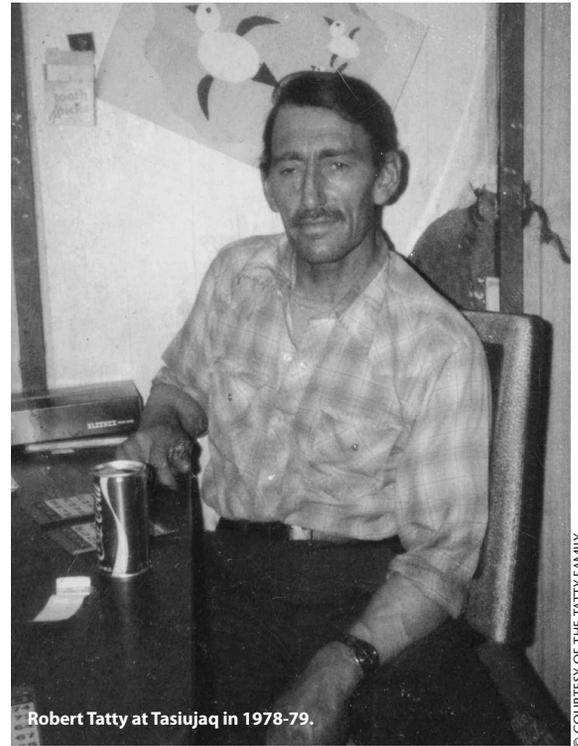
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Robert Tatty's father was W.E. "Buster" Brown, post manager at Ukkusiksalik for the outfit year 1926-27, but he left before his son was born. Tatty's mother, Toota, was one of Iqungajuq's wives, so naturally Tatty became an adopted son. When the last of the *qallunaat* managers left in the summer of 1933, Tatty was not quite six years old. Iqungajuq took over as the post manager, and soon young Tatty was helping out, in effect helping to run the family business. Tasiujaq was home, in the deepest sense possible.

Fast forward many years, and it is no surprise that Robert and Annie Tatty decided in 1978 to move their family back to the old Tasiujaq post in Ukkusiksalik. He loaded some of his family and an array of supplies onto his Peterhead boat in Rankin Inlet – where he and Annie had raised their family since 1959 – and they headed north to Ukkusiksalik. She remembers it well.

“Tatty wanted to come back here. We heard about polar bear hunters, those *qallunaat* from America. If they were to come here to hunt polar bears he [Tatty] wanted to make money because the mine was closed at that time in Rankin Inlet. He needed a job. We have some pictures of the polar bear hunters that went hunting in this area. In the winter when the spring was near, he guided them at Nuvukliit area. I think there were two hunters. There are pictures of them. You could tell it was cold, cold winter – they have all their thick caribou parkas.”

The family lived at the old HBC post from the summer of 1978 until the summer of 1980. Tatty and his wife stayed in the larger building at the back, known by the HBC as the “Native house.” Others came with them. The Ukaliq family stayed in the old store, the smaller building on the west side of the site. “Kaluk’s [son Paul’s] family came here with us at the same time” – they stayed in the old manager’s house, the building to the east. “When Kaluk’s family went home to Rankin Inlet, Kakak’s [son John’s] family



Robert Tatty at Tasiujaq in 1978-79.

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Annie Tatty during her return visit to Tasiujaq in 2010.

came here to live with us.” At this time, the generators were moved to the old manager’s house, the porch of that building was shifted over to the old store, and John Tatty’s family lived in that porch. Robert and Annie Tatty continued to live in the old “Native house,” with Simeoni’s family (wife Minnie and young daughter Dorothy) living upstairs in the loft. Food from the land was abundant. Life, it seemed, was good. Tatty was back at his true home.

“During the summer we would go buy food supplies, but people from Rankin Inlet would travel to where we were [and bring some store-bought food]. We got many fox skins. We have some pictures – the fox skins are hanging. They caught many foxes. The fox skins are easy to clean but the wolf skins are harder to clean because they are very thin. I did not have any help. People mostly from Repulse Bay used to visit. People who went hunting to this area. They knew they can fill up their gas from here, so they used to come here to hunt.

“If Tatty did not get ill – he was ill for a while – we would have stayed there longer. When he got ill, we went to Rankin Inlet and right after we went to Rankin Inlet, he went away for medical – he had to have surgery. He was ill and I also told him our children have to go to school as well. He started to think that I was homesick so we went home. After the two years we have stayed here, we never did come back here,” said Annie, with

a hint of sadness, sitting by the shore at Tasiujaq during the 2010 trip, going home for one last time. It was a long while since 1980, when Robert Tatty moved his family back to Rankin Inlet, and was never to return again.

With that, the long and storied history of the HBC buildings at Tasiujaq came to an end, 55 years after their hasty construction started in the autumn of 1925. All three buildings soon began to decay, and may one day return to nature. But, fortunately, the colourful stories of the lives, which unfolded in those buildings, are preserved. 

*Long-time contributor David Pelly (www.davidpelly.com) wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the family of the late Robert Tatty (1927-2009) in the preparation and illustration of this article.*