

# *Mercy Mission:*

## Connie Beattie & Arctic Polio, 1949

### 13 ESKIMOS VICTIMS OF POLIO EPIDEMIC

40,000 Square Miles in Arctic  
Put Under Quarantine—  
'Carrier' Is Traced

By P. J. PHILIP

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

OTTAWA, March 8—Medical experts who flew to Chesterfield Inlet on the west shore of Hudson Bay last week to investigate an epidemic of poliomyelitis among Canadian Eskimos have returned here with an amazing story of the reasons why an area of 40,000 square miles of Arctic territory has been quarantined.

### By Christopher J. Ruddy, Ph.D.

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University of Toronto

Presented @ Toronto Medical Historical Club

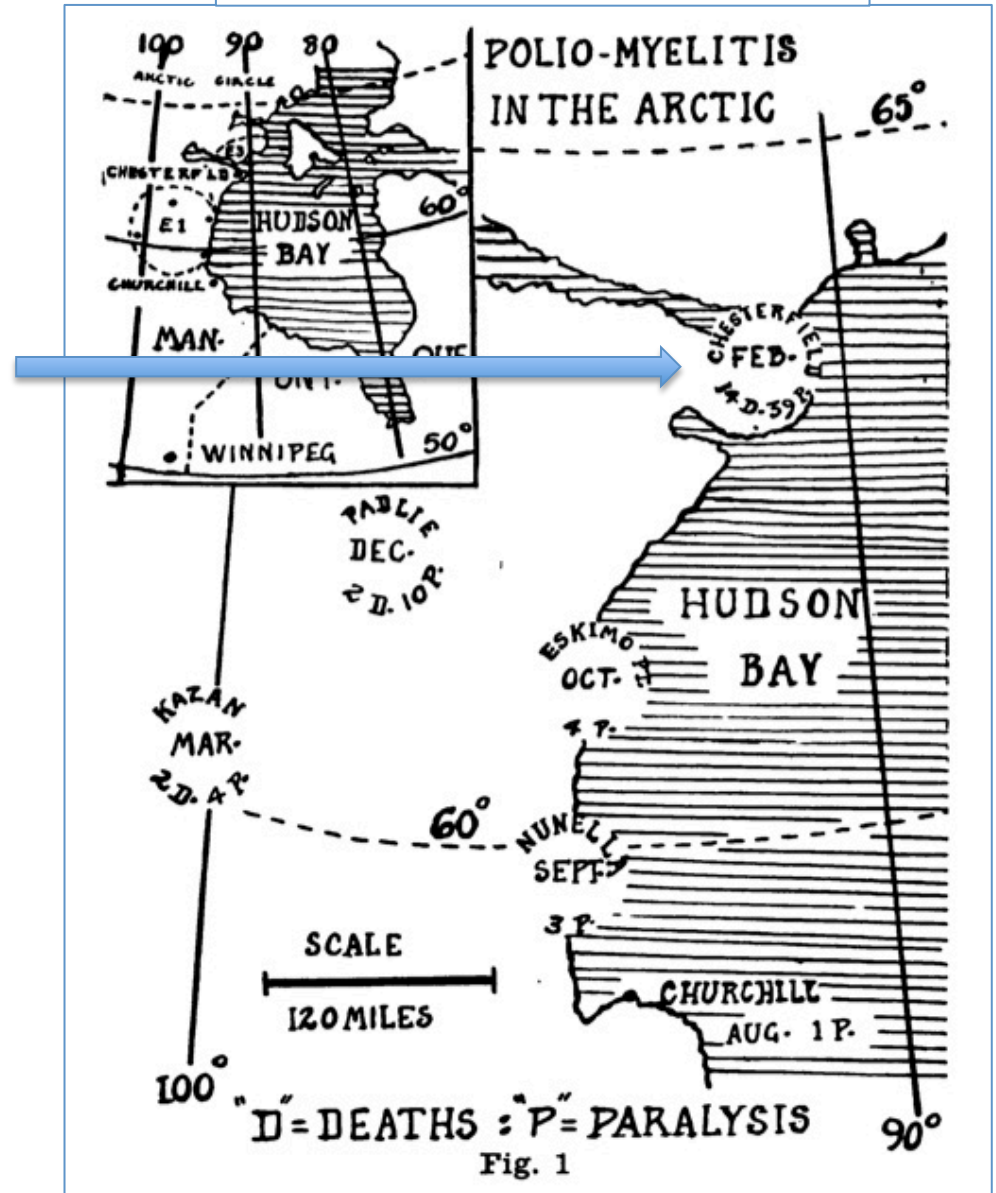
February 22, 2019



# Introduction

- **Feb 22, 1949** – Exactly 70 years ago today, a major polio epidemic reached its peak in the Arctic outpost of Chesterfield Inlet, NWT (now Nunavut) on the west coast of Hudson Bay
- **1911** - Chesterfield Inlet is the oldest permanent settlement in Nunavut, first established as a Hudson Bay post
- **1912** - Roman Catholic Mission
- **1914** - RCMP base
- **1921** – Meteorological station
- **1925** - Radio station
- **1931** - Mission Hospital

Canadian Medical Association Journal, Oct. 1949, p. 339



# Introduction

- **Feb 26** – However, the first newspaper reports of what was described as an “obscure malady,” which had so far killed four Eskimos, did not suggest polio as the cause, although the “rapid and severe paralysis” was certainly similar to polio
- The cause was very likely a virus, although specimens would have to be secured and then sent to Connaught Medical Research Laboratories at the University of Toronto for confirmation

## MALADY KILLS FOUR IN ARCTIC QUARANTINE 40,000 SQ. MILES

Ottawa, Feb. 26 — (CP) — A vast region of Canada's sub-Arctic today was under quarantine as the government prepared to investigate an “obscure” malady which has affected 25 persons, killing four.

Causing rapid and severe paralysis, the sickness had struck at Chesterfield Inlet, 350 miles north of Churchill, Man., on the north-western shore of Hudson Bay.

Both whites and Eskimos are believed affected. To reach the point an R.C.A.F. Dakota will take off from Winnipeg next week on the 1,000-mile mercy flight to Chesterfield Inlet, carrying three doctors and 300 pounds of medical supplies.

Meanwhile, R.C.M.P. detachments at “central points” will prohibit and halt travel to and from the area under quarantine, extending 200 miles inland from the inlet to Baker Lake and the same distance to Eskimo Point, where another epidemic took several lives last year.

R.C.M.P. officers will inform natives not to leave the area. Army signals stations will be employed to pass warning of the quarantine through the north.

However, because of the vastness of the region and its isolation from civilization, it will not be possible, said a health department spokesman last night, to rigidly enforce the quarantine.

Physiotherapy equipment for combatting paralysis will be among the articles flown in from Winnipeg in the flight due to take off Monday, health department spokesmen said. One item was expected to be a bicycle for working paralysis out of muscles.

Chesterfield Inlet, chief settlement on the Hudson bay shore north of Churchill, has a mission, an R.C.M.P. detachment and a trading post.

### Mobilize Resources

First indication of trouble at Chesterfield Inlet came to Ottawa only three days ago. Mobilization of health department resources followed a more urgent message Thursday. The air force was called upon for flying facilities.

In a statement, Hon. Paul Martin, minister of health, said last night: “The exact nature of the epidemic has not been determined. But it is suspected of being of virus origin. Specimens for laboratory examination are being secured and sent to Connaught Laboratories in Toronto.

*Toronto Star*, Feb. 26, 1949, p. 2

# Introduction

- **March 1** – Reports soon said that there were 25 Eskimo cases with 11 deaths from the “mystery malady” -- out of a local population of 250 -- although none of the 20 resident “whites” seemed affected
- An unprecedented 40,000 square mile (100,000+ sq. km) quarantine of the area had been ordered
- A “mercy flight” with 5 doctors and medical supplies was prepared

**Mystery Malady  
Kills 11 Eskimos,  
Strikes Others**

Winnipeg, Feb. 28 (CP).—Eskimos in the sub-Arctic Chesterfield Inlet region tonight counted 11 deaths due to a mysterious malady sweeping the area 1,000 miles north of here.

The report came from Dr. J. P. Moody, Dominion Health Department official at Chesterfield Inlet, as the Health Department and RCAF were preparing for a mercy flight to the northern outpost with doctors and medical supplies.

In addition to the 11 dead—seven more than earlier reports indicated—an undisclosed number were said to be stricken with the strange sickness, symptoms of which included rapid and severe paralysis.

Five doctors, headed by Dr. W. J. Wood of Winnipeg, regional superintendent of Dominion Indian Health Services, will be aboard the RCAF Dakota when it leaves here tomorrow to take aid to the ailing Eskimo population of the Eastern Northwest Territories.

On instructions from Ottawa, the region — embracing 40,000 square miles — already has been quarantined to prevent the sickness from spreading.

Toronto Star, March 1, 1949, p. 10

Accompanying Dr. Wood will be Dr. J. D. Adamson, professor of medicine at the University of Manitoba; Dr. A. F. W. Pert, chief of the Dominion's Health Department's epidemiology division; Dr. J. C. Wilt, assistant pathologist, Winnipeg General Hospital; and Major Roy A. Smillie, hygiene officer for the Canadian Army's Prairie Command.

Dr. Wood said it was hoped that after examination of the stricken Eskimos the disease could be diagnosed and adequate steps taken to prevent its spread.

At the same time he suggested that two epidemics might be prevalent, one caused by food poisoning, the other by a virus spreading some nervous diseases. Food poisoning, he said, could have been caused by whites and Eskimos storing caribou meat before cold weather set in and allowing it to rot.

Piloting the mercy plane will be Flt. Lt. C. Allison of Vancouver.

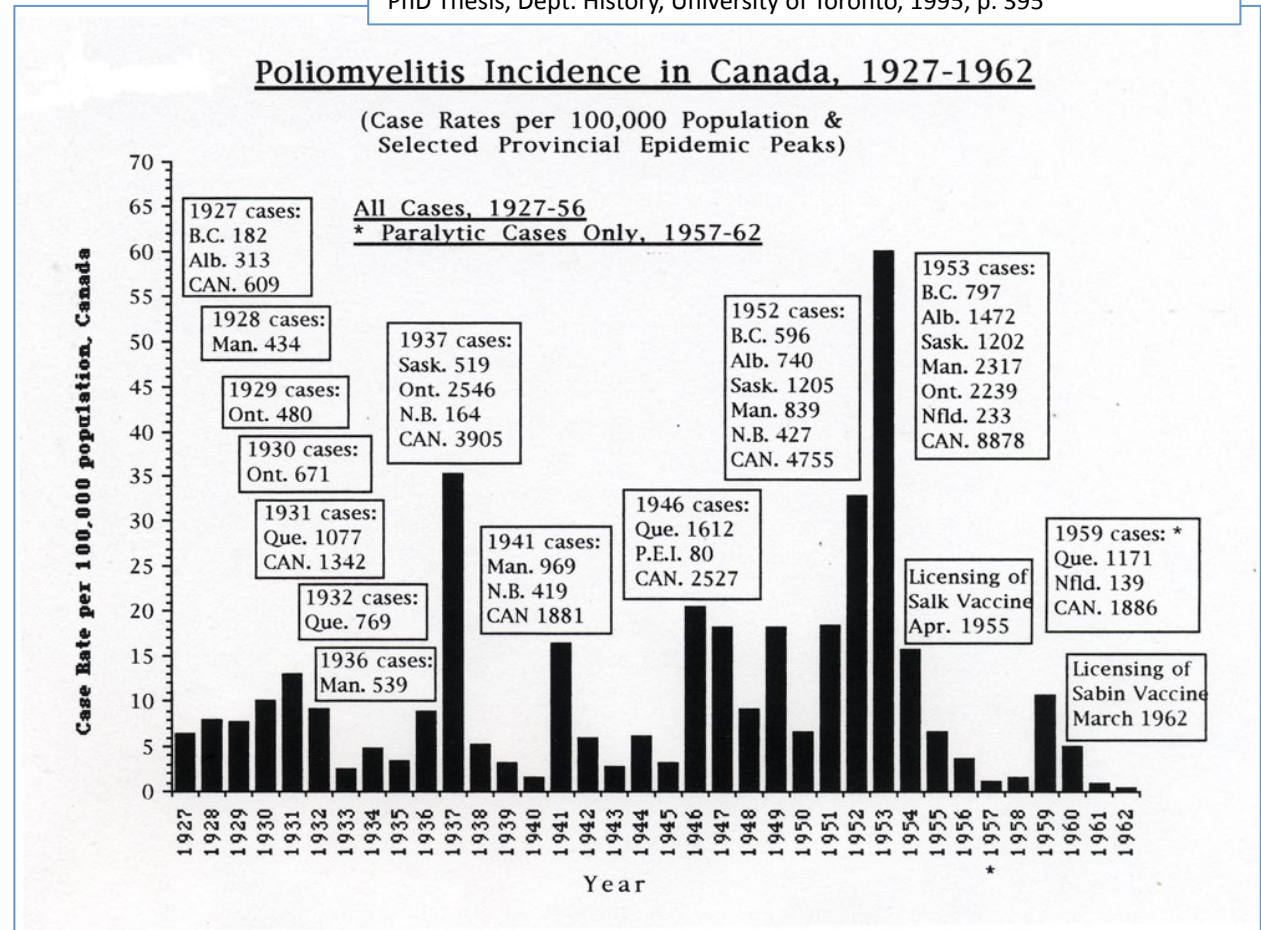
Air force officials said the Dakota will fly from Winnipeg to Chesterfield Inlet, where the doctors and medical supplies will be left. The aircraft then will proceed to Churchill, Man., to await developments.

In addition to Eskimos, population of Chesterfield Inlet, on the west coast of Hudson Bay, 350 miles north of Churchill includes approximately 20 whites, among them two Roman Catholic fathers, one brother, and four or five grey nun sisters at the settlement's hospital.

# Introduction

C.J. Ruty, "Do Something! Do Anything! Poliomyelitis in Canada, 1927-1962"  
 PhD Thesis, Dept. History, University of Toronto, 1995, p. 395

- Very little about this outbreak fit what was known about polio at the time, especially it striking so far north in the middle of winter when the average temperature was near  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$



- By 1949, Canada had experienced polio epidemics regularly, and often very severely, but while much remained mysterious about polio's virology, immunology and epidemiology, "polio season" was clearly during the summer/fall and its primary victims were children

# Introduction

- **March 7, 1949** - This CBC Radio News report sums up the dramatic situation

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1724050262>



1949: Polio epidemic hits Northern Canada  
**Digital Archives**

March 7, 1949 | 03:10

The crippling disease that is sweeping Canada reaches the North, where no treatment facilities exist.

# Introduction

- The physiotherapist they would soon find was Constance Marie Beattie, better known as “Connie”, who was born on August 24, 1924, in Brockville, Ontario
- **June 1945** – Connie graduated from the Physiotherapy Undergraduate Program, University of Toronto, then joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and served in Nanaimo, Brandon and Portage la Prairie

Constance Marie Beattie  
Brockville, Ont. (3)

From Brockville our Connie came  
A knowledge of Physio to gain.  
Always witty and full of pep,  
The Army's her future,  
She's our Social Rep.

Torontonensis, 1945, p. 146



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie (Connie's nephew)

# Introduction

- **1947** – Connie joined the Physiotherapy staff at Toronto East General Hospital and in 1948 became head of the department



- **1948-49** – She was also president of the Toronto branch of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association
- **Jan – Mar 1949** – While polio cases were mounting in the Arctic, Connie was organizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Congress and General Meeting of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, set for April 1-2 in Toronto

35 TORONTO DAILY STAR: Thur., March 31, 1949

## CANADIAN PHYSIOTHERAPISTS MEET IN TORONTO FRIDAY

The Canadian Physiotherapy association is holding its 29th annual meeting and third congress Friday and Saturday of this week at the Royal York hotel. Constance Beattie, president of the Toronto branch of the association has arranged a program of lectures by prominent local doctors.

Following a business meeting and luncheon in the Tudor Room, Friday, members will hear lectures by Dr. Paul McGoey of the staff of St. Michael's hospital and Dr. Stewart Gordon, of Toronto General hospital.

On Saturday Dr. Stewart Wright, Queen Elizabeth hospital will speak on the problems of the chronically ill. Dr. H. Cranfield, director of physiotherapy for D.V.A. will describe a new treatment of convalescent polio and a practical demonstration of the treatment will be given by Barbara Ross. Other speakers during the day will be Dr. C. P. McCormick, of the staff of the University of Toronto and Dr. H. M. Coleman, Toronto East General hospital staff.

At the dinner being held Saturday evening, in the Tudor room, Dr. J. McFarlane, dean of medicine, U. of T., will act as chairman. Dr. Robert McClure, recently returned from China, will be guest speaker. Among the special guests will be Dr. J. B. Menelle and Mrs. Menelle from England. Dr. Menelle is regarded as one of the foremost specialists in physical medicine. Other guests include; Mary Haskell, from the American association; Mrs. Gwyn Gower-Rees, chief physiotherapist of Canada; Lieut. (P.A.) G. Pinhorn, physiotherapist for the Army Medical Corp; Dr. Duncan Graham and Mrs. Graham, Dr. J. R. McRae, Dr. R. J. Galloway, Dr. W. J. Gardiner, Mrs. J. C. Dickinson, Dr. E. H. Botterell and Constance Beattie. Delegates from the Vancouver, Halifax and West Virginia will also be present.



—Photo by John Palmer.  
**CONSTANCE BEATTIE**



# Introduction

- **March 29** – Connie was the only real choice to answer a distress call issued by the Department of Indian Affairs
- A physiotherapist was urgently needed to provide muscle re-education to Inuit polio victims in the Arctic settlement of Chesterfield Inlet
- **March 31** – As she told her parents, “The whole thing started the day before yesterday when the CPA had a wire from Winnipeg asking for a girl to go north and treat the Eskimos. I asked to be first on the list so they sent my name...”

**TORONTO NURSE TO TREAT  
18 ESKIMO POLIO VICTIMS**

**STAR APR 2 1949**

The first physiotherapist ever to be sent across the Arctic circle, 24-year-old Constance Beattie will soon be treating 18 polio-infected Eskimos at Chesterfield Inlet. Miss Beattie, as president of the Toronto branch of the Canadian Physiotherapy association, was first to receive a letter from the department of Indian affairs at Ottawa, asking for volunteers. She wired back immediately, asking that her name be put first on the list.

Nine days from today, Miss Beattie will go to Winnipeg to spend three weeks treating Eskimos there. Then she will go 400 miles inside the Arctic circle to Chesterfield Inlet for a four-month stay.

Near the end of last January a mysterious plague was reported among the Eskimos around Chesterfield Inlet. Later it was discovered there were over 60 cases of poliomyelitis. Since then, 13 have died.

“It will be a thrilling adventure,” she exclaimed. “It will be a chance to help those unfortunate Eskimos who don’t have half the chance that polio victims have down here.” She said she probably would live in the seven-bed hospital which has been improvised to care for 35 patients. There are 25 whites and 250 Eskimos at the settlement.

Constance has been working with orthopaedic cases at the Toronto East General hospital since her discharge from the army. She is in charge of the physiotherapy department, and plans returning to it after her stay in the Arctic.

“The furthest north I’ve ever been is Winnipeg,” she smiled. “I was posted there while in the army. There is one resident doctor at the Chesterfield Inlet hospital and several Grey nuns.”



**CONSTANCE BEATTIE**

- **April 2** - “It will be a thrilling adventure and a chance to help those unfortunate Eskimos who don’t have half the chance that polio victims get down here,” she told reporters when news of her Arctic mercy mission quickly spread

# Introduction

- The 1948-49 Arctic polio epidemic was a crucible in the history of polio on several levels
  - The epidemic itself and its aftermath was a multiple tragedy for the Inuit community of Chesterfield Inlet and the surrounding region
  - However, much was learned about the immunology and epidemiology of polio from the unique size, scope and features of the epidemic that would prove critical towards the development of polio vaccines
- And of special interest in this presentation, the epidemic and its impact was very much a crucible, and ultimately a tragic event, for Connie Beattie...

## The Canadian Medical Association Journal

Vol. 61

OCTOBER, 1949

No. 4

### POLIOMYELITIS IN THE ARCTIC\*

**J. D. Adamson**

*Director, Department of Medicine, University of Manitoba; Director, Department of Medicine, Deer Lodge Hospital (Department of Veterans' Affairs)*

**J. P. Moody**

*Field Medical Officer, Eastern Arctic, Indian Health Services*

**A. F. W. Peart**

*Chief, Division of Epidemiology, Department of National Health and Welfare*

**R. A. Smillie**

*Major, R.C.A.M.C., Command Hygiene Officer*

**J. C. Wilt**

*Assistant Pathologist, Winnipeg General Hospital*

and

**W. J. Wood**

*Regional Superintendent, Indian Health Services*

DURING the autumn of 1948 and the winter of 1949 a widespread epidemic of acute anterior poliomyelitis occurred in the Eastern Arctic of Canada. This epidemic has attracted much attention since it was at its height during the winter in an isolated district, sparsely settled by Eskimos who had previously had no poliomyelitis. Thorough investigation was undertaken by Indian Health Services in the Federal Department of Health and Welfare, to whom this report is accordingly submitted.

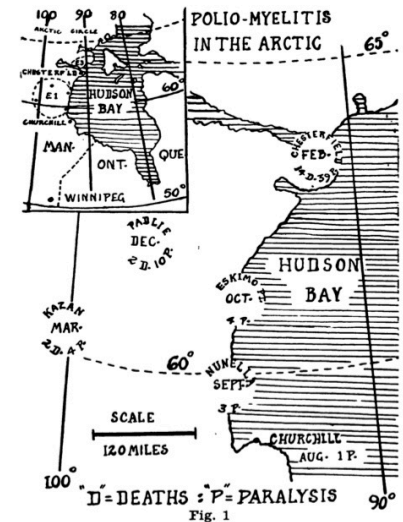
Two trips in ski-equipped aircraft were arranged by the Royal Canadian Air Force, the first in the first week of March and the second in the first week of May. The party received most valuable assistance from members of the white settlement at Chesterfield. Without

\* This study was conducted under the direction of the Department of National Health and Welfare.

their general knowledge of the Eskimo and familiarity with local conditions the important features of the epidemic could not have been discovered.

#### THE LOCALE

Reference to the map will show the area affected to be between 60 and 65° N. and between 90 and 100° W. Chesterfield Inlet is a thousand air miles north of Winnipeg. This is one of the most northerly epidemics of polio-



myelitis on record and among the very few known to have occurred in Eskimos. Arne Hoygaard<sup>1</sup> refers to an epidemic in August-November, 1925, at Angmagssalik, East Greenland (65° N.) which caused 27 deaths among 800 Eskimos. He also refers to a report of an epidemic in West Greenland by A. Bertelson<sup>2</sup> in 1935.

It will be seen that the epidemic occurred during the coldest part of an unusually cold

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Canadian Medical Association Journal, Oct. 1949, p. 339

# Polio Prelude, 1948

- By the late 1940s, “polio season” was something the press told Canadians not to panic over, despite worsening epidemics across the country
- **1946** – There was a major resurgence of polio epidemics in Canada; Quebec hit with its worst ever, 1,612 cases and 115 deaths
- **1946** - Polio also struck Paul Martin, Jr. in Windsor, just before Paul Martin Sr. was appointed Minister of National Health & Welfare
- **1948** – Federal Health Grants program launched, supports Public Health Research Grants and provincial services for crippled children

Maclean's, Aug. 1, 1948, p. 7

Maclean's Magazine, August 1, 1948

7

## DON'T PANIC OVER POLIO

By CHARLES NEVILLE

**T**HOUSANDS of parents this month will lose weight, sleep and peace of mind worrying about a disease which kills far fewer Canadian children each year than the common whooping cough. Poliomyelitis, the mysterious childhood crippler which more frequently maims than it kills, reaches its seasonal peak during the hot, humid days of mid- and late summer. It is then that a doctor, called to the bedside of a feverish sickly child who complains of stiff muscles, is most likely to shake his head and pronounce the words a parent dreads: infantile paralysis.

For this is the disease we can't forget. The victims of other more serious ailments die, are buried and pass out of mind: most of polio's victims live on, pathetically deformed and handicapped, to remind us year after year that here the crippler struck.

This year it will strike in Canada again, but how hard it is impossible to say. In the last two years there have been comparatively severe outbreaks (2,500 cases in 1946, 2,000 in 1947) and since each epidemic brings immunity both to those whose disease is diagnosed and to hundreds of others whose attacks are so mild that they are not recognized, medical authorities hope that the 1948 outbreak will be less widespread.

### The Great Unknown

**B**UT no one can predict for certain. Polio is still among the most mysterious of mankind's afflictions. During the past 10 years it has been studied more than any other disease, with the exception, possibly, of cancer. The National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis alone has spent \$15 millions in polio research since 1938 in Canada and the U. S.

To date there is no proven method of prevention or cure. No one is sure how polio spreads, why it strikes one victim and passes by a thousand others, why it makes a vicious attack in one area and then suddenly appears somewhere else hundreds of miles away, or why an epidemic one year kills one out of every four of its victims and only one out of every 25 victims the next.

Yet some of the mystery is lifting. The disease is no longer the unfathomable unknown that it was 20 and even 10 years ago. Somewhere, maybe next week, maybe a decade hence, one of the thousands of polio research projects will throw off the final secret and reveal a cure or a preventive that will close the books on one of the greatest scientific assaults of history.

But, in the meantime, the biggest comfort for parents is this:

Polio is actually an uncommon and mild disease. Doctors say that even when it reaches so-called epidemic proportions the odds of any one particular youngster contracting polio are about 1 in 1,500, so small that a professional gambler would put all his money on such a sure thing.

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Continued on page 31



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And — 30,000 to 1 against dying of it

In midsummer polio weather—

**DON'T** let your child become chilled in swimming; don't let him swim in polluted water; don't let him get overfired.

**DO** wash all fresh fruit and swat that fly; try to postpone tonsil operations till fall; call the doctor if there's polio nearby and your child is drowsy, has nausea, a fever or headache and stiffness in the neck or limbs.

# Polio Prelude, 1948

- Polio can be defined as the middle class plague, mostly striking otherwise healthy children, as well as increasing numbers of adults, particularly in new suburbs, and fueled by the post-war baby boom
- Polio epidemics worsened, ironically, because of improving public health standards, limiting what had previously been all but universal circulation of the poliovirus among infants
- The virus harmlessly infected the gastrointestinal track, but if it entered the bloodstream and invaded the nervous system, it could damage motor neurons in the spinal cord and impair nerve connections to muscles

Maclean's, Aug. 1, 1948, p. 7

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BECK & HILL

# Polio Prelude, 1948

- Improving sanitary standards delayed poliovirus exposure beyond infancy, increasing the likelihood of it attacking neurons
- Damage to the upper area of the spinal cord could lead to life-threatening paralysis of muscles that controlled breathing and swallowing; the “iron lung” was developed in the late 1920s and designed to force air in and out of the lungs
- Much remained mysterious and uniquely frightening about “The Crippler,” yet the experience of summer “polio seasons” certainly reinforced the popular, medical and scientific view of polio as a warm weather disease threat in North America

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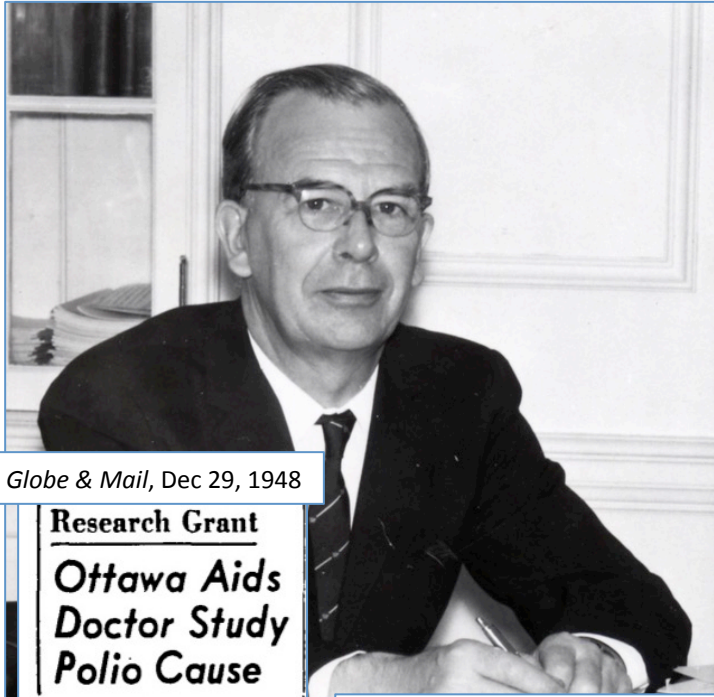
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BECK & HILL

# Polio Prelude, 1948



Globe & Mail, Dec 29, 1948

**Research Grant**  
**Ottawa Aids Doctor Study Polio Cause**

By HARVEY HICKEY  
 Ottawa, Dec. 28 (Staff).—Federal aid is being granted a Toronto scientist whose research may have a bearing on the transmission of poliomyelitis.

The scientist is Dr. Andrew J. Rhodes, research associate at the Connaught Medical Research Laboratories at Toronto and associate professor of virus infections at the University of Toronto's School of Hygiene.

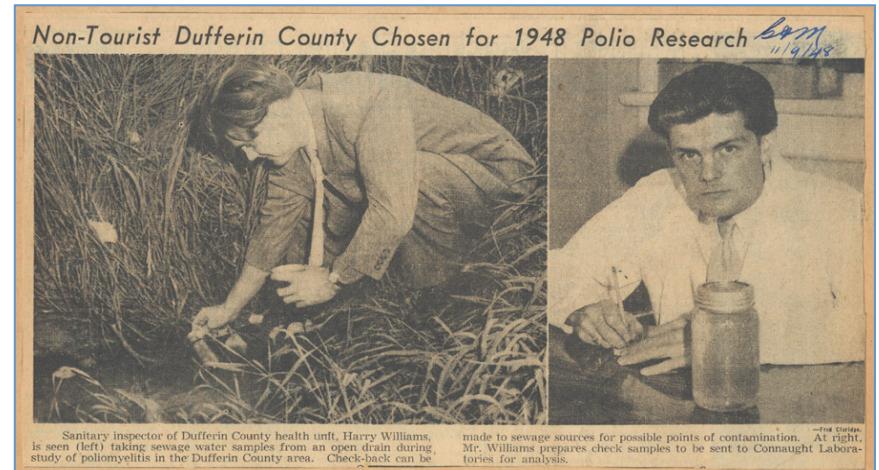
Dr. Rhodes, an Englishman, who is ranked among the top experts in his field, is investigating neurotropic viruses. This is a virus which affects the nervous system and which, scientists think, may possibly have some relationship to the development of poliomyelitis.

Doctors still don't know what causes polio. Neither do they know how the neurotropic virus is transmitted. One line of inquiry is whether it travels in sewage, and if so, how it is then picked up by the human body. Dr. Rhodes hopes to answer some of these questions.

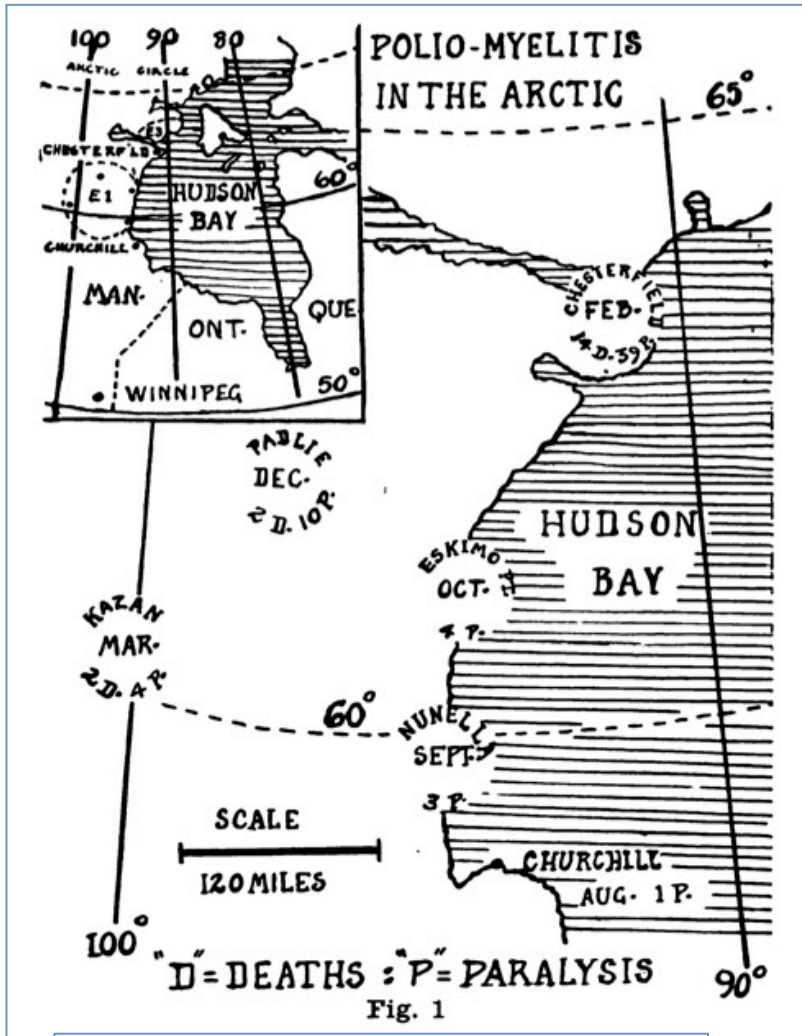
Sanofi Pasteur Canada Archives



- **1947-48** – Meanwhile, Dr. Andrew J. Rhodes, a leading virologist specializing in polio, was recruited from the U.K. to lead a comprehensive research program at Connaught Medical Research Laboratories of the University of Toronto to investigate the virology, epidemiology and clinical diagnosis of polio
- Rhodes' research was funded by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (U.S. March of Dimes), Canadian Life Insurance Companies, and the new Federal Public Health Research Grants



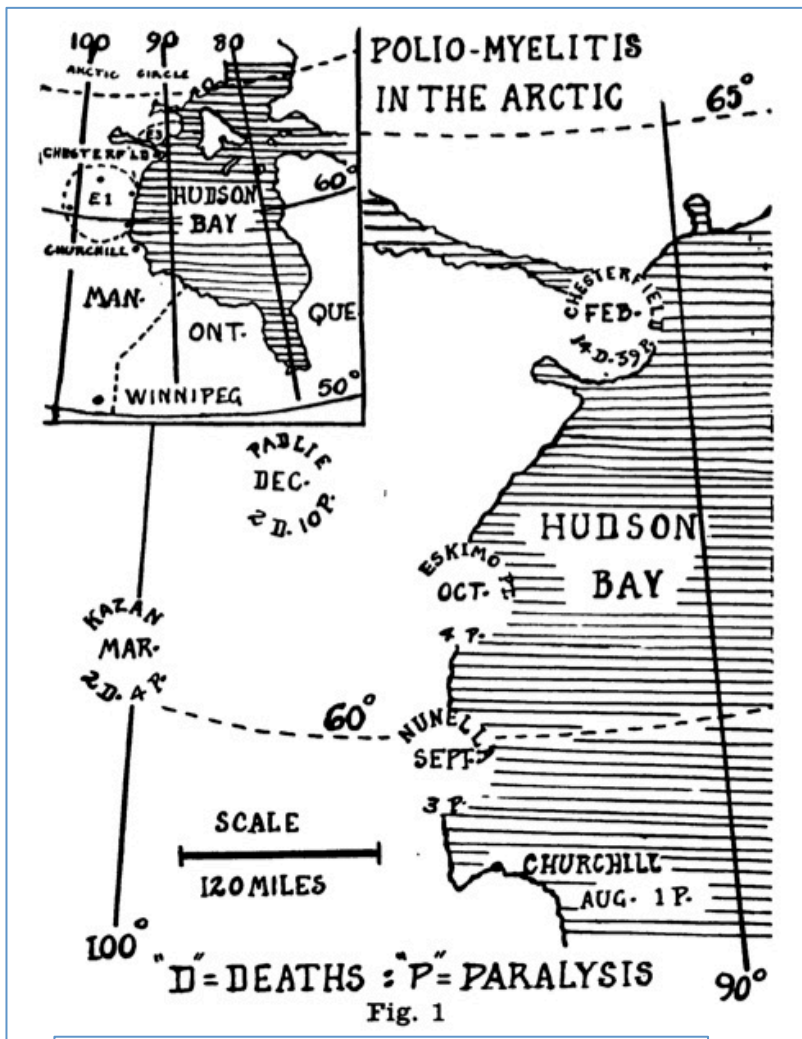
# Polio Prelude, 1948



Canadian Medical Association Journal, Oct. 1949, p. 339

- **July 1948** – The origins of the Arctic polio epidemic were traced to an Inuit man who contracted polio in Churchill from a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force; the RCAF man was taken to Winnipeg and a polio diagnosis confirmed
- **July 1948** – A young Chippewyan girl was also stricken with polio north of Churchill
- **Sept 1948** – “Tutu,” a young Inuit hunter, also visited Churchill and contracted polio, but only showed sub-clinical symptoms
- Tutu then took a leisurely trip home to Eskimo Point, visiting several camps and settlements and unknowingly spread the poliovirus, not unlike an Arctic “Typhoid Mary,” as one newspaper report suggested

# Polio Prelude, 1948

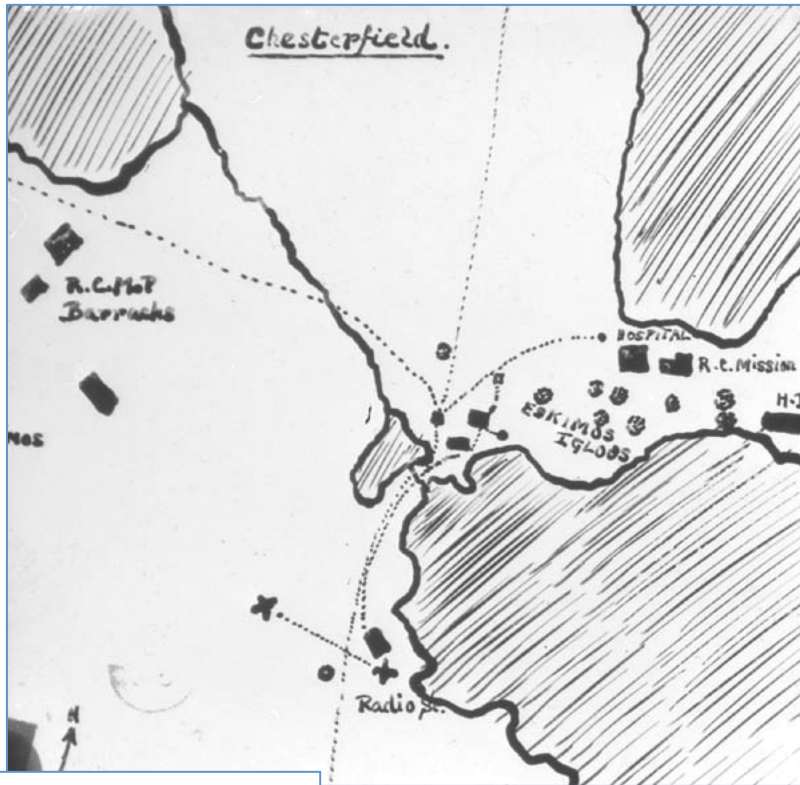


Canadian Medical Association Journal, Oct. 1949, p. 339

- **Oct 1948** – Two cases of paralytic polio developed in Nunella and three in Eskimo Point
- In Nunella, one case was an Anglican missionary, another a native RCMP special constable who traveled to Padlei; 7 paralytic cases developed in that settlement by late December, two of whom died
- Another missionary, Father Dionne, was the likely connection between the first outbreak and Chesterfield Inlet
- Father Dionne had been in Eskimo Point and flew to Chesterfield on January 28, but did not show clinical symptoms, although he had visited polio victims in Eskimo Point



# Chesterfield Inlet, 1949



<http://chesterfield-inlet.ca>



- **Jan 28-Feb 9** - While in Chesterfield Inlet, Father Dionne was accommodated in the outpost's St. Theresa Hospital; he visited patients and others there and mingled among the white and native populations before returning to Eskimo Point on February 9
- **Feb 14** – The first of many polio cases emerged in Chesterfield Inlet
- Within two weeks, 15 of the 25 Inuit that were in the hospital developed polio, 3 of whom died and 8 were paralyzed

- **Feb 20** – Dr. Joseph P. Moody, Medical Officer of Health for the Eastern Arctic, and resident physician at Chesterfield Inlet, ordered the quarantine of 100,000+ sq. km, strictly restricting the movement of the vast area's mostly Inuit population, estimated to be about 600

# Chesterfield Inlet, 1949

## FLY OUT THIRTEEN ESKIMOS FROM POLIO-INFESTED AREA



PARALYZED ESKIMO CHILD IS CARRIED FROM PLANE  
Dr. W. J. Wood, Right, Aids Winnipeg Disembarkation

### Special to The Star

Winnipeg, March 7—Thirteen ailing Eskimos, six of them under 12 years of age, arrived in Winnipeg early today following an R.C.A.F. mercy flight into plague-infested Chesterfield Inlet.

A caravan of eight ambulances rushed the stricken Eskimos to King Edward Isolation hospital. The evacuation was carried out 12 hours before a March blizzard was expected to sweep the isolated outpost.

Dr. W. J. Wood, who accompanied the patients with a team of five doctors, said the Eskimos were "definitely suffering from poliomyelitis." Twelve of the polio victims were stretcher cases. Only one was able to walk. Two girls, under 12 years of age, were among the stricken and were cared for by Nurse Muriel Clift of the Churchill army hospital. The eldest victim was a 45-year-old man.

Two R.C.A.F. Dakotas arrived at the airport shortly after 1 a.m. One by one the ambulances pulled up to the aircraft, loading on the victims. The children, cradled in doctors' arms, were lowered to waiting ambulance drivers, to be put into the vehicles. Their faces were twisted in pain as their legs dangled uncontrolled, their arms hanging loosely at their sides, paralyzed.

are now trying to prevent the spread of polio to other regions in the north," Dr. Wood said.

"As a rule—and this is the first time it's happened—Eskimos do not contract polio. It has never affected the Eskimo like it has the whites," Dr. Wood said.

"It is pretty hard to determine who the carrier was -- and there definitely must have been a carrier who distributed the disease," Dr. Wood added.

The evacuation of the Eskimos from Chesterfield Inlet was accomplished without mishap in nearly 40 below weather and a howling wind.

First word that an epidemic was sweeping the Eskimo population in the Chesterfield Inlet area of the Northwest Territories reached Ottawa Feb. 26 from Dr. J. P. Moody, resident physician at the remote northern post.

Toronto Star, March 7, 1949, p. 3

- **March 2** – A team of five doctors arrived at Chesterfield Inlet
- After a few days of treating cases in the outpost's hospital, investigating the outbreak, and gathering specimens for laboratory tests -- and before a major blizzard hit -- the RCAF Dakota plane returned to Winnipeg with the doctors and 13 of the Inuit polio patients for further treatment at King George Hospital
- There were twelve "stretcher cases," the oldest a 45-year-old man, and six patients under 12, all of whom would need specialized physiotherapy

# Connie Beattie's Adventures



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

- **Jan – Mar 1949** – Meanwhile, in Toronto, Connie Beattie was juggling her job as Head of Physiotherapy at Toronto East General Hospital, her position as President of the Toronto Chapter of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, and what often felt like the thankless job of organizing the CPA's Annual Meeting
- As she told her parents in a Jan 12<sup>th</sup> letter,  
*“Last night was the monthly meeting to plan the programme for the Congress. I darn near went nuts – it was just awful. The programme part was alright but then they started nattering about salaries & ‘what does the C.P.A. do for me’ – for 3 hours. I arrived home with a stiff back and a splitting headache and I haven’t recovered yet. It really was gruesome. There are parts of the program I’m displeased with but then who am I. I’ll just get blamed...”*

# Connie Beattie's Adventures



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

- **Jan – Mar 1949** – Connie was also juggling what appeared from her letters to be quite the busy social life of a 24-year-old working woman in Toronto, living in her own apartment with a room-mate, often visiting her many friends, in addition to her fiancée, Dr. William Guthrie Grant, who was the same age as Connie
- A third-generation doctor, Guthrie graduated from University of Toronto Medicine in 1947 and joined the Brooklin Medical Centre (near Whitby/Oshawa); he would become a distinguished physician and surgeon and Brooklin's country doctor

# Connie Beattie's Adventures



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- **March 10<sup>th</sup> letter to Mum & Dad:** *“Guthrie arrived over unexpectedly. I gave him dinner (steak and fresh frozen peas – that’s so difficult to prepare! But at least I got my vitamins) then we went to see ‘Every Girl Should be Married’ with Cary Grant – it was entertaining. Afterwards we dropped by at the Silver Rail for a rye and the host kindly touched my arm and said ‘How old are you my dear?’ So I slipped him five bucks and went on in!!”*

# Connie Beattie's Adventures

- **Mid-March** – There had been some 60 polio cases in an Inuit population of about 275, with 38 having definite paralysis and 13 died from respiratory complications; there were no iron lungs available
- Yet, according to Dr. Moody (right), the majority of cases were not seriously paralyzed, most with one or more extremities or back muscles affected by weakness or paralysis
- He thought that several cases would benefit from physiotherapy, but advised against evacuating them to Winnipeg



Library & Archives Canada, e010983693

- Instead, he suggested that temporary assistance by a person trained in orthopaedic exercises would be essential for a successful outcome in many of the cases

# Connie Beattie's Adventures

- **1949** - Physiotherapy in Canada was a growing specialty in medicine, fuelled by post-war demand for veterans' rehabilitation, as well as by the mounting toll of children and adults affected by polio
- **1918-20** - Physiotherapy generally recognized in Canada after WWI, although only British-trained physios in Canada; Military Hospitals Commission organized courses
- **1920** – Graduates banded together to form the Canadian Physiotherapy Association



*J. Canadian Physiotherapy Assoc., Sept 1949*

- **1929** – University of Toronto opened an undergraduate course in Physiotherapy with 10 students; Connie's 1945 class had 40 graduates
- **1950** - UofT's course taken under jurisdiction of Faculty of Medicine and combined with existing course in Occupational Therapy

# Connie Beattie's Adventures

Page 6 The NATIVE VOICE

## Brockville Girl To Aid Polio-Stricken Eskimos

On March 29th, 1949, a pretty young physiotherapist gave up her comfortable job in the city of Toronto to aid the Eskimos stricken with polio at Chesterfield Inlet. She is the first physiotherapist ever to be sent into the Arctic Circle.



ported among the Eskimo settlements around Chesterfield Inlet. It was later discovered there were over 60 cases of poliomyelitis. Since then 13 have died and 13 others have been flown to Winnipeg for treatment. Extra-medical aid has been sent up north.

Miss Beattie will join the 25 whites and the 250 Eskimos in the isolated Arctic village. . . She has been assured that, although the Eskimos all live in igloos, the white live in houses. She will likely stay at the seven-bed hospital which was improvised to accommodate 35 patients after the epidemic was discovered.

Since her discharge from the Army, Constance has been working with orthopaedic cases at the Toronto East General Hospital, where she is in charge of the physiotherapy department. After four months in the Arctic she plans to return here.

The farthest north Miss Beattie has ever been is Winnipeg, one of her postings during her army career. Although there are one resident doctor and several Grey Nuns in the hospital, the physiotherapy treatment of the 18 Eskimos will fall entirely on Miss Beattie.—(Taken from the Globe and Mail, Toronto, Ont.)

**CONSTANCE BEATTIE**  
Of Brockville, Ont.

We of the Native Voice Salute You

Her eyes shining with excitement 24-year-old Constance Beattie, from Brockville explained how she had jumped at the opportunity. As president of the Toronto Branch of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, she was the first to receive a letter from the Indian Department of the Canadian Government asking for volunteers. She immediately wired back, asking that her name be put first on the list.

"It will be a thrilling adventure," she exclaimed, "and a chance to help those unfortunate Eskimos who don't have half the chance that polio victims get down here."

It was at the end of January that a mysterious plague was first re-

The Native Voice, April 1949, p. 6

- Connie Beattie was the ideal person for the physiotherapy job in Chesterfield Inlet, and she was truly excited about the opportunity, which would involve a 4-month commitment
- Her parents, especially her Dad, had some concerns, but Connie assured them in a March 31<sup>st</sup> letter that Chesterfield Inlet was on the same latitude as southern Alaska, and going there wouldn't worry them; "hundreds of people do it"

*"Now don't misunderstand me. I don't feature this as any bed of roses – there are 18 Eskimos there for treatment and that's no joke but do feel it's a chance of a lifetime so please try to see my way. So far as contracting the disease there is no more possibility of that than there is around here. I treat them just in the course of a day's work – and the epidemic is over there the same as here. It's simply another job in a new locale."*



# Connie Beattie's Adventures

- **March 31** - As Connie added in her letter to her parents,

*"The Congress is tomorrow and Saturday and I haven't had a spare minute since I last wrote. I hate myself but you've no idea what a job it's been – all the things that can go wrong. The phone here rings off the wall all day and then here at home all night. It's really been quite something.*

*"I hope you won't be too mad at me. It really isn't the least bit dangerous and want you to be excited like I am at a wonderful opportunity – please."*

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TORONTO DAILY STAR: Thur., March 31, 1949

## CANADIAN PHYSIOTHERAPISTS MEET IN TORONTO FRIDAY

The Canadian Physiotherapy association is holding its 29th annual meeting and third congress Friday and Saturday of this week at the Royal York hotel. Constance Beattie, president of the Toronto branch of the association has arranged a program of lectures by prominent local doctors.

Following a business meeting and luncheon in the Tudor Room, Friday, members will hear lectures by Dr. Paul McGoey of the staff of St. Michael's hospital and Dr. Stewart Gordon, of Toronto General hospital.

On Saturday Dr. Stewart Wright, Queen Elizabeth hospital will speak on the problems of the chronically ill. Dr. H. Cranfield, director of physiotherapy for D.V.A. will describe a new treatment of convalescent polio and a practical demonstration of the treatment will be given by Barbara Ross. Other speakers during the day will be Dr. C. P. McCormick, of the staff of the University of Toronto and Dr. H. M. Coleman, Toronto East General hospital staff.



—Photo by John Palmer.  
CONSTANCE BEATTIE

# Connie Beattie's Adventures

- **April 19** – Connie's Arctic adventure actually began in Winnipeg, spending four days in residence at the King George Hospital assisting with the care of the 13 Inuit polio patients who had been brought from Chesterfield Inlet
- But as she noted in a letter published in the *Journal of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association*, there had essentially been “no Physio” provided so far. The hospital desperately needed a physiotherapist, “especially with their Eskimo wards”

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie



- Connie focused most of her attention on two of the Inuit boys, 6-year-old George Tanniak, and 5-year-old Simeone Yerak, who she would accompany back to Chesterfield Inlet for additional physiotherapy

# Connie Beattie's Adventures

- April 20, Connie's letter to her parents,

*"The Eskimos are surprisingly good for such a short period of time – each and every one of them with measles – and just feeling miserable. They are all children but 2 who are 32 & 44 I think they said. They are a happy people – one Augustine is a little devil he just lies in bed and giggles – his eyes are such tiny slits you'd wonder what he could possibly see out of them – whatever it is he loves it. There are just 2 little girls and a little Indian girl who arrived after the Eskimos."*

## Take New Art To Arctic -- Winking

By CORY KILVERT

Tanniak, a six-year-old Eskimo boy from Chesterfield Inlet, is very shy about making conversation with white people. But round-faced George has set one trick during his seven-week stay in King George Hospital where he has been treated for polio. George winks.

Whether young George perfected his trick because he liked the nurses at the hospital is not clear, but he has it down pat. All you have to do is say, "Hey, George. Wink!"

And George bats down his right eyelid like a flash. It works every time. If you keep winking at George he'll keep it up until you get tired.

Sunday afternoon he and his little companion, five-year-old Simeoni Yerark were sitting quietly in the R.C.A.F. waiting room at Stevenson field until a plane was ready to take them back to their home 1,000 miles north of Winnipeg in the Northwest Territories.

Both boys, although they said their bout with paralysis sufficiently to be allowed to go back north. They will be placed in the mission hospital however for further treatment on arrival.

### Fur-Fringed Clothing

Both little patients sat in their Arctic clothing complete with fur-fringed parka hoods. Each had clutched in his hand a picture magazine from the waiting room table.

But George wasn't displaying any interest in pictures. He was busy watching people. Dark-eyed Simeoni seemed engrossed in his magazine. He kept flipping pages and studying food and automobile ads.

Every few minutes he'd sneak a quick look at the curious bystanders and then go back to his magazine.

An airman showed a picture of a caribou to Simeoni, and his face brightened into a big smile. He identified the animal in Eskimo.

Both boys, although they said little, appeared to understand much that was said to them.


Both spoke a polite "thank you" in English when given candy and gum, and they said "goodbye" when they left.

Simeoni hid behind his magazine and, after a furtive look around, finally popped the candy into his mouth when he thought no one was looking.

The older lad, clad in a blanket cloth parka, walked to the waiting plane holding the hand of one of the doctors.

Simeoni however, is not allowed to walk so far. He was wearing the inner suit of Arctic clothing which consists of caribou skin with the hair turned in to the skin. In cold weather he wears another suit of caribou with the hair outward.

Besides their trouble with polio, both George and Simeoni have just recovered from measles which they contracted while in civilization because they had no natural resistance to this white man's disease.



**Going Home**—Simeoni Yerark, five-year-old Eskimo boy (right), smiles happily at prospect of returning to his Chesterfield Inlet home after seven weeks' poliomyelitis treatment in a Winnipeg hospital. His six-year-old companion, George Tanniak, does not seem impressed at making 1,000-mile plane ride.

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- **April 25, Connie's letter from Churchill,**  
*"We left Winnipeg about 2:30 yesterday complete with George & Simeoni our two returning Eskimos and landed here at 6 o'clock. It was a Dakota by the way as everyone said it would be and a very easy trip. Specially since I found myself a nice quiet spot, stretched out and slept the whole way."*

*"We are grounded here until tomorrow because of snow but expect it will be clear by mid-night tonight. Actually it's been wonderful for me because I've had more peace since I left home. I was so busy in 'peg getting last minute stuff that I never once relaxed."*



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- **April 27, Connie's letter from Chesterfield Inlet,**

*“Well here I am – very comfortably ensconced in the mission hospital in the nicest room I've seen in the community although I'd rather not be in the hospital... In fact it's a good deal more comfortable than the set-up in Winnipeg & so far the meals have been better. We had caribou steak at noon to-day & it was very good – rhubarb pie for dessert & noodle soup beforehand. Hardships. I don't know the temp, so I can't give it to you but the houses are oil heated & so far more cozy than any of the boarding houses I had in Toronto.”*

*“We arrived yesterday afternoon as you no doubt heard via Ottawa. The doctors are in until Friday as the weather has closed down again & the air-strip is too soft for a Dakota.”*



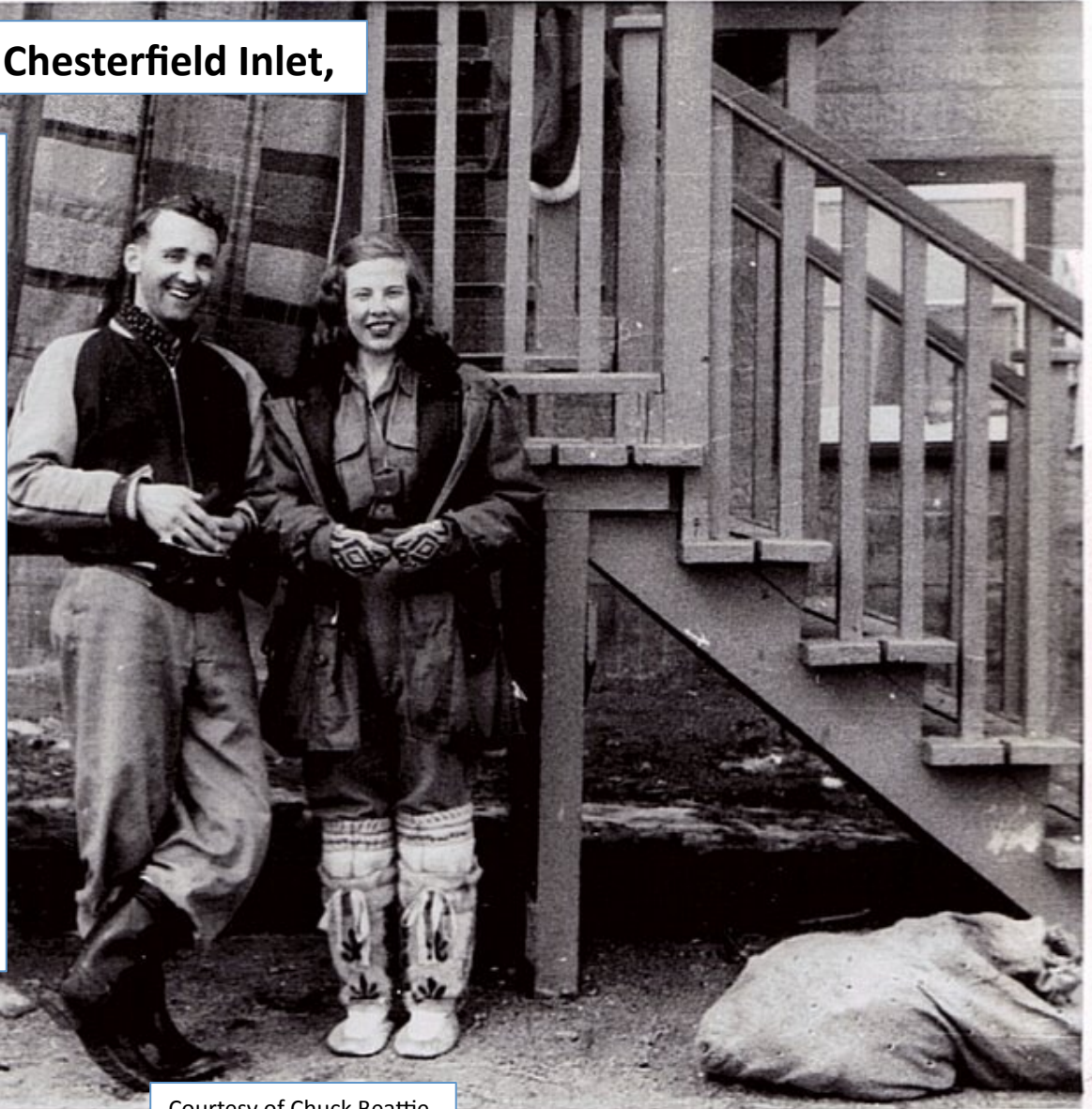
Courtesy of Chuck Beattie



# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- April 27, Connie's letter from Chesterfield Inlet,

*"There is a great deal to tell, I scarcely know where to begin. First of all I'd better warn you that the last scheduled plane before the boat comes in in about 2 weeks. So after that if you don't hear from me simply assume no news is good news for I will have no way of contacting you unless by the occasional wire. I will try to get mail out with whoever comes in unscheduled but that is unreliable."*

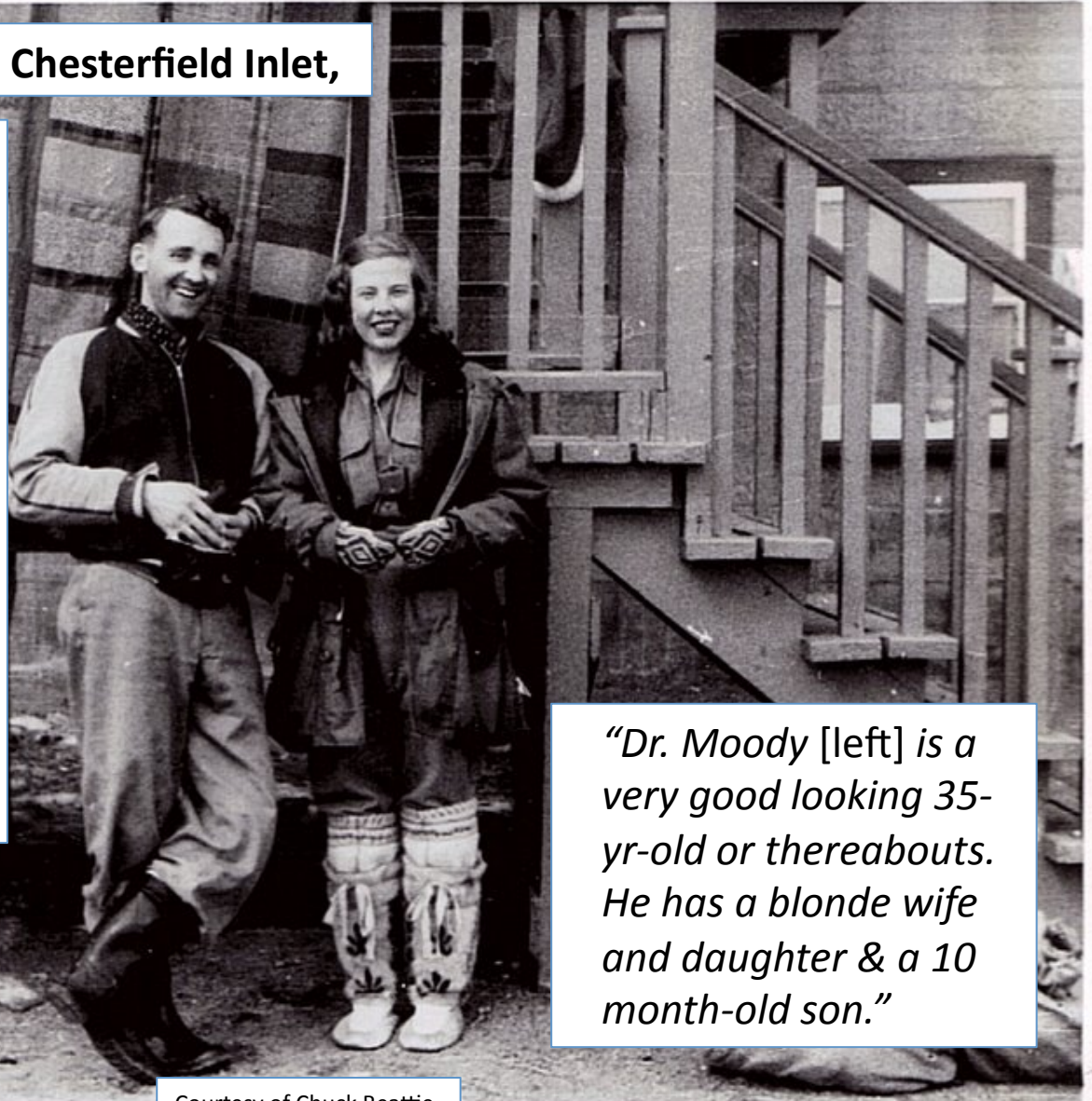


Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- April 27, Connie's letter from Chesterfield Inlet,

*"The nuns as we suspected speak only French except the superior who has a smattering of English. Actually its an excellent opportunity for me to learn the language. Eskimo script is fun not extremely practical. They are very nice all of them. There are 2 fathers & 1 brother. The head Father is a redhead with a full red beard!"*



*"Dr. Moody [left] is a very good looking 35-yr-old or thereabouts. He has a blonde wife and daughter & a 10 month-old son."*

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- April 27, Connie's letter from Chesterfield Inlet,

*"There is electricity in all the homes and running water in most although not flushing johns. The construction however is similar – just don't flush them if you follow me - & of course they are inside."*

*"They are taking out 4 more Eskimos to facilitate treatment here & that leaves me, at the moment with 9 not to badly affected. They expect more in from the country but can't find them at the minute as they are following the caribou herds."*

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie



# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- Connie settled into her new life in Chesterfield Inlet quite smoothly, taking lots of pictures and getting along well with the unique blend of people there:
- Nuns, Brothers, radio operators, RCMP detachment officers, Dr. Moody and his family, and the local Inuit community and the polio patients she cared for
- Everyone quickly became very fond of Connie; to the local Inuit, she was “Isuaksiajikulaq,” or “young doctor”
- They also called her “Noo-Kee-Lee-Ree-Jay” which means, “the one who works with nerve. I guess they forgot the muscle but that’s very discerning of them anyhow I thought”



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- She did remarkable therapeutic work among the 40 polio patients left with residual paralysis in the area, providing therapy to patients in the hospital and in their igloos, based on the Sister Kenny method
  - Sister Elizabeth Kenny was a Australian nurse who revolutionized the treatment of polio patients, especially in North America during the 1940s, based on a mix of active/passive physiotherapy and the use of “hot-packs” to stimulate muscle re-education
- In a letter home, Connie stressed, “Arctic or no Arctic, I am still hotpacking!”
  - She often had to melt snow when water was needed for the hot packs



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

## Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- Connie's workload in the hospital varied, with it sometimes fairly light, leaving her time to visit Inuit families, exploring the area, trying local foods, and surprising herself with how quickly she was learning the language and getting used to the weather

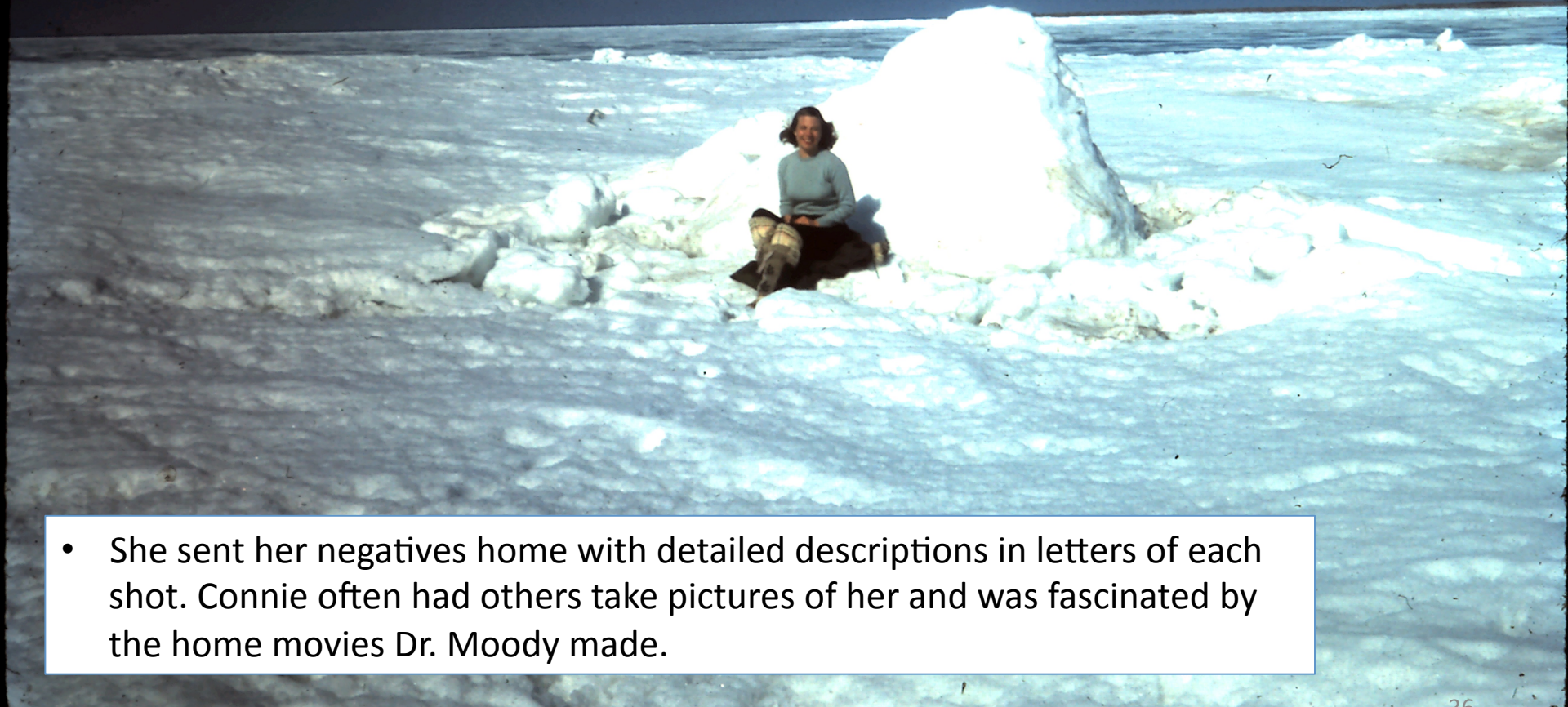


- She also spend considerable time with a resident southern couple, Rita and Jack Koehler, becoming quite close with Rita, who reminded Connie of her mother, especially because of her cooking

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

- Connie took lots of photos, planning a picture/book project about her time in the Arctic. The Brockville Kawanis Club invited her to speak. As she told her parents, "I really don't think I'll have anything to say that will keep them at all fascinated but I didn't see how I could very well refuse."



- She sent her negatives home with detailed descriptions in letters of each shot. Connie often had others take pictures of her and was fascinated by the home movies Dr. Moody made.

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures

- And as she told her parents in a June 22nd letter,

*“Father Chocque lent me his camera to take some colour film while there was still snow around... I hope at least some of them turn out so you can get an idea of the gorgeous blue cast to the snow. I believe it will be slightly exaggerated in the pictures.”*



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

# Arctic Polio Research

## An Outbreak of Poliomyelitis in Canadian Eskimos in Wintertime

### LABORATORY INVESTIGATIONS\*

A. J. RHODES, M.D., F.R.C.P., Ed.<sup>1</sup>  
EINA M. CLARK, B.Sc., M.A.<sup>1</sup>  
ALICE GOODFELLOW, B.A., M.D.<sup>2</sup>

AND

W. L. DONOHUE, M.A., M.D.<sup>2</sup>

### TECHNICAL METHODS

SEVERAL pathological specimens were obtained from Eskimos involved in an epidemic of poliomyelitis at Chesterfield Inlet which has been described elsewhere. The specimens were shipped by aeroplane in the frozen state, and were received in good condition; they were stored in the carbon dioxide ice chest until the time of examination. Some nervous tissue was also received in glycerol, and this was stored in the cold room.

It was decided to examine sufficient specimens by monkey inoculation to confirm the clinical diagnosis of poliomyelitis beyond reasonable doubt. Accordingly, the following 7 samples were selected as most suitable: preparations of brain and cord from 2 cases; stools from 3 cases; and throat washings from 2 cases.

Nervous tissue was prepared for inoculation by grinding in a mortar to constitute a 20 per cent suspension in broth. Penicillin (1,000 units per ml) and streptomycin (5 mg. per ml) were added, and the inoculations performed in rhesus monkeys by the cerebral route; the suspension was allowed to stand at room temperature for about 30 minutes before inoculation, to allow the antibiotics to act.

Bacteria-free extracts of 2 of the stool samples were prepared by shaking repeatedly with ether, without concentration of the contained virus. In the third case, virus in an aqueous suspension of stool was concentrated in the ultracentrifuge at approximately 39,000 r.p.m. Inoculations were made cerebrally and peritoneally in rhesus monkeys.

The throat washings were treated with penicillin and streptomycin without concentration of the virus, and inoculated cerebrally and peritoneally.

Monkeys were examined daily, and were killed when paralysis developed. Monkeys that did not develop paralysis were killed 4 weeks after inoculation. All animals were examined histologically.

\*Aided by a grant from the Department of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa.

<sup>1</sup>Connaught Medical Research Laboratories, University of Toronto.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Pathology, Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto.

- While Connie Beattie was applying her physiotherapy skills to the Inuit who had been stricken by polio, considerable work was conducted at Connaught Laboratories in Toronto, led by Dr. Andrew Rhodes
- **April 1949** - Rhodes confirmed the presence of the poliovirus in specimens recovered from 5 of the fatal Inuit cases
- There was now no doubt about the polio diagnosis, but how to explain “thecrippler” striking under such unusual geographic and climate conditions and striking this “primitive” and largely nomadic population with such severity?

# Arctic Polio Research

- It soon became clear to Rhodes that polio epidemics had very little to do with geography or a summer “polio season”
- Indeed, the Arctic polio experience underscored “that poliomyelitis antibody is universally present in human communities, and that by inference poliomyelitis virus is likewise widely distributed”
- But this distribution had significant demographic and geographic gaps in countries with the most advanced public health infrastructures, in which polio epidemics were generated
- Such insights into the immunology and epidemiology of polio were significant to accelerating progress toward a polio vaccine

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### POLIOMYELITIS AMONG ESKIMOS

ELSEWHERE in this issue are printed two papers describing studies carried out in connection with a most interesting outbreak of poliomyelitis in the far north of Canada. The first paper presents the epidemiological features as far as they are known at the moment. It must be realized that this enquiry was conducted under exceptional difficulties, and that the complete tracing of cases in the “frozen north” is impossible. It is very greatly to the credit of the medical officer at Chesterfield Inlet, mounted police constables, and the team flown to this settlement, that so much accurate information has already been assembled. It is understood that enquiries are still in progress, and that a fuller report will appear at a later date. Much interest has already been taken by workers in the United States and elsewhere in newspaper accounts of this outbreak, and it is satisfying that a preliminary scientific report is now available, even though a complete analysis must await a more detailed description. The second paper in the series describes the isolation of typical poliomyelitis virus from five selected Eskimos involved in the Chesterfield Inlet district. This paper may be regarded as final, as the identification of the virus has been established beyond reasonable doubt. It is the intention in this brief commentary to draw attention to some of the more interesting epidemiological features described in the first paper.

The outbreaks of poliomyelitis here described occurred in an isolated part of the subarctic where, in winter, travel is mainly carried out by dog team, and the communities are isolated to a considerable degree. A unique opportunity was therefore afforded for tracing possible sources of infection, and several such were brought to light. The evidence is in full accord with the modern concept of poliomyelitis as a disease of high communicability spread by contact between humans. The infection appears to have travelled first from the Churchill district to Eskimo Point, and then to Chesterfield Inlet. There is no evidence that any extra-human source of infection was operative. At least one of the persons (Gibbons) incriminated as a possible source of infection can be regarded as a convalescent carrier. The interesting point here is that he appears to have remained infectious for at least three or four weeks after the onset of

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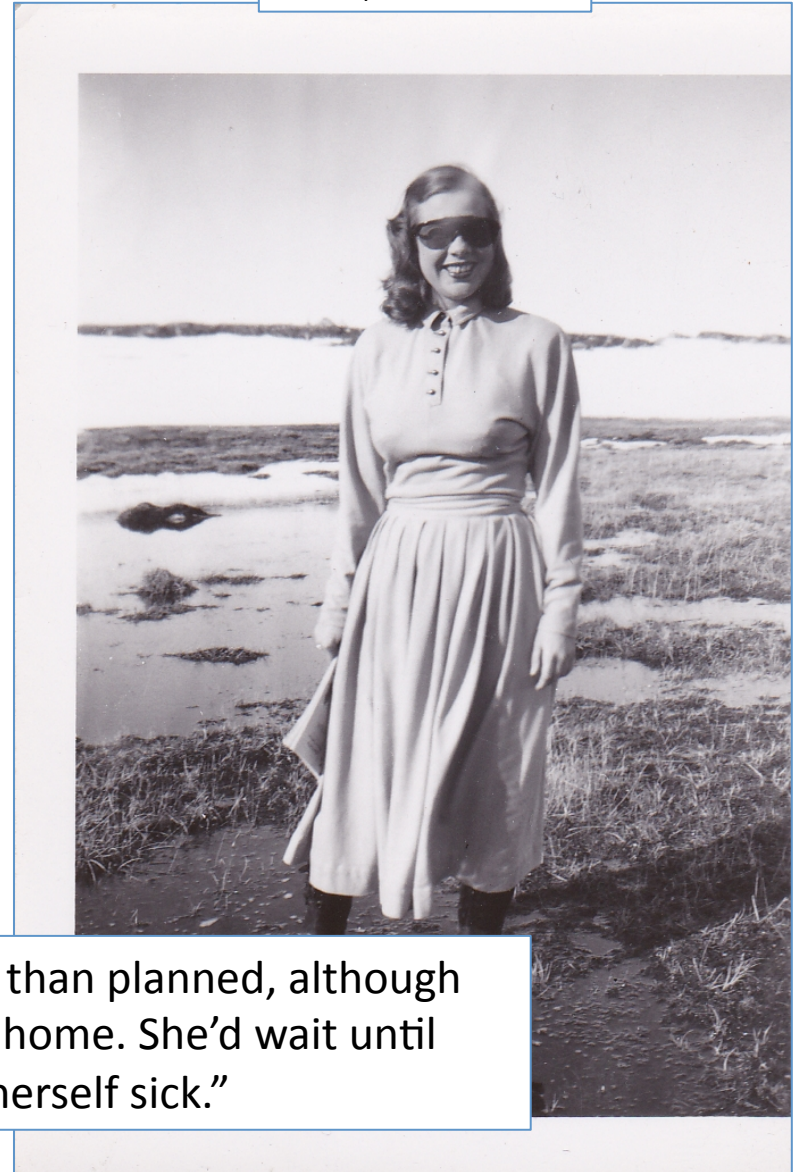
*Canadian Journal of Public Health*, Oct. 1949, p. 440

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End

- After a fairly quiet spring and early summer, Connie was surprised to learn that she would be leaving two weeks earlier than expected, although she was eager to get home as she had wedding plans to figure out
- The earlier departure was to facilitate the flight plan of the RCAF Canso amphibious aircraft that would first transfer several federal transportation department personnel at a remote weather station on Baffin Island, before stopping in Chesterfield Inlet and heading for Winnipeg on Aug 21

- It was a scramble getting ready to leave earlier than planned, although Connie didn't tell her parents she was heading home. She'd wait until getting to Winnipeg, "as Mother would worry herself sick."

Courtesy of Chuck Beattie





# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End

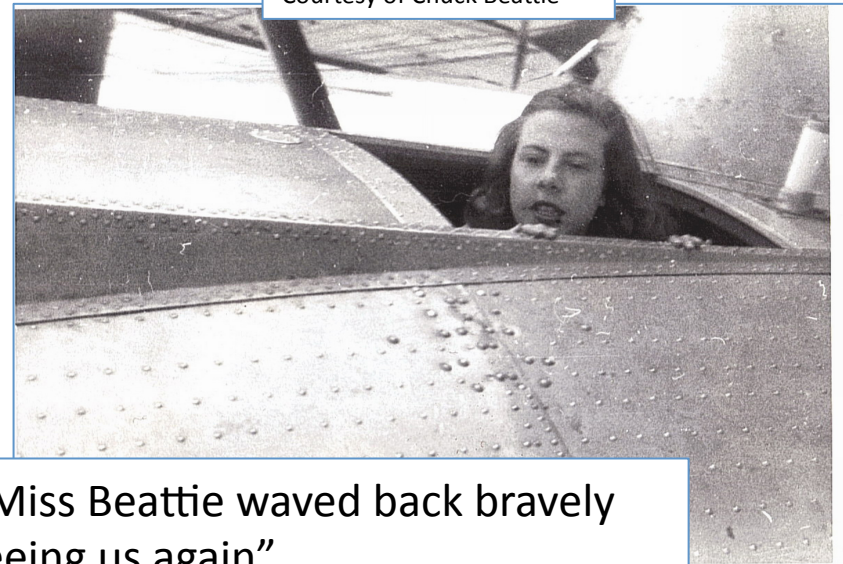
- Although Connie had completed her Arctic assignment, and eight of the most serious polio cases would accompany her on the flight to Winnipeg, as Dr. Moody later wrote in his book, *Arctic Doctor*, “we dreaded having her go back to civilization”

“The evacuation of eight paralyzed Eskimos was a pitiful sight. Many young men, formerly great hunters, were carried out with arms and legs dangling helplessly.”

- The remaining Inuit grieved as they watched their friends and family members carried onto the canoe that took them to the plane
- Several of the children resisted until they understood that Connie would also be going
- Everyone finally waved a cheery farewell and “Miss Beattie waved back bravely and laughed and called out something about seeing us again”



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie



# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End

- **Aug 21** – The first leg of the trip was to Churchill to pick up some additional passengers before the flight to Winnipeg



Courtesy of Chuck Beattie

- In addition to Connie and eight Inuit “crippled by polio,” on the flight there was a crew of seven, a noted newspaper reporter returning from a northern assignment, and four federal transportation department inspectors on their way home after long duty spells in northern outposts

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End...

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## TORONTO DAILY STAR

THE WEATHER  
Toronto and vicinity—Tuesday:  
Sunny and warm. Low tonight, 60;  
high Tuesday, 85.

57TH YEAR

Authorized as second class mail.  
Post-Office Department, Ottawa

MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 1949—38 PAGES

3c PER COPY, 18c PER WEEK

# 20 MISSING ON MERCY PLANE

## COMB BARREN NORTH FOR MERCY AIRCRAFT ONTARIO GIRL ABOARD

### Special to The Star

Winnipeg, Aug. 22—Search planes are mustering at Stevenson airport here today for a second sweep of some 750 miles of barren territory to the north holding the secret of an R.C.A.F. Canso amphibian, missing with 20 aboard since last night on a mercy flight.

Four department of transport inspectors, returning from long duty spells at northern outposts, are among the missing. With them are seven Eskimo polio victims, a crew of seven, a nurse and a newspaperman.

Constance Beattie, 24, of Brockville, is believed to be the nurse accompanying the polio-stricken Eskimos aboard the missing plane. She is a physiotherapist.

Miss Beattie, who left her Brockville home to nurse in the north, was looking after the Eskimos on their flight to Winnipeg, where they were to enter the city hospital. All seven were crippled by polio during the last winter's polio outbreak.

### Newsman Aboard

Jack Avesson of Canadian Press was also aboard, returning from a northern assignment. Pilot of the plane is Flt-Lieut. Frank Huth.

Air force authorities said two of the Eskimos were women, three young girls and two men. Two could walk but five were loaded on the overdue Canso in stretchers.

With fuel to last 10 hours, the Canso left Churchill at 6 p.m. last night and checked in with the Hud-

## HOME AND SPORT EDITION



MISSING AIRCRAFT from Chesterfield Inlet is believed to have among 20 persons aboard Nurse Constance Beattie of Brockville, who was accompanying seven Eskimo polio victims from inlet. Plane, Canso, is being sought by aircraft in northern Manitoba

- **Aug 22** - Connie Beattie's smiling face dominated the front page of the *Toronto Star*, but it was placed below an alarming headline...

- Like the news of the Arctic polio epidemic itself, news of the missing "mercy flight" spread quickly in the North American press

- Hopeful the plane landed on one of the numerous lakes of northern Manitoba, an intensive search effort was launched...

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End... Tragically

- The next morning, newspapers reported the grim news that the Canso had crashed and all 21 on board were very likely killed
- Aug 23** - The front page of the *Toronto Star* again featured Connie Beattie, the “pretty physiotherapist” in her graduation photo, along with a picture of her fiancé, Dr. Guthrie Grant

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## TORONTO DAILY STAR

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 1949—40 PAGES

THE WEATHER  
Toronto and vicinity—Wednesday  
Clearing, cooler. Low tonight, 49  
High Wednesday, 78.

57TH YEAR
Advertising and general circulation  
Post-Office Department, Ottawa
TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 1949—40 PAGES
3c PER COPY, 18c PER WEEK

# FIND WRECK, HINT ALL 21 DEAD

**Doctor Won't Drop Hopes  
Bride-To-Be Still Alive**

HOME AND  
SPORT EDITION

**Fight Every Application  
At Robb Liquor Hearing**




**AMONG THE 21 PERSONS** aboard R.C.A.F. Canso which crashed, buried while en route to Winnipeg from Churchill, Man., with Eskimo polio victims, was Constance Beattie of Brockville and Toronto, seen, right, during another mercy mission. She went west on plea for physiotherapists at time of Chesterfield Inlet epidemic, when this picture was taken

**R.C.A.F. GROUP** ready to attempt rescue of any who may have survived is briefed by Wing Commander A. L. Wainwright. Wreckage of craft, which disappeared Sunday night during heavy rain storm, was subject this morning by searching R.C.A.F. planes. Also aboard aircraft was A. B. Neill of Glenora, Ont., who has spent two years in the north on government work

**SEE 'NO SIGN OF LIFE'  
IN BURNED WRECKAGE  
OF R.C.A.F. AIRCRAFT**

Special to The Star

Winnipeg, Aug. 23—Airborne para-rescuers today are winging toward the wreckage of an R.C.A.F. Canso aircraft carrying 21 persons, including a Brockville, Ont., nurse, that crashed and burned between Churchill, Man., and Winnipeg.

Discovery of the lost plane, which disappeared on a mercy mission, was announced by the R.C.A.F. The tersely-worded bulletin suggested the 21 are dead. It said the Canso had burned and there was "no sign of life" visible from the air.

**In Barren Territory**

Cramped on barren tundra on a direct track between Churchill and Winnipeg, the crashed Canso was sighted at 10:25 a.m. Toronto time. Search headquarters here and the para-rescue team, which had been standing by, immediately left for the scene. Two Blot planes and an amphibious Canso were also ordered into the air.

Discovery of the wreckage followed reports by two Indians at Little Grand Rapids, 200 miles north of Winnipeg, that a parachute flare was seen dropping from a twin-engine plane late Sunday night, when the Canso vanished. As information concerning the plane and its passengers was correlated, it became known 21 were aboard, one more than originally announced by the R.C.A.F.

**Brockville Girl Aboard**

They include 24-year-old Constance Beattie of Brockville, who was returning home to be married after four months tending polio-stricken Eskimos, 400 miles within the Arctic circle; three department of transport radio-operators and a cook from Baffin Island weather station.

All four were married men returning from the Clyde river base



—Photo by Ambler and Grigg

**FIANCE** of Miss Beattie is Dr. Guthrie Grant, who flew to Winnipeg early today



—Photo by Ambler and Grigg

**PRETTY PHYSIOTHERAPIST**, Miss Beattie, is described by friends as "a swell type." A graduate of University of Toronto, she wanted to aid in work of improving the health of Eskimos and other residents of the north. Photo was taken at time of graduation

**Doctor Flies to Rescue  
Clings to Hope Nurse  
His Bride-to-be Alive**

Special to The Star

Winnipeg, Aug. 23—A young doctor from Brockville, Ont., clung wearily aboard an R.C.A.F. rescue plane today, still hoping to find alive the girl who, returning to marry him after a four-month mercy mission inside the Arctic circle, crashed with 20 others when storms enveloped the plane bringing her home.

Dr. Guthrie Grant, who set out on a journey of never hope and fear from his Brockville surgery last night, fears that search planes had reported no sign of life. But he still believed he might find his fiancée, 24-year-old Constance Beattie, Dr. Grant heard the radioed message that the wreckage had been miraculously alive.

Hour after hour, he had waited in Air Commodore Martin Cassels' hangar operations-room as the radio cracked and searching pilots turned in their reports. Arriving at the airport here in the evening, Dr. Grant finally got the good sleep watch until the first crew began to filter in for the dawn search.

**Doctor's Story Spreads**

It had been a cold, impersonal drama until that moment. Grant, and being so feeling but weary-faced flares cleaned at the instant, then, the doctor climbed aboard a "weed-packed" plane in the copter. They were reaching the scene," he said. "Perhaps we got 21 human beings that was all, but we might see something. We might find someone alive, surely. . . ."

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End... Tragically

- As soon as he heard the plane was missing, Grant had set out on a Trenton-based RCAF search plane for Winnipeg, although by the time he arrived he knew the plane had been found with no signs of life



—Photo by Ashley and Crippen  
**FIANCEE** of Miss Beattie is Dr. Guthrie Grant, who flew to Winnipeg early today

*"It had been a cold, impersonal drama until that moment – Grim-faced fliers glanced at the silent, tweed-jacketed figure in the corner incuriously. They were searching for 21 human beings; that was all.*

*But the story of Dr. Grant was spreading and the lonely figure assumed more importance. This was the fiancé of that girl in the plane – the physiotherapist who spent all that time caring for Eskimos in a polio-infested Arctic outpost..."*

## *Doctor Flies to Rescue Clings to Hope Nurse His Bride-to-be Alive*

### Special to The Star

Winnipeg, Aug. 23—A young doctor from Brooklin, Ont., climbed wearily aboard an R.C.A.F. rescue plane today, still hoping to find alive the girl who, returning to marry him, after a four-month mercy mission inside the Arctic circle, crashed with 20 others when storms enveloped the plane bringing her home.

Dr. Guthrie Grant, who set out on a journey of mixed hope and fear from his Brooklin surgery last night, knew that search planes had reported no sign of life. But he still believed he might find his fiancée, 24-year-old Constance Beattie of Brockville, Ont., somehow miraculously alive.

Hour after hour, he had waited in Air Commodore Martin Costello's hangar operations-room as the radio crackled and searching pilots turned in their reports. Arriving at the airport here in the early hours of the morning, he stood sleepless watch until the first crews began to filter in for the dawn-search.

### Doctor's Story Spreads

It had been a cold, impersonal drama until that moment. Grim-faced fliers glanced at the silent, tweed-jacketed figure in the corner incuriously. They were searching for 21 human beings; that was all.

But the story of Dr. Grant was spreading, and the lonely figure

assumed a new importance. This was the fiancée of that girl in the plane — the physiotherapist who spent all that time caring for Eskimos in a polio-infested Arctic outpost.

The search became a more personal matter as the crews talked to the stranger. It was still a concentrated, mechanical affair with black, straight lines dividing off the maps to indicate each plane's assigned area. Now, though, it was something more as well.

### Contacts fiancée's Family

Four hours after the first planes took off in the pre-dawn darkness, Dr. Grant heard the radioed message that the wreckage had been spotted.

"I've got to ontat the Beattie family before I do anything else," he said. "Then I'll try to get out there."

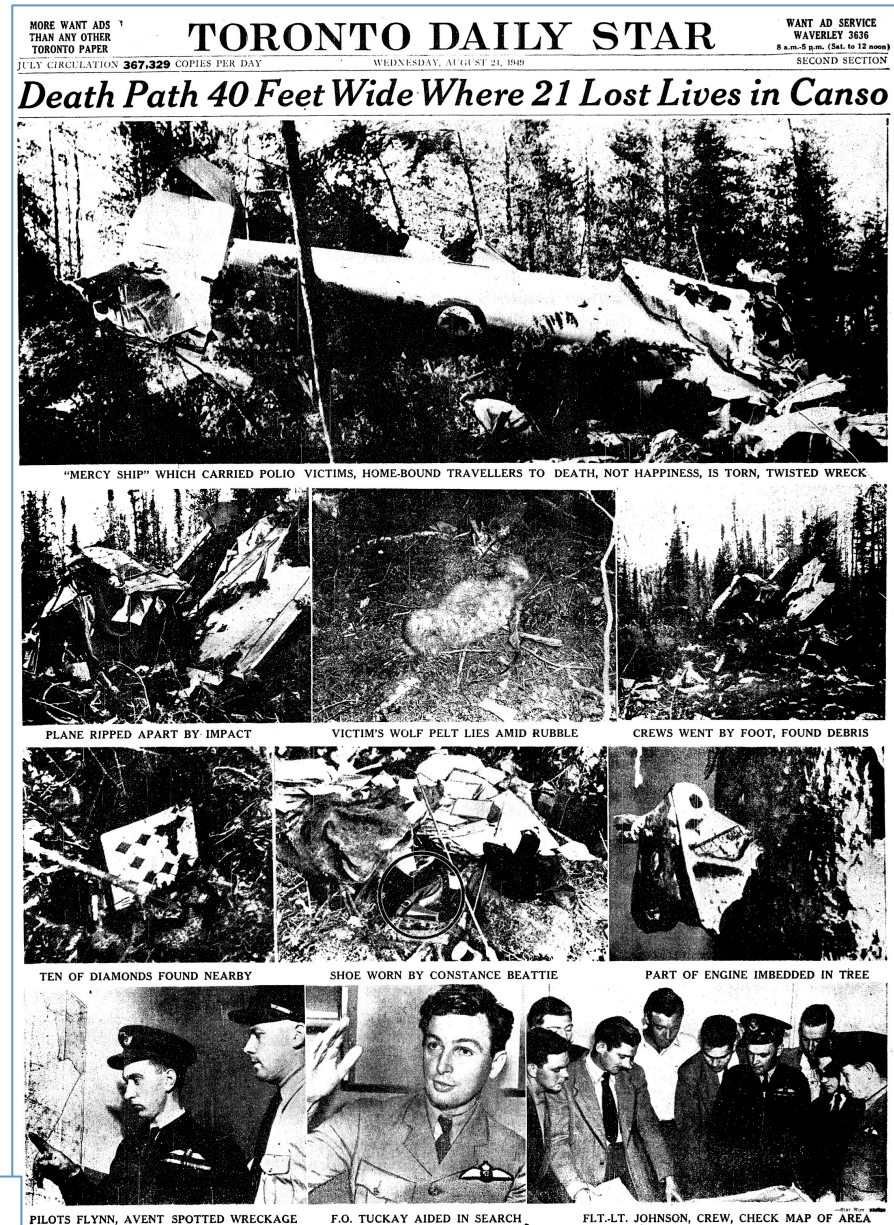
But there were telephone delays, and the para-rescue team had already taken off for the crash scene when Dr. Grant finally put through the message that was to raise new hopes and fears in a small Brockville family.

At lunch time, unshaven and with an empty stomach, but still grave and betraying no feeling but weariness, the doctor climbed aboard a reserve plane. "There's a lake near the scene," he said. "Perhaps we can get down there. At any rate, we might see something. We might find someone alive, surely. . . ."

Toronto Star, Aug. 23, 1949, p. 1

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End... Tragically

- **Aug 24** – While initial reports suggested the crash site was little more than burned-out wreckage, a reporter's first hand account described a gruesome scene of mangled wreckage and mutilated bodies with minimal signs of fire
- His report included photos showing personal effects strewn about the scene, including several that had clearly belonged to Connie: a pair of high-heeled shoes, women's magazines, a pocket camera that had sprung open exposing its film, and several photographs of Inuit people she had taken



Toronto Star, Aug. 24, 1949, p. 25

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End... Tragically

Toronto Star, Aug. 25, 1949, p. 7

## BRING OUT BODIES, OFFICER SAYS CRITIC WRONG, UNFAIR

By J. E. BELLIVEAU  
Star Staff Correspondent

Winnipeg, Aug. 25.—Lumbering out of the northern wasteland with a cargo of pathetically broken bodies, a Canso amphibian landed on the R.C.A.F. airstrip at Stevenson Field here late last night with six of the 20 victims of Manitoba's worst air tragedy. A handful of drawn-faced relatives of Constance Beattie of Brockville and members of the crashed Canso's crew stood with a group of air force officers and newspapermen in the gloom of the airport as the bodies were removed to funeral parlors for identification.

They had been brought by an air rescue crew from Bigstone lake in the far north to where they had been ferried from the nameless lake beside which the R.C.A.F. plane had cut a swath through the forest and been smashed to bits. For some of the bodies there might never be positive identification but air force officers said they believed identity of most of them could be established.

Three children were among the Eskimos killed. The children, all girls, were identified by the Indian affairs department here as Anayasee, 10; Annartosi, 10; and Ublu-reak, 15.

The department identified the other Eskimos aboard the plane as three men, Arnaluktitar, 65; Akrolayuk, 25, and Ohoto, 27, and one woman, Anglalik, 25.

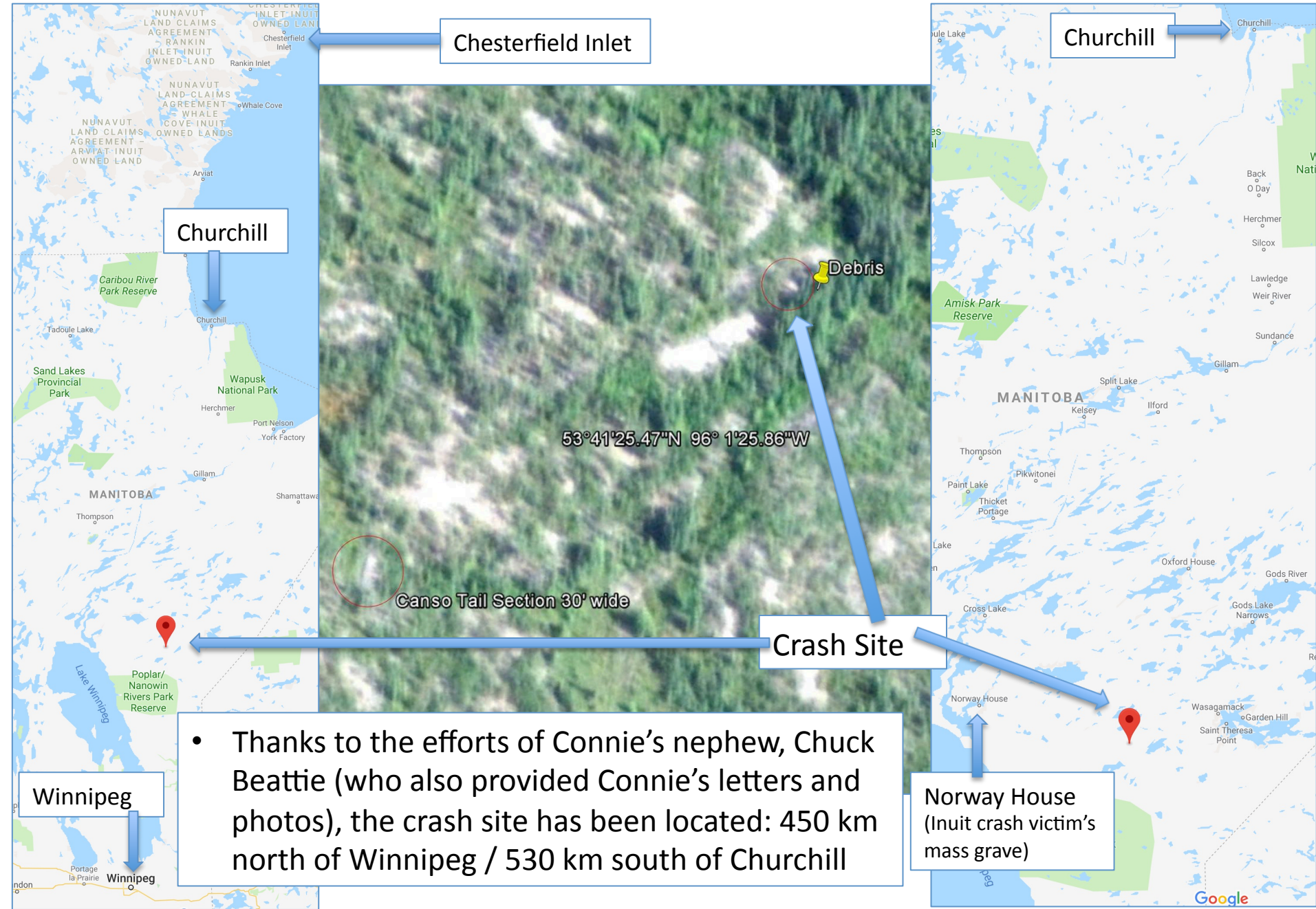
It was not the end of the tragic episode in northern flying, for an official investigation is under way. The investigators are Wing Com. W. G. Welstead and Flt.-Lieut. A. H. Collings, of Rivers, Man., and Flt.-Lieut. William Clark, of Edmonton.

Until the commission's work is done and a report made to Ottawa the cause of the crash that took the lives of the seven air force men, four weather station men, newspapermen Jack Aveson, Miss Beattie and eight Eskimos will not be known.

- In contrast to the personal details given about the white victims of the crash, the extensive newspaper coverage said very little about the plane's Inuit passengers, other than to note that their bodies were taken for burial near Norway House at the head of Lake Winnipeg

- **Aug 25** - An article in the *Toronto Star* seems to have been the only contemporary report to publish the names of the Inuit victims of the crash
- However, their relatives in the Chesterfield Inlet area were not told of the unmarked mass grave
- The burial location would not be discovered until some 60 years after the tragedy. A grandson of one of the crash victims tracked it down

# Connie Beattie's Arctic Adventures End... Tragically





# The Connie Beattie & Artic Polio Legacy

- Connie Beattie's personal story of heroism and service in response to the Arctic polio tragedy, coupled with her personal tragedy while completing this service, was especially poignant as it played out prominently in the Canadian press
- Her death hit her fellow "physios" especially hard
- Indeed, "she had served where no physio had served before"
- Her legacy has lived on to this day, most notably with the establishment of the "Constance Beattie Memorial Fund" bursary program by the Canadian Physiotherapy Association

**THE JOURNAL**  
of the  
**CANADIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION**

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The Canadian Physiotherapy Association was incorporated by Dominion Charter in March, 1920. It has approximately five hundred members, all of whom maintain a high standard of work and are pledged to work only under medical direction. Members do not advertise but a list of members practicing in any district may be obtained from the Secretary at Headquarters. The Appointments Bureau is at the disposal of anyone requiring the services of a fully-qualified Physiotherapist.

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**CONNIE BEATTIE: Physio**



**L**AST spring we received a letter from Connie Beattie from Winnipeg. It was a bright, bubbling, cheerful letter as she headed into the Arctic to treat Eskimo polio patients at Chesterfield Inlet. We published a portion of that letter in the last issue of the Journal and it seemed to reflect perfectly the enthusiasm of this young woman as she set out on her adventure into the northland, where no physio had ever served before.

Then in August we all received the saddest of news. On a Sunday evening in the wild, rugged country between Winnipeg and Churchill, a Canso aircraft of the R.C.A.F. had crashed. All 20 persons aboard perished. Connie Beattie was among the victims. She was flying out to Winnipeg, with seven of her Eskimo patients.

Connie died on duty. She was only 24. She was the first casualty on service among the members of the association. All Canada was shocked by the crash but the tragedy was all the more poignant to those members of the association who knew Connie as an associate and friend.

To her father, Charles Beattie, her

[5]

Courtesy Winnipeg Tribune.

*J. Canadian Physiotherapy Assoc., Sept 1949, p. 5*

# The Connie Beattie & Arctic Polio Legacy

- The fund was designed to support post-graduate training in physiotherapy, originally with preference for work in the treatment of polio. Fundraising dances at the University of Toronto organized by physiotherapy students and concerts helped launch the fund, and the bursary program has continued to the present

## Memorial Fund Planned by Members of Association

Plans are now underway to establish a Connie Beattie Memorial Fund. It is proposed to endeavor to collect sufficient money in order to provide an annual prize or scholarship for physiotherapy students. Subscriptions will be open to the entire membership and should be sent to the head office, 10 Bedford Road, Toronto 5, Ontario. By the time this Journal is received, a meeting probably will have been held in Toronto to deal with this question and to draw up a complete plan. Full details are expected to be published in the December issue.

The PFC has moved to a biennial awards cycle.

For more program information, please contact [foundation@physiotherapy.ca](mailto:foundation@physiotherapy.ca) or 1-800-387-8679 ext. 253.

### 2019 Awards

The following awards will be offered in 2019. The call for applications is now open until February 24th, 2019.

#### Constance Beattie Memorial Fund (CBMF) Bursary Program

This fund was established in 1949 by the CPA in honour of Constance Beattie who died in a plane crash at the age of 24 while serving as a dedicated physiotherapist in Canada's north. The bursary is administered by the Physiotherapy Foundation of Canada. Bursaries are made available to successful applicants for continuing education courses that are relevant to their career goals.

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

## THE CONSTANCE BEATTIE STORY



Canadian  
Physiotherapy  
Association

l'Association  
canadienne  
de physiothérapie

44 Eglinton Avenue West  
Suite 201  
Toronto Ontario M4R 1A1  
National Office

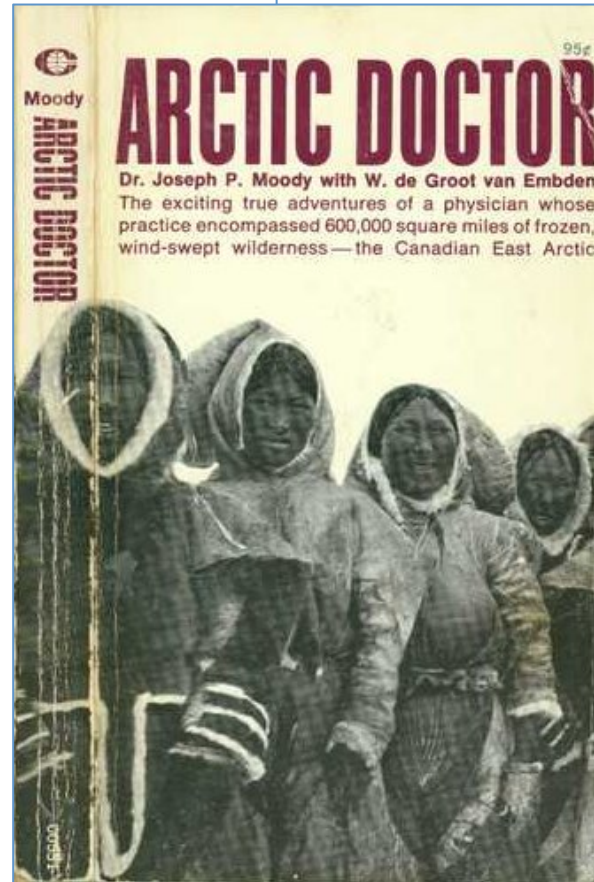
# The Connie Beattie & Artic Polio Legacy

- **1950** - A memorial initiative was also undertaken in Brockville, led by the local Rotary Club, to construct an arts and crafts building at “Merrywood of the Rideau” camp for disabled children near Perth, Ontario
- With most of the children using the new building having been affected by polio, as was noted in a local newspaper report, “it is indeed fitting that this addition be a memorial to ‘Connie’ who gave her life to treat polio-infected Eskimos”



# The Connie Beattie & Arctic Polio Legacy

- The Arctic polio epidemic and its aftermath certainly weighed very heavily on the Inuit, who would refuse all medical evacuations for a long time
- As Dr. Moody put it in his book, *Arctic Doctor* (first published in 1955), “this great disaster pursued the Eskimos like a nemesis. By direct action, it had crippled a race. Indirectly, it had been responsible for a plane crash that added another blow to the thinning of the ranks of the coastal and Caribou Eskimos”



2 THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1949.

## Took Terrific Toll

# Arctic Polio Outbreak Hit Hard, Killed Quickly

Ottawa, Oct. 7 (CP).—The infantile paralysis epidemic which struck Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., last February, would have knocked out half the population of a large city if it had hit in a similar degree.

This is the view of a medical team which flew into the sub-Arctic to make a post-epidemic investigation.

Poliomyelitis hit Chesterfield Inlet, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, some 350 miles north of Churchill, Man., between Feb. 14 and March 7.

In that time there were 14 deaths and 39 cases of paralysis among the 275 Eskimos in the area. In addition, there were 13 deaths in other areas of the Eastern Arctic.

The group of specialists who investigated for the federal Health Department reported their findings in a leading article in the current issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

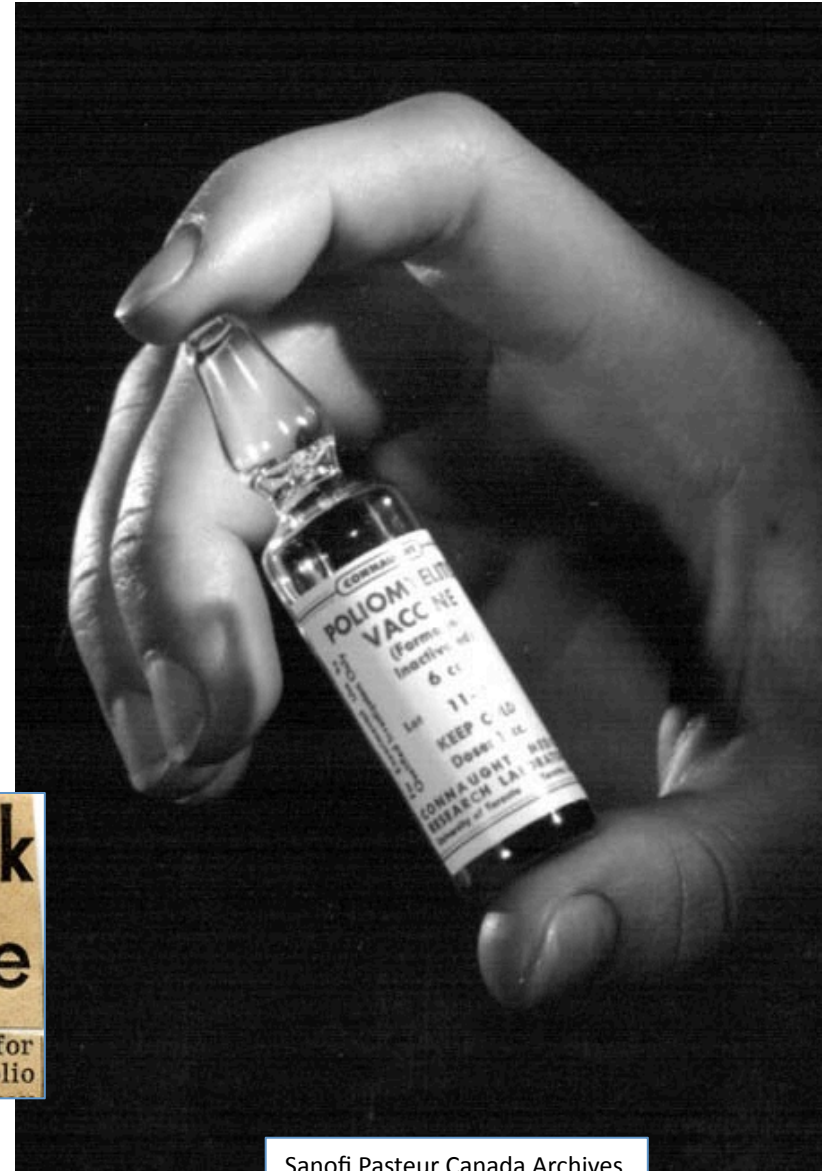
“The enormity of this outbreak can be appreciated only if one translates the death and disability rates into corresponding figures in a large city,” the report says.

“For example: If an epidemic of the same destructiveness were to attack Greater Winnipeg, more than 50 per cent of the people would be laid up, there would be in the course of 10 days 15,000 deaths and 42,500 people would be left with paralysis.”

Globe & Mail, Oct 8, 1949, p. 2

# The Connie Beattie & Artic Polio Legacy

- However, amidst all the tragedy surrounding this unique epidemic, much of scientific significance was learned about the epidemiology of polio, and especially about its immunology, that would ultimately prove very valuable to the development of polio vaccines, an essential role in which played by Canadian scientists like Dr. Andrew Rhodes and Connaught Laboratories



Sanofi Pasteur Canada Archives

# The Connie Beattie & Artic Polio Legacy

The Native Voice, Sept. 1949, p. 11

## Thank You...

The NATIVE VOICE

Page 11



<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/48323878/constance-marie-beattie>



DEAD WITH 20 OTHERS aboard R.C.A.F. Canso aircraft in flight from Churchill to Winnipeg was Miss Constance Beattie of Brockville and Toronto, pretty young physiotherapist, who went to Chesterfield Inlet, where this picture was taken, to aid polio stricken Eskimos.

**GREATER LOVE** hath no nurse than this, that she lay down her life while in charge of her patients. WE of "THE NATIVE VOICE" with saddened hearts, extend our deepest sympathy to the bereaved ones, and we mourn with them!

# The Connie Beattie & Arctic Polio Legacy

This presentation is an extension of my article published in *Canada's History Magazine* (Feb-March 2018), available at

<http://healthheritageresearch.com/clients/docs/Arctic-Polio/>

## MERCY MISSION

WHEN POLIO STRUCK THE INUIT COMMUNITY AT CHESTERFIELD INLET IN THE LATE 1940S, IT LED TO A TRAGEDY THAT SHOCKED THE COUNTRY.

BY CHRISTOPHER J. RUTTY

**C**ONSTANCE BEATTIE WAS THE ONLY real choice to answer a distress call issued by the Department of Indian Affairs in late March 1949. A physiotherapist was urgently needed to help treat Inuit polio victims in the Arctic settlement of Chesterfield Inlet on the west coast of Hudson Bay. It would be an unprecedented mission in response to an unprecedented and especially tragic polio epidemic that struck during the winter of 1948–49, seemingly seeking out a large proportion of the immunologically vulnerable Inuit population. There were about 275 Inuit, along with 25 non-Inuit, living in and around the outpost.

Connie was twenty-four years old. She grew up in Brockville, Ontario, and graduated from the University of Toronto's physiotherapy program in 1945 before serving in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. In 1948 she joined Toronto East General Hospital's physiotherapy department and very quickly became its head. She was also president of the Toronto branch of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, which was where officials from the Department of Indian Affairs started their search.

Connie wasted little time in volunteering her services. "It will be a thrilling adventure and a chance to help those un-

