

AMOS COMENIUS MEMORIAL SCHOOL

Hopedale

presents

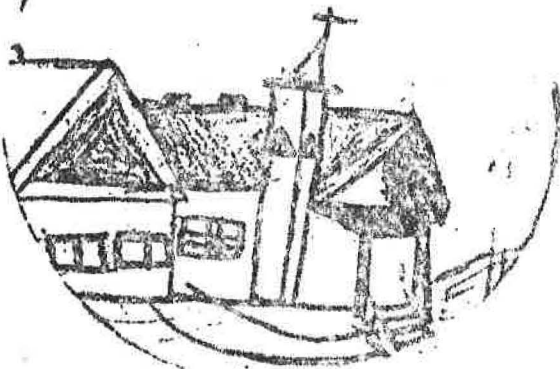
"WOMEN OF LABRADOR"

This play is an historical look at the women of Labrador over the last 200 years. The play is done in mime, depicting the chores, achievements and tragedies experienced by these brave women who did much in bringing Labrador to where it is today.

Cast (in order of appearance)

Narrator	Robina Pijogge
Inuit Woman	Hilda Hunter
Missionary Woman	Barbara Pijogge
Settler Woman	Lovey Piercey
Lighting	Ben Mitsuk Agnes Jararuse
Make-up	Sara Karpik

Labrador
Arts
Festival



WOMEN OF LABRADOR

Prepared by: Theatre Performing Arts Class 1983/84
Amos Comenius Memorial School
Hopedale, Labrador

Robina Pijogge
Barbara Pijogge
Hilda Hunter
Christine Winters
Lovey Piercy
Agnes Jararuse
Ben Mitsuk
Sara Karpik

Instructor: Larry Legere

for: LABRADOR CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

November 1983

Introduction:

(Narrator and actresses take places on dark stage. Each actress will be performing on different levels - narrator on stage right. At chosen point in introduction music, the spotlight will come up slowly on narrator, dressed in contemporary clothes.)

Tonight I want to take you on a journey back through time. I want to show you a glimpse of life as it was many, many years ago in Labrador. However, I will not be telling you of the accomplishments of men. Instead I want to tell you of the greatness of women.

Let's take this trip together. I want you to close your eyes. That's right - just relax and close your eyes and imagine we are all going back in time; ten years, twenty years, fifty years, one hundred, one hundred & fifty, two hundred years.

(During above, spotlight will be turned off and podium light will be switched on.)

Now slowly open your eyes. Our story is about to begin:

In the beginning, the Eskimos did not know that anyone else existed. They called themselves INUIT, meaning The People. They had their own way of life, a way of life that helped them to survive in a land that was bleak and hard and often cruel to them.

The Eskimos depended completely on the success of the hunt. Animals supplied them with food, clothing and raw materials.

(Lights come up slowly on Inuit woman who is miming the lighting of blubber lamp.)

One of these raw materials was the blubber from sea mammals. This blubber was burnt in homemade lamps often made of soapstone. The woman would slowly move the flame along a trail of blubber until the lamp was totally lit. This not only gave light but provided some heat for the inside of the igloo. This heat was not much but to the Eskimos it was a delightful welcome after being in the cold Arctic wind all day.

(Light comes down on Inuit woman.)

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In the year 1735, the first Moravian missionaries came to America. Soon, missions were set up along the coast of Labrador.

(Lights come up slowly on missionary woman miming the lighting of a fireplace.)

Many of the young men left Europe without wives and soon discovered the loneliness of missionary work. Many sent back home for their wives, who were often chosen through a lottery. This was always done with the young women's consent. After much prayer, a name was drawn and many young women soon found themselves in the cold mission houses that dot our coast. Usually there were several young couples who shared not only the mission house, but the chores as well. Each woman would take turns working week about, cooking, cleaning, sewing and so on. Often the task of lighting the fireplace was left to the woman, since the man was often away from the village.

(Lights go down on missionary woman.)

With the coming of wood stoves, the settler women found it much easier to cook and heat her home.

(Lights come up slowly on settler woman just getting out of bed. She will mime the lighting of the wood stove.)

Like the other women, the job of lighting the stove was usually her responsibility. Her husband was often away hunting or trapping or fishing. Getting up to a freezing house is no fun for anyone but this woman did it without complaint. It was expected of her. There was no one else around to do it. By the time her children were up, the frost had melted from the window panes and a good hot breakfast was sitting on the top of her stove. The children would run to the stove and rub their little hands together over the heat and wait patiently while their mother dressed each of them near the warmth of the stove. Another day had begun.

(Lights go down on settler woman.)

(Lights go up slowly on missionary woman who is miming the planting of a garden.)

Much of woman's time, in Labrador, was spent preparing for winter. Families often planted gardens when there was good earth to work with. They only grew hearty vegetables like potatoes, onions, turnip, carrots, cabbage, radish and even lettuce. Rhubarb was a very popular crop. The growing season might have been short but the days, during summer, were very long. This encouraged the seeds to grow into healthy plants. The woman did not mind working with the earth. It gave her a break from her constant housework. It also gave her great joy later when she could serve a steaming meal with vegetables that she had grown with her own hands.

(Lights go down on missionary woman.)

(Lights go up slowly on Inuit woman miming drying fish.)

The Inuit woman too, did much to get ready for the winter months. After a good catch of fish, it was her job to clean them and lay them out to dry under the hot sun. The catch was brought to her by the husband. Sometimes she would help him with his fishing but she was never allowed to go on the hunt. It was believed that this would anger the gods and that the animals would consider it an insult to be hunted by a woman. They would leave the land and never return.

After cleaning the fish, the woman would lay the fish pieces in the sun to dry. She always stayed close to the drying fish to watch for birds who would try to steal a free meal. But the woman's hands were never idle.

(Inuit woman begins miming the chewing of and sewing of moccasins.)

Even while sitting guard, she would do some handwork. This might have been embroidery work along the edge of a parka or on a pair of skin mitts. Maybe she would soften an animal skin, by gently chewing on it, and begin the sewing of a pair of winter boots. The stitches are made to keep out not only the snow, but water as well. Stitching an animal skin takes a great deal of patience and skill. If she did the job poorly, it would mean much discomfort for her family. Cold, wet feet would mean an angry husband and sick children. So she took her time. She did it exactly the way her mother or grandmother had shown her many years before. Parents and grandparents were the only teachers these people knew.

(Lights go down on Inuit woman.)

Teachers did come to the North with the arrival of the mission.

(Lights slowly go up on missionary woman teaching group of children
- mime)

The missionary woman often took on the responsibility of teaching the younger children in the village. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were important but time was also spent studying the history and geography of Labrador. As with many other things, the woman had very few educational materials to work with and had to make do with what she could make or find.

Strange as it may seem, this woman did not teach her own children. When a child was about 8 years old, all their belongings were packed and they were sent back to Europe to go to school. It must have been heartbreaking for these mothers to send their children so far away.

(Lights down)

For all women in Labrador housework was never done. There was always something to keep hands busy.

(Lights up on settler woman miming housework.)

Daily chores included preparing meals, baking bread, washing dishes, sweeping floors, dusting, making beds, and looking after the children. Other jobs, like washing windows, scrubbing walls, mending clothing, sewing new clothes, preserving meat, fish and berries, knitting socks, hats and mitts, were done at regular intervals during the year. Because husbands were often away trapping, the women might find themselves hunting small animals and fishing when food was low. Many of these chores were done with three or four small ones hanging onto her skirts day in and day out.

(Lights down on settler woman.)

(Lights up on Inuit woman miming ice fishing.)

The Inuit woman, too, sometimes found it necessary to help with getting food. Ice fishing was something that Eskimo women enjoyed. It gave them a chance to leave the igloo and be by themselves. With a spear, the woman would patiently chop away at the ice, breaking it into small pieces. Every now and then, she would bend over and scoop out the broken pieces. She would then go back to chopping away at the ice. Soon, water would be found and a hole would be dug through the ice

and slush. This was very cold work and much of it was done with bare hands. The woman would stop occasionally and put her hands into the sleeves of her parka. When the proper size hold had been made, the woman would drop a line, attached to a piece of wood, into the freezing water below the ice. Sometimes the woman would have to stand for a long time in the bitter cold before a fish would bite. When a fish was jigged, she would pull it in until the fish came out of the water. After removing the hook, she could throw the fish onto the snow around her. One thing the Eskimos did not need were refrigerators.

(Lights down on Inuit woman.)

The missionary woman was seen as a person who could do almost anything, and the village people were often knocking at her door with one difficulty or another. One job she often found herself doing was nursing.

(Lights up on missionary woman miming the mending of a cut.)

This might have been the pulling of teeth, delivery of babies, taking care of the sick and dying and performing minor operations. The missionary woman had to make do with what she had. Some times helping people was very difficult because she did not have the proper medicines or equipment. Often she would have to make her own remedies. Just imagine, she stitched up wounds, made small incisions and pulled teeth with nothing to relieve the pain. At times she probably felt sick when faced with problems she did not have the knowledge or equipment to do anything about. Many people died who would not die today if they had the same problem.

(Lights down on missionary woman.)

Death was a fact of life for the people who lived in Labrador years ago. I want to recreate a scene that occurred now and again in the homes that dotted the rough and often cruel coast of Labrador.

(Soft lights up on settler woman miming the grief for her lost husband.)

On a long, cold evening the wind is howling and shaking the window panes. Two days have now passed and still there is no sign of the fishermen. The woman walks the floor, back and forth, back and forth. She is very worried but she will not allow herself to think the worst. But where are they? Are they still alive? Why does this storm not stop? She lights a small lamp and puts it in the window. Perhaps

this light will guide her husband home. She is thinking too much so she makes herself busy. She washes up the dishes left from supper. Perhaps she checks the stove, making sure the fire does not get too low. Her husband will need the heat when he returns. She warms up the soup for the third time that night. Won't he be hungry, too? She has put the children to bed but the baby wakes up in his cradle by the stove. She picks him up to cuddle and comfort him. She tells him how much he looks like his father. She begins to cry. Dear God, why don't they come back?

(Lights down on settler woman.)

The Inuit woman had a different kind of dying to live with. Unlike the other women, death was sometimes caused by this woman.

(Lights up on Inuit woman miming the smothering of unwanted girl child.)

The problem was the birth of unwanted girl babies. Girls were not considered as important as boys. Boys grew into young men who would hunt and care for their families. An unwanted girl child meant one more mouth to feed. It was not considered wrong to do away with such a child. Even so this must have been a very difficult thing to do. What if the woman wanted to keep the child? What if she felt something special for it in her heart? But she did not think of these things. It would make what she had to do unbearable. And so, she would gently lay the child in its bed and smother it until it was dead. Such were the ways of the Inuit of long ago.

(Lights down on Inuit woman.)

After many years of service the missionary woman and her husband would return to Europe or maybe move on to another mission.

(Lights up on missionary woman on deck of boat.)

They would wait for the arrival of the one and only boat each year to leave the community. With her, she would be taking away many memories, some beautiful, many sad. She had learned to live in a land where many others had failed and would fail in the years to come. She had accepted the challenge and she had won. Until her dying day, she would never be able to forget the land and the people of Labrador.

(Lights down on missionary woman.)

(Lights up on Inuit woman miming moving.)

The Inuit of long ago moved from place to place in search of food. They were nomads, moving from one camp to another, always looking for the best hunting grounds, for those animals that gave them food and clothing. Igloos were left and new ones were built from the snow that surrounded them. The Eskimo woman was responsible for packing the cooking utensils and blankets and bundling up the children for the long, cold trip. This woman was never sure where she was going, or what hardships waited for her there. She did not worry about these things.

(Lights down on Inuit woman.)

Let us take one final peek at the settler woman, who unlike the other two, has moved little and has made her home a solid foundation for years to come. She knows that no matter what tragedies or unhappiness she has experienced, her joy for life and its challenges have been passed onto her children and she knows that they, too, will survive.

(Lights up on settler woman miming the tending of plants.)

And when her family has left her home for houses of their own, she will turn her attentions to new life. Perhaps she will fill her rooms and windows with plants. Plants are everyone's promise from nature that life will go on. This woman knows this. She knows that with patience, love, and nourishment, nothing is impossible. Even in the harsh lands of Labrador, her fragile plants will live.

(Lights down on settler woman.)

I have come to the end of my story. Such an amazing history these women have created for the people of Labrador. But what of the young women of today?

(Lights up slowly on all three women - they shall disrobe, revealing contemporary clothing. All will have cosmetics, [lipstick, eyeshadow, mascara] mirror and brush. They shall transform themselves into the young women they really are.)

Certainly, many things have been passed on to us from generations gone by. When the time comes, we will know how to care for a family. Housework will not be new to us. Preparing meals, taking care of

young children, tending the sick, getting ready for the winter months - none of this will be new to us. A choice to remain in Labrador, like many before us, or to leave our communities to attend a university, or a trade school or maybe just to experience the world outside. Because we now know that things can be different. We have seen this on television, in magazines, during student exchange trips. We now know that with the right kind of training we can become a lawyer, a doctor, a welder, a nurse, a teacher, an engineer, a model, an actress, a dancer. These challenges are exciting but many of us will choose to remain, to continue building the history of Labrador. But no matter what our choice, we have come far enough, as we have shown you here tonight, to demand praise where praise is due, to expect thanks for a job well done.

We are ready to walk forth and open the many doors life has waiting for us. Wouldn't you love to be around to see all the changes we are going to make? (Girls leave stage and walk through audience to exit.)

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