

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DAWJ-1  
The Middle North at Wingspread

P.O. Box 2723  
Whitehorse  
Yukon, Canada

June 8, 1966

Richard H. Nolte, Esq.  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10017  
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The middle north is a twentieth century phenomena. In the nineteenth century everything north of the industrial revolution was hard Arctic, a place for gold rushes, bearded Old Testament missionaries, and in Canada, Mounties on patrol. Most of Siberia's five million square miles was hell on earth, Lapland only a fairy tale and Alaska, of course, "Seward's Folly." No distinctions were made, there were no tones or shades. Everything was coloured white for eternal snow.

The myth faded slowly. There had always been a sharp difference between high arctic and northern forest but in the nineteenth century it was a distinction known only to academics and bushwhackers. Civilization and settlement were too far away and life in Shelby, Montana, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, or Kirov, Russia was strenuous enough. Any pioneer energy could be dissipated close to home with the double-bitted axe, the plough or the post-hole digger. The middle north had to wait until these artifacts became fashionable in the antique business.

The new technology which had been at least a century in the making took time to come north. It was after 1945 that man-made environment in the north began to have feasible advantages over nature's ready made one. By then it was an environment which could be packaged, shipped north and made to work in many places without excessive cost. A man in Whitehorse could do a full day's work, spend more time than he should in pursuit of leisure and diversion and yet take only a few minutes each day manipulating thumb and forefinger to provide his heat, light, shelter, plumbing and transportation. It was no longer a full-time job just to stay alive. Until twenty-five years ago sled dogs in the Yukon ran the mail, carried groceries and provided a stable ride for bibulous citizens on Hogmanay. Now, huskies, malamutes and siberians are family pets. Like their masters they tend to be soft and overfed.

The old isolation has gone too. What's news in Washington and Moscow is news in Juneau or Noril'sk. If he has to, the northerner can upset his metabolism as easily as anyone else by travelling between breakfast-time at home and midnight snack half way around the world.

This easy exchange of information and people has done more than keep the north in the picture. It has reduced the prototype to the stereotype. It is hard to be a Rube anymore. The backwoodsman and the city slicker are practically indistinguishable.

It was after 1945 also, that strategy came north. The influence and effect of DEW Lines, air bases and polar submarines were probably felt more in the south where the money came from and where most of it was spent. Much of this modern armoury was an adventure in the high arctic, well beyond the limits of the middle north, Air transport and supply lines leap-frogged over us. The bases which are in the middle north however, have made a contribution to local development. But strategy can change overnight. The modern version of the ghost town is the deserted military installation.

This mingling in the twentieth century, of technology and strategy has made the middle north and the arctic liveable and to a degree, more profitable. It has been a time also when the south has had more money, wealth and energy than ever before. What has been spent in the north has not been at the sacrifice of priorities or needs in the south. So, change and development have been epidemic in the middle north since 1945. Mines, power stations and pulp mills, a few of them gigantic, are now spotted on northern maps. How many more will appear in the next fifty years will depend largely on how man copes with his two universal conundrums, population and the need for raw materials. The middle north may offer respite to a hard pressed south. Undoubtedly there is space in abundance and it may well be that "vast storehouse of natural resources " that pamphleteers have written about for decades. Certainly, our knowledge of northern resources is paltry and we have discovered only the most obvious concentrations of natural wealth. After seventy years of effort, for instance, only about one percent of the Yukon has been thoroughly prospected.

So much for prologue. It was ideas of this sort which led to "Wingspread," a good name for a place given over to talking and thinking. The Arctic Institute of North America sponsored a symposium to discuss "The Middle North as Future." The Johnson Foundation of Racine, Wisconsin, played host to the symposium and made available their splendid facilities at Wingspread.

The Wingspread Symposium was not arranged to be a conversation among arctic buffs. There were old hands present, men like Governor Eske Brun with half a life-time in Greenland, but many of the participants were southerners with little or no specialized experience or knowledge of the middle north. They were there because this middle north is their backyard and its growth and change will be substantially in response to plans and needs from the south. A conference planning paper said that the symposium would "consider the North American north as an area of potential development and... suggest desirable courses of action." To do this effectively, you needed men from other parts of the world and with other facets of knowledge. The symposium proved that this mixture of background and outlook among the participants was an effective way to produce debate, new ideas and realism.

I can claim at least some residence and affiliation in the north. For four years I have worked and lived in northern Canada and in the process have gathered impressions and ideas about the future of the place, but I went to Wingspread to listen and to pay particular attention to what the southerners had to say. As I listened I made notes. In the end, three days later, the scratch paper I had used was remarkably free of doodles. There had been little time to wool-gather, or to doze off after the magnificent Wingspread cuisine. The discussions moved quickly. The atmosphere was light and easy. Ideas, arguments, propositions and prophesies flowed, sometimes even too quickly for the scribbler keeping track of what was said. I went home and began to write a summary of what I had heard and ended up producing an editorial rather than a report. What now follows therefore, is not so much a record of the Wingspread meetings as a commentary coloured by my own reactions and opinions.

#### THE MIDDLE NORTH AS GEOGRAPHY OR AS A STATE OF MIND

Where and what is the Middle North? This first question at the Symposium puts the man who hails from the area on the defensive. He is quick to explain that it is not the land of icebergs, penguins and perpetual winter night, nor is it the romance or polar dashes, Franklin's buttons, Oates' walk, or Nansen's "Fram."

The region defies precise description but it lends itself to some generalizations:

1. It is international; Russia, U.S.A., Canada, Greenland, and Scandinavia share portions of it. Great Britain, Japan, Iceland and China have peripheral and historical interests in the region;
2. In north America and Scandinavia it lies north of urban and industrial areas, north of the super highways and trunk railways. In Russia it lies not only north but east as well;
3. It is an area of sparse settlement where cities are few or non-existent and where indigenous people, who are usually of different racial stock than the dominant southerners, are a large percentage of the population;
4. It is a place where agriculture has never been the foundation of the economy nor the chief spur to new settlement;
5. It is usually a land of trees and mammals. In some places it runs down to the sea with a harvest of fish and water mammals. It is seldom pure tundra;
6. It is an empty land not because it is inhospitable, but because it has been the preserve of a group of industrialized and advanced nations who have not needed the area either for lebensraum or wealth. In bureaucratic jargon it has been, "surplus to requirements;"
7. Its future will mainly depend on needs and motives in the south.

8. It is a land which suffers from at least two misleading epithets; "the last frontier," and "a vast storehouse of natural resources." The first is inaccurate and the second probably exaggerated;

9. It shares the reputation of every past terra incognita. It is a land which most people couldn't care less about. When it is mentioned, it is usually more to frighten than inform.

#### THE MIDDLE NORTH AS VARIETY

Although the middle north shares many characteristics it has important variations to be reckoned with. No one description will suffice for all its parts. It was described at the Symposium by several speakers.

#### SIBERIA

The Soviet north is three times the size of its north American counterpart and supports ten times the population.

The sea routes between the Barents Sea and the Bering Strait are now used by some two hundred to three hundred ships each year carrying somewhere between one and two million tons of goods. A fleet of icebreakers lengthens the season to four months. The Soviet government has plans for new icebreakers and appears ready to make more use of this route.

On the rivers flowing north, hydrofoils are making an appearance. The current models carry between 80 and 250 passengers and can travel up to 60 k.p.h.

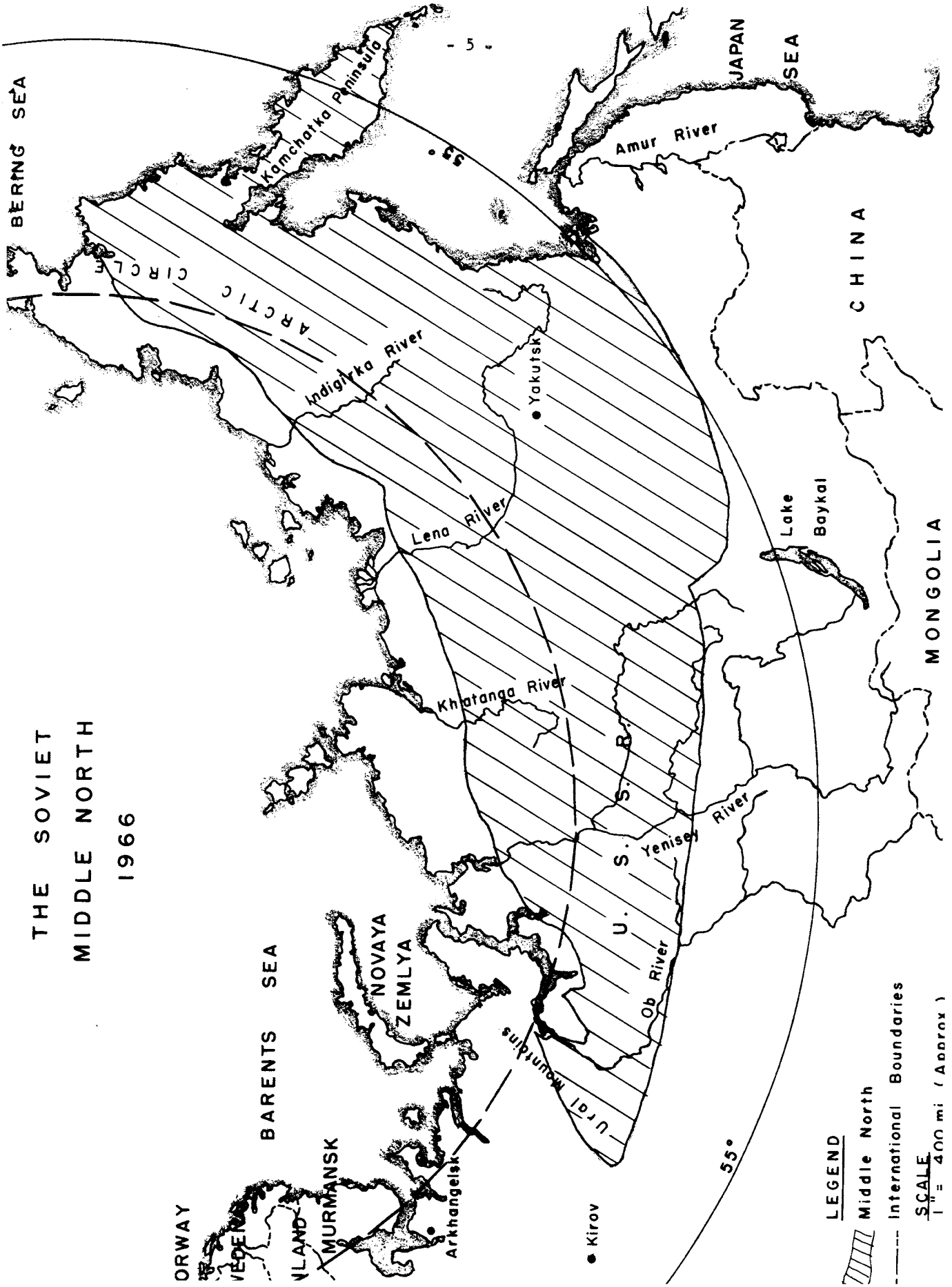
Air services within Siberia and over the Urals are dense. There are five jet flights a day between Moscow and Yakutsk. Overland transport is restricted by lack of roads. The trans siberian railway runs from east to west and seven spur lines have been built northwards between the Urals and Lake Baikal. Not one of these goes over the 65th parallel.

Mineral resources are extensive. Diamonds, gold, nickel, tin, oil and gas are probably of leading importance to the economy. The city of Noril'sk (close to the latitude of Inuvik, Canada) was built adjacent to a large deposit of nickel. The city has a population of some 120,000.

The Soviets have put more effort than north Americans into the harvesting of northern biological resources. Fur ranching and trapping are widespread and timber exploitation is important particularly in the valley of the Yenisey River. A domesticated reindeer herd further east is estimated to contain 2½ million head and is used for food and hides. The sea fisheries of the northern Atlantic and Pacific are big business to the Russians who are now planning to use such techniques as a 40,000 ton vessel with forty trawlers on deck.

THE SOVIET  
MIDDLE NORTH

1966



LEGEND

▨ Middle North

--- International Boundaries

SCALE  
1" = 400 mi (Approx)

Conditions of employment in Siberia are intriguing. Workers there can receive two or three times the salary and benefits which can be earned west of the Urals, and more significant is the fact that in the Soviet north the cost of living is not appreciably higher than in Moscow or Leningrad. The Soviet worker should have more money in his pocket comparatively at the end of his northern stint than his Canadian counterpart.

The turnover of labour in some parts of Siberia is high; as much as 95% a year in some places. Four main reasons are given for this; the lack of fresh food; anomalous wage scales within the same area where, for instance, an employee of a regional administration may earn less than a Moscow based man; lack of utilities in housing; and climate.

The use of convict labour has diminished considerably and the economics of development are now a factor which the Soviets reckon with. The future of Siberia is a matter of pride and national security for Russia and the area is a source of raw material needed in old Russia.

#### NORWAY AND FINLAND

The Norse and the Finns are the professionals in northern development. The Russians, Canadians and Alaskans are the tenderfeet. Settlements in the Scandinavian and Finnish north are often centuries old. The traditions of local government and of close political concern for the northern areas are established and accepted. In Norway there was fresh interest in the north after 1945 when the Norwegian government set about to repair the extensive damage done by the Germans. Since that time Norway has participated in a number of international ventures in the area, such as the building of a reindeer fence on the Finnish border and a co-operative power development with Russia.

#### GREENLAND

Settlement in Greenland is confined to a fringe along the southern coasts. This country is not a part of the Middle North which appears to have great potential for further settlement or industrial development. It is however, a place which bears close looking at. The society evolving there may be unique and perhaps the envy of its neighbours.

Modern settlement began in the early part of the 18th century and from then on Greenland was treated as part of metropolitan Denmark. It is, however, out-of-bounds to indiscriminate settlement. In the late 19th century the seal crop declined and the social and economic life of the natives began to undergo profound change; the classic transition from the stone age to the modern world of steel and electricity. The Danish government encouraged and guided the change by providing the basic services of the state but still in an environment where until recently, the native was cut off and protected from frequent contact with the rest of the world.

Greenland's population is now 45,000 with a growth rate on the order of 4% per year. These people are Greenlanders, a mixture by marriage of European and Eskimo. There are no pure Eskimo left in the country.

### CANADA

The geography and economy of the Canadian Middle North received thin treatment at Wingspread. Most of the remarks about the area were introspective and heartsearching. Canadians suffer from this handicap in the 1960's. The problems and schisms of confederation may dominate the future of the Canadian middle north for a time.

Aside from these fashionable constitutional issues are the more durable facts of Canadian life: a small population; limited investment capital; and the political necessity of maintaining, at all costs, the second highest standard of living in the world. The north must compete for attention and it will get that attention only if it can be made into an immediate money making proposition. Sovereignty, investment for the future, pride and curiosity will have little place among the Canadian motives for northern development, at least for the time being.

### ALASKA

Alaska is still an expensive proposition for the United States but Americans are probably still happy to have acquired the territory from Russia long before it might have become an Arctic Cuba. The strategic significance of the State still overshadows its other assets unless, of course, one can measure the romantic appeal that the word "Alaska" seems to have for residents of the southern 48. Just to say the word must give vicarious pleasure to millions of metropolitan-bound folk who have little chance of ever facing the terrors of the Alaska highway.

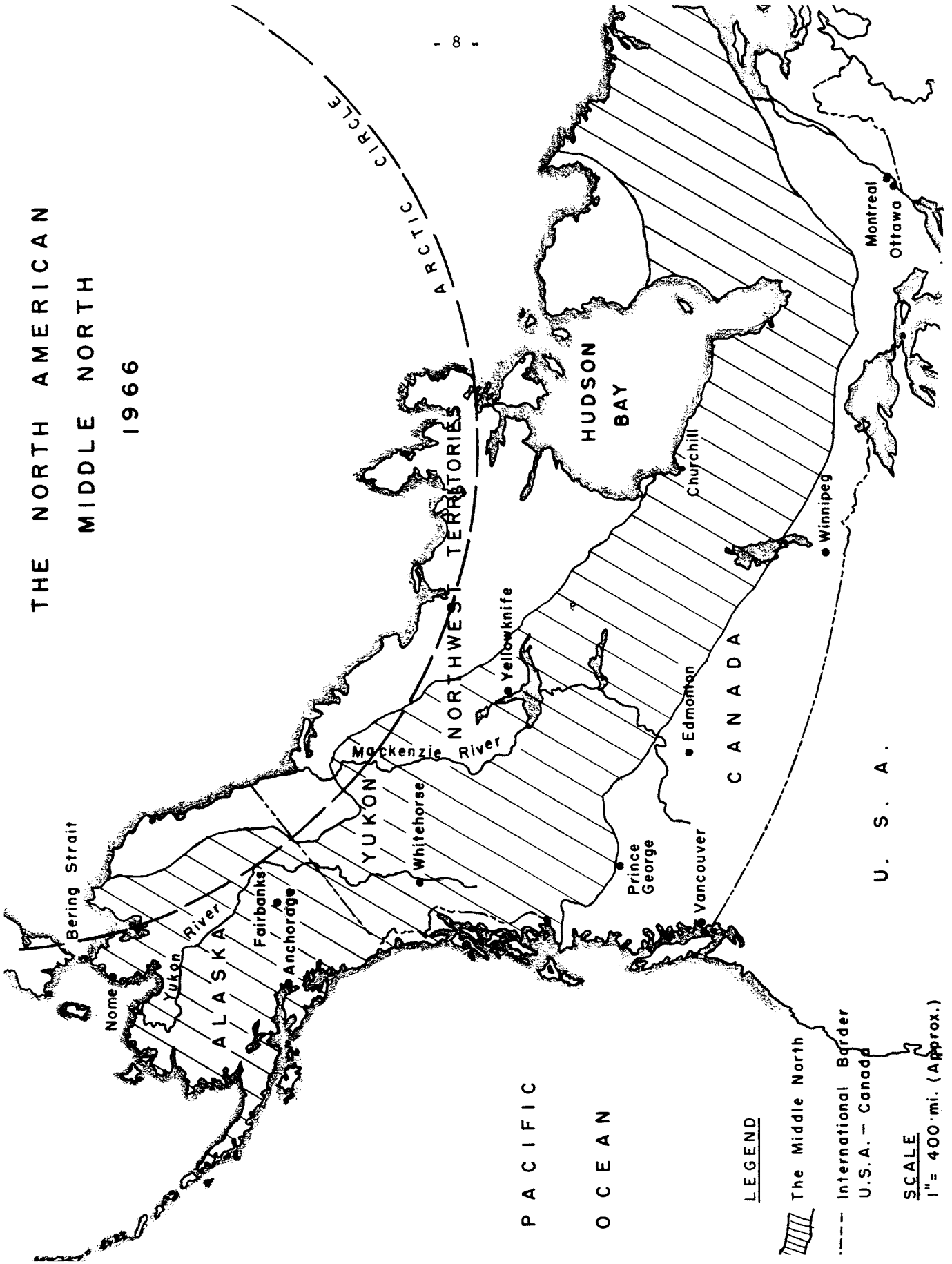
If the military importance of Alaska wanes then perhaps the moment of truth for the State may have arrived. Will it be able to support its present population at twentieth century standards? The answers to this problem are the ones which are now sought by Canadians who would be wise to keep a close eye on Alaskan events.

### THE MIDDLE NORTH AS OPPORTUNITY

One of the suggestions of the Symposium was that the middle north can be a useful asset to the south as a laboratory for study and experiment, both social and scientific. The classic confrontation between stone age society and the twentieth century is producing profound changes in the social structure and behavior of natives in the north. For the most part the initial shocks of "The Fatal Impact," are over and the long, slow process of change and adaption is in train. In Alaska and northern Canada the cultural and social problems of the Indians and Eskimos have been predominant. They are facts of everyday life and they are not yet solved.

THE NORTH AMERICAN  
MIDDLE NORTH

1966



PACIFIC  
OCEAN

LEGEND

-  The Middle North
-  International Border
- U.S.A. - Canada

SCALE  
1" = 400 mi. (Approx.)

U. S. A.

CANADA

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

YUKON

ALASKA

HUDSON BAY

Bering Strait

Nome

Yukon River

Fairbanks

Anchorage

Whitehorse

Mackenzie River

Yellowknife

Prince George

Vancouver

Edmonton

Churchill

Winnipeg

Montreal

Ottawa



But the native people are not the only social challenge. The north is the end of the road for many others who have not come to terms with the twentieth century; alcoholics, anarchists, pipe-dreamers and the professionally unemployed. Experiment here, in a conveniently isolated and small environment, might point the way to conclusions or remedies for the severe and dangerous flaws in the Great Society.

The middle north can share its problems as well with the other underdeveloped regions of the world. If the needs for education, health, utilities and services of all kinds can be made a part of successful economic development then the techniques and pitfalls of such a venture will certainly have relevance in Africa, Asia and South America. The north will also be a place for experiment in international relations, particularly for the delicate contacts between east and west. Although the strategic importance of the area may be dwindling there are still resources to be parcelled out and information and chores to be shared. A pattern of co-operation has been evolved in the relatively sterile political environment of Antarctica. A similar achievement in the north would be significant. "Go north to thaw out," etc.

The Middle North can also be a place to test the shibboleths of capitalism and communism, a new environment where the dogmas of the south can be exposed to fresh thinking. In northern Canada the ingredients of government and industry are already mixed according to different recipes. In northern Russia there may now be a tendency to judge success more by the balance sheet than by conformity with Party rubrics.

Finally, the north is yet another place where man can adapt to an environment and in doing so can increase his control over the elements.

#### THE MIDDLE NORTH AS FUTURE?

An outsider listening to the talk at Wingspread would probably say "future indefinite," in summing up what he had heard. There seemed to be no clear consensus about what will, or will not, happen in the next few decades in the middle north. This doubt may have been due in part to the lack of precise information at the Symposium about the natural resources of the area and the important developments now underway in the northern parts of some of the Canadian provinces. As for Siberia, it is very difficult to know what the Russians are really up to and whether they are making money or running on political inspiration.

The Symposium's careful and perhaps, pessimistic, approach to the future of the middle north was probably generated more by two specific ideas than by a shortage of knowledge, however. The first idea, which might have grown into a conviction by the end of the conference, was that the middle north would never be a place for settlers. In the twentieth century men seek cities and sun. The rural population in some parts of the world has shrunk in the last century and there has been a steady withdrawal, particularly in the United States, from the highwater marks of settlement in the nineteenth century towards the warmer parts of the continent. This trend is made possible by scientific farming. Fewer and fewer people

can grow more and more. Something of the same pattern can be expected in the extractive industries which in the middle north will probably increase in number and size in the next thirty years. The need for relatively large numbers of say, miners, drivers, clerks, labourers and longshoremen may diminish and instead the industries in the north, as in the south, may be manned only by a cadre of highly skilled technicians and engineers. As the need for employees grows smaller, so the opportunities and reasons for settlement will shrink.

The other concept which dominated the Symposium was the prophesy that mankind's sources of raw materials and energy would be radically different by the year 2000. Hydro power, coal, oil, gas, base metals, timber, natural fibres and so forth might conceivably become antique curiosities, about as useful in the twenty-first century as a philosopher's stone to us. The middle north would thus be obsolete before it had even had a chance to be modern. It might become the big back yard of two continents, a place for the new leisured classes to hunt, fish and admire the midnight sun. (Anyone who understands the mosquito and blackfly will know that the big backyard in the north is a little different from a California patio or a Cape Cod cottage. I suspect the much touted northern holiday would be a once in a lifetime experience!).

I wonder if these assumptions are too glib? Changing technology is undoubtedly going to have a profound influence on the middle north. It has already during the last century but so far each new technique and skill seems to have worked in favour of northern development, not against it. Air travel, hydro power, petroleum products, new metallurgy, electronic communication and radar have not only made life easier but more profitable in the middle north.

Technology will change radically but we can work and plan within our present knowledge and skills because the development of the middle north is a here-and-now proposition. It is not something which has to wait and take its chances thirty or fifty years from now. Mineral production in the Canadian north has risen from \$17 million to \$100 million in the last two years. The Yukon alone will probably produce \$100 million worth of ore by 1975. There is a report in this morning's newspaper that the Japanese are looking carefully at the huge deposit of low-grade iron ore on the Snake River in the Yukon. This may turn out to be the world's largest. If it is mined, that figure of \$100 million for the Yukon could double. Siberian figures may be even more impressive.

The middle north will go on developing within the technology and social patterns of the twentieth century. It will be a place of small cities, large mines, hydro and water developments, ranches and pulp mills. And there will be people to come north, away from the congestion and organization to a place where money can be made and where the individual can still make his voice heard. They will be the people who will not conform with the general pattern; misfits perhaps but undoubtedly pioneers.

#### THE SYMPOSIUM AS AGENDA

The sessions at Wingspread may offer some pointers for future meetings and seminars about the middle north.

1. We need to know a good deal more about the middle north, its resources, potential, communications, economy and what sort of people live there and the kind of life they lead. Without this knowledge discussion tends to fall back on arctic jargon and examples which are sometimes misleading or useless for the middle north.

2. I believe there is often a tendency to confuse the sociological problems of the natives with those of the future of the area. Since the days of the fur-trade the indigenous people of the north have not been an important factor in northern strategy, economics or technology. They are valuable people who deserve all the benefits and emancipation which understanding and study can bring. Their treatment will be a yardstick of our maturity. But the future of most of the middle north will not turn on their fate.

3. The middle north is an economic problem. How, why, when and where should governments and industry invest in its development? What should be the role of each in the overall scheme? Where is improvement needed in the tools and techniques of resource exploration and harvesting? Are incentives necessary and what are they? These are the vital questions in any discussion of the middle north as future.

4. The middle north cannot be talked about by itself. It is an integral part of the south, or in Russia, the west, unless China takes a shine to the region. Plans, policies, priorities, forecasts and motives for the middle north must be seen and understood as part and parcel of the northern hemisphere and of national and international patterns.

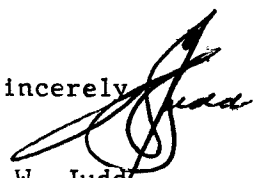
#### FINISHING OFF

I suppose I should be orthodox and entitle this last section something like "conclusions," or "lines of action." Should a symposium produce conclusions? The Greeks, who must have invented such a civilized institution, would never have reduced it to the mundane level of a board meeting. They knew that intelligent conversation in a convivial atmosphere is an end in itself (cf. cocktail party?). If we followed the Greek pattern we'd be better off, for a symposium, above all, is a time for education and not just another compulsive attempt to produce executive decisions. It's obvious however, that we don't think much of the classical custom. The closest word in our language is "bull session."

Well, Wingspread was a lot more than that. It was international; it spanned an immense breadth of knowledge and experience; it was history; it was topical and modern; it was future; it was even science fiction. People met people they should have known years ago or who were only names and biographies. Plans were made for further discussion and research.

And, I believe, it stirred curiosity and interest. The Middle North needs large dollops of both of these.

Yours sincerely

  
David A.W. Judd