

Thanadelthur

Thanadelthur was a young Dene woman born in northern Manitoba sometime in the late 1690s. There are no written records of her life, but we have come to know her story through the testimony of men who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and the oral tradition of her people.

Thanadelthur lived at a time when the Dene and the Ininew (Cree) were fiercely competing in the fur trade and regularly raiding one another's camps. In 1713, Thanadelthur was captured by the Ininew during one of these raids.

Escaping her captors, she arrived at York Factory in 1714. There she met the chief factor of the fort, James Knight, who was impressed by her forceful personality. Knight was concerned about the conflict between the Ininew and Dene and believed it was a distraction from the fur trade. He thought that if the Dene and Ininew could make peace, fur-trade profits for the HBC would increase. He hoped that Thanadelthur could help establish this peace.

In 1715, a peace mission was organized. Accompanied by Thanadelthur as the interpreter, plus 150 home guard Ininew people, Knight travelled more than 1000 kilometres north and west to meet with Dene leaders. Historical records contain testimony from HBC officials who said that Thanadelthur had a sharp tongue and was highly persuasive. She was said to have guided the two groups to an agreement through "her perpetual [sic] talking." After almost a year, the party headed back to York Factory, accompanied by ten Dene people.

Thanadelthur fell ill and died on February 15, 1717. The young woman was pivotal in establishing a peace between the Dene and Ininew peoples. This peace helped build trade relations between the HBC and the Dene, leading to the construction of an HBC fort at present-day Churchill, Manitoba.

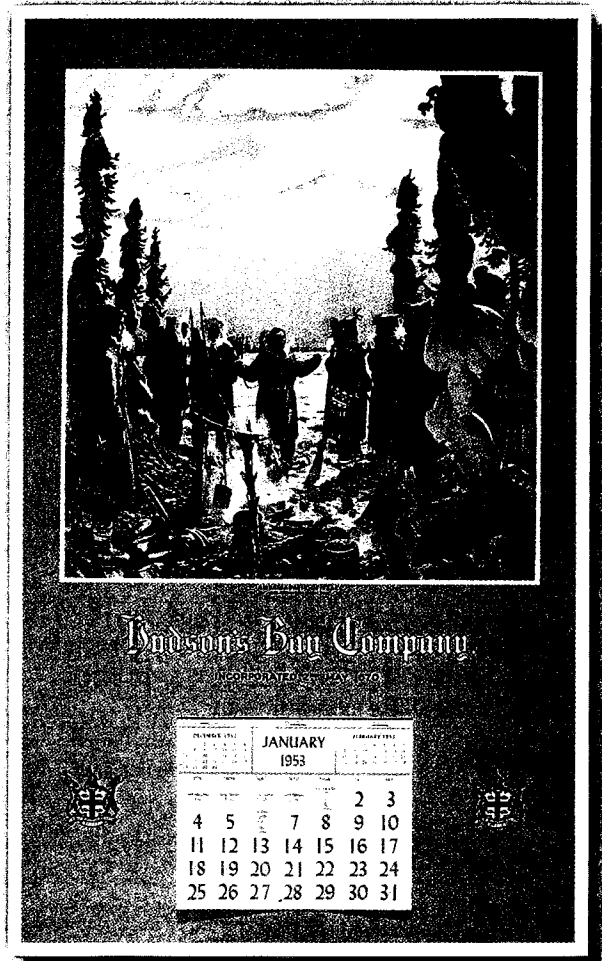


Figure 3-16 This illustration of the Thanadelthur story by Franklin Arbutuckle was created for the HBC's 1953 calendar. Thanadelthur was given credit for making peace by both HBC officials and the oral histories of the Ininew and Dene communities involved.

EXPLORATIONS

1. Name two consequences of the peace facilitated by Thanadelthur.
2. After Thanadelthur's death, James Knight wrote in his journal that "She was one of a very high Spirit and of the Firmest Resolution that ever I see in any Body in my

Days and of great Courage." Research other sources of information about Thanadelthur. Which are primary and which are secondary sources? Explain which information you find most reliable and why. What aspects of Thanadelthur's story are missing?