

O'Byrne, William R. 1849. *A naval biographical dictionary: Comprising the life and services of every living officer in Her Majesty's Navy, from the Rank of Admiral of the Fleet to that of Lieutenant, Inclusive*. London: John Murray.

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PEOPLE OF THE LAKES: STORIES OF OUR VAN TAT GWICH'IN ELDERS/GOOGWANDAK NAKH-WACH'ÀNJÒO VAN TAT GWICH'IN. By VUNTUT GWITCHIN FIRST NATION and SHIRLEEN SMITH. Foreword by JOSEPH LINKLATER. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-88864-505-0. Ixii + 391 p., maps, colour + b&w illus., glossary (Gwich'in-English, English-Gwich'in), bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$34.95.

A black and white photograph, taken in 1946, dominates the cover of this publication based on the Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Collection. Margaret Blackfox looks thoughtfully at the photographer. Her face is weathered and marked by a long life out on the land. The photo invites the reader to learn more about this old woman, her life, and the history of her people. *People of the Lakes* indeed recounts the story of four generations of Van Tat Gwich'in, aboriginal people living in the northern Yukon Territory, Canada. These four generations cover more than a century of firsthand experiences. The authors, the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation and Shirleen Smith, provide a written record of the aboriginal perspective on historical events and “how Van Tat Gwich'in approached the changes—and continuities—in life over the past two or more centuries” (p. xxxv–xxxvi), but especially since the mid 1800s onwards. In doing so, they want to secure language, oral history, and knowledge of the land for future Van Tat Gwich'in generations. Recurrent themes are childhood experiences, seasonal activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, and trapping), and historical places (e.g., harvesting areas like the Old Crow Flats, trading posts like La-Pierre House or Rampart House, and social gathering places like Bear Cave Mountain), as well as kinship, relations with Inuit, and the changes that began with the entry of European and Canadian fur traders and missionaries. The vast majority of information is obtained from the Van Tat Gwich'in Oral History Collection, which includes interviews with the four generations recorded by local researchers in collaboration with Canadian academics.

The book is divided into an introduction and four parts. Each segment deals with a particular historical era and generation. In the introduction, the authors give the context of the interviews and elaborate on the process of writing a book based on oral history. They deliberately leave out

a thorough theoretical anthropological discussion. Instead, the authors expand on the practical issues concerning the transcription of interviews from more than 300 audio tapes and the editing of those transcriptions to turn oral accounts into written ones.

In the first part, the authors discuss “long-ago stories” dealing with the era prior to European arrival in the mid 1800s. The elders of the “first” and “second” generation describe how the present world came into being. This part includes several old stories about animals, Gwich'in cultural heroes, the importance of Gwich'in women, and the relation between Gwich'in and their neighbours.

In the second part, eight “first-generation” elders (born at the end of the 19th century) vividly describe the 19th century and touch upon the early 20th century. They show how they, their parents, and their grandparents relied on the land for food, shelter, clothing, and material for producing tools. They further illustrate how newcomers, like the Hudson's Bay Company and the Christian missionaries, were incorporated into the existing nexus of relations between Gwich'in, Inuit, and other aboriginal people.

In the third part, 20 “second-generation” elders describe in detail their upbringing and the changes they endured in the first half of the 20th century. These elders form the largest group of interviewees and have been the most influential in the development of the Oral History project. The elders tell of their travels, social cohesion, important places, and the incorporation of new technologies (e.g., radios, store food). They further explain how the international boundary between Alaska and the Yukon Territory, non-local trappers, wage labour, and residential schools, have led to a gradual shift from a life out on the land to a more settled life in Old Crow.

In the relatively short fourth part, the “young elders” and the “youth” (presumably, the third and fourth generations) have a final say. Eight middle-aged Van Tat Gwich'in discuss the teachings of their parents and grandparents. They refer to important historical places, the animals hunted, and the importance of living life out on the land. They discuss the decline of muskrats since the mid 1970s and the definitive move to Old Crow. Nine young people address the importance of visiting historical places and listening to stories of their elders. Like the previous generations, the youth stress the pivotal role of the land. The authors conclude with a brief summary and emphasize the unique perspective this book offers on Van Tat Gwich'in history.

The stories and quotes, shown in a different text colour, combined with a vast number of illustrations, make for a pleasant read. In their attempt to bring four generations together in one volume, the authors allow enough room for Gwich'in voices. Indeed, the book reveals “an exquisite patchwork quilt” (p. xxxvii) from a predominantly Van Tat Gwich'in perspective. Unfortunately, the pattern of the quilt becomes repetitive and incoherent at times. The contextualization of historical events and significant places is repeated in several parts. Four of the six depicted maps are almost identical in showing historically significant places (caribou

fences, rivers, mountains, lakes and gathering places). Likewise, some photographs are reproduced as many as three times in the book. Finally, an inclusion of a CD or DVD with audio or video materials of the Oral History Collection might further enrich this book.

Beyond these editorial issues, *People of the Lakes* is an inspiring book and worthwhile reading. The beauty of this impressive volume lies in the continuity of the narratives and the intimacy in which the different generations tell about their personal lives and those of their ancestors. The book offers new insights into Van Tat Gwich'in history and illustrates how stories can and have been used as pedagogical tools. It is an invitation for Van Tat Gwich'in youth to listen to their elders and revisit historical places. Most of all, the book is a welcoming invitation for any reader interested in Gwich'in lives, aboriginal and Canadian history, anthropology, religion, politics, and ethnohistory. To conclude, *People of the Lakes* does fulfill its promise of learning quite a bit more about Margaret Blackfox and her people's history.

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THE LAST VIKINGS: THE EPIC STORY OF THE GREAT NORSE VOYAGERS. By KIRSTEN A. SEAVER. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010. ISBN 978-1-84511-869-3. xx + 277 p., maps, b&w illus., reference notes, works cited, index. Hardbound. £18.99.

From medieval literary sources and archaeological evidence, it is known that people of Scandinavian descent came to Greenland around the year 1000 and lived there for about 500 years. These people came from Iceland and colonized two areas on the southwest coast of Greenland: the Eastern Settlement (the Julianehåb district) and the Western Settlement (the Godthåb district). From Greenland, these colonists sailed onward to North America, setting foot on the shores of this continent 500 years before it was discovered again by Columbus. By about 1500, the Norse settlements in Greenland were abandoned, and the fate suffered by the settlers is an unsolved riddle, though one that has given rise to many theories: that they were attacked by or mixed with the Inuit, that they were exterminated by sickness, that they emigrated to America, that they were attacked by English pirates, and that a worsening climate resulted in famine. In *The Last Vikings: The Epic Story of the Great Norse Voyagers*, novelist, translator, and independent historian Kirsten A. Seaver examines what happened in the years between 1000 and 1500 on the basis of archival research, historical data, and archaeological evidence. She takes a critical

look at the theories about the demise of the Norse colonies in Greenland, for, as she points out, "serious problems arise when attempts at riddle-solving blossom into fanciful creations because records are spotty and scarce or, better yet, nonexistent" (p. 2).

In chapter 1, "No Forwarding Address," Seaver introduces the medieval literary sources about Greenland and assesses some of the suggestions as to why the Norse Greenlanders vanished. She dismisses climatic changes, arguing that "changes in the climate would not in themselves have caused an entrenched population to vanish while there was still food on the land and in the sea" (p. 9). She is also skeptical about the theory that the severing of contact with Norway around 1400 was a contributing factor, noting that "the Eastern Settlement lasted for a century or a century and a half after the rupture of formal Norwegian connections" (p. 11).

Chapters 2, "Eirik the Red Knew Where to Go," and 3, "Forging a New Homeland," provide an overview of the emigration to and colonization of the southwestern coast of Greenland. Chapters 4, "Leif Eiriksson Explores Another New Land," and 5, "Who Were the Skrælings?" treat the discovery of North America by Norse Greenlanders and their attempted settlement in the New World, which was abandoned because of clashes with the aboriginals. In medieval Icelandic sources, these aboriginals are referred to as *skrælingjar*—a term that Seaver maintains is a direct translation of *Pygmæi* (Pygmies), and which is used in reference to both Amerindians and Inuit peoples.

Chapters 6, "Relations with Church and Crown," and 7, "Foreign Trade," concern contacts with Norway. The former discusses the (successful) attempts of Norwegian kings to impose organized Christianity upon Greenland, and the latter, Greenland's exports, with a focus on Norway's increasingly tight restrictions on trade with and among Norway's Atlantic colonies. Chapter 8, "Contact with Iceland," gives a survey of historical events in Iceland from around 1000, including the Conversion, the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth, and Norwegian politics in Iceland. Seaver devotes several pages to an account of the wedding of Sigrid Björnsdóttir and the Icelander Thorstein Olafsson in Greenland in 1408 and of their departure in 1410, which is the last recorded voyage from Greenland.

Chapter 9, "The English in the North Atlantic," is also concerned with Iceland, though the focus here is on the English pursuit of cod and cod products in and around Iceland, especially as it relates to the consequences for the Norse in Greenland. Seaver speculates that the powerful Thorstein Olafsson probably encouraged English merchants to become middlemen for trade in Greenland stockfish, and she points to artefacts of English origin discovered in late-phase strata at Norse Greenland farms.

In chapter 10, "Where Did the Norse Greenlanders Go?" Seaver advances the theory that the Norse Greenlanders left on their own accord: "So few artefacts have been found in the ruins of both farms and churches that it points to a community decision to move on and bring their valuables with