

STEAM WHALING IN THE WESTERN ARCTIC. BY JOHN R. BOCKSTOCE WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY WILLIAM A. BAKER AND CHARLES F. BATCHELDER. *New Bedford, Massachusetts: Published at the New Bedford Whaling Museum by the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, 1977. 127 pages, illus., maps. \$15.00.*

Adjectives like brief, well-researched, illustrative, thorough, and readable best describe John R. Bockstoce's study of steam whalers and the history of their employment in the western Arctic. In this regard, the book is clearly in a class by itself, for it is meant "to serve as a catalog for a special exhibition at the Whaling Museum . . . and to stand thereafter as a permanent contribution to knowledge about this last significant phase of American whaling industry."

The author sets both the mood and the scene by describing one of the last authentic whale hunts in the western Arctic — that undertaken by the *Polar Star* in 1914. Through a judicious juxtapositioning of narrative and illustrations, he brings to life the drama of this highly-specialized endeavour of a bygone era. Then, leaping backward in time, he depicts the dilemma the American whaling industry faced in the eighteen-seventies. Plagued by declining profits, it had to choose between entering into a more lucrative business, such as the textile trade, or else changing over to the use of steam-propelled vessels, which could break through the ice-choked Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean to reach the bowhead whales. The lot of those who selected the latter course is the subject of the first section. This account is enhanced by an excellent description of the annual wintering-over at Herschel Island. The life of the families that began, from the winter of 1894-95, to accompany the whalers is discussed in some detail, with reference to contemporary records.

The next section, by William A. Baker, contains not only technical data concerning numerous ships, but also builders' illustrations, models and designs. The following section, written by John Bockstoce and entitled "Ship Biographies", is a treasure trove of information; each biography contains a detailed description, a photograph or other illustration, and a brief history, of a particular steam whaler, together with information on the location of manuscript records concerning it. The last section, written jointly by John R. Bockstoce and Charles F. Batchelder, comprises a chronological listing of the commercial wintering voyages for the years 1850-1910, the rig, master and route of each vessel being recorded with pertinent remarks.

Without exception, the graphics — maps, paintings, drawings, and photographs — were

thoughtfully selected and faithfully reproduced, with the captions serving as an excellent reinforcer of the text. The map on page 10 is a good example, graphically displaying the geographical knowledge of the sailors of the period under discussion. The vessels of the former U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, incidentally, also plied these waters, coming to the aid of whalers in distress or, when necessary, reminding them of the law. At Indian Point, Siberia, for example, cuttermen many times engaged in an impromptu rodeo under the midnight sun; they would lasso reindeer and hobble them for the short sail to Alaska, where the natives could use them as breeding stock. Today, one can search in vain on modern maps for the actual location, but the map on page 10 clearly identifies this once-familiar landmark.

Errors, if they exist at all in this slim volume, other than a few typographical ones, have escaped the concerned perusal of the present reviewers. In their opinion, Mr. Bockstoce has produced a handsome and readable book, of value to both the neophyte and the veteran scholar. It is, therefore, an especially welcome addition to the rapidly growing shelf of modern histories of the Arctic.

Dennis L. Noble
Truman R. Strobbridge

SIR JOHN RICHARDSON, ARCTIC EXPLORER, NATURAL HISTORIAN, NAVAL SURGEON. BY ROBERT E. JOHNSON. *London: Taylor and Francis, 1976. 209 pages, plus 33 plates on 16 pages. £15.00.*

The subject of this new biography was surgeon and naturalist to Sir John Franklin's two overland Arctic expeditions, which mapped much of the northern shore of the North American continent in the eighteen-twenties. He collaborated on five major books that still provide a valuable pre-settlement account of the plant and animal life of western Canada, surpassing that available for any other part of the continent.

At the age of sixty, Richardson returned to Canada to search with Dr. John Rae for the missing third Franklin expedition, and in the fastest canoe journey ever, travelled from Montreal to the mouth of the Mackenzie in the period between mid-April and the first week of August. In all, Richardson spent nearly seven years in Canada.

Richardson was not forgotten in his own country. During his lifetime, he was knighted by Queen Victoria, made a Companion of the Bath, received the Royal Medal from the Royal Society of London, and was awarded an honorary doctorate by Trinity College, Dublin. Even today, a popular guide directs

one to Richardson's grave at Grasmere as well as that of William Wordsworth.

The first biography of Richardson was written by his niece's husband, the Reverend John McIlraith, in 1868. It emphasized Richardson's piety and nobleness. McIlraith however lacked the expertise in natural history, geography and medicine to properly assess Richardson's contributions to these fields, and was furthermore too close to his subject, both in time and attachment, to be objective.

More than one hundred years later, recognizing that McIlraith had "treated Richardson's many achievements only superficially", Robert E. Johnson, an Illinois physiologist, has attempted a definitive assessment of this important figure in the history of Arctic exploration. He devoted two sabbatical years to the task.

Appendix A gives brief biographies of 132 persons important in Richardson's life; Appendix B lists the portraits, medallions, medals, monuments, memorials and geographic features relating to, or named for, Richardson; Appendix C is a fascinating translation from the Latin of Richardson's M.D. thesis of 1816 on yellow fever; and Appendix D lists Richardson's descendants. The bibliography of printed works and unpublished sources occupies 21 pages. Additional helpful notes are gathered in another 24-page section at the end of the book. All this material is important and attests to Johnson's diligence and scholarship.

The fourteen chapters of the biography proper provide a succinct, well-written and interesting summary of the important details in the life of this talented man. Thirty-three plates depict Richardson, his relatives and his hospitals and residences. Unfortunately, the place names on the two 1877 maps of D. M. Smith are very difficult to read.

While this excellent book covers adequately the medical career and explorations of Richardson, it does have some points of weakness. The dates of Richardson's arrival in and departure from Canada were not determined by the author, and there are at least ten errors of fact or interpretation, though most of them are minor.

My chief regret is that Johnson has not provided the "critical evaluation in modern terms" that he promised in the foreword. He is not a naturalist, and relied on a superficial assessment, containing some errors and many omissions, by a museum curator who obviously was not familiar either with the writings of Richardson or the area of his

studies. Johnson accepted at face value Richardson's overly-modest disclaimer of much knowledge of botany, and omitted any reference to his being joined by the even-more-competent botanist, David Douglas, in June and July 1827. The definitive assessment of Richardson's contributions to the natural history of the Arctic and Subarctic has yet to be written.

Johnson quotes Dr. D. A. Stewart, then head of the Ninette Sanatorium in Manitoba, who gave a masterful sketch of Richardson at the joint meeting of the British and Canadian Medical Associations in 1930:

"[Richardson] had in his life many of the conventional honours, and some marks of distinction as well. His was perhaps a life of industry more than a life of genius, but it was a full, good life, and in many ways even a great life. It is not every day that we meet in one person — surgeon, physician, sailor, soldier, administrator, explorer, naturalist, author, and scholar, who has been eminent in some roles and commendable in all."

I recommend this worthwhile book.

C. Stuart Houston

Books Received

ALASKA CRUDE: VISIONS OF THE LAST FRONTIER. TEXT BY KENNETH ANDRASKO. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCUS HALEVI. Toronto: Little, Brown. 1977. 152 pages. No price indicated.

THE ESKIMOS AND ALEUTS. BY DON E. DUMOND. New York: Thames and Hudson. 1977. 180 pages, illus. \$12.95.

ESKIMOS: GROWING UP IN A CHANGING CULTURE. BY CAROLYN MEYER. New York: Atheneum. 1977. 215 pages, illus. \$7.95.

THE FUR TRADE IN THE MOOSE MISHINAIBI RIVER VALLEY 1770-1917. BY DOUG BALDWIN. Toronto: Government of Ontario. 1977. (Ministry of Culture and Recreation, Historical Planning and Research Branch, Research Report 8.) 92 pages, illus. No price indicated.

NORTH AMERICA AND THE GREAT ICE AGE. BY C. L. MATSCH. Toronto: McGraw-Hill. 1976. 131 pages, illus. \$5.45.

RACING ALASKAN SLED DOGS. COMPILED BY BILL VAUDRIN. Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company. 1976. 133 pages, illus. \$8.95.

THE WINTER BIRDS. BY M. A. OGILVIE. London: Michael-Joseph. 1976. 224 pages, illus. £5.75.