

## Unfreezing the Arctic

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UNFREEZING THE ARCTIC. By Andrew Stuhl. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 232 pp. \$35.00 (hard-cover). ISBN: 978-0-226-41664-9

Stuhl is an assistant professor of environmental history based at Bucknell University. The subtitle of this book—SCIENCE, COLONIALISM, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF INNUIT LANDS—gives a strong glimpse into the book's themes, which is based on extensive library and archival investigations plus two years of living in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada, where the author served as a volunteer for the Frontiers Foundation. The geographical area of interest of the book includes the Mckenzie delta and westward along the Arctic coast of Alaska.

After an introduction, the book evaluates the social and historical changes within a chronological framework, first noting the early “colonization” of the area and the impact associated with the spread of the whaling industry (Chapter One) eastward along the Arctic Alaskan shelf to Herschel Island and Arctic Canada. Stuhl notes (p. 15), “*Far from being isolated or self-sufficient, these places (along the coast of the Beaufort Sea) depended upon an*

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*immense corridor of economic exchange, itself under threat and supported by two world superpowers—the Russian and British Empires.*” The coming of the whalers during the 1800s represented a marked shift in the economy of the Inuit from subsistence to an increasing reliance on bartering for trade goods and even for making a living, especially with the advent of the fur trade in the mid-1800s.

The second chapter deals with the introduction of “science” into this area of the Arctic and in particular notes the incursion of Canadian interests. “*The ‘Mary Sachs’ was a harbinger of Canadian colonial relations ... Of the nine ships waiting for ice to shove off the coast in 1913, three perused new lands and scientific knowledge for the Dominion.*” (p. 40). Stuhl interprets the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–1918 as a move by the Canadian Government to end the “bullying” of this new nation by England and the U.S.A. and to assert its claims to the sovereignty of the Canadian Arctic islands and channels. There follows an interesting discussion of the role of science and important role that the Geological Survey of Canada played in these early years of scientific exploration and discovery.

The attempts in both Alaska and Canada to introduce reindeer herds for commercial exploitation and First Nation employment is the topic of the third chapter. Interestingly, it was reported recently in the news that one of the few (only?) remaining herds on an Alaskan island will be selling meat to “high end” restaurants in the “Lower 48.” From a Canadian perspective, this effort was initially entrusted to a botanist, Alf Erling Posild. The chapter is an enthralling account of the social and

legal issues involved in trying to get both musk-ox and reindeer herding established, but its near fatal demise was associated with the stock market crash of the 1930s.

The role of the Arctic, geopolitically, took on urgent overtones after World War II, and Chapter Four, “Strategic: Defense and Development in Permafrost Territory,” describes the difficulties in understanding the role of permafrost in Northern development both in terms of the scientific challenges it presented and in its impact on development. This period led inevitably into the next period, which included the development of the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline and the increased involvement of both government and universities in Canada and the U.S.A. in efforts to document present-day biotic and abiotic processes and to increasingly comprehend the role of climate change in the past, present, and no doubt future histories of the region. Several individuals mentioned in this chapter that will be familiar to readers of AAAR include Drs. Ross Mackay and Jerry Brown.

As a non-environmental historian, but as someone with a deep interest in the Arctic, I found this book both readable, enjoyable, and instructive. I recommend it to anyone interested in viewing the last one and a half centuries of change in this part of the Arctic.

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