

firearms. Unfortunately, foreign traders and whalers were far less concerned about introducing these items and did so with great abandon.

While the Russians were hard at work expanding their area of influence and trade in western Alaska, the Hudson's Bay and the North West companies wanted to expand their trading activities into the Northwest. In 1789, Alexander Mackenzie had traced the flow of the Mackenzie River to its confluence with the Arctic Ocean. He observed that in spite of active trade links between Native groups, considerable hostility was evident between the Mackenzie and the Alaskan Eskimos, as well as with the Gwich'in Indians. The merger of the Canadian companies in 1821 set the stage for a western expansion of trade activities culminating with the establishment, in 1847, of the Hudson's Bay post, Fort Yukon, well within Russian American territory.

Part three deals with the accelerated social and economic changes imposed upon the Native peoples of the Bering Strait region by dramatic increases in whaling activities. During the summer of 1848, the crew of an American whaling ship, *Superior*, had a successful season, news of which spread quickly following their return to port in Hawaii. The following year 50 whaling ships headed north, and the fleet increased dramatically until 1852, when 224 whalers entered the Bering Sea region. Whalers were not the only newcomers to the area. Chapter 11 provides an excellent description of the vessels and commanders involved in the search for the missing Franklin expedition from the Pacific side of the illusive Northwest Passage.

Foreign whaling and trading activities were only some of the difficulties facing the Russian-American Company. At the company headquarters in St. Petersburg, enthusiasm for the distant trading enterprise was cooling, and thoughts of selling Alaska to the United States of America evolved into open discussions following the end of the American Civil War in 1865. Tsar Alexander was not interested in competing with American interests, and by 1867 the deal was settled: for the sum of 7.2 million dollars, Alaska became an American territory. Two years later Captain Charles Raymond boarded the 50-foot sternwheeler, *Yukon*, and made his way up the Yukon River to Fort Yukon, where (according to the author) he was cordially welcomed by the Hudson Bay Company manager. To no one's surprise, Charles Raymond's land survey proved that the trading post was well within the boundary of what had become United States territory. The following year the Hudson Bay personnel retreated up the Porcupine River and later all the way back into unquestionable Canadian territory.

In Chapter 14, the author reflects on the fate of the many Native groups in the Bering Strait Region. The latter half of the 19th century had brought considerable misery to them all. Trade had become part of the whaler's income, with alcohol and guns used freely as tender. The unconstrained flow of alcohol and diminishing sea mammal resources caused starvation on a large scale. Responsibility for the new U.S. territory passed from army to navy and finally to civil control. As stories of mass starvations reached the

outside world, U.S. revenue cutters increased their patrols, gradually reducing the illegal alcohol and firearms trade. Correspondingly the Russians improved their control of trade on the Asian side of the strait.

The 15th and final chapter of the book brings the 19th century to a close with the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek in the Klondike. As soon as the news reached the south, thousands of eager prospectors started out for Alaska and the Yukon, bringing about yet another change in the lives of the Bering Strait peoples, particularly on the Alaskan side.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Alaskan and Northeast Asian history. The research for the book is very impressive, as are the 69 pages of notes and the extensive bibliography. The map illustrations are sufficient. The reader will find a certain amount of redundancy between chapters and topics. However, considering the number of events, places, dates, and people encountered in this work, some degree of redundancy is actually helpful.

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FINDING DAHSHAA: SELF-GOVERNMENT, SOCIAL SUFFERING, AND ABORIGINAL POLICY IN CANADA. By STEPHANIE IRLBACHER-FOX. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7748-1624-3. 216 p., b&w illus., notes, bib., index. Cdn\$85.00.

There is a respectable and growing literature on the establishment of aboriginal self-government in Canada sited primarily within the fields of political science and political philosophy. We are beginning to be able to reflect upon the institutions, formal structures, and theories of aboriginal self-government, yet we know far less about its specific content and on-the-ground practices. At present, both the Canadian federal government and the Government of the Northwest Territories are engaged in negotiations for self-government with several northern indigenous communities, often touting self-government (and the related process of political devolution) as a route to aboriginal self-determination within the political structure of Canada. Hence, *Finding Dahshaa: Self-government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada*, by anthropologist Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, is a timely and extremely welcome contribution.

Finding Dahshaa contains fascinating, ethnographically rich descriptions and analysis of formal negotiations for aboriginal self-government in the Northwest Territories. Despite official federal and territorial policies to devolve services to aboriginal communities, the mandate of government negotiators belies a reluctance of governments to relinquish bureaucratic authority. Irlbacher-Fox, who assisted teams negotiating on behalf of several aboriginal groups,

goes further, arguing that the very processes by which the negotiations occur prefigure outcomes that will transfer very little real authority to aboriginal communities. Governments select the matters to be negotiated, set the terms for and the pace of negotiations, and determine which negotiating positions are valid. As a result, “self-government negotiations marginalize and exclude Indigenous peoples’ experiences and aspirations, to the point that agreements reached do not represent a form of self-determination but rather another iteration of colonization and forced dependence” (p. 5).

Irlbacher-Fox explicates her thesis with case studies drawn from three separate sets of self-government negotiations: the Dehcho First Nations’ negotiations for resource royalties, the efforts of the community of Délîné to assume responsibility for the delivery of child and family services, and the joint Inuvialuit and Gwich’in negotiations for control of language and culture programs. While each case concerns a different issue and involves different actors, they are remarkably similar in the way the outcomes are pre-determined to achieve very limited forms of self-government. Irlbacher-Fox attributes this result largely to a government discourse that labels social suffering in indigenous communities as historical rather than contemporary. Where it persists, as evidenced by poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, poor health outcomes, and violence, social suffering is labeled “dysfunction” and becomes the government’s proof that aboriginal peoples continue to require its strict supervision. In the three cases presented, social suffering as dysfunction is most clearly and poignantly articulated through the struggles of Dene residents of Délîné to assume jurisdiction from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) over child welfare programs. Although the state has proved to be a very poor protector of aboriginal children, the GNWT negotiators have insisted that the community of Délîné must demonstrate that it can successfully protect children for 10 years, using the existing GNWT protocols, before it can negotiate for fuller responsibility. But in a situation where the state is unable to protect the children in its care, how can Délîné possibly demonstrate its capacity? Yet, that is exactly what the state insists it must do. “Canadian Aboriginal policy provides a rationale to Indigenous peoples for their suffering, while simultaneously positioning the state as a source of redemption and healing. This positioning functions as the state’s theodicy, characterizing Indigenous peoples as unmodern and dysfunctional, caused respectively by cultural difference and poor lifestyle choices. ...Unable to cope with modernity either culturally or morally, Indigenous peoples are encouraged to turn to the state as the source of redemption through programs and services that will assist both their modernization and their development of necessary knowledge and techniques to overcome self-imposed dysfunction” (p. 31).

Chapters covering the three sets of negotiations are interspersed with ethnographic descriptions of the author’s experience learning to tan moosehide from Dene women. The book’s title comes from the Gwich’in name for the

difficult-to-find, partially decomposed spruce wood (*dah-shaa*) used in the final smoking of a hide. Irlbacher-Fox uses her descriptions of the work of moosehide tanning as a way to counteract the all too hegemonic discourses that present “indigeneity as historical rather than real” (p. 44). The activity of moosehide tanning reveals the continued vitality of northern aboriginal cultures. Moosehide tanning is far more than a technology; rather, it is a political activity that supports and is supported by valued Dene social relations and practices. Irlbacher-Fox shows that through moosehide tanning (and presumably other activities), Dene are able to enact a form of self-determination. Genuine *dahshaa* is rare and hard to find, as is the (thus far) elusive indigenous control sought in self-government negotiations.

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