

LABRADOR ODYSSEY: THE JOURNAL AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF ELIOT CURWEN ON THE SECOND VOYAGE OF WILFRED GRENFELL, 1893. Edited by RONALD ROMPKY. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. xxxix + 231 p., b&w illus., notes, index. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.95.

Eliot Curwen's account of a summer expedition to the southern Labrador coast in 1893 offers compelling insights and information on the lifestyle of transient cod fishermen and permanent residents of the region. His journal reflects the intellectual and literary tradition of the Victorian age, showing Curwen as an inimitably curious natural scientist and a lucid diarist. He combined his medical profession with interests in archaeology, human behaviour, geology, meteorology, natural history, and photography, as well as being an active evangelist. His candid observations on social conditions along the Labrador coast describe a desperately impoverished society that lacked adequate food, housing, clothing, and the means—both material and constitutional—to alter its circumstances.

Curwen and Grenfell were two of three doctors who travelled to Labrador to establish two outpost hospitals that would provide medical treatment to people living at numerous small fishing stations dispersed throughout the southeastern coastal region. Sponsored by the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, a London-based charity aiding mariners in the North Sea, the venture was also supported by the commercial and political elite of Newfoundland concerned with the operation of the Labrador fishery.

Facilities available at Battle Harbour, a southerly centre for the cod fishery, enabled the immediate opening of a hospital there, but bad weather delayed the delivery of construction materials for the second hospital farther to the north at Indian Harbour, of which Curwen was to have taken charge. Instead, Curwen used the Mission's schooner as a mobile hospital: he sailed to large harbours and also visited outlying stations by rowboat or on foot over a period of three months. Grenfell also made tours to various remote fishing premises, travelling in a motor launch that could more easily navigate the rugged coastline. The most northerly settlement reached by Curwen was a Moravian Church community at Hopedale, while Grenfell's tour extended further, to Moravian villages at Zoar, Nain, and Okak.

Curwen prepared three records of his observations: an indexed notebook, which was the basis for a polished journal narrative that he sent in installments to his family, and two albums of photographs, which he developed and printed on board the ship or anywhere a darkroom was available. The present volume derives from his journal and photo collection, as well as correspondence written by other principal expedition members, particularly the leader, Grenfell. Two photographs of Inuit at Okak, published on pages 114 and 115, were obviously taken by Grenfell and should be credited to him, since Curwen did not visit this area.

The comprehensive endnotes refer to the content of Curwen's original notebook, but I would have preferred to

have more information about and from that document in the text rather than the reports by other authors, which interrupt Curwen's account and digress from his perspective. Rompkey gives no justification for the inclusion of this material, nor does he indicate the criteria for his selection of images from Curwen's collection, described simply as containing numerous photographs that could not all be reproduced. Curwen was obviously an ardent photographer who would have given equal value to his images and his text, so an explanation of Rompkey's interpretation of them is warranted.

The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen expedition to Labrador occurred at a time when codfish catches had been meagre for several years, which partly accounted for the abject poverty of migrant and resident fishing families. However, in Curwen's view, a pervasive factor influencing the state of coastal affairs was the exploitation of people by merchants. Exorbitant prices for essential provisions, along with the devaluation of cod and other local resources, depleted the income of fish harvesters, who trusted the financial calculations of shopkeepers because they could not read. Thus Labrador residents, known as "livyers" (a corruption of "live here"), were unable to afford proper fishing gear and could not compete with fishing crews from Newfoundland, who made better catches but faced appalling conditions during transit in severely cramped holds of schooners. Curwen took particular exception to the poor treatment of women and children in fishing crews and was critical of the overall neglect shown by the Newfoundland government in Labrador affairs.

Extreme hardship typified life on the southern Labrador coast. Curwen was repelled by the squalor of log and turf hovels, people dressed in patched garments or layers of rags without a change of clothing or warm apparel for winter and a food supply barely sufficient to avert malnutrition or even starvation. He was remarkably mystified by the behaviour of Newfoundlanders, whom he portrayed as stoically indifferent to the gifts, greetings, and medical aid given to them. Curwen was more comfortable in the society of the Moravian missionaries and the Inuit at Hopedale, who were more affable, orderly, and prosperous.

"Livyer" inhabitants in southern Labrador had Inuit ancestry, and a brief review of their history and association with aboriginal people would have benefitted readers unfamiliar with the unique cultural complexity of the Labrador coast. Reference to the ethnic status of families is not consistent, as shown in a photograph of the Thoms family (p. 37): the caption describes the widow as "a half-breed," but the journal's text states that she and two brothers, one with a wife, were "full-blooded Esquimaux." A photograph on the following page indicates that the brother's wife had one grandparent who was an Englishman, but three others who were Inuit. Whether this family and their descendents qualify as Inuit or Métis is a critical question in contemporary Labrador ethnopolitics. The rendition of surnames and place-names should also have been verified with regional conventions, as the "Blomfield" family referred to on pages 145 and 147–149 should be "Broomfield," and "France's Bight," mentioned on

page 188, was commonly known as “St. Francis Harbour Bight.”

One expedition to the Labrador coast was apparently enough of an experience for Curwen’s career. His pragmatic nature contrasted with Grenfell’s casual but determined approach that ultimately led Grenfell to become the champion of social and economic reform in coastal Labrador and to create an international agency to attract donations for the cause. Curwen served as a medical missionary in China from 1894 to 1900 and then settled in Sussex, where he established a medical practice and made an active study of local archaeological sites.

The publication of Curwen’s account coincides with a moratorium on the harvesting of northern cod in an immense area stretching from southern Labrador to eastern Newfoundland. This resource was the foundation for the lifestyle and culture described by Curwen—a lifestyle which, a century later, is rapidly becoming only a memory. With the preservation of people’s experiences in this volume, Ronald Rompkey has made a fine contribution to the history of Labrador and of the inception of Grenfell’s mission there.

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GREAT NORTHERN LOST MOOSE CATALOGUE.

Whitehorse, Yukon: Lost Moose Publishing, 1997. 224 p., b&w illus., maps. Softbound. Cdn\$26.95.

This is the third and largest catalogue published by Lost Moose Publishing since 1979. With over 250 contributors, the Catalogue is an eclectic mix of stories, science, history, poems, and illustrations of life in the Yukon. It celebrates the beauty of the land and the people, brings laughter and tears, and educates with how-to articles, history, and scientific publications. The collection is not a compilation of the most well-known authors and artists of the North, but rather a juried selection from unsolicited and solicited submissions. It speaks of the diversity of cultures, interests, perceptions, and knowledge of the people living in the North in the late 1990s: “In all our silly poems and goofy pictures, in all our fine handcrafted easy chairs, filling our faces with rosehip jelly and lowbush cranberry tea, mushing our dogs or tapping at our computers, here is whatever the north means, at least to an ill-knit community, scattered around Canada and Alaska, in the hear [sic] and now. This book is our celebration of the North we know today. Whatever kind of thrown-together-and-scattered-again-to-the-four-winds community we might have, we have done what little we could to stitch it together and show it off, in a land so big and wild you can lose a moose in it” (Al Pope: front matter).

The work is loosely divided into nine topic areas, with an additional chapter devoted to book reviews of other

publications from Lost Moose Publishing. The table of contents is repeated on the outside of the back cover, and tabs are printed along the outer edge of every page. An index assists the reader with rudimentary location of general story subjects. Pages have generally been formatted in three-column newspaper style, with an average of two written submissions per page. With an even greater number of visual presentations, the reader is treated to an enormous selection of Yukon impressions. The black-and-white reproduction of most illustrations is of professional quality.

“Lay of the Land” provides the reader with vivid passages describing northern landscapes and colours through the seasons, highlighting the beauty and necessity of out-houses, and showing our obsession with the weather—how cold it gets in the winter, how long the cold lasts, and what works and doesn’t work at those temperatures. The reality that Whitehorse has some urban ailments is evident in the submissions from a street child and a visitor to a drop-in-centre.

“Animals” mixes scientific studies with government publications, tongue-in-cheek humour, tales of encounters, and how-to articles. Readers can learn how to make a moose puppet, which Yukon species are at risk, where bird watching on the Dempster Highway is optimal. A northern rendition of “The Three Little Pigs”—retold as “The Three Gophers”—is particularly entertaining.

“Self-sufficiency” spans recipes for rhubarb, gardening in the North, living at 40 below (the weather theme is evident again), making furniture, dealing with blindness, the art of berry picking and preserving, fixing wobbly axes, and the challenges of working from home. There are stories which reminisce, teach, and entertain.

“Growing kids” is a theme that is new to this catalogue—youth are given a place to record thoughts, ask questions, and exhibit their artwork, while adults talk about youth. A new legend is presented to explain why you should not whistle or clap at the northern lights. While some youth share the positive aspects of being a young person in the Yukon, one teen records a sobering account of youth suicide. The Old Crow school fire, Whitehorse teen-parent centre, and Old Crow youth centre project are factual accounts of events and programs involving youth. Parents who are outdoor enthusiasts share advice on how to succeed at family outings in all seasons.

“Art” presents interviews and notebooks from carvers, weavers, and filmmakers. Artists share the inspiration that they receive from the natural beauty of the land, describe how to make willow baskets, and recall memories from the stage. Art work and photos enliven the pages in this chapter and throughout the collection.

“Recycling” is very similar to the “Self-sufficiency” chapter. Here the reader will find articles on building a home from a garden shed and the local dump, spinning and knitting dog hair, composting with worms, making a quilted pot holder, making paper, and the top ten uses for wooden pallets. The hierarchy of the three Rs is discussed, and personal environmental impact is evaluated.