

Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic: The *Neptune* Expedition of 1903-04

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ABSTRACT. Prior to 1903, Canada did not effectively exercise jurisdiction over its Arctic territories, where men of various nationalities carried out whaling, hunting, trading and mining without any restriction. The Dominion Government Expedition of 1903-04 on board the *Neptune* constituted the first significant step towards the assertion of Canadian authority in the eastern Arctic, particularly in Hudson Bay. Its members established a police post, implemented customs procedures, prohibited trade in the hides of musk-ox (an endangered species), and informed the Eskimos that Edward VII was their king. In addition to demonstrating the Dominion Government's authority over its Arctic territories, the *Neptune* Expedition helped to promote the decline of the whaling industry, which for decades had provided the economic basis of Eskimo life in certain regions.

RÉSUMÉ. *La souveraineté du Canada dans l'Arctique: l'expédition du Neptune en 1903-04.* Jusqu'en 1903 le Canada n'exerçait pas de juridiction efficace sur ses territoires de l'Arctique où des hommes de nationalités diverses s'adonnaient sans restriction aucune à la pêche à la baleine, à la chasse, aux échanges commerciaux et à l'exploitation minière. L'expédition du gouvernement du Dominion de 1903-04 à bord du *Neptune* représenta le premier pas important en vue d'une assertion de l'autorité du Canada sur l'Arctique de l'est, en particulier sur la mer d'Hudson. Ses membres établirent des postes de police, rendirent effectives des procédures douanières, interdirent le commerce des peaux de bœuf musqué (une espèce en danger d'extinction) et informèrent les Esquimaux qu'Edouard VII était leur roi. En plus de cette démonstration de l'autorité du gouvernement du Dominion sur ses territoires de l'Arctique, l'expédition du *Neptune* favorisa le début du déclin de l'industrie de la pêche à la baleine qui pendant des décennies avait fourni la base économique de la vie esquimaude dans certaines régions.

РЕЗЮМЕ. *Права Канады в Арктике: экспедиция «Нептуна» 1903-04 гг.* До 1903 г. Канада не осуществляла эффективно юрисдикцию над своими арктическими территориями, где представители различных национальностей без всяких ограничений занимались китобойным промыслом, охотой, торговлей и добычей минералов. Организованная правительством доминиона экспедиция «Нептуна» 1903-04 гг. была первым серьезным шагом в демонстрации канадскими властями своих прав на восточную Арктику, в частности, на Гудзонов залив. Руководители экспедиции учредили полицейский пост, ввели таможенные правила, запретили торговлю шкурами мускусного быка/который находился под угрозой полного истребления/ и довели до сведения эскимосов, что Эдуард VII является их королем. Помимо демонстрации прав доминиона на арктические территории, экспедиция «Нептуна» помогла сократить китобойный промысел, который в течение десятилетий был в некоторых районах экономической основой жизни эскимосов.

BACKGROUND

The extension of Canadian jurisdiction into the Arctic regions was not accomplished at any one time or achieved by any one event. It was the outcome of many individual feats of discovery, claims of possession, acts of administration, and

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instances of occupation. Discovery and claim are seldom, by themselves, enough to confer secure title to land; how much more is required depends on the international political climate of the day, in particular the degree to which other nations covet the territory in question or its resources.

In 1870 and 1880 Britain transferred to Canada certain mainland regions and islands in the Arctic which were believed to be British through discovery and a number of declarations of possession (Johnson 1933; Smith 1961, 1963). The boundaries of the transferred regions were defined only in the vaguest terms, open to several reasonable interpretations. These two cessions, however vague, and an Act of the Canadian parliament of 1895 under which the territories were divided into four districts, provided the politico-legal framework for Canadian sovereignty in the North; but it remained for Canada to turn paper privileges into real and undisputed possession. There was, however, an atmosphere of complacency or lack of interest regarding these remote regions, and effective control was slow to be exerted. When Otto Sverdrup, a Norwegian, discovered and claimed several large islands in the Arctic Archipelago around the turn of the century, "the shock drew the Canadian Government straight up in its armchair" (Jenness 1964 p. 18). One of the positive results of this shock treatment was the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic islands on board the D.G.S. *Neptune*, or more simply, the *Neptune* Expedition.

There had been government expeditions before — three commanded by A. R. Gordon in the eighteen eighties, and one under William Wakeham in 1897 — but their main object had been to assess the feasibility of commercial navigation from a proposed grain port on Hudson Bay through Hudson Strait. They were manifestations of a lingering, two-centuries-old Hudson's Bay Company concept of the Arctic as a transit zone, a region to be traversed for a few months in summer, a short cut between New World resources and Old World markets. The expeditions did little to strengthen Canada's claim in the Arctic, for the meteorological stations established in Hudson Strait were only temporary, and explorations further north were minimal, but they did draw attention to the intensity of foreign whaling operations and resulted in the suggestion that the industry be regulated (Zaslow 1971 p. 256).

Foreign whaling vessels had been operating between Greenland and Baffin Island for two and a half centuries. As whale stocks had declined and shifted away from hunting pressure the whalers had pushed steadily westward, to the coast of Baffin Island (1820), Cumberland Sound (1840), Hudson Bay (1860), and later Prince Regent Inlet. One-season voyages involving brief and irregular encounters with the native inhabitants came to be supplemented more and more by wintering voyages and the establishment of year-round shore stations, which increased the frequency and duration of contact. No government asserted authority over the regions in which the whalers cruised; the captains were never notified of policies or restrictions on the killing of whales and other animals, navigation within territorial waters, the establishment of shore bases, or trade and employment among the Eskimos. Indeed, in the minds of the whalers the Arctic was beyond the sphere of national sovereignties, a no man's land in which they were free to operate as they wished. In the absence of any tangible demonstration of

governmental authority they could make what they wished of the political geography; the page heading of the logbook kept on board one American whaler in Hudson Bay reads "Lying in Repulse Bay, Greenland" (Millard 1866-67).

Only in one area had the whalemens been challenged, and there only half-heartedly. The Hudson's Bay Company, which held a commercial monopoly over the whole of Rupert's Land, sent a vessel northwards from Churchill in 1866 to oppose the trading activities of American whalers beyond Marble Island (Ross 1973). The gesture in no way discouraged the Americans, who continued to operate in the region until 1915.

It was not only whalemens who had been operating in the Arctic without restriction. Many explorers had traversed the region, wintering here and there, dispatching overland parties, and adding to the maps. While their ecological impact was generally less than that of the whalers, their potential political impact was greater; explorers, whether representing a government or not, tended to see themselves as the vanguard of territorial acquisition.

The permissive atmosphere of nineteenth century exploration and exploitation in the Arctic regions north of the Canadian mainland does not appear to have

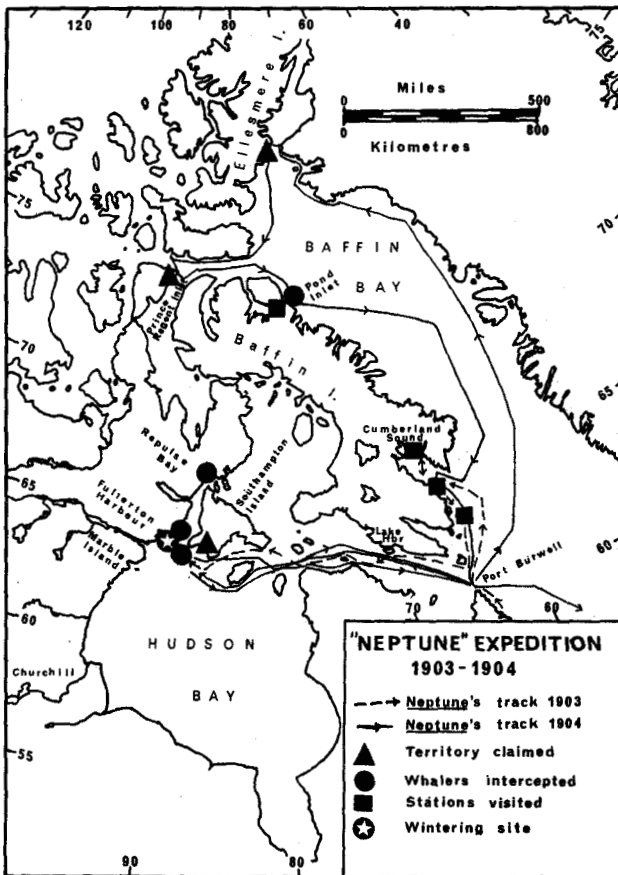


FIG. 1. The itinerary of the Neptune expedition. Sources: Borden n.d., Low 1906, Moodie 1905, Taylor 1956.

been altered by the transfers of 1870 and 1880 or the several government expeditions that followed. The period prior to the *Neptune* expedition has been aptly characterized by the term "government myopia" (Jenness 1964 p. 7). But the climate of public and government opinion began to harden after 1900, as the dimensions and implications of foreign activity became more widely known, and as it became clear from the disappointing outcome of the Alaskan Boundary Dispute that "legal arguments and historic claims to land were a poor substitute for rights established by effective occupation" (Judd 1969 p. 594). Concern was expressed, not only for remote parts of the Arctic, where there was seldom if ever a Canadian presence, but also for relatively accessible regions where Canada's title had hitherto been taken for granted. The geologist Tyrrell expressed a disquieting opinion:

... although by the Treaty of Utrecht, the sovereignty of Hudson Bay was ceded to Great Britain, it is just possible that, through long continued acquiescence, these foreigners [American whalers] may be establishing rights whilst ours are being allowed to lapse.

(quoted in McGrath [c. 1903]a)

In 1903, concurrent with the extension of police authority to Herschel Island in the western Arctic and Fort McPherson in the Mackenzie River valley, the *Neptune* Expedition headed north to enforce Canadian jurisdiction in the eastern Arctic (see Fig. 1).



FIG. 2. The officers of the D. G. S. *Neptune*, 1903-04. A. P. Low, S. L. Bartlett and L. E. Borden are seated respectively second, third and fifth from the left.

The expedition was commanded by A. P. Low (Fig. 2), an experienced geologist with extensive field work in the Subarctic and Arctic to his credit. Major J. D. Moodie — promoted to Superintendent during the expedition — headed the six-man detachment of the Northwest Mounted Police and possessed wide administrative powers. Several scientific and professional men were on board to collect data on arctic plants, animals, physiography, geology, meteorology and Eskimo health, and to make a photographic record of the voyage. An Eskimo interpreter joined ship at Port Burwell. All together the complement of the vessel was forty-three. The *Neptune* herself was a Newfoundland sealer of 465 tons, wooden-hulled but strengthened for ice navigation, schooner rigged with auxiliary power (see Fig. 3). Her captain was S. L. Bartlett (Fig. 2).

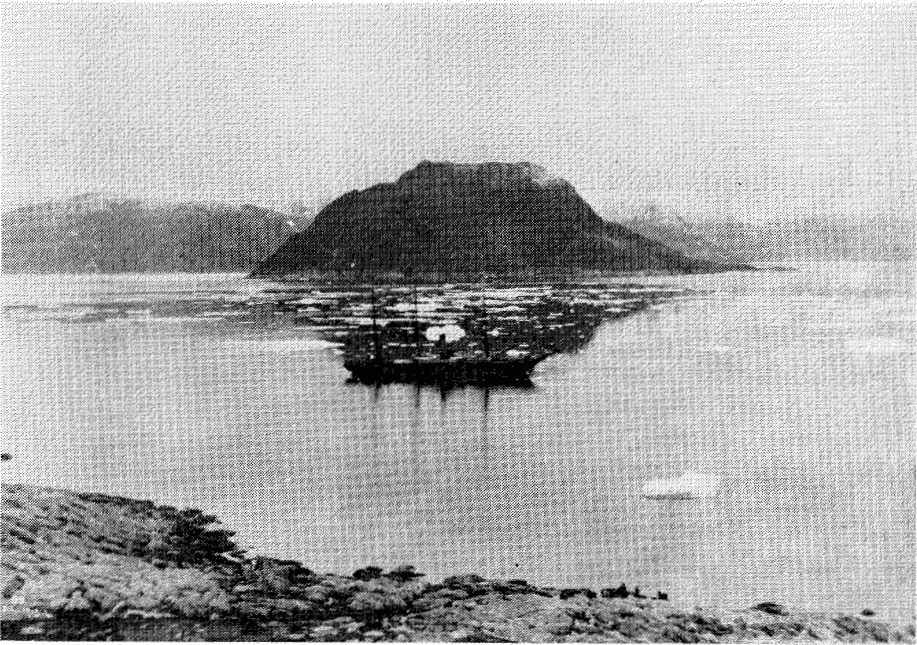


FIG. 3. D. G. S. *Neptune* in northern waters, 1904.

On 23 August, the *Neptune* departed from Halifax and by 4 September she was entering Cumberland Sound, Baffin Island. After visiting the whaling stations at Blacklead Island, Kekerten, and Cape Haven, where Moodie explained the intentions of the Canadian government, the ship proceeded to Hudson Bay and took up winter quarters at Fullerton Harbour together with the American whaling schooner *Era* (Fig. 4). In the following summer, the vessel cruised northward to Ellesmere Island and Lancaster Sound, encountered several whalers near Pond Inlet, stopped again in Cumberland Sound, returned to Hudson Bay, and finally departed homeward, arriving in Halifax on 12 October 1904. In the course of this itinerary, whaling regulations were publicized, and at least three formal declarations of territorial possessions were made.

Through much of the *Neptune's* voyage, the contacts with both natives and

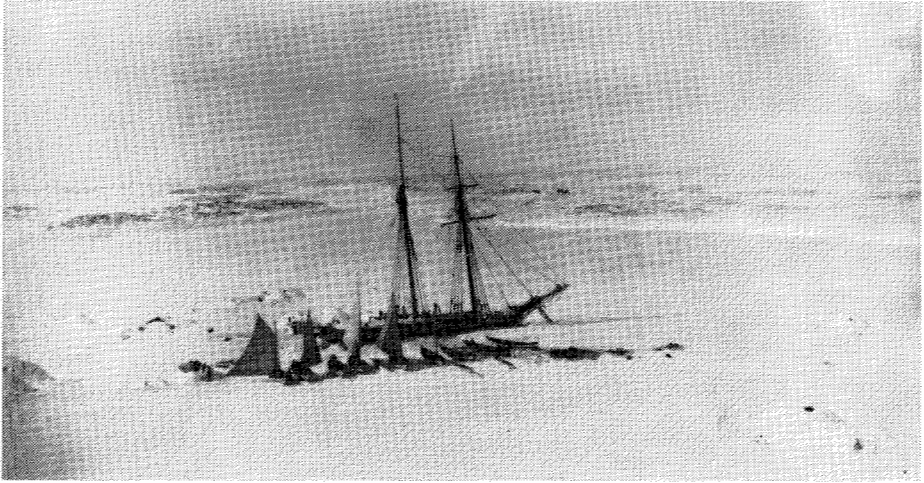


FIG. 4. The *Era* preparing for spring whaling at Fullerton, N.W.T., 1903-04. Photograph by A. P. Low in the Geological Society of Canada Collection, Public Archives of Canada.

whalemen were brief, and there is little documentation on the nature of these encounters, the precise restrictions established on whaling, trading, and relationships between whalemen and Eskimos, or the reaction of the people concerned. But in Hudson Bay, where the ship wintered for ten months near an American whaler and an Eskimo community of about 150 persons, the impact of the expedition and the new order it introduced can be expressed not merely in high-sounding phrases such as "exertion of authority", "exercise of jurisdiction", and "effective occupation", but in down-to-earth terms which show how the Canadian presence touched upon the everyday lives of individuals, both native and non-native.

For the events of this winter, and the reactions of some of the participants, the official published report of the expedition (Low 1906) can be supplemented by the unpublished private journals of Lorrin Elijah Borden (Fig. 2) and George Comer. Dr. Borden was twenty-six years of age, and fresh from the medical school of Dalhousie University, Halifax. He had been appointed to the *Neptune* to carry out the duties of ship's surgeon, to act as botanist on the scientific party, and to investigate the state of Eskimo health in the localities visited, paying particular attention to cases of cancer, tuberculosis and syphilis. Comer was the master of the whaling schooner *Era* of New Bedford, Massachusetts, a man of forty-five years, veteran of whaling and sealing voyages to the Arctic and the Antarctic, and a keen naturalist frequently commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C., to collect animal and human skeletons, animal skins, and ethnographic material.

IMPACT ON THE WHALEMEN

During more than four decades, foreign whalemen had enjoyed a long and profitable association with Hudson Bay. Americans, Scots and Englishmen had made more than 140 voyages into the Bay to exploit the concentration of

whales in Roes Welcome Sound and adjacent waters. They had killed more than 600 whales (Ross 1974) for baleen and oil, and had secured a number of skins of seal, walrus, caribou and musk-ox, as well as a quantity of walrus and narwhal ivory. The greatest proportion by far of these voyages had been undertaken by American vessels.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the publicity attending the departure of the *Neptune* engendered some resentment among New England whaling masters and ship-owners, who had become accustomed to operating in northern regions without any restrictions or supervision. American whalers felt that through long usage they had established a historic claim for continued exploitation of the Hudson Bay region. If the Canadian government did not explicitly recognize this claim, it certainly had no intention of prohibiting American and British whalers from cruising in Hudson Bay, as long as they operated within the constraints of Canadian law. The government intended to give due warning of procedures to be implemented and, as the instructions to Major Moodie stated, to avoid "any harsh or hurried enforcement of the laws" (Millward 1930 p. 14), yet some Americans chose to believe that the real objective of the *Neptune* expedition was the immediate expulsion of American whalers from Hudson Bay. In the words of one writer, Canada had sent "an armed expedition . . . to expel New Bedford Whalers now fishing in that area. . . ." (McGrath [c. 1903]a) and he warned that "it will not be an easy matter for Canada to carry out the policy of expelling the alleged trespassers. . . . American whaling crews are not composed of the most tractable persons. . . ." (McGrath [c. 1903]b). Furthermore, there could be broad international repercussions. "To dislodge them will probably require a resort to force, and this may bring about a clash between the two Anglo-Saxon peoples. . . ." (McGrath [c. 1903]a).

In addition to claiming historic rights, American writers raised the issue of the territorial status of Hudson Bay. Prior to the departure of the *Neptune*, a member of the Canadian parliament had suggested that the Bay should be declared territorial waters and renamed the "Canadian Sea" (Zaslow 1971 p. 263), despite the fact that its entrance, Hudson Strait, was appreciably wider than the three-mile territorial zones of its coasts. Although the case for Canadian sovereignty over the waters of Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait was to be put forward officially and successfully in 1906, the situation in 1903 was uncertain. But it had in fact little relevance to the matter of the *Neptune* expedition's "interference" with American whaling activities in the region, because the whaling was not entirely pelagic. Navigation of inshore waters and contact with the land and its inhabitants were essential components of the whaling routine, and there was no disputing the fact that the coasts of Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait, and the adjacent three-mile territorial sea, were Canadian.

On 23 September 1903, the *Neptune* anchored in Fullerton Harbour, Hudson Bay, close to the American whaling schooner *Era*. Captain Comer of the latter, as well as being an experienced whaler, was as familiar with northwestern Hudson Bay and its native inhabitants as any white man alive. But the great days of American whaling in the Bay were over. Comer and the *Era* were anachronisms, the last vestiges of a dying industry. Whale stocks had been virtually exhausted

throughout the region, and trading for furs, skins and ivory had become the economic mainstay of such voyages. The prospects of voyages being profitable had diminished to the point where there were seldom more than two or three vessels in the Bay — in sharp contrast to the situation prevailing during the first decade of whaling after 1860, when 51 American whalers killed more than 400 whales (Ross 1974 p. 96).

As the two crews prepared their vessels for wintering, relations between them were cordial and instances of mutual cooperation were frequent. Judging from the official report of the *Neptune* expedition (Low 1906), these friendly and helpful associations continued through the winter. Officers and men from both ships came together for entertainments, dances, dinners, holiday celebrations, religious services, ball games, and races on the harbour ice. They cooperated in retrieving a grounded launch, searching for a missing man, and constructing buildings for the police post. Social visits between the two vessels were commonplace, and in the spring Low, Borden, two sailors and six Eskimos accompanied Comer's whale-boat crews on a cruise to Southampton Island, using two boats belonging to the *Era*. The Canadian authorities had not attempted to expel the Americans, and the armed conflict predicted by some alarmists had not occurred.

Nevertheless, it is clear from unpublished sources that Comer resented the restrictions upon whaling activity and indeed the very presence of the Canadian government vessel. What, specifically, was the nature of the government restrictions, and how did they affect the operations of the sole American whaler in Hudson Bay? The proclamation distributed to whaling ships and stations by Superintendent Moodie read as follows:

A detachment of the Northwest Mounted Police has been sent into Hudson Bay for the purpose of maintaining law and order and enforcing the laws of Canada in the territories adjacent to the said Bay and to the north thereof.

Headquarters have for the present been established at Fullerton. This has also been made a port of entry for vessels entering Hudson Bay and adjacent waters. All vessels will be required to report there and pay customs duties on dutiable goods before landing any portion of their cargoes on any place in the said territories.

Duty [on goods] imported into Canadian territories lying to the north of Hudson Bay will be collected for the present by a Canadian cruiser which will visit those waters annually or more frequently. Any violation of the laws of Canada will be dealt with by an officer of the police accompanying such cruiser.

(quoted in Jenness 1964 p. 19)

These measures cannot have caused Comer much inconvenience in the winter of 1903-04. His vessel was already at Fullerton when the laws were put in force, so he had no need to modify his itinerary. Clearing harbour required but a short visit to the police post. Producing a manifest and report was a minor consideration, and the duty levied amounted to only \$99.85. The enforcement of Canadian law required other procedures not specifically mentioned in the proclamation; when one of the *Era's* crew died, Comer was required to get a death certificate from Borden "and had to present it to Major Moodie accordian [sic] to law" (Comer 1903-05, 6 April 1904). There is nothing in Comer's journal to indicate opposi-

tion to the general principle of establishing Canadian jurisdiction and implementing these specific measures in the Arctic.

One restriction not intended prior to the departure of the expedition was the prohibition on the possessing or exporting of musk-ox skins. Moodie reported:

On arrival here, I found the slaughter of these animals for the sake of their skins was much greater than supposed. The United States schooner *Era* took home over 350 skins on her last voyage. The Scotch steamer *Active* had, I am informed, between 150 and 200 skins. . . . Knowing the wish of the government in this matter, I took the only method which would be of practical use, and issued, on November 8, 1903, a notice prohibiting the export, etc.

(Moodie 1905 p. 12)

Comer was allowed to retain the ninety or so musk-ox skins on hand at the time of the imposition of the restriction, but was forced to discontinue sending ships' natives on hunts. If unsolicited skins were delivered by distant natives who had not heard of the ban, Moodie could give a special dispensation and allow their acceptance in trade. At least two parties of Eskimos arrived at the harbour in the spring of 1904; Comer recorded that "Major Moodie was over and gave me a permit to own and export the 3 musk-ox skins and heads" (Comer 1903-05, 5 May 1904). What became of the skins brought to the *Neptune* by her ships' natives is not stated; certainly some members of her crew were anxious to obtain musk-ox and other skins. Borden confided to his diary, shortly after Moodie's prohibition: "I am going to try and get a musk-ox skin or two out of the racket some way" (Borden 1903-04 p. 50). Fortunately, Comer later gave him two musk-ox skins and three bear skins in return for medical services through the winter (Comer 1903-05, 17 May 1904).

Unquestionably the musk-ox ban was a blow to the *Era*. A tally of furs on hand in mid-May 1904 shows that, although six months had passed since the musk-ox trade had been terminated, the skins of these animals were still the most numerous of all collected up to that time. The totals were: musk-ox, 101; fox, 96; wolf, 26; bear, 15; wolverine, 4 (Comer 1903-05, 17 May 1904). Nevertheless, Comer felt that the measures taken to prevent the extermination of the species were "proper" (Comer 1903-05, 10 November 1903).

Although Comer does not appear to have objected to the regulations on customs, immigration, and musk-oxen, he claimed that the law was not being applied impartially in the Arctic. He wrote: "I did not like to have this law affect me alone and as he [Moodie] has not notified [sic] any others I protested against his discriminating against the American Vessel." (Comer 1903-05, 10 November 1903). Indeed, he described himself as "considerably offended" (13 November 1903), but according to Borden he was more than that; he was "incensed" and felt that the proclamations were "a direct insult aimed directly at him. . . ." (Borden n.d., p. 35).

Was Comer's claim of discrimination real, imagined, or pretended? Although the *Neptune* cruised north of Hudson Strait in both summers, Hudson Bay was clearly the main target of the expedition. Whaling was known to have been prolonged and intense there; whaling ships frequently wintered; American whalers

had come into competition with posts of the Hudson's Bay Company; and the presence of foreign vessels weakened the case for declaring Hudson Bay a closed territorial sea. Consequently, Low's instructions were "to find, and, if possible, to pass, the winter in company with the American Whaling ship known to be in Hudson Bay" (Low 1906 p. 20).

But why an American, and not a Scottish whaler? At that time the Scots were more active in the Hudson Bay region than were the Americans. The Kinnes firm of Dundee had a mica mine at Lake Harbour; a whaling station on Southampton Island; a ketch, the *Ernest William*, stationed in the region; and a steamer, the *Active*, which each summer supplied the two stations, collected their produce, and cruised for whales in Hudson Bay. In July 1903, the Southampton Island station had been closed but the *Ernest William* had been shifted to Repulse Bay to function there and in Lyon Inlet as a floating year-round station.

The Canadian government may not have known of these operations which, at the time of the Hudson Bay expedition under Wakeham six years earlier, had not yet been initiated by the Scots; the Hudson Bay whale fishery had then been dominated by the Americans, and the impression may have persisted.

In early September 1903, the *Neptune* visited Scottish and American whaling stations north of Hudson Strait, and her officers doubtless inquired about the situation in Hudson Bay; but how much was known by the agents there, and how much divulged? Superintendent Moodie reported only that, while in Cumberland Sound, they had "heard that American whalers were somewhere about the north of Southampton island" (Moodie 1905 p. 4), a piece of information which was both vague and incorrect.

Whether through ignorance of the Scottish presence in the Bay, instructions based on obsolete knowledge, or possibly an official view that attention should be directed specifically towards the Americans, rather than the British, the *Neptune* proceeded to the whaling grounds of northwestern Hudson Bay in search of American whalers. At Winchester Inlet, Eskimos explained that the American schooner *Era* was at Fullerton Harbour (Low 1906 p. 20) and that a Scottish station existed at Repulse Bay (Moodie 1905 p. 4). Low immediately decided to winter at Fullerton, and Moodie decided to erect a police post there. The place had a sheltered harbour, a good water supply, plenty of caribou, fish and birds, and it was within range of sled travel to Churchill, where another police post was expected to be established (Moodie 1905 pp. 4-5). It was already 25 September — too late in the season to think of cruising north through unfamiliar waters to contact the Scots at Repulse Bay — so the next ten months were spent close to the *Era*, the only genuine whaleship of any nationality wintering in Hudson Bay or, indeed, in the entire Canadian eastern Arctic.

Comer's complaint of discrimination thus appears ill-founded, or at the very least, exaggerated. Before entering Hudson Bay in 1903, the *Neptune* had made the Canadian government's intention known at American and Scottish whaling stations on Baffin Island and, in the following summer, a police patrol from Fullerton carried the notification to the Scottish vessels *Active* and *Ernest William* in Repulse Bay, while the *Neptune* reached all but one of the five Scottish whalers operating north of Hudson Strait. By the end of 1904, therefore, representatives

of all the whaling firms operating in the Canadian eastern Arctic had received, and were governed by, the new Canadian regulations.

There was another point of contention. For years Comer, like other whaling captains, had enjoyed a free hand in the northern regions, holding the reins of power not only over his crew but also, to a large degree, over the Eskimos associated with the ship. Now he had to recognize the existence of a higher authority, acknowledge an external body of laws, and contend with the presence of law enforcement personnel in the same harbour. A shipboard incident revealed the full dimensions of the new relationship; not even on his own vessel was he the supreme authority. One of his men acted in an insubordinate manner, so Comer put him in irons. Under normal circumstances, the matter would probably have ended there, but the presence of a police detachment close at hand presented the opportunity for appeal. Some other crew members complained to Superintendent Moodie, who summoned Comer by note. At first he ignored the message, "in the belief that he [Moodie] had no right to have anything to say in regard to the punishment of the men", but in the end he went to the post to put forward his point of view; he explained that, when men talked back or refused to work, a captain had to employ stern measures or he might find a mutiny on his hands; but Moodie insisted that the punishment was too severe and, finally, "after some talk (not cool)" between the two men, Moodie persuaded Comer to release the offender (Comer 1903-05, 25 March 1904).

Comer had certain views about the underlying cause of the incident, and he did not hesitate to explain them to his crew. He told them that

having come on the Voyage of their own free will they had no one to blame and the fact that the Canadain [sic] Government steamer being here and able to live in abundance of everything that money could buy and all having clothes furnished them free no doubt did make our means look small. . . .

(Comer 1903-05, 27 March 1904)

They had "imbibed a spirit of discontent from mingling with those of the steamer and Police force" (Comer 1903-05, 27 March 1904), so Comer suspended all relationships with the personnel of the *Neptune* and the post, and cancelled leave privileges. Faced with these measures, the crew began to show more respect, and Comer soon restored normal leave and visiting arrangements.

The contrast between the condition of the two vessels and the accommodation of their crews was certainly very real. Low described the schooner as "very leaky, and in such a condition that she could not get a British rating"; the ship's biscuit had been "left over from the Spanish American War, and returned from Cuba more or less alive" (Low 1906 p. 266). Her crew was inexperienced, and some had been shipped under false pretences or while inebriated. Paid on the customary lay system and obliged to purchase cold weather clothing from the ship's slop chest, they stood to gain little, if anything, financially from the voyage. The men were crowded into a small, oppressive fore-castle, where an oil-lamp produced "far too much carbon dioxide for healthy living" (Borden n.d., p. 64). After examining a patient in the tiny space, the doctor wrote, "It was the most stifling place I was ever in. To add to it, when I started to examine the poor fellow the

bed-bugs were so thick that I could hardly get a place to percuss." (Borden 1903-04 p. 43). The ship's provisions lacked antiscorbutics; the molasses smelled revolting; and he had personally seen "a weevil at least two inches long when a hard tack was broken" (Borden n.d., pp. 65-66).

Comer himself had no pretensions about the conditions of the vessel under his command. At the outset of the voyage, he had remarked upon her dirtiness and noted that, prior to her departure from New Bedford, the owners had been pumping the ship at night so people would not see how leaky she was (Comer 1903-05, 6 July; 15 July, 1903). The *Era* continued to leak throughout the two-year voyage, and the crew had to pump as many as 2000 strokes a day to keep the ship afloat (Comer 1903-05, 23 April 1904).

Comer saw the presence of the *Neptune* as a disruptive influence on his own crew. More than that, the *Neptune* was a competitor for native labour, fresh meat, and furs for winter clothing. The *Era* had on previous occasions utilized most of the visiting Aivilingmiut and Qaernermiut adult males as whalers, sled drivers, hunters and casual labourers, and a number of the women as seamstresses to make up and repair winter parkas, trousers, boots and sleeping bags. The *Era's* crew numbered twenty, but now there was another vessel to serve and an additional forty-three men to care for. Soon after the arrival of the *Neptune* in the autumn of 1903, an arrangement was made whereby the Eskimos at the harbour were divided between the two ships, the *Era* obtaining the services of about two dozen Aivilingmiut, and the *Neptune* hiring about a dozen Qaernermiut (or Kinipetu, as they were called). The division appears to have favoured the whaler, but Comer would have preferred the *Neptune* to winter elsewhere. Aside from losing trade and services from the natives, there was the question of meat supply.

If the Steamer had not been here we should not with doubt have had from the natives much of the fresh meat which has been traded to her this of course would have done much to have warded off the strong symptoms of the scurvy which is now keeping the men (2) sick.

(Comer 1903-05, 27 March 1904)

IMPACT ON THE ESKIMO

By the time of the *Neptune* expedition, much of the Canadian eastern Arctic had experienced prolonged contact with whaling vessels. In northwestern Hudson Bay there had been about 140 voyages during the preceding 43 years, and the effect upon distribution of population, the economy and material culture had not been slight (Ross 1975). The Aivilingmiut and Qaernermiut in particular had altered their seasonal hunting cycles in order to obtain the material benefits available from the wintering ships. They had drifted out of territories that had previously been more or less distinct and separated one from the other by barriers of geography or hostility, in order to concentrate during the winter at harbours selected by wintering whalers. Supplying fresh meat, skins and articles of trade, and acting as hunters and whaling crews, they had obtained in return firearms, tools, whaleboats, food, and metal containers, and the acquisition of these articles had in turn modified the nature of their hunting, travelling and domestic functions,

as well as the spatial characteristics of their annual cycle. They had acquired a certain degree of security of food supply, because shortages of game could be offset by supplies from the whalers. Furthermore, their wounded or sick could be given some sort of treatment. On the other hand, alien diseases often ran through the concentrated and susceptible native populations with disastrous effect. Thus the native way of life in 1903 was significantly different from that existing before the commencement of whaling in 1860. To all but the elderly the new way of life was now the natural order, the "traditional" existence, for they had experienced no other.

Since the native economy had thus become closely bound up with that of the whalers, and as the *Neptune* expedition regulated whaling activities, it is reasonable to enquire how the expedition influenced the Eskimos. Its main thrust was in the sphere of customs and immigration, specifically in establishing procedures for entering and leaving port, and for paying duty upon imported goods. So far as is known, the police did not impose restrictions on the employment of Eskimos in harbour, the shipping of Eskimos for whaling cruises, or the relocation of Eskimos. On the other hand, the prohibition on traffic in musk-ox skins reduced the Eskimo trading potential, and may have led to a concentration on other species, notably the arctic fox, setting the stage for the establishment of the extensive trading-post system which followed the whaling period.

Prior to the departure of the *Neptune* expedition, there had been considerable outrage concerning the relationships between whalers and Eskimos in the western Arctic (Zaslow 1971 p. 258). Less was known about the influence of whalers in Hudson Bay, and what information had been derived from the reports of various expeditions tended to present a more favourable picture. In retrospect, the comparison appears valid; the degree of debauchery frequently observed in the western Arctic was absent in Hudson Bay, for reasons that are not yet understood. Evidently the police taken into Hudson Bay on board the *Neptune* did not consider that controlling drunkenness and promiscuity was their primary task. There is nothing to indicate that they attempted to regulate social interaction, or to restrict the behaviour of either whalers or Eskimos.

Taking the example of the whalers, the police constables and sailors of the *Neptune* mingled with the Eskimos on special occasions such as Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, participated with them in sports events and festivities, and joined them in shipboard dances held frequently on each vessel. At these, the native women decked out in "somewhat of a civilized dress" (Borden n.d., p. 40), stepped nimbly through the Lancers and other dances with escorts that included police constables, and whalers of various ethnic origins, colours, sizes and shapes.

According to Borden, the social relationships between whalers and Eskimo women in the past must have had a sexual dimension. The evidence was there to see, for children of mixed blood were not uncommon in the settlement, and the ravages of venereal diseases were visible. He had been told that whalers often lived with native women during the winter. It was not so on board the *Neptune*, however, where "women were never allowed to enter a cabin" (Borden n.d., p. 66). Despite the doctor's self-righteous protestation, the crew of the

Neptune, and more particularly the enterprising men of the police detachment, must have found ways to circumvent such restrictions, for a record of births at Fullerton compiled by Comer over a 22-year period (1889-1911) reveals that a child sired by a man on board the *Neptune* was born of an Eskimo woman in the fall of 1904 after the departure of the vessel homeward and that, during the eight years 1903-10, personnel of the Northwest Mounted Police at the Fullerton post fathered six children — more than a quarter of the 22 births recorded during the period. It appears that the extension of Canadian authority into Hudson Bay initiated by the *Neptune* expedition may have had a social impact quite different from that originally envisaged by the Canadian government.

Canadian law was to be applied to the Eskimo population as well as to the foreign whaling crews, and Superintendent Moodie faced the delicate task of explaining to the original inhabitants of the land that they were in fact subservient to a higher authority thousands of miles away. He faced the challenge squarely, designing a scenario reminiscent of Indian days in the old West, and assuming an appropriate degree of pomposity for the occasion. Borden witnessed the ceremony:

The Major had about eight gallons of tea made and with five pounds of hard tack and other biscuits soon disappeared. A clay pipe and a bit of tobacco was given to each of the twenty-five natives present. Then through the interpreter the Major told the natives that there was a big chief over them all who had many tribes of different colours and how this big chief, who was King Edward VII, had the welfare of all his peoples at heart. King Edward wanted them all to do what was right and good, and had sent the Major as his personal representative or in other words the King could not come himself so 'I was to act for him!' The Major wanted them to do what was right and good and to settle all quarrels but he would punish all offenders.

(Borden n.d., p. 38)

Moodie asked them if they "had ever killed any of their own people to eat" (Borden n.d., p. 38). They said they had only done this once — when they were exceptionally hungry. Had they killed female babies? No, but the Eskimos of Hudson Strait were known to do this. Had they killed their old people? Only long ago. Moodie urged them to travel to Churchill to send happy messages to the King, but their desire to communicate with the Big Chief was evidently not great enough to offset the inconvenience of a 500-mile voyage and return.

Then,

a constable brought packages to the Major who with real ceremony presented a suit of woolen underclothes to each of the twenty-two adult Eskimo and a tuque, a pair of mittens and a sash to each of the boys.

(Borden n.d., p. 39)

Borden watched the Eskimos "standing open-mouthed with varied expressions" during Moodie's speech. Their amazement is not difficult to understand. Eskimo occupancy of the region had extended back several centuries in time. They had experienced encounters with white explorers for a century and a half. For more than 40 years they had maintained close economic and social ties with American

and Scottish whalers. Their hunting equipment included whaleboats, harpoon guns, shoulder guns firing explosive projectiles, and repeating rifles. They wore American shirts, trousers, jackets, overalls, hats and sunglasses. Their women used sewing machines, and possessed ball gowns for dances. And here was underwear proffered like frankincense and myrrh, accompanied by a fairy tale about a Big Chief. They were speechless.

On this momentous occasion it is difficult to know who was more astonished and amused, the Eskimos or the white people. The doctor called it "the pow-wow at Govt. House" (Borden 1903-04 p. 43) and Comer remarked "it has about made me sick" (Comer 1903-05, 15 November 1903). Thus, in an atmosphere of incredulity, ridicule and disgust, was the new era of administration of the Arctic ushered in.

CONCLUSION

Sovereignty

Prior to the *Neptune* expedition, Canada's claim to the Arctic regions had rested precariously upon the flag-planting and cairn-building activities of British explorers from the time of Frobisher onwards, but chiefly through the nineteenth century. There had been no evidence of occupation, of regular visitation, or of the enforcement of law. The precise delimitations of the regions transferred from Britain to Canada in 1870 and 1880 had been open to different interpretations. An American request for mining privileges in Cumberland Sound, Baffin Island, had thrown both the British and Canadian governments into confusion; and, even as the *Neptune* sat frozen into five-foot ice in Hudson Bay in January 1904, the Dominion's Chief Astronomer submitted a report in which he concluded that "Canada's title to some at least of the northern islands is imperfect" (King 1905 p. 8).

Like other explorers before them, and a good many that were to follow, the officers of the *Neptune* did their share of flag raising. Here and there amid the vast spaces of the Arctic they deposited beneath boulders small pieces of paper which proclaimed the adjacent lands to be Canadian. In the High North, where such activities were least extensive geographically and were unaccompanied by other evidence of a Canadian presence, the Dominion's jurisdiction remained precarious, and was challenged later by explorers or the governments of Denmark, Norway and the United States (Smith 1963 p. 7). But in Hudson Bay and the islands south of Lancaster Sound, where the expedition had taken the first steps towards regulating foreign whalers and establishing permanent police posts, the validity of Canada's claim was unquestionably strengthened. One particular manifestation of this was the success with which the Canadian government, in 1906, declared Hudson Bay to be a territorial sea.

Whaling

For several reasons, the whaling industry was approaching extinction in 1903. An elevated price for baleen was keeping a few whalers in operation in the Arctic, but when prices slid irreversibly downward after 1904, the number of active

whaling vessels dwindled steadily. In this context, the regulations introduced with the *Neptune* expedition cannot be said to have brought about the cessation of whaling in the Canadian Arctic. They can, however, be viewed as a contributory factor. The termination of the musk-ox trade and the imposition of customs duties constituted additional constraints upon an industry already only marginally profitable, and hastened its demise. Ironically, it was restrictions upon trading, rather than whaling, that helped to bring the whaling era to a close.

Eskimos

In so far as the restrictions introduced at the time of the *Neptune* expedition contributed to the decline of the whaling industry in the Arctic, the Eskimos, who had been dependent upon whaling, were of necessity affected. In north-western Hudson Bay, the native economy had for almost half a century been closely interwoven with whaling. In the years that followed, the lives of the Eskimos continued to be dominated by an external economic system, but one that was fundamentally different from whaling. Under the fur trapping system of the Hudson's Bay Company most of the Eskimos were required to spend as much time as possible away from their post tending traplines. Face-to-face contact with white people occurred only during their occasional visits, and then only with one or two who managed the post. In contrast, whaling had encouraged Eskimos to congregate at harbours, rather than to disperse; a high proportion of adult males had been employed, many of them year after year; and face-to-face contact had been virtually a daily occurrence, involving large numbers of Eskimos and white people. The shift from whaling to trading, a process in which the *Neptune* expedition may have had some influence, may be regarded as a retrograde step in Eskimo acculturation. It turned the Eskimos back to the land, and caused a decrease in the frequency and variety of Eskimo-white encounters, a reversal of the trend towards civilization of the whaling period, and a postponement for several decades of the prospects of establishing effective educational and health services for the Eskimos.

One of the objectives of the *Neptune* expedition was "the enforcement of the law as in other parts of the Dominion" (Low 1906 p. 3). By and large this appears to have meant enforcement of the law among the foreign whalers, rather than among the Eskimos. Moodie, it is true, had announced to the natives that he would punish offenders, but one is struck by the fact that, whereas he felt obliged to interfere with disciplinary measures on the American schooner, he did not feel it necessary to investigate an Eskimo's confession that he had killed half a dozen people south of Rankin Inlet a few years earlier (Moodie 1905 p. 8).

It is a curious fact that, in order to make a visible demonstration of occupation of the Arctic, Canada chose to establish police posts, rather than, say, schools or hospitals. Did the government feel it necessary to confront foreign interests with a show of force before turning full attention to the native population? Or was it simply unconcerned about the Eskimos?

The Canadian government had, to its credit, appointed a doctor to investigate and report upon Eskimo health. Borden was the first doctor ever sent into the Arctic by Canada, and was probably the first medical man specifically instructed

by any government to search for the presence of cancer among an aboriginal hunting society. When he was not tending the sick on board the *Neptune* or the *Era* at Fullerton, he worked among the Eskimos, and each summer he attempted to learn as much as possible about Eskimo health in other regions, through first-hand observation as well as local information. He found no evidence of cancer, disproving a current theory that the disease was caused by the eating of meat, but he confirmed the occurrence of syphilis, gonorrhoea, tuberculosis, rheumatism, bronchitis, epilepsy, hardening of the arteries, eye problems and influenza (Borden 1904).

Unfortunately, Borden's medical report disappeared and has never been found. Were it not for the fortuitous discovery of his handwritten preliminary draft half a century later, we would now know nothing about his conclusions.

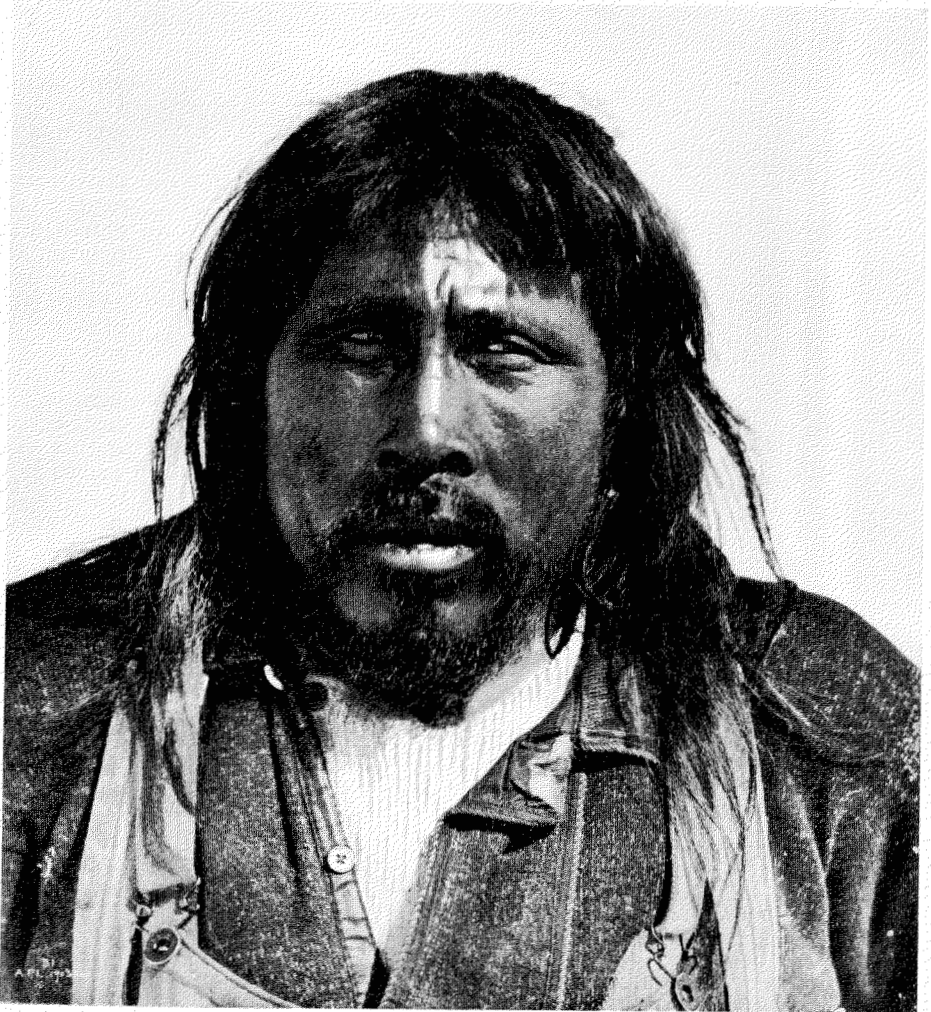
Borden submitted the report to Low, the commander of the expedition. Low evidently received it, for he in turn included part of it (the body measurements of nine Eskimos) in his official report (Low 1906, Appendix VI). It is not inconceivable that Low side-tracked or suppressed the rest of the material. That he might be worried about the impropriety of revealing personal or shocking facts of Eskimo life, and be capable of restricting the dissemination of such information, is indicated by a remark in Borden's diary, which Borden had permitted Low to read. The diary records that Low "suggested that the remarks in these seven lines had better not be seen if this diary ever becomes public property" (Borden 1903-04 p. 22). The lines were duly expunged.

On the other hand, it is possible that Low forwarded the complete text of Borden's medical report to the Canadian Ministry of Marine and Fisheries or to another department. If so, was the report shelved by a government that was more interested in making the Eskimos "wards of the police" (Jenness 1964 p. 18) than in providing the medical attention so clearly needed? The answer may never be known.

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Tom Pepper, Qaernermiut (Eskimo), Fullerton, N.W.T., c. 1903. See paper by W. Gillies Ross, p. 87. Photograph by A. P. Low in the Geological Society of Canada Collection, Public Archives of Canada.