

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