

THE BRUCE COLLECTION OF ESKIMO MATERIAL CULTURE FROM PORT CLARENCE, ALASKA. BY JAMES W. VANSTONE. *Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1976 (Fieldiana: Anthropology, vol. 67). 117 pages including 47 plates. No price indicated.*

Miner W. Bruce, who amassed the collection described in this monograph, was the first superintendent of the reindeer herding station established at Teller, Alaska, in 1892, and later became a trader specializing in Eskimo artefacts. He sold the collection to the Field Museum of Natural History in two lots: approximately half — the material he obtained during the year he was superintendent at Teller — in 1894, and the remainder probably in 1896. VanStone ranks it as being "among the significant assemblages of nineteenth-century Alaskan Eskimo material culture in American and European museums." (p. v.)

The author devotes the first of three chapters to a brief account of the historical background of Port Clarence; in the major section he describes the collection itself; and in the concluding section illustrates by means of two analyses the utility of such collections for anthropological studies. In the appendix each item is listed by catalogue number, and the 47 plates form an important adjunct to the descriptions.

Port Clarence is an inlet of the Bering Sea located a short distance south of Bering Strait. As an especially good harbour it was known to Europeans by 1829, and sustained contacts between Eskimos and Europeans took place from 1849 when ships of the expedition searching for Sir John Franklin began to overwinter there. Souvenir trade is recorded as early as 1866, and by the eighteen-nineties — the decade in which the Bruce collection was made — Port Clarence had become a customary stopping place for whalers. The latter traded with both local and visiting Eskimos for staples and clothing, as well as for souvenirs. In 1892, domesticated reindeer were introduced into Alaska at Port Clarence and the reindeer station was established at Teller.

Using the system he has successfully employed in other monographs, VanStone describes the collection in terms of functional complexes: for example, hunting, fishing, household management and clothing. After a few introductory remarks, he proceeds directly to the descriptions. As this reviewer discovered, the appendix can serve both as a guide to the organization of these descriptions and as a summary of the collection as a

whole. The descriptions are brief, although they are broadened by references to other published material and are supplemented by photographs. The plates show approximately 275 items, or nearly half of the extant collection. For purposes of providing an inventory they are adequate, but the graphic potential of the collection will not be realized until many of the finer items are featured in a more lavish genre. However, illustration is more than adequate for one of the most notable components of the collection — the 25 dance masks. VanStone observes that, as befits their presumed provenience, the masks resemble more closely those from northeastern Alaska than those from southwestern Alaska, while in terms of elaboration they are intermediate.

The report is primarily descriptive, but the author does not eschew discussion. The present reviewer found a few attributes of the collection, not touched upon by VanStone, especially interesting. For instance, there is the mixture of skins of sea, land and air creatures in some of the bags and pouches which belies preconceived notions of the separation of products of the land and the sea; there are birch-bark baskets, undoubtedly the products of trade, since forest distribution maps do not show birch trees on the Seward Peninsula; and most dog harnesses lack swivels or hooks, a fact which already has been drawn to the attention of those who look upon the absence of such objects as indicative of a lack of dog traction. VanStone repeats an earlier observation that most clothing of the area was made of reindeer hides obtained from the Chukchi of Siberia rather than caribou hides from Alaska.

Siberian-Alaskan trade is a topic apart from the description of the Bruce collection, but it merits mention in reference to one item in particular. VanStone remarks that the *spring trap* for foxes and wolves is "one of the most ingenious . . . traps devised by Eskimos . . ." (p. 15). However, this trap was illustrated 70 years ago by Bogoras, in his monograph on the Chukchi¹, in which he suggested that it was brought to "the northern part of the Old World" by the Russians. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Davidov² had already noted that the Russians in southern Alaska trapped foxes with *kleptsy*, instruments still known on Kodiak Island which can be identified as the spring-torsion traps being discussed. These traps, then, may have been introduced into Alaska by more than one route: indirectly in the north by the Chukchi, perhaps to improve the take of furs that could be traded for reindeer hides, and directly in the south by the

Russians.

The Bruce collection provides an excellent opportunity to focus on changing Eskimo craftsmanship at a time when contacts with white people were becoming a significant factor in northwestern Alaska. For this purpose VanStone considers the collection in four categories: items equivalent to continuing indigenous implements; derived forms produced in imported material but patterned after earlier items; Western imports; and derived forms produced out of local material, but patterned on Western items. The author concludes that "... the sizeable number of Western-derived forms ... indicates that the process of material culture change was already clearly defined in the late nineteenth-century, less than 50 years after the first sustained European contact in the area." (p. 51).

Following the system developed by Oswalt³, VanStone applies indices of technological complexity to the collection. These are all lower in magnitude than the equivalents for several eastern and central Eskimo groups, the Caribou Eskimo excepted. Obviously, technological complexity as so measured does not necessarily equate to cultural complexity or degree of development, although one might tend to assume such.

This short monograph is intended primarily for Arctic specialists, but the type of study undertaken should be of interest to every museum curator. One particular situation is vividly described:

The present condition of much of the Bruce collection is poor. Seventy-eight years of inadequate storage and damaging exhibition installation have taken their toll. Ivory, antler, bone and wood specimens are cracked and broken; occasionally pieces of particular specimens are missing. Sinew has disintegrated and skins have dried and split. The few remaining items of clothing that were not sold out of the collection have been badly damaged by insects and lack of humidity control in the storerooms. (p. 6).

Originally there were 735 catalogue entries representing a slightly greater number of specimens of which 209 are unaccounted for (44 apparently lost, and the remainder sold, exchanged or discarded).

The conditions described by VanStone are common in museums throughout Europe and North America. Some curators are aware of them, but only in particular cases do they have the resources to adequately conserve their collections. This reviewer therefore hopes that the study will encourage others to record and publish languishing collections before they lose their integrity due to dispersion and lack of conservation. Even by

drawing attention to the neglected state of curation, especially the lack of proper storage, VanStone has done a service.

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REFERENCES

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- ²Davidov, G. 1977. (Originally published in Russian 1810-12.) *Two Voyages to Russian America, 1802-1807*. Kingston, Ontario: Limestone Press.
- ³Oswalt, W.H. 1973. *Habitat and Technology; The Evolution of Hunting*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

YUKON. BY JACK HOPE. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL VON BAICH. *Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1976. 184 Pages. \$35.00.*

In the near future, the Government of the Yukon will initiate measures to discourage the migration of southern Canadians to the territory — or at least, those who can be regarded as unskilled job-hunters and/or thrill-seekers; for construction of a natural-gas pipeline from Alaska through the southern Yukon, as recently decided upon by the Government of Canada, is expected to give rise to an enormous wave of in-migration to the territory that will likely have profoundly unfavourable social results.

The book here reviewed will not be helpful in discouraging such a movement, for it will serve to spur the imagination and arouse the desire of its readers to hit the road north. To put it simply, *Yukon* offers a vivid and eye-boggling glimpse of one of the last real frontier areas in the world.

Through the lens of a camera and by means of some very sensitive writing, a Canadian photographer and an American writer have tried to describe what the Yukon is really like today. To the extent that they concerned themselves with the inhabitants of its non-urbanized areas, they have probably succeeded. A common error, however, when looking at the North is to confidently believe that one has the total picture as a result of generalizations made concerning its inhabitants. This has not been avoided in the present book. The majority of the population of the Yukon that live in its one city, Whitehorse, are intentionally ignored because they work at commonplace jobs in a typical urban setting. In addition, there is hardly any reference to the original people of the Yukon — the status and non-status Indians — who comprise about a quarter of its population. Yet