

UKKUSIKSALIK: THE PEOPLE'S STORY. By DAVID F. PELLY. Toronto, Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-4597-2989-6. 284 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$35.00.

A few decades ago, Inuit lived in scattered camps of a few families, moving with the seasons and occasionally visiting a trading post for equipment like guns and ammunition and supplies like flour and tea. Today, with their inhabitants long established in permanent communities, the camps that dotted the coast, and a few inland, lie empty, but they still inhabit the hearts and minds of those who once lived there.

Ukkusiksalik is the area that surrounds Wager Bay, which stretches inland west of Southampton Island, off Roes Welcome Sound. Rich in wildlife, the area has an equally rich human history, most of it archived exclusively, and ephemerally, in the memories of the Aivilingmiut Inuit who made it their home. In the 1990s, Arctic historian and author David F. Pelly gathered some of their stories for Parks Canada, which was preparing to establish a new national park there. They form the centrepiece of Pelly's new book, *Ukkusiksalik: The People's Story*.

The first of the book's three parts, "A Prehistoric Glimpse," sets the stage by describing the emergence of the landscape after the last ice age and its gradual transformation into habitat for a diversity of wildlife. It then briefly discusses the explorers who discovered the area and settled there, distant ancestors of today's Inuit. Next are the first Europeans to visit the general area. Although they did not stay long, their journals and logs have endured, and some offer fascinating glimpses of Inuit life at the time.

Part Two, "The People's Story," presents accounts of life in Ukkusiksalik by six women and 13 men. They range in age from the oldest, Leonie Sammurtok, born in 1902 when the whaling era was drawing to a close and an adult by the time the fox trading era began in the 1920s, to the youngest, Theresie Tungilik, who was born nearly 50 years later and attended residential school in Chesterfield Inlet.

Through engaging and unvarnished glimpses from their lives, these people invite the reader into the intimacy of life on the land in Ukkusiksalik. Tuinnaq Kanayuk Bruce, born in 1925, tells the story from her childhood of her family's pet polar bear, who was frightened unintentionally by children throwing stones into the water and ran away to live with another family until they brought him back (p. 45). Felix Kopak, born about 1918, describes a method of hunting caribou in which hunters howled like wolves to frighten the animals into swimming across a lake or river toward waiting hunters on the other side (p. 82). Guy Amarok, born in 1935, mentions how a man, driving his dog-team in dense fog, hurtled off a cliff and became paralyzed: "Back then people died of accidents or people died [by] getting murdered or people died of carelessness or just pure negligence ... People didn't die too often from disease like they do now" (p. 87). Mariano Aupilaarjuk, born in 1920, emphasizes the importance of respect in Inuit thought: coming from Repulse Bay to Ukkusiksalik

requires crossing a dangerous whirlpool near the entrance of Ukkusiksalik from Roes Welcome Sound. "Before you crossed to the other side, to respect the Inuit law, if a person had any bad feelings toward another person, you'd have to confess.... Any bad thing has to be dropped, because if you don't do that, then you'd never make it to the other side ... respect for the land and respect for people is just as one" (p. 54). Theresie Tungilik, born in 1951, offers some colourful images from her childhood: "One sunny day I was out searching for insects and I found a large, hairless green caterpillar. I could feel its legs crawling in my hand, but it fell and I couldn't find it again. I wanted to show everyone how beautiful it looked. My mother would have screamed if it came near her. My mother was petrified of bugs so I would chase her around and she would run away from me" (p. 119).

Three family trees at the end of this section explain the genealogy of people associated with the HBC post at Tasiujaq, at the western end of Wager Inlet. The post was a major influence on families in the area during its operation from 1925 to 1945, and many of the voices in the book are those of descendants of traders, both Southerners and Inuit.

Part Three, "A Landscape of Stories," incorporates excerpts from the accounts in Part Two with complementary information from other sources. Each chapter focuses on a particular topic: travel routes inland and connections with other Inuit groups; the search for the lost Franklin expedition by the American Frederick Schwatka in 1878–80 (p. 157); the whaling era, tales of policemen and priests, fatal accidents; the first Inuk trader, Iqungajuq (Wager Dick); how to build a sod house. The variety of topics is appealing, and the stories are well told. Here, as elsewhere in the book, the author has thoughtfully provided references for further reading.

An appendix following this section presents excerpts from the journals of Southerners who worked as traders at the Tasiujaq post. These are quick snapshots of post life in the 1920s and 1930s, the laconic entries leaving it to the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks: "April 24, 1927: Gale. The force of the wind is so great that the snow was driven into both bedrooms..." (p. 251). An account of a man who fell through the ice while sealing on 19 November 1927 says that he "managed, Lord knows how, to get onto the shore ice and after crawling a mile or so on his hands and knees reached his igloo, and the next day was none the worse for his dunking except the loss of his rifle" (p. 259). Several entries refer to lively Christmas dances in the post to the sound of the accordion.

The book is well illustrated: photographs include portraits of the interviewees, archival images, and more recent images of the interviewees and their families and the landscape of Ukkusiksalik. The clear and attractive maps are very useful given the number of places mentioned. Paper and reproduction quality are excellent.

Some of the interviewees' stories would have benefited from more attention to editing: Inuit elders are masters of oral expression in their own language, but the reader

occasionally trips over sentences where the English version does not reflect this mastery, and there are occasional minor errors in the spellings of Inuktitut words.

This book will be very useful for people traveling to Ukkusiksalik National Park (everyone planning a trip there should read it), as well as to students and teachers. It will also appeal to those who enjoy learning about the Arctic and its history. Most importantly, the book is a well-balanced source of information for young Inuit who, whether or not they have family connections to Ukkusiksalik, are hungry for better understanding of the past to help them find their bearings in a time of sustained and rapid change.

John Bennett
51 Glengarry Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 0L4
Canada
bd714@ncf.ca

ALASKA'S SKYBOYS: COWBOY PILOTS AND THE MYTH OF THE LAST FRONTIER. By KATHERINE JOHNSON RINGSMUTH. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-295-99508-3. xiii + 267 p., b&w illus., notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$34.95.

Despite this book's title, *Alaska's Skyboys: Cowboy Pilots and the Myth of the Last Frontier*, and the sepia-toned image of a bush plane soaring over Alaskan snowcapped mountains on its cover, Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth's Alaska aviation history centers only upon the area of Alaska that would eventually become the Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve and its surrounding communities (“the Wrangells”). Ringsmuth moves beyond the formulaic bush pilot biography as she seeks to illuminate the complicated relationship between the Wrangells' aviators, the federal government, and the American psyche. Ringsmuth also explores the greater social influences that have molded the public's romanticized view of Alaska and its bush pilots as 20th century manifestations of the 19th century concept of frontier and repackaging of the cowboy romance.

Perhaps Ringsmuth's greatest strength and weakness in undertaking this line of research is that she is not, herself, an aviator, a fact she bluntly puts forth in the book's opening line: “I am not a pilot” (p. xi). Aviation aficionados reading the book may pick up on that fact when occasional inaccuracies about aircraft types occur, such as her description of the Douglas DC-3 (p. 3). Those from non-aviation backgrounds will appreciate the lack of technical jargon and language highly specific to the aviation industry.

Alaska's Skyboys emphasizes the role that government investment has played in the advancement of the air transport industry in Alaska and asserts, quite rightly, that this crucial element of Alaska's aviation history is often overlooked by those advancing the cowboy narrative.

Ringsmuth begins with a discussion of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis as it deals with “the growth of democracy, rugged individualism and American exceptionalism” (p. 14), and from there illustrates how the development of air transport in Alaska's Wrangell Mountains has been framed in the public eye as a reinterpretation of this idea. *Alaska's Skyboys* recounts the major economic influences on the development of air transport—mining, mail delivery, scientific research, and military, hunting, and conservation activities—as it grew to become a fixture of everyday life in Cordova, Valdez, and other Wrangell Mountain area communities. Ringsmuth focuses on several early bush pilots—Charles “Harold” Gillam, Robert “Bob” Campbell Reeve, M.D. “Kirk” Kirkpatrick, and perhaps the most amusingly nicknamed, Merle “Mudhole” Smith—who have strongly influenced the development of the air transport industry in the Wrangells. While she highlights some of the structural changes that have occurred within the industry, for example, the shift from those early single pilot operators to larger corporations, she notes the continuing drive to capitalize on Alaska's reputation as a “pristine wilderness—a luxury quickly disappearing on America's new industrial, technological, and progressive frontiers” (p. 129), thus clinging to the frontier imagery. Ringsmuth concludes with a discussion of how late 20th century conservationist movements involving the Wrangell Mountains area have affected the way aviators interact with the territory that has become Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve as government regulation has effectively fenced in their former frontier.

Scholars of Alaska aviation may find Ringsmuth's depth of research similar to Ira Harkey's (1999) biography *Noel Wien: Alaska Pioneer Bush Pilot*. Ringsmuth's research and documentation is both thorough and evident throughout the book, sometimes to the detriment of the narrative. In this respect, *Alaska's Skyboys* struggles somewhat to find its pacing and flow. Ringsmuth occasionally digresses to topics only obliquely related to the main theme, leaving the impression that it was some juicy tidbit dug up during research and considered too interesting to leave out. The book finally reaches its stride approximately two-thirds of the way through, when the frontier skyboy theme again comes into focus, in the context of post-war sport hunting in the Wrangells.

The greatest disappointment about this book is that the skyboy thesis is not more consistently supported throughout the text. Future editions of this volume would benefit from more careful copy-editing, a tighter narrative structure, and the verification of technical details pertaining to aircraft operations. Descriptions of the early pilots, while informative, could be condensed significantly and still provide valuable support for the frontier argument. Typographical errors throughout the book are apparently the result of overreliance on word processor spell check software. While most of these errors are minor and can be interpreted from context, they do detract from the authoritative level of the work.