

FINDING FRANKLIN: THE UNTOLD STORY OF A 165-YEAR SEARCH. By RUSSELL A. POTTER. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. xvi + 262 pages, maps, b&w illus., notes, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$34.95; Cdn\$39.95. Also available as an eBook.

The fate of Sir John Franklin's 1845 Northwest Passage expedition has fascinated researchers and the public for more than 17 decades. The degree of interest has waxed and waned but never died away entirely and, as this book seeks to show, from the 1850s through the 1870s, and again from the 1920s through to the present, the area where the expedition disappeared has drawn searchers interested in learning more about its fate. Author Russell Potter, a professor of English at Rhode Island College, documents these searches, but his focus is at least as much on the searchers themselves as on the searches, and especially the effect on the searchers of the Franklin expedition story. Its effect on Potter himself is also documented; when he received a satellite phone call in April 1998 from the location where the Franklin survivors had come ashore exactly 150 years earlier, he said, "[I] almost thought I could hear the howling of the winds" (p. 166). Other sections are less autobiographical but equally revealing about the author. Potter is clearly fascinated with the portrayal of the Franklin story in the media, lovingly describing and editorializing on TV documentaries made about the story. He spends almost five pages describing scenes presented in the 2008 film *Passage* and when discussing a 1994 documentary, he characterizes Margaret Atwood's contribution as "prescient" and describes amateur historian Barry Ranford as the "craggy anchor" of the film (p. 160).

But the primary thrust of the book is to describe the searches in the vicinity of King William Island. The book's early chapters are named after and revolve around themes that have pervaded the Franklin search story over the years (e.g., Bones; Papers; Provisions; Maps). Several of the book's central chapters each deal with a single searcher, and these names (Rae, Hall, Schwatka, Ranford, and Woodman) will be familiar to anyone who has read the voluminous Franklin literature. The book closes with more

themed chapters (Ice, Inuit), a brief epilogue that notes all the things and places that the author believes still need to be researched, and an appendix listing the searches by year. That summary hints at the book's complex structure—it is not quite a chronological account of the searches, nor is it a purely thematic study. The book's subtitle is also an overstatement, since most of the stories recounted here have been written about at length elsewhere. There are entire books about John Rae and Charles Francis Hall. Frederick Schwatka's journal and those kept by his companions have been published, David Woodman authored two books, and Barry Ranford published magazine article accounts of his research. Even the minor searchers' stories have generally been published somewhere. Thus there are only a few truly untold stories in this book, such as the sad acknowledgement that amateur historian Ranford secretly collected human bones and artifacts from some of the sites he discovered. So rather than telling untold stories, the most important contribution of this book is bringing together these previously told but disparate accounts.

Throughout his descriptions of the searches, the author's appreciation of the "amateur" is emphasized. Present-day enthusiasts, participating from their armchairs at home via blogs and Facebook, are repeatedly invoked. His enthusiasm for these amateurs is combined with an apparent belief that professional researchers have somehow not followed up on clues. As someone who has participated in a supporting role in some of the research I was a bit taken aback by the almost "conspiracy theory" tone of some of the writing. In several places he refers to the "classical" or "conventional" reconstruction of Franklin expedition events and in two places in the book laments his impression that no "proper archaeological survey" has been done of locations that he finds intriguing, such as the Todd Islets.

Unfortunately the book contains numerous errors, ranging from minor to significant. For example, the very first two sentences of Chapter 1 get wrong the date of the *Erebus* discovery press conference in Ottawa on 10 September 2014 and claim that a "red-eye flight-for-one" brought Parks Canada archaeologist Ryan Harris there. In

fact, several researchers made that trip together on the same regularly scheduled commercial flights. More significantly, important geographic locations are mistaken. On page 124, Potter has William Gilder making a sledge trip from north of Chesterfield Inlet to "Resolute Bay," which would have been a 1200 km journey far to the north; in fact, he seems to be referring to a 150 km trip south to Marble Island. On page 131, he has Frederick Schwatka reaching "Erebus Bay itself," which is located on the west coast of King William Island, and there discovering a cairn built by Charles Francis Hall. Hall's cairn is situated on the south coast of King William Island, and the text makes sense only if the author intended to write "King William Island itself." On page 152, he describes Owen Beattie's finds from Erebus Bay and mistakenly states that they were found "within a few miles" of the body that produced the "Peglar Papers," which actually was found near Cape Herschel, more than 60 km away on the south coast. Here Potter seems to be confusing two different projects conducted by Beattie. He also asserts incorrectly on page 18 that Parks Canada's southern area searches were "closely based on Woodman's previous surveys," when in fact they appear to have been based on Parks Canada's own rather different interpretations of the 19th century Inuit testimony and other factors. Quite a few other small (but unnecessary) errors detract from the work.

This book had the mixed luck to be released by the publisher within weeks of the announcement that the second of the Franklin expedition's ships, HMS *Terror*, had been discovered. The refreshed public interest may help sales, but the discovery immediately rendered moot the author's extensive speculation on where the *Terror* might be found, which it turns out was far from any of the locations he favoured.

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