

WE ALL EXPECTED TO DIE: SPANISH INFLUENZA IN LABRADOR, 1918–1919. By ANNE BUDGELL. St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador: ISER Books, 2018. ISBN 9781894725545. 392 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., appendix, index, endnotes. Softbound. Cdn\$26.95.

There are many things about history that are “known”—in the sense that most people are aware of them—but are not really *known* at all. Such is the case with the impact of the “Spanish” flu in Labrador. While anyone who cares to look up the statistics can see the horrific impact of the disease in communities such as Okak and Hebron, the full significance of this cataclysm—both its shocking details and its larger cultural significance—has never been fully told or understood.

Anne Budgell’s book remedies this lack, and it does so unflinchingly and courageously. Drawing from letters, diaries, and other little-known archival materials, alongside the public records of the Moravian missionaries and the Newfoundland government, she gives her readers a clear, chronological account that situates the 1918 outbreak in the context of the larger history of Labrador and its Indigenous peoples. Her account begins, as it should, well before the twentieth century; we learn that, almost from the moment of the establishment of their missions there, the Moravian brethren regarded the Inuit—whom they thought of as “their Eskimos”—as a doomed race. Their spiritual needs, of course, required all the more diligent attention, but as to their physical health and wellbeing, more neglectful shepherds would be hard to imagine. Known preventatives, such as inoculation against smallpox, were neglected, and the lack of trained medical personnel was never regarded as a significant problem in need of attention. In some communities, there might be a missionary with limited medical training, but in Okak, which was by far the best supplied with facilities appropriate for medical care, there was no doctor.

As a result, year after year saw bills of mortality that would be regarded as a crisis in almost any other kind of community. Measles was a frequent culprit, along with smallpox, diphtheria, and whooping cough. And, though influenza had taken a significant toll in many years before 1918, the disease was poorly understood, and the nature of its contagion—through direct human contact, and quite possibly when the carrier was not visibly ill—not at all. Nevertheless, the connection between various communicable diseases and the periodic visits of supply ships was common enough that the need for some precautions ought to have been readily evident. Instead, the Moravians generally blamed the outbreaks of illness among the Inuit on their perceived poor habits, lack of cleanliness, and indolence. Most shamefully of all, once the stunning death toll in settlements visited in 1918 by the brethren’s ship *Harmony* became clear, they inserted a false narrative within which they had warned the Inuit about the contagion, but that the foolish Natives went ahead and fraternized with ship and crew heedlessly. In fact, no such clear warnings

were made; the most that seems to have been done (and this only at some locations) was vague advice to the Inuit that they not go to the part of the ship where the sick person was. Budgell clearly documents the ways in which the revisionist history of these purported warnings was woven into the historical record by those who knew better.

And the result of this negligence on the part of the captain of the *Harmony*, the Moravians, and the staff at each mission station was devastating. At Hebron, 86 of its 100 residents died, while at Okak, 204 of its 263 inhabitants. It was not just the sheer number of deaths, but the suddenness with which they came that made the epidemic into a theatre of horrors. Men who came in to warm themselves by the stove fell over and died within minutes, mothers died with babies in their arms, and in numerous households—because the disease was most fatal for adults—only children remained to care for themselves. Meanwhile outside, the dogs in every community went wild; with no one to feed or restrain them, they broke into peoples’ homes and devoured the bodies of the dead. Fed on this frenzy, some packs of dogs even attacked and killed the healthy who dared to venture outdoors. In such a situation, the dead were left where they lay, or a house was designated as the depository for corpses. And worse—sometimes, amidst the corpses, were a few who recovered, rising from the death-heap and knocking on a neighbor’s door, hoping for a smoke! In one of the worst cases, a single child, the rest of her family dead, managed to live for days off of stale bread, despite the fact that the door of her house was blocked open by a corpse, and dogs were actively feeding on the body and others of the home’s former residents. The girl, protected by her father’s old lead sled dog, survived.

With such extraordinary human suffering, one would think that the response would be enormous and generous, as soon as the scope of the tragedy was known, but it was not. A harbinger of this lack of response was one government official’s overheard remark—when limited aid for a crisis that was not yet fully known was proposed—that the officials in Newfoundland should “let them die” and save themselves the cost of caring for them. When help was finally sent, it came in the form of a shipload of wood and lining for coffins; help that was angrily refused by the survivors, until one man negotiated with the relief ship and was able to use the wood for a schoolhouse. Aside from human prejudice, another key factor was the poor quality of communication; there was no wireless station north of Battle Harbour, and communications between settlements relied on boats in the summer and dog-sledded mail in the winter. All that those in the southernmost part of Labrador knew was that the mail had never come.

It’s to her credit that Ms. Budgell tells this story frankly, dispassionately, and as fully as possible, while acknowledging that at times the lack of documentation prevented recounting every part of the story. In appendices, the complete bills of mortality are given; even when they had to bury people in mass graves or sink them beneath the ice, the Moravians were diligent record-keepers. Her book

deserves a wide readership and should be on the shelves in every library in Canada, and the world for that matter.

When I visited the site of Hebron last summer as a historian aboard an expedition cruise, I made sure that the passengers were aware of the injustice suffered by the Inuit of that community when in 1959 they were forcibly evacuated. I now know though, that 40 years earlier, that same community suffered an even worse cataclysm, one that—albeit its ultimate cause was a deadly disease that could not have been fully anticipated—was made so much worse by human prejudice and incompetence. Perhaps it should be considered the worse of the two.

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TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE GLORY OF POLAR EXPLORATION. By JOHN H.V. DIPPEL. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2018. ISBN 978-1-63388-411-3. 343 p., b&w illus., notes, index. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.50; US\$28.00. Also available as an ebook.

With the subtitle of his most recent book, *To the Ends of the Earth*, historian John V.H. Dippel promises to reveal “the truth behind the glory of polar exploration.” Having tracked the endless debates about Robert E. Peary and Frederick Cook’s competing claims to have been the first to reach the North Pole (a question that will never be resolved), I am skeptical of any publication that promises to reveal “the truth” about any matter relating to polar exploration expeditions. These were complex endeavors, and there can be no single “truth” about them, nor should we expect one.

Dippel’s main thesis is that nineteenth and early twentieth century polar expeditions were marred by conflicts “between personal ambition and group well-being, between moral rectitude and self-preservation” (p. 18) and that ultimately, the leaders of polar expeditions were driven primarily by a quest for personal glory that led them to make self-serving decisions, often with disastrous results. There is a kernel of truth here, certainly, but hardly the whole truth. This single-minded focus on proving an argument serves no one well, for it has led to superficial discussions of expeditions. In addition, the publication contains numerous errors of fact.

The book is organized thematically rather than chronologically or geographically, and Dippel draws on a variety of the (mostly) better known polar expeditions to make his point. Typically, each chapter begins with a vignette of some aspect of an expedition, which the author uses as a springboard for a wide-ranging discussion, drawing on examples from various times and places to

make his case. This structure means there is no easily summarized narrative arc—individual chapters focus broadly on themes such as the self-aggrandizing nature of the leaders of polar exploration; their propensity to lie about their motives (professing to be interested in science when really they only cared about personal glory and setting records); the challenges of isolation, exacerbated by differences in language, class, and motive; and the struggle between doing what is “civilized” versus what is necessary to survive in the extreme conditions of the polar regions.

As the text covers each theme, readers are repeatedly whisked between the Arctic and Antarctic and from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, a whirlwind that might be manageable for those familiar with the people and places mentioned, but that readers unfamiliar with polar exploration literature are likely to find confusing. To give just one example, as the author describes explorers’ self-perceived need to maintain a brave face despite impending disaster, the text moves directly from describing Shackleton and Worsely waltzing on the deck of the *Endurance*, nipped in the Antarctic ice in 1915, to Lieutenant George Back, writing about the “pusillanimous weakness” of a voyageur who (accurately) predicated disaster for the overland expedition to the Arctic coast in 1832 (p. 41). None of these men, nor the expeditions with which they are associated, are described in any detail until much later in the text. The fact that these events took place nearly 100 years apart in very different circumstances is never addressed.

The book does not include any maps, and the narrative contains numerous errors of fact and geography. More than once, the text mentions that the recently discovered wreck of Franklin’s ship *Terror* was found south of the *Erebus*, for example (p. 63, p. 155), while in Chapter Three, Barrow Strait is described as separating Baffin Island and Greenland (p. 83). Littleton Island is mis-identified as the location of Greely’s camp at Cape Sabine (p. 71) and where Elisha Kent Kane and his men overwintered in 1853–55 (p. 91). Most of these errors do not really impact the argument Dippel is trying to make, but they grate and contribute to a sense of the work’s unreliability. My own expertise is in the Arctic, and it leaves me to wonder how many errors related to Antarctic exploration I failed to notice.

Equally troubling, the book conveys an apparent disdain for science. Dippel devotes a whole chapter to exposing polar explorers as frauds for claiming to have scientific research as an important goal, while really only caring about personal glory through geographic accomplishments. Yet, when expeditions do collect data, he is dismissive of their efforts and displays an ignorance of how science was conducted under extraordinary field conditions: “Icebound parties set up makeshift observatories near their vessels and went to great pains to accurately record measurements—under appalling conditions, and with what strikes us today as obsessional and unnecessary diligence” (p. 89). In fact, scientists and other expedition members often showed huge devotion to collecting accurate, detailed information and understood