

is perhaps better suited to students and practitioners than the layperson.

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THE TANANA CHIEFS: NATIVE RIGHTS AND WESTERN LAW. Edited by WILLIAM SCHNEIDER. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2018. ISBN 97816022-33447. 160 p., b&w illus., bib., notes, appendices, index, ebook. Softbound. US\$35.00.

Alert researchers often unearth an event pivotal to history that has faded from public memory. In this example of attentive research, Schneider and four colleagues reconstruct a July 1915, two-day meeting. The meeting brought together 14 civic leaders from Athabascan bands living in the Tanana River Valley in Interior Alaska to discuss their future with six representatives of the U.S. federal government and the deacon from an Episcopal mission in rural Alaska. The 21 conferees breached barriers dividing Indigenous North America from Western cultures to explore ways to cope with the impending construction of Alaska's recently authorized federal railroad.

James Wickersham, who was halfway through his fourth two-year term as Alaska's sole federal office holder and delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, officially convened the meeting. He had won re-election in 1914 in all four judicial subdivisions by the largest combined plurality of his political career (58% of 11 000 ballots cast among three candidates; Atwood, 1979:286). In April 1915, Wickersham returned to his home in Fairbanks, flush with legislative successes in Washington, D.C. One was his bill providing land grants for an Alaska agricultural college and school of mining, and another was President Wilson's route selection of the Seward-Tanana Valley federally-funded and operated railroad.

Delegate Wickersham found his hometown's population in decline, however. Having depleted nearby gold claims of shallow pay dirt, placer miners had moved to unexplored Tanana-tributary creeks farther west of town. Concerned about this shift, he toured new placer claims near Minto and Tolovana. He chanced upon Chief Alexander of the village of Tolovana, where they chatted for many hours over two days about drastic changes to be expected once railroad construction crews arrived.

Wickersham and Chief Alexander joined forces to hold a Tanana Chiefs' Conference (TCC) on 5–6 July 1915 at the public library building in Fairbanks. Eight Chiefs and six other Athabascan leaders traveled various distances to the meeting, motivated by collective alarm among the region's

Athabascans. Their first concern: had Tolovana's Chief Alexander accurately identified threats to their lifestyle that Delegate Wickersham supposedly told him would come with the railroad? During introductions facilitated by the interpreter Paul Williams of Tanana, Wickersham confirmed Chief Alexander's every word. The TCC then got down to business. Athabascan invitees listened intently to Wickersham's welcome and recommendation that they seek government help to select and secure land on which they could continue subsistence hunting and fishing without fear of being overrun or disturbed in their pursuits (Will Mayo, *in* Schneider, 2018:49–51).

In the 48 years since purchasing Alaska from Russia, U.S. attention to and concern for Alaska Natives had been uneven. Some of the early explorers, who penetrated the Interior of the new territory on military assignments, expected that warlike Alaska Natives would have to be subdued and confined to reservations in the style of the western states. But Alaska Natives proved hospitable by guiding passage and feeding such adventurers. A dozen years before the 1897 Klondike Stampede, Army Lt. Henry Allen and two companions completed a notably ambitious trip with help from Ahtna Athabascans. In 1904–1905, Navy Lt. George Thornton Emmons alerted Congress to his serious concern regarding starvation among Copper River Natives whose supply of upriver salmon was being denied them by commercial fisheries at the mouth of the river for processing in nearby canneries (Schneider, 2018:28–29).

A decade later, the 1915 TCC broke new ground in cultural relations by encouraging Athabascan invitees to speak for themselves and by faithfully recording their statements. Even in translation and transcription, their eloquence survives. Chief Joe of Salchaket said, "We are suggesting to you just one thing, that we want to be left alone. As the whole continent was made for you, God made Alaska for the Indian people, and all we hope is to be able to live here all the time. And we wish to ask you to give us written instruction on our matters" (Schneider, 2018:60 and Appendix 2, Transcript: 89).

For his part, Delegate Wickersham's career in Western jurisprudence shaped his expectations for the outcome of the meeting. Although he genuinely respected Athabascans' lifestyles, he had reluctantly come to regard exclusive land ownership and property rights of individuals both as a means to gauge the degree of "civilization" of Indigenous North Americans, and as their main defense against infringement upon the freedoms that Chief Joe espoused.

Therefore, beginning early on the second day (6<sup>th</sup> July 1915), Delegate Wickersham and the two representatives of the Federal Lands Office must have been surprised by the strength of the Athabascan representatives' eagerness to discuss three objectives other than protecting their lands by reservation or by allotment. Their preferred topics were an industrial school, government-guaranteed medical care, and equitable chances to be awarded contracts for unskilled labour in supplying construction camps with local fish and game. The Episcopal Deacon, Reverend Madara, provided

insights and information essential to both sides in these discussions.

This book is a compendium of perspectives from five contributors on the context, significance, and successes and failures of the 1915 TCC. Each chapter reveals the challenges faced by both the 1915 participants and the contemporary analysts.

The book's success can be measured in several dimensions. First, Schneider and his collaborators have summarized the 33-page transcript of the proceedings well enough that readers need not risk eyestrain from reading the photocopy of the transcript provided in Appendix 2:77–111. Second, this account tempers Evangeline Atwood's (1979) enthusiastic political biography of James Wickersham in which she credits him with writing the prototype Environmental Impact Statement "antecedent to the National Environmental Protection [sic] Act of 1973 [sic] by nearly sixty years" (Atwood, 1979:297–298). Third, this book fills the gap in earlier attempts to trace evolving northern North American issues in land use and conservation. One such attempt is Justice Thomas Berger's (1985) critical review of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, in which he wonders at the tone deafness of U.S. federal government policies. Another example is Peter Coates' (1993) treatise on progress in defining land use and conservation issues preceding the Trans-Alaskan (oil) Pipeline controversies of 1968–77. Had Schneider's analysis of the 1915 TCC meeting been available in 1980, neither Berger nor Coates would likely have missed the opportunity to cite its evidence for steps in evolving public land policies. Finally, one of Schneider's collaborators has recently published a synthesis of Alaska's historical developments between 1896 and 1916 in the context of political progressivism (Alton, 2019). The 1915 TCC figures as prominently in this synthesis as it could have in Berger's and Coates' earlier accounts.

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**NORTH POLE: NATURE AND CULTURE.** By MICHAEL BRAVO. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. ISBN 978-1-78914-008-8. 256 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., bib., index. Softbound. US\$24.95.

Wide-ranging cultural histories of the polar regions constitute a small but vibrant genre. There are, of course, endless accounts both primary and secondary of polar adventure, and even when these are focused on a single expedition, they often include brief histories of exploration in the far north or far south, along with some reflections on the cultural significance of such exploits. There are also numerous tightly focused academic studies of the Arctic or Antarctic as represented in literature, painting, and other arts. Works aimed at the general educated reader and covering broad swaths of polar history and geography, primarily from the cultural perspective, are rarer, yet sometimes more memorable. Among the best-known examples are Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986), Francis Spufford's *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (1997), and Sara Wheeler's *Magnetic North: Notes from the Arctic Circle* (2009).

Lopez, Spufford, and Wheeler are all professional writers whose work is published by major commercial firms. Now, Michael Bravo—an academic based at Cambridge University—has entered the field with a book designed to answer the simple question: "Why does the North Pole matter?" (p. 7). In appearance, *North Pole: Nature and Culture* is more like a trade book than an academic publication: the entire volume is printed on glossy paper, and there are many exceptionally beautiful colour illustrations. The contents are in some ways more impressive than the work of Bravo's predecessors in the genre and in some ways less so.

While Spufford and the others have researched Arctic or Antarctic themes well and written about them with imagination and flair, they are not polar specialists. Bravo is, and it shows. His volume starts out with a refreshingly original chapter on the celestial pole in both European and Inuit astronomy. Long before the geographical North Pole was an object of ambition, observers from many cultures noticed that there was one spot in the heavens around which the constellations appeared to rotate. As Bravo explains, the celestial pole is not especially useful as a reference point in the Arctic because it appears high overhead, out of a traveller's line of vision. For European mariners, in contrast, it became ever more significant as the centuries passed. Bravo's second chapter considers the place of the geographic pole in Renaissance mapmaking. Even as cartographers devised new ways of representing the earth in which the pole took pride of place, especially circumpolar and cordiform (heart-shaped) projections, rulers such as the Emperor Charles V used maps and globes to embody their political power.

After the discovery of the compass, the north magnetic pole's invisible power added greatly to the Arctic's mystery