

THE YUKON RELIEF EXPEDITION AND THE JOURNAL OF CARL JOHAN SAKARIASSEN. Edited by V.R. RAUSCH and D.L. BALDWIN. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2002. xvi + 261 p., b&w illus., maps, bib., index. Softbound. US\$26.95.

On 11 August 1897, Inspector Charles Constantine of the North West Mounted Police wrote to Ottawa from Dawson City, then in the initial throes of the Klondike Gold Rush: “the outlook for grub is not assuring for the number of people here—about four thousand crazy or lazy men, chiefly American miners and toughs from the coast towns” (Berton, 1958:178).

Some six weeks later, he decided to do something about the situation, and in late September he posted a notice in Front Street in Dawson City, which read:

For those who have not laid in a winter’s supply to remain longer is to court death from starvation, or at least the certainty of sickness from scurvy and other troubles. Starvation now stares everyone in the face who is hoping and waiting for outside relief. (Berton, 1958:178)

The news of the fabulous wealth of the Klondike creeks had broken only in mid-July, when the steamers *Excelsior* and *Portland* reached San Francisco and Seattle, respectively, with the first miners who had “struck it rich.” At the time of Constantine’s warnings, probably only a few hundred prospective gold seekers had reached Dawson from “outside.” But news of the strike in the Klondike valley had spread quickly up and down the Yukon River, to towns such as Forty Mile and Circle City, and practically every prospector and miner in the Yukon watershed had rushed to Dawson.

Many of the men involved were Americans, and the reaction in Washington to the news of an impending crisis was strong and swift. On 9 December 1897, Senator George McBride of Oregon introduced a resolution in the U.S. Senate that would appropriate \$250 000 for relief for the “starving” miners of the Upper Yukon Valley and authorize the Secretary of War to administer the funds and to select the means of delivering the necessary relief. The Senate amended the appropriation to \$200 000, and President McKinley signed the bill into law on 7 January 1898. The plan was to import draft reindeer from Lapland (along with experienced drivers) and to use them to haul relief supplies from Skagway or Haines Mission to Dawson. The entire operation was to be known as the Yukon Relief Expedition; it is not clear whether Ottawa was asked to contribute, or was even consulted.

Critical to the entire operation was the input of Dr. Sheldon Jackson, superintendent of Presbyterian Missions since 1877. Having made a cruise aboard the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Bear* in the summer of 1890, during which he had observed widespread poverty and hardship among the coastal communities of the Bering Sea littoral of Alaska, Jackson had set afoot a campaign to convert the hunters

into reindeer-herders. Through his efforts, 538 domestic reindeer had been introduced from Chukotka to the coastal communities between 1892 and 1895. By 1897, they numbered 1466 animals. Jackson was thus quite familiar with the problems of transporting reindeer and was now invited by the U.S. Government to purchase reindeer in Lapland and transport them to Dawson.

Along with an employee, William Kjellmann, Jackson traveled via New York and London to Trondheim. There he purchased a large quantity of reindeer moss (actually lichen, mainly *Cladonia* spp.) from the farmers in the nearby Røros area. It was loaded aboard the Allan Line steamer *Manitoban*, which then proceeded north to Bossekop in Altafjord. Here she loaded 539 draft reindeer, 418 sledges, and 511 sets of harness. Jackson also hired 68 men, mostly Saami, as reindeer drivers, plus women and children: a total of 113 people would accompany the reindeer to Alaska. Among the men hired was Carl Johan Sakariassen of Fladstrand, aged 23. Starting from his departure from home on 2 February, he kept a detailed journal, which (translated from the Norwegian by James P. Nelson) represents the major component of this book.

The *Manitoban* sailed from Bossekop on 4 February 1898, bound for New York. The introduction by Rausch and Baldwin ends in mid-Atlantic, and thereafter, Sakariassen’s lively and perceptive diary entries carry the story. Having reached New York on 28 February 1898, the reindeer and their drivers were loaded on two trains, which started west on 1 March and reached Seattle a week later.

In fact, as early as 1 March, the Secretary of War had cancelled the relief mission, since the crisis at Dawson City had evaporated; the distressed miners had simply dispersed up or down the Yukon by their own efforts. Nonetheless the “Yukon Relief Expedition” still headed north.

On 17 March the reindeer and drivers were loaded aboard the barque *Seminole*, which then headed north, reaching Haines Mission (now Haines) on 27 March. The plan was to drive the reindeer overland from there, over the Dalton Trail via the Chilkat Pass, to Circle City, where they could be used by various U.S. Army exploring expeditions. But at Haines Mission, things began to disintegrate. All the “reindeer moss” had been consumed on the long trip from Lapland, and hence, despite efforts at feeding with various alternatives, the reindeer began to lose condition.

Despite miserable, rainy weather and the increasing weakness of the reindeer from lack of food, Sakariassen and his companions began driving the herd through the bush up the Chilkat River on 5 April. On 6 May, by which time they had not even reached the summit of the Chilkat Pass, 16 of the men were detailed to continue north with the surviving 185 reindeer; they reached Circle City on 28 February 1899 with only 116 animals. Meanwhile Sakariassen and his companions, almost starving, had returned to Haines Mission. On 15 May 1898 they boarded a steamer (probably the *City of Seattle*), and three days later they were back at Port Townsend, where they had left the women and children.

Dr. Jackson had sold the U.S. government on the idea of using reindeer sledges for winter mail delivery in Alaska, and to this end now proposed to establish a reindeer station, to be called Eaton Station, some 13 km inland from the settlement of Unalakleet, in turn about 70 km across Norton Sound from St. Michael. He now persuaded over 30 of the reindeer herders, including Sakariassen, to head back north to Alaska to participate in this project. They sailed aboard the steam schooner *Navarro* on 28 June, reaching St. Michael on 25 July and Unalakleet six days later. Here Jackson had assembled a herd of reindeer that had been imported from Chukotka to be used on the mail service. Then, on 5 August, Sakariassen and his companions traveled inland up the Unalakleet River to the proposed site of Eaton Station.

While a small number of the men looked after the reindeer, the majority, including Sakariassen, were living in tents and employed in erecting the buildings of Eaton Station. They moved into the buildings on 12 November, and thereafter had little to do for the winter apart from cutting and hauling firewood.

From 1 November onwards, they became increasingly restless as news of the gold strikes at Anvil City (later Nome) near Cape Nome, where their own Jafet Lindberg had made one of the initial strikes, continued to percolate along the coast to Unalakleet and Eaton Station. Having resigned their jobs, on 8 April 1899 Sakariassen and two companions, hauling a sledge with all their belongings, set off for Cape Nome, some 330 km away. Reaching Anvil City in early May, they spent the summer staking claims and panning for gold, quite successfully, until about mid-September, when freeze-up brought all panning activity to a halt. Sakariassen's journal presents considerable detail on claim staking, on the outbreak of claim jumping, and on the origins of the unusual phenomenon of gold panning on the beach at Nome. Sakariassen departed on board the steamer *Portland* on 18 October, reaching San Francisco on 2 November.

The introduction by Rausch and Baldwin, and even more so Sakariassen's journal, represent an extremely valuable contribution to the history of Alaska and the Yukon. Sakariassen's journal presents a firsthand account, by a very perceptive observer, not only of the bizarre history of the Yukon Relief Expedition, but also of the Nome gold rush, a phenomenon about which little has been written, certainly as compared to the Klondike Gold Rush. Strangely, however, there is no mention in Rausch and Baldwin's introduction of the fact that a considerable portion of the journal is devoted to Sakariassen's experience as a gold miner at Nome. A further criticism is that while many of the endnotes (organized by date and totaling 28 pages) are extremely detailed, and all are well referenced, there is no indication in the text of Sakariassen's journal that it is in fact annotated. Many readers, like this reviewer, will stumble on the fact that there are endnotes only at quite a late stage in reading the book.

REFERENCES

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DEADLY WINTER: THE LIFE OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN. By MARTYN BEARDSLEY. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2002 (First published in Great Britain in 2002 by Chatham Publishing, Rochester, Kent). xiv + 272 p., map, b&w illus., appendices, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$34.95.

Martyn Beardsley's *Deadly Winter: The Life of Sir John Franklin* begins with a rejection of what the author calls "the modern trend towards revisionist history," which he finds "anachronistic" in its practice of "putting a modern...slant on the actions and beliefs of people living in different centuries and different worlds" (p. x–xi). Beardsley's position will strike a positive chord in readers who feel dissatisfied by the sort of thinking that faults historical figures for not behaving as though they lived in the present.

Its politics aside, revisionist history can at least offer the possibility of new insight and information, and that, in turn, can lead to a more complete understanding of history. Its problem is one of focus, as it tends to look at the past solely through the lenses of the present, and at first, Beardsley appears to reject such narrow scope. But as *Deadly Winter* unfolds, it becomes clear that the author has only rejected the limiting peephole of the present so that he can look, once again, through the even more limiting peephole of the past. So while the reader hoped to get a panoramic understanding of Franklin that only two centuries of insight could provide, Beardsley delivers nothing more than a shallow repetition of the popular Franklin-as-hero stereotype, little changed since the Victorian era.

In spite of his claim to the contrary (p. 235–236), Beardsley seems obsessed with maintaining his own boyhood vision of Franklin—along with Drake and Nelson—as a sacrificial hero winning his "place in British history" (p. x). Instead of being an informed, balanced biography, this book is, more than anything else, a petty exercise in regressive thinking and inadequate research.

This criticism is harsh, but *Deadly Winter* fails in too many ways. Although the biography purports to be current and to deal appropriately with related works on Franklin, Beardsley remains disturbingly unaware of numerous important books and articles that have been published in the past decade, many of them in Canada. For example, he