

FUR TRADE POSTS OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES: 1870-1970. By PETER J. USHER. *Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1971. 8½ x 11 inches, 180 pages.*

To the serious student of Canada's Far North, and to those whose interest stems from that nostalgia that one who has lived there never seems to get over, this excellent work by Dr. Peter Usher is invaluable. To go back 100 years and sift through masses of unrelated material, piecing together and cross-checking the often tenuous and unravelled threads of fur trade history is an undertaking that would discourage all but the trained research scientist. It also required personal dedication and when one reads and studies the introduction and preambles to the different sections, the personal involvement of the author is quite apparent.

This last stronghold of the Fur Trade, the Northwest Territories, has been divided into six regions, taking into account such important factors as the grouping of people, the nature of the fur resources, transportation routes, traditional trapping grounds, and the organization of the trade. By again dividing the regions into sub-regions, the author has made it easy to study special areas. Trade Post locations have been coded and are easily found on the accompanying maps. The ownership of trading posts has also been broken down into five different categories from the major companies down to Mission Posts, the latter having from time to time been licensed to trade in furs for special reasons.

Although the Fur Trade is generally regarded as having reached its zenith in the pre-Confederation years, it lingered on in the Territories as the most important means of livelihood for the native peoples until the nineteen forties when the transition from a hunting to a wage-earning economy took place. The author, to use his own expression, has put flesh on the bare bones of fact by consulting "living fur-traders", now a dwindling band, to clear up points which had not been properly documented, and the result of the author's personal contacts with northerners is quite apparent.

One hundred years ago there were only nine fur trade posts in the Northwest Territories, all located in the Mackenzie River Valley where the Hudson's Bay Company held a monopoly. Twenty years after the cession of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1870, the building of a railway and the introduction of steamboats on the northern rivers gave easy access to the Mackenzie River Basin.

During the past 100 years, a total of 535 trading posts were in operation in the Territories at 229 locations. The Eastern Arctic got a late start in 1909 with the establishment of Wolstenholme Post in Northwestern Quebec, then considered to be a part of the Northwest Territories. Today, for reasons which are analysed by the author, the number of posts within the Territories has declined to a mere 69, of which 40 are run by the Hudson's Bay Company, and the remainder by Independents and Co-operatives.

The work under review gives statistical breakdowns by ownership, opening and closing dates, the number of fur trading establishments which have operated within each settlement and information on "camp trades" and "tripping" for furs. One interesting observation is that the Mackenzie River Delta, because of population density and convenience to the major trading posts, rendered unnecessary the tripping and camp trading so common at one time in other areas. The relative trade stability of the Mackenzie River Delta stems from the muskrat population which did not suffer the cyclic ups-and-downs to the same extent as did other fur-bearers, notably the white fox.

It is difficult to do justice to a statistical work in a brief review but the introductory material and preambles to sub-region sections is well-written, informative, authentic and an excellent reference source. The author invites comments from interested people to clear up any points in doubt, or in need of correction. These seem to be very few indeed.

Slowly but surely the history of our north country is being pieced together and Peter Usher's *Fur Trade Posts of the Northwest Territories* is an outstanding contribution, well received by northerners.

A. Copland

RESEARCH IN THE ANTARCTIC. EDITED BY LOUIS O. QUAM. *American Association for the Advancement of Science, Publication No. 93. Baltimore: The Horn-Shafer Division of Geo. W. King Printing Co., 1971. 6¼ x 9¼ inches, 768 pages, illustrated. \$19.95 to AAAS members; \$24.95 to non-members.*

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