

HUNTERS ON THE TRACK: WILLIAM PENNY AND THE SEARCH FOR FRANKLIN. By W. GILLIES ROSS. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-7735-5283-8. 544 p., maps, b&w illus., bib., index, endnotes. Hardbound. Cdn\$39.95.

From his vantage point on the deck of William Penny's ship, 20-year-old assistant surgeon and third mate John Stuart watched eight ships follow west past the ice-choked mouth of Wellington Channel. This was the 1850–51 search for Sir John Franklin's missing expedition; a well-financed international operation that had carried the hopes of a nation into what is now Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic. But in 1850, what Stuart saw was an “unseemly and undignified race of nine vessels, their different commanders less actuated by any anxiety for the rescue of Franklin, than eager to outstrip his neighbours in a passage to the westward” (p. 401).

No clear plan had been agreed before these ships—HMS *Resolute*, HMS *Assistance*, HMS *Intrepid*, and HMS *Pioneer* of the Royal Navy; the *Lady Franklin* and *Sophia* sailing with Naval orders but under the command of a Scottish whaling captain; two US Navy brigs, the USS *Advance* and *Rescue*; and the little *Felix*, independently commanded by a septuagenarian Trafalgar veteran—had left their respective ports.

There had been no discussion on how to divide the search areas so that effort was not duplicated, nor opportunities lost. No allowances had been made for the four completely different approaches and disciplines within the search squadron: that of the Royal Navy under Horatio Austin and Erasmus Ommanney, of the ships commanded by whaler William Penny and his second Alexander Stewart, of Edwin De Haven and Samuel Griffin on the American Navy vessels sent by Henry Grinnell, and of whatever Sir John Ross was doing on the *Felix*.

It was, in short, a mess. And perhaps nobody other than the great geographer W. Gillies Ross could have taken control of the conflicting accounts, considered the evidence from an assortment of reliable and less than reliable narrators, and charted a clear path through many obstacles on land and sea to deliver the first comprehensive history of this vitally important period in the search for the Franklin Expedition.

The late Professor Emeritus of Geography at Bishop's University in Quebec had devoted decades of his long life to the study of Arctic whaling, producing several books and papers on the subject (Ottawa Citizen, 2019). He was also the author of several papers on the life of William Penny and his involvement in the search for Sir John Franklin and wrote *This Distant and Unsurveyed Country* (Ross, 1997) on Margaret Penny's overwinter in Baffin's Bay with her husband and son in 1857–58. *Hunters on the Track* is thus the pinnacle of a life of close study, and it carries great scholarly weight while also packing an emotional punch.

The sprawling scope of this well-presented book—544 pages, including a postscript, several pages of notes

and an exhaustive bibliography—allows Ross to not only follow Penny's ships through Arctic waters until the end of the 1850 season, but to bring his readers inside the winter quarters and let them walk alongside the sledges the following spring. However, it does sometimes veer off the track. Ross devotes an entire chapter to the travails of the USS *Advance* and *Rescue* as the ships and crew drifted helplessly through the ice after leaving for home, which will not take most researchers and readers anywhere they really needed to go. The real interest, and the drama, is in the chapters that follow it: Penny's race home, his communication with the Admiralty, and the bitter dispute that erupted after some of his communications with Horatio Austin were published just days after the HMS *Resolute* docked at Woolwich.

The disagreement was simple: Penny claimed that he'd asked Austin for the use of a steam tender that would enable one final search in the ice of Wellington Channel, and that Austin had refused the request. However, Austin denied that the conversation had ever taken place and pointed to written evidence to the contrary. So, in October 1851, the Admiralty appointed a high level Arctic Committee to investigate what had gone wrong.

This episode tends to overwhelm many accounts of the 1850–51 story. But here it is placed into careful context by Ross, who weighs up the evidence, analyses the power dynamics, and the ways in which he feels Penny and his men were disadvantaged or discriminated against, and considers the influence of Penny's friend and champion Lady Jane Franklin, “that magnificent manipulator of men” (p. 356).

While no blame or censure was apportioned, the Naval committee, nevertheless, came down hard in favour of Austin's version of events. However, it was underdog William Penny who received most of the sympathy from a public gripped by the search for the *Erebus* and *Terror*. After all, it was Penny and his men who had discovered the Franklin Expedition's 1845–46 winter quarters, with its graves and its relics, on Beechey Island. They did not find any written record telling would-be rescuers where Franklin's ships had gone, but this was not through lack of searching.

Penny clearly felt that he should have been given the opportunity to lead another search expedition. But the Admiralty “had had enough of the outspoken whaling captain whose critical comments about Austin had forced them to convene a special inquiry and expose some soiled laundry to public view” (p. 389).

Penny's defence in front of the Arctic Committee, and that of his officers, had undoubtedly been damaged by the Admiralty's refusal to return the journals kept by his officers, a setback not shared by Captain Austin and his colleagues. Some journals were returned eventually but others including Penny's “vanished under suspicious circumstances” (p. 328).

Until such time as these missing journals are rediscovered in an attic or archive, it is hard to imagine that *Hunters on the Track* will be challenged by a more

comprehensive overview of Penny's life and participation in the search for Franklin. But while this is an undeniably authoritative work, it should not be the last word on the wider 1850–51 expedition. Many more stories are waiting to be told, and future hunters on the track will be able to uncover bright new insights if they follow the detailed map drawn so carefully for us by W. Gillies Ross.

#### REFERENCES

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**HAROLD INNIS ON PETER POND: BIOGRAPHY, CULTURAL MEMORY, AND THE CONTINENTAL FUR TRADE.** By WILLIAM J. BUXTON. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. ISBN 978-0-7735-5861-8. 376 p., bib., index, notes. Softbound. Cnd\$39.95. Also available as an ebook.

Most scholars of Canadian history are familiar with Harold Innis's (1956:393) maxim, articulated at the end of *The Fur Trade in Canada* that, "the present Dominion emerged not in spite of geography but because of it." While the statement has been derided as a crude form of geographic determinism linking river basins to national development, William J. Buxton's new volume, *Harold Innis on Peter Pond*, implores readers to pay closer attention to the next sentence in Innis's (1956:393) book: "the significance of the fur trade consisted in its determination of the geographic framework". For Buxton, Innis's primary interest was in the way the fur trade economy, as much as the constitutional developments that led to Confederation, shaped the outline of the Canadian nation. For those who believe Innis's large-scale economic studies neglected the relationship between individual agency and historical change, Buxton's volume reveals how, for nearly two decades after the release of *The Fur Trade in Canada*, Innis's fur trade scholarship focused primarily on a single person: the explorer Peter Pond.

Buxton's book consists of a lengthy and well-crafted introduction that explains Innis's obsession with Pond, followed by a large collection of Innis's writings and correspondence on the explorer, including the full text of his biographical work, *Peter Pond: Fur Trader and Adventurer*; a layered work that includes his reflections on the fur trade alongside the text of Pond's memoirs. Buxton's critical

commentary and Innis's writing confirm that the latter's obsession with Pond stemmed from a desire to reclaim Pond's reputation not only as the preeminent explorer of northwestern Canada, but also as a Father of Confederation.

How does a man who plied his way through rivers and forests in search of fur in the 1770s become a "father" of a nation that emerged a mostly independent political entity nearly a century later? For Innis, Pond's role in pushing the fur trade toward the Athabasca region in the early 1780s and his path-breaking mapping of the country between Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean, especially the all-important Mackenzie River Drainage basin, was the catalyst for the expansion of commercial activity in the region. Innis was adamant that historians had overstated the importance Alexander Mackenzie's famous voyage down the Mackenzie River in 1879, because none of Mackenzie's achievements would have been possible without Pond's initial surveys of the region. Although many will be familiar with Innis's well known declaration that the eventual geographical contours of the fur trade roughly matched the political boundaries of Canada, the book reveals Innis's corresponding belief that the fur trade was only able to expand when it did because of the pioneering work of Peter Pond. According to Buxton, Innis's interest in Pond was piqued by academic celebrations of Canada's diamond jubilee in 1927. Forced to endure various celebrations of the political origins of Canada (responsible government, Confederation) in the 1850s and 1860s, and even worse, celebrations of Pond's disciple Mackenzie as the principle agent of northwestern expansion, Innis abruptly decided to devote at least some of his writing time to promoting Pond's legacy.

Although this book will largely appeal to specialists in the northern fur trade and Innis scholars, Buxton has done a great service to illuminate the later stages of Innis fur trade research and re-focus the reader's attention on Peter Pond, as Innis would have wanted. Pond's archaic English in the biography may be difficult reading for many, but the clarity of Innis's own writing helps bring the explorer's ideas and experiences to life. Innis's attempts to brand Pond as a Father of Confederation may seem to stretch the bounds of accuracy from a contemporary vantage point, but the book nevertheless provides a crucial window into some of the earliest moments of European and Indigenous contact in northern Canada, including Pond's keen observations on land and people and important details such as the equipment and provisions that facilitated the journeys. Equally important are the documents detailing Innis's obsession with Pond, which includes remarkable correspondence on commemorating Pond's legacy with one of his descendants, evidence that Innis's fur trade research was not an account of impersonal economic forces, a "dehumanized" account of the past, as historian Carl Berger (1976:98) has suggested.

Admirable as this volume may be, there were areas where I thought Buxton may have more thoroughly explored the wider implications of Innis's intellectual affinity for Pond. Buxton's introduction might have