

Book Reviews

JOSEPH-ELZÉAR BERNIER: CHAMPION OF CANADIAN ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY, 1852–1934.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre. Translated by William Barr. Montréal: Baraka Books. 371 p, illustrated, hard cover ISBN 978-0-9812405-4-1, soft cover ISBN 978-0-9812405-1-0. Hard cover C\$75, soft cover C\$39.95. doi:10.1017/S0032247409990593

'Arctic Sovereignty? Canada owes it to Joseph-Elzéar Bernier!' gushes the promotional material for this book. Well, not really. Bernier undoubtedly played a very important role in maintaining Canadian sovereignty during the early decades of the twentieth century, and a full length biography such as this one is long overdue. However, Canada's claim to the Arctic archipelago does not rest first and foremost on Bernier's voyages. The true foundation was the formal transfer of sovereignty from Great Britain to Canada in 1880. But Bernier, like many other polar explorers, had a large ego, and it suited him to promote the idea that he, and he alone, had taken possession of the northern islands in his country's name.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre accepts Bernier at his own valuation and recounts his exploits with breathless, entirely uncritical admiration. Books treating any explorer in this unabashedly hero-worshipping manner are now rare, but Saint-Pierre cheerfully admits in her introduction: 'I love heroes . . . Their journeys move me profoundly. They speak to me of passions, dreams, determination, love, failures, challenges to be met and missions to be accomplished' (page 21). To her, Bernier is a larger than life, legendary figure, who for some perverse reason was never given his due by the Canadian government. She dedicates an entire chapter to identifying the house where he was born, in a manner better suited to a biography of Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln, or some other world-renowned figure. Elaborate genealogies are provided not only for Bernier himself but for his two wives and his adopted daughter. An appendix informs us of Bernier's whereabouts on his birthday for each year of his long life.

The major problem with the book is that it is based mainly on the papers and other materials preserved by Bernier himself and his relatives. Inevitably, Saint-Pierre sees Bernier only as he wished to be seen. She has done a small amount of research in the government files at Library and Archives Canada, but not enough to provide her with another perspective on either her subject's personality or the motives of the politicians and civil servants with whom he dealt. As a result, her portrait of Bernier's fellow French Canadian, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, is little better than a caricature. The explorer and the prime minister appear as polar opposites. As Saint-Pierre tells the story, Bernier was a poorly educated but tough and determined visionary, Laurier an overly refined, cunning, and rather effete political animal. From 1898 to 1905 Bernier bombarded the prime minister with pleas that the government should finance his planned North Pole expedition. Laurier defended his refusal by observing that Robert Peary

would probably reach the pole if it could be reached at all. What was the use of spending large amounts of money only for the Canadian expedition to arrive second or fail altogether? Saint-Pierre describes this reasoning as evidence of Laurier's 'indifference' to Bernier's northern dream (page 169), but in fact it was a shrewd, realistic assessment. Bernier's plan was to drift across the polar basin from Siberia to Spitsbergen; both Fridtjof Nansen before him and Roald Amundsen in later years attempted the same feat without success.

The plan to uphold Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic archipelago by regular government patrols was Laurier's, and Bernier accepted the post of commander only with reluctance. Yet here again Saint-Pierre presents Bernier as the northern visionary and Laurier as the mere politician. Criticism of Bernier by members of his crew is dismissed as petty jealousy. The diary of Fabien Vanasse, who acted as official historian on these voyages, is filled with complaints. Saint-Pierre writes indignantly, '[h]is main target was always the captain, without any real reason and without provocation on Bernier's part, simply because he detested [Bernier's] authoritarian leadership, his ostentatious actions, or because his table manners disgusted him' (page 246). To a biographer less enamoured of his or her subject, authoritarian leadership and ostentatious actions might seem like cause for at least some criticism. As for the scandals created by Bernier's practice of trading the ship's stores for furs which he later sold at an enormous profit, Saint-Pierre defends her hero by noting that his contract with the government did not specifically forbid such commercial transactions (page 247). To further enhance Bernier's reputation, she claims that his relations with the Inuit were excellent and always based on mutual respect. As evidence, she cites passages from a book by Bernier's comrade Alfred Tremblay, insisting that they preserve authentic echoes of Bernier's own voice (page 255). Alas, the quotations Saint-Pierre provides reflect a highly paternalistic attitude (which is hardly surprising, given that Tremblay shamelessly plagiarised the material in question from Peary's *The North Pole*).

Despite such problems, this handsomely produced book has considerable value as a detailed record of Bernier's life and times. Though the information in the chapters on his career as a sailor is drawn mainly from his ghostwritten autobiography, *Master Mariner and Arctic Explorer* (Bernier 1939), the numerous and well chosen illustrations provide wonderful glimpses of the world in which he grew up and spent his youth, the nineteenth-century world of wooden sailing ships and busy North Atlantic trade. The son of a merchant shipbuilder and captain, Bernier made his first sea voyage at the age of three and was a captain himself at only 17. That a man who had prospered in this milieu should turn his ambitions towards the North Pole may seem almost inevitable in retrospect, but in fact Bernier's nation wide campaign for a polar expedition set him dramatically apart from the majority of French Canadians. The illustrations in this part of the book are especially fascinating,

and indeed the whole topic of Bernier's press campaign will appeal to anyone interested in the cultural history of polar exploration. Almost as an aside, Saint-Pierre observes that Bernier and Laurier, so different in all other ways, were both Quebecers who followed the unusual course of seeking success in English Canada (page 161). Both had to adopt the rhetoric of Anglo-Canadian nationalism, which was then strongly imbued with British imperial ideals. It is unfortunate that she did not explore this theme more fully. In doing so, she might have

taken a major step towards placing Bernier's northern career in its proper historical context. (Janice Cavell, Historical Section (PORH), Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2, Canada.)

Reference

Bernier, J.E. 1939. *Master mariner and Arctic explorer: a narrative of sixty years at sea from the logs and yarns of Captain J.E. Bernier F.R.G.S., F.R.E.S.* Ottawa: Le Droit.

HEALTH OF ANTARCTIC WILDLIFE: A CHALLENGE FOR SCIENCE AND POLICY. K.R. Kerry and M.J. Riddle (Editors). 2009. Heidelberg, Berlin: Springer-Verlag. 470 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN: 978-3-540-93922-1. £180.

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This book provides a useful and interesting introduction to the health and related issues of Antarctica's seabirds and seals. It includes a great deal of information about known diseases and is therefore intended for, by the authors' own admission, a broad audience, including veterinary and biological scientists and policy makers and administrators who are tasked with ensuring the continued health of Antarctica's wildlife. As an ecologist with more than a passing interest in policy related matters I found this volume to be of considerable interest. In numerous places the book causes the reader to recall the continued importance of disease as a selective pressure and how this is important in shaping ecological interactions. More explicitly it also links this concept with the many current and varied international efforts to understand climate variability impacts on the Antarctic ecosystem. Climate change will potentially allow a variety of introduced diseases to enter the Antarctic system, with unforeseen consequences. The importance of appropriate policy and management is therefore critical for ensuring the continuing health of Antarctica's seabirds and seals.

The editors have separated the book into two parts: the first section covers wildlife disease and comprises nine contributions covering disease reviews, case studies and health assessments; the second section covers external factors and comprises eight contributions covering environmental, administrative and legal issues.

As yet there is no conclusive evidence that humans have been responsible for the introduction or spread of any disease, alien introduced or endemic, amongst wildlife populations or breeding aggregations in the Antarctic. This is a remarkable achievement. Nevertheless, the risk of introducing alien organisms is real and may be increasing with climate change. The considerable efforts of the international community working within the Antarctic are therefore important and there is a continuing need to develop and implement precautionary measures.

Disease organisms are normal ecological components that affect all plants and animals in both the Antarctic marine and terrestrial systems. In pre-history, disease outbreaks would have occurred, as they will continue to occur into the future. Antarctica's remoteness means that such outbreaks are generally unobserved, and even where they have been recorded, it is rare that an infective organism or cause is ever isolated. Further, clinical symptoms do not necessarily mean that an isolated pathogen is actually the cause of a reported disease outbreak.

Thus, the first part of this volume is extremely valuable in that it provides a brief overview of the different diseases commonly found in wild populations of Antarctic seabirds (Chapter 2) and seals (Chapter 3). Mass mortality events do occur and it is remarkably difficult to attribute cause (Chapter 1). If this is difficult, then it is also recognised that it is also even more difficult to stem the progress of such an event. An important conclusion is therefore that humans must, as a priority, refrain from exacerbating naturally occurring disease or mass mortality events. Reports of naturally occurring disease events (Chapters 4 to 6) are therefore extremely valuable as they provide important experience for others coming across or managing such situations. Determining whether disease levels are unusual, or abnormal, requires information about the expected species, types and levels of infective organisms commonly encountered in a given species of seabird or seal. Such descriptions (Chapters 7 to 9) are rare and must be encouraged, particularly those that take an epidemiological standpoint.

The Antarctic is different to many other parts of the planet. It is large, remote and inhospitable to humans. Such factors mean therefore that managing human interactions in the Antarctic that may exacerbate naturally occurring disease or mass mortality events is critical. Understanding how man may introduce disease or how man's influence on climate may lead to increased transmission of infective organisms from other more temperate or sub-polar latitudes is complex. Certainly critical ecological interactions may be unexpected. Thus understanding the drivers of change and developing risk based procedures to prevent change are fundamental. The second part of the book starts with a brief discussion (Chapter 10) of Antarctic climate; such a starting point emphasises how climate must be considered in all situations, both as a contributing factor and as an impediment to understanding. The main expeditions to the Antarctic include those of national operators (Chapter 11) and those of non-governmental tourist operations (Chapter 12). Such expeditions have very different 'footprints' and both generate different risk situations. Humans have definitely impacted upon Antarctic wildlife (Chapter 13) through the harvesting of marine living resources, though as yet humans have not knowingly been involved in introducing disease. Human interactions are also thought to expose wildlife to stress, so measuring stress levels in a variety of seabird and seal species is increasingly important (Chapter 14). Similarly, understanding the potential pathogenic levels associated with human sewage treatment and disposal (Chapter 15) is essential. Legislating (Chapters 16 and 17) for these and other possible factors leading to impacts on health and/or outbreaks of disease requires careful consideration.

The editors note in their introduction that mechanisms are now in place within the Antarctic Treaty System, particularly through the Madrid Protocol of 1991 (implemented through the Committee for Environmental Protection) to protect the health