In the spring of 1933, Canadian poet E.J. Pratt conceived the idea of writing a verse epic on Sir John Franklin's ill-fated 1845 expedition in search of the Northwest Passage, a story that had "long haunted his imagination." Pratt's sources of information about Franklin, and about the Arctic in general, were almost purely literary, and rather strangely assorted. One that had a particularly strong impact was James Macdonald Oxley's Hentyesque novel *North Overland with Franklin* (1901), which Pratt had read in his youth. Another was a November 1930 article by Jean Mitchell Smith in the *Canadian Magazine*, called "The Riddle of the Snows." Pratt's interest in Franklin endured throughout his life. One of the last books read to him while he lay dying in 1964 was Richard Lambert's 1949 biography *Franklin of the Arctic*. However, the epic poem was never written. The project was revived in 1944, as the last expedition's centenary approached, and again in 1949 (presumably because Pratt was inspired by reading Lambert's book soon after its publication). But there was an insuperable obstacle in the way of this poet who wanted to write on what his friend Northrop Frye described as "a great Canadian theme": he had no direct personal experience of the Arctic, and despite strenuous efforts, it proved impossible for him to obtain any. Pratt felt that he could not do justice to his subject without having visited the scenes where the Franklin tragedy took place, and travel to the Arctic was both expensive and difficult to arrange. In 1933 Pratt tried to book a passage on the Hudson's Bay Company supply ship *Nascopie*; in 1944 he hoped to journey north by government airplane; and in 1949 he applied for a travel grant from the Humanities Research...
Council. All these attempts, however, came to nothing. Instead of the last Franklin expedition, Pratt wrote his epic on the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway.4

Pratt’s experiences reveal much about the relationship between Canadian culture and the Arctic in the first decades of the twentieth century. Interest was undoubtedly on the rise, and stories like Franklin’s were now seen as part of Canada’s history and heritage. However, the physical distance separating the vast majority of southern Canadians from the far north meant that the Arctic was much more of an idea than a reality. It was a region of the mind, known only from reading; often exerting a powerful fascination, but remote from everyday experience. The Yukon and the Mackenzie valley were represented mainly through glowing accounts of their natural resources and tales of the Mounted Police who extended the rule of British law over this Canadian corner of the far-flung empire. The archipelago and the northernmost reaches of the “barren lands,” on the other hand, became familiar to Canadian readers almost exclusively through stories of exploration.

This article will examine the print culture that gave rise to Pratt’s interest in the last Franklin expedition. The cumulative effect of the books and periodical articles published between 1890 and 1930 was to give Franklin and other heroes of the nineteenth-century British search for the Northwest Passage a place among the icons of Canada’s past, and thus to promote an awareness of the Arctic as part of the nation. From about 1910 onward, Canadian writings about the north were for the most part strongly tinged with the ideology of British imperialism. Like the Canadian imperialists studied by Carl Berger,5 many writers on Arctic history emphasized those aspects of the past which could serve to reinforce ties between the new nation and the mother country. In particular, the “British” type of stoical heroism displayed by Franklin was held to be a quality that would serve Canadians well as they developed their northern hinterland. In the years from 1919 to 1925, the writings of Vilhjalmur Stefansson questioned the value of British Arctic heroes as role models for Canadians in the north. By the later 1920s, however, Stefansson had

been discredited, and Franklin was widely celebrated as both a British and a Canadian hero.

Despite this broad, underlying theme, it is difficult to detect any common set of intentions linking the various authors together. They included commercially-minded writers for whom profit was an important motive; academics; and well-educated civil servants who published articles and books on historical topics. Writers in the first category often seem simply to have been responding to the broad trends and demands of the North Atlantic literary market, in which stirring tales of adventure—no matter what the setting—were always welcome. Among those with a more specific interest in the Arctic, some authors saw the far north as a land remarkable for the heroic deeds that had been done there, but too distant and desolate ever to be an integral part of Canada; others wished very strongly to promote a more northern orientation in the intellectual and moral life of the nation; still others wrote in an enthusiastic spirit of boosterism about the economic possibilities of northern development. Some writers had different motives and embraced different attitudes at different points in their careers. They were, however, united by their lack of direct experience in the far north. In contrast, there were the leaders of Canadian Arctic expeditions, several of whom brought back new evidence or suggested new theories about the fate of the last Franklin expedition. This small but obviously influential group included J.B. Tyrrell, Joseph Elzéar Bernier, Lachlan Burwash, and—the best-known but most controversial of all—Vilhjalmur Stefansson. The emergence of a nationalist Canadian narrative of Arctic exploration was thus a highly contingent and often discontinuous process.

The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of change and growth in the Canadian publishing industry, and that these disparate elements could come together to create a major new Canadian theme is a tribute to the increasing vigour of the country’s print culture in those years. The author of an anonymous 1905 article in the Canadian Magazine pointed to the early 1890s as a turning-point for Canadian publishing, and remarked that “the dark days are nearly past.”

Popular periodicals like the Canadian Magazine and MacLean’s

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7 The Canadian Magazine was founded in 1893. MacLean’s began publication in 1905 as the Business Magazine; the name changed to Busy Man’s Magazine in 1906 and then to MacLean’s in 1911.
flourished, along with more scholarly journals such as the Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada. Publishers, benefiting from improved copyright legislation, began to print more Canadian works, and to issue Canadian editions of new books by foreign authors, while also initiating ambitious projects like the Makers of Canada and Chronicles of Canada series. Arctic literature had formerly been the preserve of British and American publishers, but now re-tellings of Arctic history and discussions of the place of the far north in Canada's future development could be found in many Canadian publications. Despite all this, however, connections to British and American print culture remained numerous and complex.

Canadian readers had, of course, long shown an interest in the saga of northern discovery, but in this they were far from unique. Such interest was strong throughout the English-speaking world, and indeed beyond it: in Poland during the 1860s, schoolboy Josef Korzeniowski, later famous as Joseph Conrad, was enthralled by Leopold McClintock's The Voyage of the "Fox" in the Arctic Seas. He later remembered it as one of the books that had the most influence on his imagination. Two decades later a young Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, found his calling when he encountered Franklin's narratives of his 1819-22 and 1825-27 expeditions. "I read them with a fervid fascination which has shaped the whole course of my life," Amundsen wrote in his autobiography.

In no country other than Britain itself was interest stronger than in the United States. It was, in fact, largely from American publications that most Canadian readers gained their information about the far north in the years before 1900. Americans were always eager for news of the British expeditions; during the 1850s, they sponsored their own searches for Franklin, and enthusiastically hailed the exploits of Elisha Kent Kane, the first American Arctic hero. American expeditions led by Charles F. Hall in 1864-69 and Frederick Schwatka in 1879-81

10 Roald Amundsen, My Life as an Explorer (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1927), 2-3.
carried out further searches for Franklin relics. American publishers happily met the high demand for Arctic literature. In the years before the Berne Convention (1885) and the Anglo-American copyright agreement (1891), this usually took the form of reprinting British articles and books. Littel's Living Age, a Boston magazine composed entirely of reprints from the major British periodicals, included a high number of Arctic articles from its first issue in May 1844 onward. Harper's New Monthly Magazine, which began publication in June 1850, printed extracts from recent Arctic narratives. The American editions of leading British periodicals like Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine naturally included many Arctic items. These cheap American reprints made Arctic news in abundance available even to less affluent Canadian readers.

A similar pattern was apparent in book publication. The narratives of British explorers usually appeared as expensive illustrated quarto or octavo volumes, and unlike works of fiction, these were seldom followed by cheap British editions. (As late as 1908, one Canadian reviewer of a costly Arctic volume lamented, "If English publishers could only be induced to keep down the cost of books, instead of enhancing them by every device of expensive book-making, they would do a greater service to readers.") There were some American "author's editions" from such publishing houses as Ticknor and Fields of Boston, but the North American appetite for cheap polar literature


12 In the 1850s (that is, the period of the Franklin search), the printer of these American editions, Leonard Scott of New York, offered subscriptions to Blackwood's Magazine and any one of the London Review, Edinburgh Review, North British Review, or Westminster Review for $5 a year. All five could be had for $10 a year. The reprints were also sold in bookstores. Scott's advertisement listed 22 booksellers in 20 American cities, and 10 stores in 7 Canadian cities. Considering the very large difference in population between the United States and British North America, this shows a high level of Canadian interest. Four Toronto booksellers stocked the journals: Boston had three outlets and the other American cities on the list only one each. Wrapper on the November 31, 1856 issue of the North British Review, in the McOdum Library, Carleton University. A Canadian reader who subscribed to the British editions of the five journals would have paid a total of $31 a year. Parker, Beginnings of the Book Trade, 134.

was met primarily by Harper and Brothers of New York and a host of smaller companies. For example, the abridged edition of Parry’s narratives, published in London by John Murray, was reprinted at least eight times in Harper’s Family Library series between 1840 and 1868. It was also available in Harper’s School District Library series. As well, there were some original American productions, most notably Kane’s *Arctic Explorations* (Philadelphia, 1856), and more frankly commercial works such as Epes Sargent, *Arctic Adventure by Sea and Land* (Boston, 1857; reprinted 1858), Zachariah Mudge, *Arctic Heroes* (New York, 1875), and *Thirty Years in the Arctic Regions, or, The Adventures of Sir John Franklin*. The latter volume, composed mainly of extracts from Franklin’s 1823 and 1828 narratives, was issued in 1859-60 under several different American imprints. Library and Archives Canada’s AMICUS catalogue shows a large number of these American publications in Canadian libraries.  

The first abridged Parry edition was *Journals of the First, Second and Third Voyages for the Discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific in 1819-20-21-22-23-24-25 in His Majesty’s Ships Hecla, Griper and Fury, under the Orders of Capt. W.E. Parry* (London: John Murray, 1828). This was one of the few British ventures in less expensive Arctic literature. The price (£1 for a multi-volume set), was well below the cost of the original editions (3 guineas or more each), but still beyond the means of most readers. A revised edition was issued by Murray in 1831, with the title *Three Voyages for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and Narrative of an Attempt to Reach the North Pole*. The Harper’s reprint of this second edition seems to have been one of the most popular Arctic items in the United States for many years, rivalled only by Kane’s *Arctic Explorations*.

One book with a complex publishing history, which may have been widely read in rural Ontario during the 1870s and 1880s, was Georg Hartwig’s *The Polar and Tropical Worlds*. This publication combined two books by Hartwig, the prolific author of such works as *The Sea and Its Living Wonders* and *The Harmonies of Nature. The Polar World* was first published by Longmans in 1869. In the same year, Harper’s brought out an American edition, presumably pirated. In 1871, *The Polar World* was combined with another of Hartwig’s works, *The Tropical World* (published by Longman’s in 1863) in a one-volume edition which appeared under the imprints of Bill, Nichols and Co. of Springfield, Mass., and Johnson and McClain of Philadelphia. There was a reprint in 1872, and in 1874 came a new edition, which included an account of Hall’s recent Arctic expedition (the venture which inspired Canadian explorer Joseph Bernier – see below). This edition was also issued by J.W. Lyon, an American who ran a subscription publishing business in Guelph. Subscription agents for such firms reached areas where there were few or no other sources of new books. On Lyon, see Alexander H. Brodie, “Subscription Publishing and the Booktrade in the Eighties: The Invasion of Ontario,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2, 1 (1977): 95-101. Longman’s, evidently realizing that the appeal of Hartwig’s polar book
Canadian readers, therefore, were extremely well informed about this British tale of heroism from the 1830s on, but a large part of their information came from south of the border rather than directly across the Atlantic. Given the amount of cheap reading material available from American sources, there was little economic incentive before the 1890s for the few existing Canadian publishers to venture into the area of Arctic literature. In addition, these publishers focused mainly on Canadian themes, and prior to 1880 the Arctic archipelago was not Canadian territory. Even after the transfer of sovereignty from Great Britain, a specifically nationalist interest in the area as part of Canada was slow to develop, in large part because nationalist impulses were then concentrated on agricultural settlement in the prairie west.16

In 1890, the eminent geologist G.M. Dawson pointed out that large areas of Canada had not yet been accurately surveyed, even though they might contain valuable mineral resources or land suitable for agriculture. He excluded the “inhospitable” archipelago from his list of areas to which he believed expeditions should be sent.17 By the turn of the century, however, this attitude was beginning to change due to a combination of political and cultural factors, in which the growth of an indigenous print culture played a part.

The conviction that Franklin's Arctic career was a Canadian as well as a British story developed intermittently and erratically in the years preceding the First World War. A good example is the book which began Pratt’s fascination with the explorer, Oxley's *North Overland with Franklin*. Macdonald Oxley, a lawyer and civil servant who wrote magazine articles and boys’ adventure stories in his spare time, was one of the most commercially successful Canadian writers at the turn of the century. He combined Canadian subject matter with the pragmatic realization that he must cater to the American market. Oxley contributed to an impressively large number of American periodicals,18 and his novels were at first printed by the American

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18 See W. Blackburn Harte, “Some Canadian Writers of To-Day,” *New England Magazine* 9 (Sept. 1890): 34. Oxley expressed his views on the relationship of Canadian writers and American magazines in the *North American Review*. He maintained that Canadians had no choice but to publish in the US, noting that American magazines like *Harper's* and *Scribner's* could be “found in every
Baptist Publication Society of Philadelphia. As his fame grew, they were issued (or reissued) by several major firms, including Nelson and Hodder and Stoughton in Britain and T.Y. Crowell in New York. From the mid 1890s onward, Canadian editions were printed by Musson or Morang in Toronto.

Oxley's first novel, *Bert Lloyd's Boyhood: A Story of Nova Scotia*, appeared in 1889. Many of his subsequent works also had a Maritimes setting. The next year Oxley published *Up Among the Ice-Floes*, which describes the northern voyage of a fictional Halifax seaman, Captain Marling. The captain, a keen reader, has long been fascinated by Arctic literature: “His chest had never been without a well-thumbed volume, and somehow or other these books had generally related to the Arctic regions.” Captain Marling’s favourites (and perhaps Oxley’s) are by Franklin, Kane, and another American, Dr Isaac Hayes. This reading inspires the captain to “try a tussle with the icebergs of the frozen North” (9). After a successful whaling voyage in Hudson Bay, he and his crew pass through Fury and Hecla Strait to the Gulf of Boothia, and winter there. Other novels were set in Red River, the Athabasca district, and British Columbia before Oxley penned his Franklin novel in 1901. The book is the tale of Pierre, a brave but impulsive and undisciplined métis boy, who meets Franklin during his first overland expedition (1819-22), forms an almost romantic attachment for the young English officer, shares his adventures, and, having gained an appreciation of the explorers' stoical and self-controlled ways, is finally taken to England with them on their return. There his innate good qualities will presumably be shaped yet further in a British mould, and like Kipling’s Kim, he will learn to serve the imperial cause.

Others besides Pratt may well have read these northern tales as characteristically Canadian stories. However, the author’s motives in writing them are far from clear. Oxley may have chosen Arctic settings because they offered geographical variety and thrilling incidents, rather than from any nationalistic interest in the far north. His choice may also have been related to the renewed American interest in polar matters sparked by the expeditions of Adolphus Greely in the 1880s and Robert Peary in the 1890s. While it seems highly likely that Oxley, in common with many of his countrymen, was susceptible

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to the glamour of Arctic exploration, it cannot be said that this preoccupation took a particularly Canadian form in his works. There is, for example, no suggestion that Captain Marling voyaged north from patriotic motives. (The only patriotic note is a Christmas Day toast to the Queen.) Whatever Oxley’s own feelings on this score may have been, the tale of a Canadian who zealously carried his country’s flag northward could hardly have been expected to appeal to American readers. The literary market for which Oxley wrote, therefore, served to mute the implications of his northern subject matter.

Northern exploration and Canadian national feeling did, however, become linked, though still somewhat tentatively, through other forms of writing in the years between 1890 and 1910. The journeys of explorers like J.B. Tyrrell and Joseph Bernier were undoubtedly a factor which influenced the growing Canadian literary interest in the Arctic and its history. Tyrrell’s work for the Geological Survey of Canada was restricted to the continental subarctic, but his travels, especially his 1893 journey with his brother J. W. Tyrrell, were extensively publicized, and turned readers’ attention northward. Tyrrell himself professed great admiration for “the death-grip struggles and splendid achievements of the heroes of Arctic exploration.” And, at one point, his researches touched on Franklin’s story in a particularly fascinating and tantalizing way. In 1890, in a camp near Lake Winnipeg, he encountered a man who had taken part in the 1855 Hudson’s Bay Company searching expedition led by James Anderson and J. G. Stewart. Following the report by John Rae in 1854 that Franklin’s men had died of starvation at the mouth of the Great Fish River, this expedition travelled down the river by canoe, and made a brief search in the vicinity of Montreal Island. Anderson and Stewart found traces of the lost explorers, but no bodies, and no clues as to their ultimate fate. According to Tyrrell’s informant, a French-Canadian named Boucher, “three men who were sent northward beyond Montreal Island ... saw one of [Franklin’s] ships far out in the ice, but returned and reported that they had seen nothing, fearing that if they reported a ship in sight, their masters would take them to it, and they ... would all perish of starvation and


exposure.” Statements from the three men involved were obtained a few years later, and all corroborated Boucher’s tale (398-402). If this was indeed one of Franklin’s ships, it might well have contained a more detailed record of the expedition than that later found by Lieutenant William Hobson of the McClintock expedition in a cairn on King William Island.

The episode inspired a poem by William Wilfred Campbell, “Unabsolved.” The poem, a dramatic monologue spoken by a character representing one of the three men in his old age, was published in Campbell’s 1893 collection The Dread Voyage. It shows how quickly a Canadian discovery about Franklin could inspire both interest and literary work, but Campbell’s depiction of the incident is inaccurate and melodramatic. The poem’s focus is on the speaker’s fear of the hostile northern environment, and on his subsequent years of remorse at having betrayed the men of the lost expedition – a remorse which is conspicuously absent from the statements obtained by Tyrrell. The three men were well aware that Franklin and his crew could not have survived ten years in the Arctic; Campbell, however, wrote as if living explorers, and not merely an abandoned ship, were in question. To heighten the effect, he described the searchers travelling northward “across that frozen waste / Of icy horror” in the dark of winter, and a brilliant flash of the aurora borealis at the moment when the speaker falsely declares that he has seen nothing. The search party had, of course, actually made their journey during the summer.

Bernier, unlike Tyrrell, journeyed through the Arctic archipelago, and visited many of the sites associated with his British predecessors. Interestingly, this area was not his original goal. His Arctic obsession began during a visit to Washington in 1871, shortly before Charles Hall’s Polaris expedition set sail. As Bernier recalled in his memoirs, the American newspapers “were filled with columns, pages even” about the expedition, and “Hall’s name was in every mouth.” Thus inspired by American sources, Bernier became a devotee of Arctic literature, buying “every new book, and many old ones, relating to the north,” and filling scrapbooks with clippings from newspapers and magazines. By 1898, he had completed plans for an expedition to

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23 J.E. Bernier, 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, 1939), 264-65.
the north pole. To reach this goal before the Americans was the great aim of his life. Bernier mounted an energetic campaign to gain the support of politicians and the Canadian public (289-91). The prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, showed some interest, but it was soon damped by the high sum Bernier asked the government to grant him ($100,000). A public appeal produced only $20,000.24

However, the question of northern sovereignty was at last becoming of serious concern to politicians. In the years since 1880 there had been no attempts to occupy or administer the islands, other than such purely paper transactions as the 1895 division of the Arctic into the four districts of Ungava, Franklin, Mackenzie, and the Yukon, and, in 1897, a flag-raising ceremony on Baffin Island by fisheries officer William Wakeham. But by 1903 the activities of foreign, and especially American, explorers and whalers in the north could no longer be ignored. The D.G.S. Neptune was sent north under the command of A.P. Low of the Geological Survey. Low proclaimed Canadian sovereignty on Ellesmere and North Devon Islands and made a cruise through the eastern archipelago and Hudson Bay. His narrative, published by the government in 1906, could not rival either earlier Arctic works or the publications of his contemporaries, the Antarctic explorers Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton.25

24 Yolande Dorion-Robitaille, Captain J.E. Bernier’s Contribution to Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978), 30. By way of comparison, the campaign which Sir Clements Markham, president of the Royal Geographical Society, conducted to raise funds for Robert Scott’s 1901-04 Antarctic expedition raised £93,000 (approximately $450,000), through a combination of public subscriptions and government grants. See Clements Markham, Antarctic Obsession: A Personal Narrative of the Origins of the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-1904, ed. Clive Holland (Aldburgh: Bluntisham Books / Erskine Press, 1986), 10.

25 The influence of these British Antarctic explorers in rousing an interest in polar matters among Canadians should not be neglected. Leslie Neatby, who later wrote two excellent books on Arctic history, traced his fascination with polar exploration to the Strand Magazine’s series of extracts from Scott’s journal of his fatal last expedition, lavishly illustrated with the photographs of Herbert Ponting. The magazine series had been sent by the family of a British-born hired man on the Neatby family’s Saskatchewan farm. Neatby later wrote that these articles exerted “a fascination which no fiction could match.” L.H. Neatby, Chronicle of a Pioneer Prairie Family (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979), 36. Canadian interest in Scott was high enough for the firm of McClelland and Goodchild to market a Canadian edition of the very expensive two-volume Scott’s Last Expedition (1913). The actual printing of these exceptionally beautiful volumes (which included hundreds of photographs, 18 colour plates, maps, and
events of the voyage were covered in only 70 pages of text, with the rest of the 355-page volume being taken up by a summary of earlier exploration and several scientific reports. The book was illustrated with 63 photographs, a substantial number, but their quality and visual appeal fell well short of either the engravings in Franklin’s and Kane’s narratives or the striking photographs produced by the Scott and Shackleton expeditions. Low did, however, establish a narrative and visual trope that would be taken up by many later Canadian explorers. The *Neptune* paid a visit to Beechey Island, the spot where the last Franklin expedition spent the winter of 1845-46, and, as Low recorded, “as many of the crew as could be spared were allowed to land ... to visit this historic spot.” A focal point of interest was the memorial to the men of the lost expedition placed on the island by one of the later search parties. Low and his crew raised the Canadian Red Ensign beside the memorial, and then a photograph was taken of the group clustered around the monument and flagstaff (fig. 1). It proved to be one of the more memorable images in the narrative, and Low’s evocation of this remote spot, consecrated to the memory of “Franklin and his heroic associates,” was echoed by explorers from Bernier to Henry Larsen, whose *St. Roch* sailed through the Northwest Passage in 1940-42 and 1944, the first Canadian vessel to achieve this feat.

In 1904, the government purchased the *Gauss*, built for Erich von Drygalski’s German Antarctic expedition, and re-named it the *Arctic*. An overjoyed Bernier was convinced that his dream of a Canadian north polar expedition was about to become reality, but to his immense chagrin, he was ordered instead to patrol the waters of Hudson Bay and to select sites for future Mounted Police posts on its shores. Bernier was determined to salvage something from the wreck of his plans, and decided that he would “devote my efforts ... to securing all the islands in the Arctic archipelago for Canada” (306). In his voyages of 1906-07, 1908-09, and 1910-11, he pursued facsimiles of Scott’s final diary entry and “Message to the Public”) was done by the Harvard University Press.


Bernier, then, was an aspiring polar hero whose ideas were slightly out of tune with his times. He attempted to organize a major expedition when official activity in the far north was only beginning, and from the response to his public appeal, it seems that other Canadians found his plans of some interest, yet not enough to win their strong support. An additional factor may have been

29 Dorion-Robitaille, 79.
that, for all the strenuous efforts Bernier made to obtain favourable newspaper publicity, he was hampered by his appearance and accent, which reportedly resembled those of the stereotyped, comical French-Canadians in the poems of William Henry Drummond. ("My name is Bernier — somet'ings have I wit' de nort' pole to do.... See me, my muscle hard as iron, not'ings de matter with me.... I haf been study dis t'ing twenty-t'ree year. Know of w'at I talk, a little," one amused editor recorded him as saying.)

Like Low's account, Bernier's books were shorter than British Arctic and Antarctic narratives, very plainly written, and published by the government in a rather drab official format. Nevertheless, the mere fact of Bernier's voyages did much to bring the archipelago and its history into the public consciousness. Bernier took a keen interest in the works of his British predecessors, and frequently emphasized the continuity between their endeavours and his own. He delighted in visiting the spots where they had placed records, and, as was customary among polar explorers, he would take these, replacing them with records of his own. Bernier's records took on more than common significance because they were explicit declarations of Canadian sovereignty. The original British records were printed in his narratives, reinforcing readers' awareness that British discoveries formed the basis of Canada's claims. The message was reinforced visually as well: some illustrations from British narratives were reproduced, and the books contain numerous photographs of Bernier and his crew standing proudly beside British cairns and monuments. Although the quality of the pictures was generally poor, these narratives did at least provide more images of the archipelago than other Canadian Arctic publications of the time, which usually offered only a few illustrations, and the photographs of Canadian explorers paying homage to the Britons who had gone before them were sometimes of considerable visual as well as historical interest. In particular, Bernier immortalized his 1909 declaration at Winter Harbour by two pictures. The first (fig. 2) shows the tablet placed by Bernier on the landmark known as Parry's Rock, where messages had frequently been left by British expeditions. The British and Canadian flags have been raised on either side of the tablet, while Bernier and his assembled crew stand in front. The second photograph (fig. 3) provides a closer view of Bernier's plaque, along with another tablet recording the visit of one
Figure 2. Bernier’s declaration of sovereignty at Winter Harbour, 1909. From J.E. Bernier’s *Report on the Dominion of Canada Government Expedition to the Arctic Islands and Hudson Strait on Board the D.G.S. “Arctic”* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910), 196. Photograph reproduced courtesy Library and Archives Canada.

Figure 3. Bernier’s plaque and a tablet left by one of the Franklin search expeditions. From J.E. Bernier, *Report on the Dominion of Canada Government Expedition to the Arctic Islands and Hudson Strait on Board the D.G.S. “Arctic”* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910), 197. Photograph reproduced courtesy Library and Archives Canada.
of the Franklin search parties. Bernier found the older tablet at a cairn not far from Winter Harbour, and reverently re-erected it beside his own on Parry’s Rock.

Nor was Bernier the only Canadian wishing to promote an awareness of the far north as part of the nation as well as the empire. In January 1900 the Dominion Statistician, George Johnson, gave a lecture on the history of Arctic exploration to the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society, and the lecture was later printed in the society’s journal. Johnson began by noting that the Arctic archipelago was a region so remote that “we scarcely think of it when we use the word ‘Canada.’” He argued that it was in fact a prize well worth possessing, both for the possible material benefits of its resources and for the inspiration its heroic history could provide. Johnson provided a glowing account of the heroes who had displayed “dash, intrepidity, individuality, coolness in time of danger, determination undismayed by defeat and all those masterful qualities which are the hall-mark of the British character” among the “islands of our north” and whose labours had provided “our ‘title deeds’ to the northern fringe of Canada.”

Johnson’s message would not normally have reached an audience much beyond the world of Ottawa civil servants to which he belonged. However, it did have an influence greater than might be expected given the relative obscurity of the journal in which it appeared. Four years earlier, in 1896, historian George Wrong of the University of Toronto had founded the Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada. H.H. Langton, the university’s librarian (who either already had or subsequently developed an interest in Arctic history),

33 George Johnson, “Canada's Northern Fringe,” Transactions of the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society (1899-1900): 9, 10, 11, 40. It is sometimes difficult to determine what relationship Johnson’s contemporaries saw between the search for the Northwest Passage and Canada’s national development. One turn-of-the-century author, Katharine Livingstone Macpherson, included a lengthy account of Franklin’s expeditions in her Pictures from Canadian History for Boys and Girls, in a chapter called “The Secret of Canada’s Polar Seas.” Macpherson concluded her account of the disastrous last expedition with the comment, “these men had perished for Queen and country. By such noble sacrifice the unknown regions of the world are sought out for young colonies and new peoples, and never, as long as the Empire exists or our language is spoken, will their heroic fate be forgotten or their tale be left untold.” This suggests that she, like Johnson, saw the establishment of sovereignty over the Arctic islands for the future benefit of Canada as one of the explorers’ greatest accomplishments. However, Macpherson also referred to the northern coastline of the continent as “the extreme edge of what was to be Canada.” Katharine Livingstone Macpherson, Pictures from Canadian History for Boys and Girls (Montreal: Renouf, [1899?]), 179, 173.
later joined him as co-editor. Articles as well as books were reviewed, and Johnson’s work received a short but approving notice. The anonymous reviewer agreed that “the great circumpolar Archipelago in which so many brave men have lost their lives ... must be considered as a part of the Canadian Dominion. Its history is therefore to be included in the history of Canada and surely no more heroic and pathetic annals can be found than those of the struggle with ice and cold which it has witnessed.” Johnson was commended for the “good service” he had done to Canadian history by bringing together an outline of exploration in the far north.34 Thereafter, the Review of Historical Publications regularly gave prominence to works on Arctic history. While it was hardly a popular journal, the Review would certainly have had an important influence on young historians, and on other members of the educated elite.

The first non-fictional Canadian accounts of nineteenth-century Arctic exploration likely to have reached a wide audience were those contained in Charles G.D. Roberts’s Discoveries and Explorations in the Century (1903), Stephen Leacock’s Adventurers of the Far North (1914), and W.L. Grant’s History of Canada (1914). Roberts’s book had no illustrations, Leacock’s only a few, and Grant’s none of the Arctic. Nevertheless, because of the high quality of the writing, all three very effectively conveyed vivid images of the north. The intellectual and publishing affiliations involved in the production of these books were British, not American – a development which perhaps reflected the greater ease of transatlantic communication and travel at the turn of the century, as well as other aspects of the writers’ personal circumstances: Leacock was British-born, while Roberts and Grant had their roots in the Loyalist tradition of the Maritime provinces. The three writers were all strongly influenced by personal and social as well as literary connections to Britain. Among the most important of these links was their acquaintance with members of organizations like the Royal Geographical Society.

Roberts, the first of the three to publish, had initially turned to American magazines as the major outlet for his writing, and in 1897, when he decided that he would attempt to make a living by his literary work alone, he moved to New York. However, Roberts gradually developed strong transatlantic ties: he made several trips to Europe,

and lived in England from 1912 until 1925. Leacock, a dedicated imperialist long before he became famous as a writer, made a speaking tour of the empire in 1907. His first fictional work, *Literary Lapses* (1910), was originally printed in a small Canadian edition at Leacock’s own expense, but quickly found a British publisher (John Lane of the Bodley Head). In later years, correspondence with and visits to British writers and politicians reinforced Leacock’s ties to the mother country.

Grant was a historian with degrees from Queen’s University and Balliol College, Oxford. He was Beit Lecturer in colonial history at Oxford from 1904 to 1910; he then taught at Queen’s until 1917, when he was appointed headmaster of Upper Canada College. Though Grant had no popular literary fame to compare to that of Roberts and Leacock, he would have been known to the public as the son of Principal George Munro Grant of Queen’s. The elder Grant had established his fame in the 1870s, when he accompanied Sandford Fleming on his transcontinental survey and then published his diary of the expedition under the title *Ocean to Ocean*.

Roberts’s *Discoveries and Explorations* was published in the Nineteenth Century Series by the Edinburgh based firm of William and Robert Chambers, long known for its focus on educational and “improving” works of general information. Roberts and two other Canadians, W. H. Withrow and T. G. Marquis, were associate editors of the series. Roberts wrote in April 1899 that he had “a fine contract” for the book, which he researched during a trip to England that year. As well as being published in Edinburgh and London by Chambers in 1903, *Explorations and Discoveries* was issued the next year in Toronto, London (Ontario), Philadelphia, and Detroit by Linscott Publishing, a Canadian firm. There were reprints in 1905,

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37 Roberts to George Parkin, quoted in Adams, *Sir Charles God Damn*, 100.
38 Rev. Thomas Linscott, a British-born Methodist minister, began his career in publishing as manager of the Brantford, Ontario, branch of the Bradley-Garretson Co. This Philadelphia-based company passed off American books as Canadian productions in order to avoid customs duty, and sold them by subscription. Some time around 1879 Linscott bought the Canadian interests of the company, published some original Canadian works, and established a Toronto branch with the name Linscott Publishing. See Brodie, “Subscription Publishing and the Booktrade,” 99. The American copyright for Roberts’s book was registered by the Bradley-Garretson Co. Linscott evidently used his American
1906, and 1907. Of the three authors, Roberts carried out by far the most extensive program of research, working mainly in British libraries and archives. In his introduction he singled out J. Scott Keltie, the secretary of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), as the individual to whose help he owed the most. British influence is clear throughout the book, and the RGS seems to have been the major channel through which it passed. Roberts opened the section on Arctic exploration with a quotation from H.R. Mill, a Scottish-born geographer and oceanographer who served as librarian of the RGS for many years. Both Mill and Keltie were closely involved with the Antarctic expeditions of Scott and Shackleton. Mill claimed that “Polar research is a survival, or rather an evolution, of knight-errantry, and our Childe Rolands challenge the ‘Dark Tower of the North,’ as dauntlessly as ever their forebears wound slug-horn at the gate of the enchanted castle.” Roberts, in turn, wrote that the “most heroic” expeditions of the entire nineteenth century were those which ventured into “the spectral Arctic regions.”

Despite his Canadian birth, his strong nationalist feelings, his great admiration for polar explorers, and the fact that he was writing at the turn of the century, Roberts evidently did not regard the Arctic archipelago as part of Canada at all. His mental vision of the nation, therefore, was the one decried by Johnson. This was reflected in the structure of his book. The voyages of men like John Ross and W.E. Parry and the overland expeditions of their fellow naval officers Franklin and George Back were presented by British writers as parts of one unified enterprise; Roberts, however, divided the search for the Northwest Passage in two. The voyages were described in the section on “Arctic Exploration,” and the overland expeditions in the section on “Exploration in Canada.” The result was a number of awkward gaps, with readers frequently being referred to another part of the connections to market books of British origin in the US, a development which shows how much more complex and profitable the operations of Canadian publishers had grown in the past few decades.


40 It appears that Roberts’s co-editor Withrow also believed that the history of the archipelago, however fascinating, was not part of the history of Canada. Withrow, a prolific writer on religious and historical subjects, had published a poem about the lost expedition: “Franklin,” New Dominion Monthly, 4 (Apr. 1869): 14-15. However, he did not include the story of the search for the Northwest Passage in his A Popular History of the Dominion of Canada (Toronto: William Briggs, 1884).
book for more information. In Roberts’s eyes, Franklin’s first two overland expeditions were part of Canadian history, but his fatal last voyage was not. Both the more northerly areas of the North American continent and the archipelago were described as “sinister regions” where “cold and desolation are supreme” (26). If little practical benefit to Canada was likely ever to ensue from northern discoveries, nevertheless the qualities of character displayed by the explorers had been of the highest: Roberts wrote that the story of Franklin’s first expedition “is one of intrepid energy in the face of terrible sufferings” (27) and at the end of his account of the last expedition he praised Franklin because “throughout all the circumstances of his life he displayed ... coolness in danger and readiness of resource” (52).

Just over a decade later, Leacock and Grant unquestionably believed that the archipelago was part of Canada. Like Roberts, they saw the far north as a land of desolation and Franklin as a hero whose fine qualities shone all the brighter against such a gloomy background. Nevertheless, it is the differences rather than the similarities between Roberts’s work and theirs that are most striking: the rapidity with which Canadian interest in the far north was increasing is apparent.41

Adventurers of the Far North was part of the Chronicles of Canada Series, published by Glasgow, Brook and Co. of Toronto, and advertised as “thirty-two freshly-written narratives for popular reading, designed to set forth, in historic continuity, the principal events and movements in Canada, from the Norse Voyages to the Railway Builders.”42 It was thus an ambitious attempt to imitate the success of the first Canadian series, Morang’s Makers of Canada.

Like Roberts’s volume, Leacock’s book was evidently commissioned

41 Another writer in whose work this shift can be detected is Lawrence Burpee. A civil servant and historian, he published The Search for the Western Sea in 1908. In this book, he described the explorations that led westward from the St. Lawrence to the Pacific, but claimed that the northern sea voyages in search of the Northwest Passage were not properly speaking part of Canadian history. Lawrence J. Burpee, The Search for the Western Sea (London: Alston Rivers, 1908, and Toronto: Morang, n.d.), 369. However, Burpee’s contributions to the “1763-1841” and “1840-1867” volumes of the series Canada and Its Provinces (both published only six years later, in 1914) do include the Arctic voyages. See Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., Canada and Its Provinces, Vol. 4: British Dominion (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, 1914), 669-90, and Vol. 5: United Canada (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, 1914), 295-306.

by the publishers for the sake of completeness in the coverage of a broad subject area. It seems likely that, as writers with established reputations and an eager audience, Roberts and Leacock were selected mainly for their potential impact on sales. The series was edited by George Wrong and H.H. Langton, and this no doubt accounts for the decision to include a volume on the Arctic. According to Carl Spadoni’s bibliography of Leacock, the number of copies printed is not known, but there were two printings in 1914, with further reprints in 1915, 1920, 1921, and 1922. Leacock was an avid reader of northern exploration narratives. “Arctic exploration,” he confessed, “in so far as it can be carried out from an armchair before a winter fire, has long been for me a pursuit that verges on a passion.” In *Adventurers of the Far North*, he focused on the example set by British heroes in the bleak Arctic environment. “On its northern side, Canada is set fast against the frozen seas of the Pole and the desolate region of barren rock and ice-bound island.... Here ... civilization has no part and man no place. Life struggles northward only to die out in the Arctic cold.” Yet, he continued, “this frozen northern land and these forbidding seas have their history...; the North ... stretches silent and untenanted with nothing but the splendid record of human courage to illuminate its annals.”

Grant’s book was widely used as a history text, and so was read by a substantial number of Canadian teenagers in the 1910s and 1920s. The *Ontario High School History of Canada* was first published by

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43 Leacock wrote three volumes in all for this series, with the others being *The Dawn of Canadian History: A Chronicle of Aboriginal Canada and the Coming of the White Man* and *The Mariner of St Malo: A Chronicle of the Voyages of Jacques Cartier*. He was paid $200 for *The Dawn of Canadian History*, $300 for *The Mariner of St Malo*, and $250 for *Adventurers of the Far North*. The books were written in fairly rapid succession: the first was completed in December 1912, the second in February 1913, and the last in September 1913. In 1915, the two chapters on Franklin from *Adventurers of the Far North* were selected as among the best in the series, and reprinted in *Six Chapters from the Chronicles of Canada*. See Carl Spadoni, *A Bibliography of Stephen Leacock* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1998), 149-55.


46 The one province in which the book was not used for long was British Columbia. It was banned from schools there in 1920, on the grounds that Grant’s publisher, William Heinemann, was of German descent, and the book itself was occasionally critical of British policies. See Charles W. Humphries, “The Banning of a Book in British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, 1 (Winter 1968-69): 1-12.
the T. Eaton Co. of Toronto in 1914; it was also issued in the same year as the *High School History of Canada* by Renouf Publishing of Montreal. In 1916, a revised edition appeared in London under the title *A History of Canada*, published by William Heinemann; this edition too was issued in Montreal by Renouf, with reprints in both London and Montreal in 1919. In 1922, a third, revised and enlarged edition was published as an Ontario school textbook by the Ryerson Press; there were eleven Ryerson printings with the title *Ontario High School History of Canada* between 1922 and 1929, as well as at least three printings each by Heinemann and Renouf between 1923 and 1927.

Grant saw the Arctic as of even greater national interest and importance than did Leacock. He very emphatically described the history of exploration in the archipelago by sea as part of Canadian history. He also claimed that Canada’s future lay in the development of the north. No previous Canadian historian had advanced such views. That Grant did so is all the more surprising, since only three years before the book was published, he had declared that “the 500,000 square miles of the Arctic archipelago ... are of less worth than a few square miles of ... forest.” This statement was made in a paper on “Geographical Conditions Affecting the Development of Canada,” given at the Royal Geographical Society in May 1911.47 At that time, Grant expressed a pessimism bordering on despair when he spoke of his country’s future. Canada, he told his British audience, “is essentially an artificial country...; in Canada man is making a nation in defiance of geographical conditions” (363-64). True, it had been united from ocean to ocean by the Canadian Pacific Railway, yet as “a mere fringe along the border of the United States” Canada remained dangerously vulnerable to American attack (367). The only solution lay in northward development, which would give the new nation depth as well as breadth. In theory, a vast territory lay waiting for such development, but Grant doubted that the enterprise was feasible. “Most of our northern boundary is in the grip of the Frost King.... It is idle to talk of a country of 3,500,000 square miles, if the greater part of it is Arctic waste.... The far north of Canada is never likely to sustain a large population,” he pointed out. This was a matter of serious concern because the only possible route to Europe, other than the established one along the American border, lay through that frigid

region. Hudson Bay was open for much of the year, and ports might be established on its shores; but to reach them ships would have to pass through the dangers of Hudson Strait, where ice posed a constant threat for all but four months out of twelve (368–71).

In the ensuing discussion, two British members of the RGS sought to allay Grant’s fears. Both geographer Halford Mackinder and journalist Leo Amery were enthusiastic about the Hudson Bay route, which, as Amery pointed out, had acted for many centuries as a link between Britain and North America. They also thought that there might well be land suitable for cultivation in northern Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, possibly even on the shores of James and Hudson Bays. Both men fervently stated their conviction that Canada was destined to one day replace England as the empire’s centre of power, and that northern development would play a key role in bringing this about. It is clear that Grant was deeply influenced by these arguments. The first chapter of his History of Canada is a revised version of the RGS paper, with all the more pessimistic reflections removed. Grant proudly referred on the first page to the 3,500,000 square-mile extent of Canada, with no subsequent suggestion that much of it was an uninhabitable wasteland. He described northern development not as a task of the utmost difficulty facing Canadians in the future, but as one that was already well under way, with every prospect of success. Grant concluded his discussion of the east-to-west unification of Canada with the remark that “Her westward expansion was ended; her northward expansion was about to begin.” He then plunged into an enthusiastic account of British Arctic exploration, describing Franklin and the others as great national heroes, who in his view deserved fame “as well as did the heroes in Homer.” “Take a map,” Grant suggested; “read the names of the rivers, capes, straits, and islands from Banks Land to Cape Best; most of them are called by the names of Englishmen or Scotchmen, and hardly a name but recalls some deed of heroism.” Grant evidently wanted his readers to envision the Arctic as a British space, which had passed to Canadians


as part of their inheritance from the mother country, and which now awaited development.

Leacock and Grant, with their imperialist brand of nationalism, published just before a major turning-point in Canadian perceptions of the Arctic. Roald Amundsen’s successful voyage through the Northwest Passage in 1903-06 roused relatively little interest in Canada, possibly because he was neither a British nor a Canadian explorer. The exploits of Vilhjalmur Stefansson a decade later were another matter, at least after his 1913-18 expedition had ended and Stefansson began to publish articles and books in which he strongly advocated the development of Canada’s northern hinterland, and forcefully challenged the idea that it was a barren realm of ice and snow. The publicity surrounding Stefansson marked a dramatic return of the American connection in Arctic print culture. Born in Canada but raised and educated in the United States, Stefansson promoted himself in both countries, but in ideas, style, and major publishing affiliations he was emphatically American. During the course of the 1913-18 expedition, Stefansson released news of his progress mainly through such publications as the New York Times, the Bulletin of the American Geographical Society and the Geographical Review (also published by the AGS). After it had ended, he turned to major American magazines and commercial book publishers. However, he was well aware that Canada formed an important secondary market for his publications.

In contrast to Bernier, whose Arctic ambitions had proved so hard to fulfill, Stefansson had the advantage of a university education, a genius for publicity, an exceptionally persuasive manner, and a talent for writing. And, coming on the Canadian scene slightly later than Bernier, he encountered a different set of attitudes among politicians and the public. (He also found a new Conservative prime minister eager to outshine the achievements of his Liberal predecessor.) Stefansson, then a graduate student in anthropology at Harvard University, first travelled to the Canadian Arctic as a member of the Anglo-American Leffingwell-Mikkelsen expedition in 1906-07. The expedition was poorly planned and meagerly financed; Stefansson did not receive the pay he had been promised, and out of necessity he turned to journalism. In 1908 he published articles about his experiences among the Inuit in Harper’s, and became something of a

minor celebrity. Stefansson returned to the Arctic in 1908-12 to carry out ethnological investigations, with the backing of the American Museum of Natural History. During this expedition, he claimed to have discovered a tribe of "blond Eskimos," who he thought might be the descendants of the lost Greenland colony. The idea was received with scepticism by many anthropologists and polar historians.

Stefansson’s next expedition (1913-18) was originally organized with the financial sponsorship of the American Museum of Natural History and the National Geographic Society. Its main aim was geographical discovery in the Beaufort Sea area. Feeling that the funds provided ($50,000) were not sufficient, he approached the Canadian government in the hope of receiving a further $25,000 grant. Prime Minister Robert Borden decided that the government would be the expedition’s sole sponsor—a clear indication of the growing Canadian interest in the far north, and a significant departure from the more cautious policy of the previous decade. The proposed cost of $75,000-$85,000 was readily accepted. As a result of this expedition, Stefansson became both more famous and more controversial. He discovered Brock, Borden, Mackenzie King, Meighen, and Lougheed Islands, but it was his success in living off the land, and the theories he based on this experience, that set him apart from earlier explorers, and caught the public’s attention most strongly. Stefansson’s ship, the Karluk, was trapped in the ice and cut off from the rest of the expedition while Stefansson himself was on a hunting expedition. He had intended to use the ship as a floating base and provision depot, but now the only way to carry out his planned explorations was for Stefansson to strike out over the sea ice with a small party and few provisions, relying on his and his companions’ hunting skills to keep them alive. This he successfully did. Richard Diubaldo has shown that these developments were the result of circumstances and luck, but Stefansson later claimed that it was what he had intended all along, since he knew that the bountiful resources of the Arctic were more than enough to sustain life, even on the ever-shifting sea ice (108-11). Stefansson’s achievements brought him great acclaim. However, the brightness of the picture was marred by the fact that the crew of the Karluk had not fared so well. The ship was crushed by ice pressure,

52 Diubaldo, 60-61, 68. The actual cost was far higher, roughly $500,000 (197).
and the crew escaped to a nearby island. Because they were trapped in an area where game was scarce, eleven of them died. Several Canadian members of the expedition felt that Stefansson’s narrative, *The Friendly Arctic* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), contained exaggerations and inaccuracies designed to enhance his own image, while casting the blame for problems on others. Despite official efforts to keep the disputes behind closed doors, there were a number of newspaper reports on the subject. The suspicion and resentment intensified when Stefansson’s attempt to claim Wrangel Island for Canada in 1921-23 resulted in four more deaths. By 1924, Stefansson had lost the support of Canadian politicians and civil servants, many of whom now disliked him intensely. Stefansson always maintained that the deaths on the 1913-18 and 1921-23 expeditions were not related to a lack of game; others charged that they were, and that Stefansson’s dogmatism, rashness, and conceit were therefore to blame.

Stefansson’s exploits, though controversial, were thus highly dramatic, far more so than those of Bernier, and his strong flair for publicity ensured that they lost nothing in the telling. His writings were eagerly sought by major American publishers. In the late 1910s and early 1920s (that is, the period before his fall from official favour), Stefansson carefully crafted his message for a Canadian audience as well. For example, the series of magazine articles that he published under the title “Solving the Problem of the Arctic: A Record of Five Years’ Exploration,” in *Harper’s* in 1919 appeared in a slightly different form in *MacLean’s*, with the title altered to “Solving the Problem of the Arctic: A Record of Five Years’ Exploration for the Canadian Government.” Another American magazine series appeared in *The World’s Work* in 1921-22, with a Canadian version in *MacLean’s*. The

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54 Diubaldo, Ch. 9, 209, 182-83. According to Diubaldo, Stefansson deliberately misrepresented the facts about the scarcity of game on Wrangel Island in order to preserve his reputation.

55 *The Friendly Arctic* was not a best-seller in either Britain or Canada (see Diubaldo, 201), but American sales were large enough to keep it in print for many years: there were two printings in 1921, three in 1922, and one each in 1924, 1925, 1927, 1932, and 1939, followed by a new edition with some additional material in 1943.

American titles were “Northward the Course of Empire,” “The North that Never Was,” “The Fruitful Arctic,” and “The Livable North,” and the Canadian “Northward the Course of Empire,” “Our North that Never Was,” “How Habitable is Northern Canada?,” “Canada’s Caribou Crop” and “Far North Really Liveable.” Stefansson’s book *The Northward Course of Empire*, published by Harcourt, Brace in 1922, was based on these articles and one other, “The Arctic as an Air Route of the Future,” from the August 1922 issue of *National Geographic*. The book was clearly designed to appeal to Canadians’ feelings of national pride as well as to the interests of the American public, and many reviewers commented favourably on the good service Stefansson’s work would do for Canada.

Stefansson’s main argument was that Canada’s future lay in northern settlement and the exploitation of northern resources. In “How Habitable is Northern Canada?” he claimed that unbiased investigation could provide “assurance that the glamorous and romantic but eternally frozen and forever worthless North is a myth” (22). But before the truth could be known, past mistakes must be exposed. “We must understand the Arctic as it really is,” he wrote in *The Friendly Arctic*. “It might seem that the easiest way to do this would be to learn more about it. A far easier way is to forget: what we think we already know.” Most of what people thought they knew about the far north came from the literature of British Arctic exploration, which in Stefansson’s view was the source of numerous distortions. He believed that their fixed ideas about the barrenness of the Arctic had killed Franklin and the men of his last expedition; according to Stefansson, so overwhelming had the power of preconception been that the Englishmen “starved to death ... in a region where game is abundant” (323). Stefansson was convinced that such stereotypes would soon be demolished, if not by the force of his arguments alone, then by the forces of historical change. “Whoever will look can see from the statistics of the last hundred years that unless the growth of population is checked ... it will not be

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58 See the unsigned review of *The Friendly Arctic* in *Canadian Forum* 2 (Mar. 1922): 70-71, and Lawrence Burpee’s review of *The Northward Course of Empire* in the *Canadian Historical Review* 4 (1923): 74-76.

long till we need the North for those to live in who like it, and for the production of that sort of food for the world’s consumption to which its natural conditions are adapted,” he wrote (574). Stefansson added the further claim that with the growth of air transport, the Arctic Ocean would become a “Polar Mediterranean,” over which the world’s major air routes would pass (690). The Canadian north would then be transformed from the periphery of the world to its commercial centre.

This was heady stuff for Canadian readers. However, the atmosphere of doubt surrounding his 1913-18 expedition had damaged Stefansson’s credibility, and further controversies dogged him during the 1920s. First came the Wrangel Island disaster, and then he was drawn into a bitter public dispute with Roald Amundsen. As the “conqueror” of the Northwest Passage and the South Pole, Amundsen was considered by many to be the greatest living explorer. His victory over Scott in the 1912 race to the South Pole was sometimes seen as proof of British inadequacies in the realm of polar exploration, but in many respects Amundsen was a firm defender of the British tradition. His career as an explorer had its roots in his boyhood reading of Franklin’s narratives, and in his own account of his 1903-06 voyage he spoke of the reverent feelings he experienced during a visit to Beechey Island. Amundsen had no liking for Stefansson and his “friendly Arctic” theories. His main departure from British supply techniques on his South Polar dash was to bring with him a very large number of dogs, with the intention that most of them would be killed and eaten. In the Antarctic interior, devoid as it was of any animal life, this proved an extremely successful plan. Amundsen was convinced that the Arctic sea ice was an environment almost as desolate as the Antarctic, and he strongly repudiated Stefansson’s claims that an expedition could safely venture forth carrying little or nothing in the way of supplies.

In Stefansson’s mind, his successful journey on the Beaufort Sea ice meant not only that explorers could travel light, but that Arctic air routes posed little risk in the event of an emergency landing. He contended that aircraft could easily land on the ice, which he described as a smooth surface ideal for the purpose, and that stranded

60 See Earl Parker Hanson, Stefansson: Prophet of the North (New York and London: Harper, 1941), 200-09.
travellers could keep themselves alive by hunting until help arrived. Like Stefansson, Amundsen was keenly interested in air transport, but he believed that it was of use only to explorers in the Arctic, and that to dream of commercial air routes over the north pole was not only unrealistic but dangerous. In 1925 Amundsen and the American Lincoln Ellsworth attempted to fly from Spitsbergen to Alaska. They were forced to land on the ice, which was rough and uneven. Only with great difficulty were they able to smooth a runway and return to land before their supplies gave out. (One of Stefansson's American supporters, Earl Hanson, suggested that the thrilling newspaper accounts of this struggle were overblown publicity-seeking, and that Amundsen and Ellsworth were never in any danger of starvation. They should, Hanson insisted, simply have looked around them carefully enough to realize that they were in a region abounding with seals and polar bears. But, like the British before them, they were hampered by their preconceptions: they saw no game not because there was none, but because they did not want to see it [204-06]).

Amundsen published his autobiography in 1927. The original Norwegian edition contained very severe criticism of Stefansson, going so far as to suggest that the Beaufort Sea journey had never taken place at all: “A more unreasonable distortion of conditions in the North has never been set forth than that a skillful marksman ‘can live off the land.’ Stefansson has never done it, although he says he has.” The Norwegian described Stefansson’s theories as “foolish talk” that had done only harm to more serious polar explorers, who now found themselves in the position of being required to justify their expenditure on provisions. Amundsen’s charges against Stefansson were published in English in an article in The World’s Work, titled “Arctic Follies,” and then in the translation of his autobiography, My Life as an Explorer. The controversy was widely publicized

62 Qtd in Hanson, 208.
63 Roald Amundsen, Mitt Liv Som Polarforsker (Oslo: Gyldendal, Norsk Forlag, 1927), translated as My Life as an Explorer, and “Arctic Follies,” The World’s Work 54 (Sept. 1927): 535-45. In both the translated edition and the article, the accusation of fraud was omitted, but Amundsen’s criticism was still very strongly worded. He wrote in “Arctic Follies” that “It is conceivable, I suppose, that a very skillful and experienced explorer, in extraordinarily favorable circumstances ... might for a very short time ‘live off the country,’ but I should not try it myself. I should consider it sheer suicide.” Even on land or close to it, Amundsen considered a journey without provisions as a great risk, while on the sea ice, “any man’s chances of ‘living off the country’ are just about equal to his chances of finding a gold mine on the top of an iceberg” (336-37). This was extremely
in the Canadian press, and according to Hanson this came about through the efforts of Stefansson’s Canadian detractors, many of whom occupied powerful civil service positions (208). It was perhaps no coincidence that Amundsen made very critical statements about Stefansson during a 1926 interview published in the Ottawa Journal.\(^6\) Canadian reviewers’ response to The Northward Course of Empire had been quite positive, but according to Hanson most readers remained unconvinced that Stefansson’s ideas had any immediate practical application: “Many people read it with great interest, but about the way they would read a tale by Jules Verne, as a fantastic romance dealing with some glorious day in the far-off future” (182). Amundsen’s experiences seemed to demonstrate conclusively that visions of a new Canada arising on the shores of the polar Mediterranean indeed belonged to the realm of fantasy.

Though Hanson’s account is basically correct, he may have exaggerated in order to portray his hero the more convincingly as an unjustly neglected prophet, the victim of his Canadian enemies. Stefansson initially won many influential converts in Canada, including Leacock. In the early 1920s Stefansson wrote to Leacock in order to criticize Adventurers of the Far North, and Leacock responded with an enthusiasm equal to that with which he had formerly celebrated Franklin’s heroic struggles. With surprising readiness, Leacock abandoned his pessimistic construction of the Arctic for Stefansson’s optimism, much as Grant had done a decade before in response to Mackinder and Amery. He deferred to Stefansson’s status as an expert with empirically determined facts at his command, and he also considered Stefansson’s vision of the north as the one most likely to further Canadian national development. In a preface to one of Stefansson’s books, Leacock repudiated his earlier views, and produced a humorous sketch of himself as an armchair explorer, who in his one venture into the writing of Arctic history had committed

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ludicrous errors. "What I lacked in knowledge, I undertook to supply by rhetoric," he admitted. This was because his experience of the far north was purely literary. After his change of heart, Leacock wrote that "towards Stefansson I feel that peculiar gratitude which is shared by all Canadians who know his writings and particularly his glorious book called The Northward Course of Empire. More than any other man he has helped to dissipate the tradition of the 'few acres of snow' that hemmed our reputation and impeded our advance."65

Journalist Donat LeBourdais had a similar conversion experience during the 1920s. He first met Stefansson in Ottawa in 1921; then, having moved to New York, LeBourdais was invited to accompany the explorer on one of his American lecture tours. He was impressed by Stefansson's "outstanding personality," and "since I was a student of Canadian history, his views about the role of the Arctic in world affairs opened new vistas for me." LeBourdais became firmly convinced that "only by developing the North can this country aspire to the high place it could attain among the nations of the world."66 Another of Stefansson's dedicated supporters was popular historian Constance Skinner. Skinner wrote in the Canadian Forum that Stefansson had "replaced a false tradition which was useless," with a new vision of the north's potential, but unfortunately the deaths on Wrangel Island "caused the unthinking majority to revert to the old and ruinous fiction about the North as an icebound, uninhabitable place, commercially worthless, and deadly to man."67

Readily though Canadians in the early twentieth century might respond to literary representations of the malevolent north, they were also often quick to join in the spirit of boosterism. Some were naturally more susceptible than others. Leacock and LeBourdais retained their faith in Stefansson (their testaments quoted above were written in 1938 and 1963). H.H. Langton, on the other hand,

65 Leacock, introduction to Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic, vi, viii. It is debatable whether the public shared Leacock's evaluation of Adventurers, since the book was reprinted in 1920, '21, and '22 -- that is, precisely the time when the publicity surrounding Stefansson was at its height.
conformed to the pattern of initial enthusiasm and subsequent disillusionment which, according to Diubaldo, was the most typical Canadian response to Stefansson. The Review of Historical Publications followed the course of the 1913-18 expedition closely, summarizing the reports that appeared in American and British sources, and it is clear that the editors’ interest in the matter was keen. However, Langton’s reviews of The Friendly Arctic (1921), Hunters of the Great North (1923), and The Adventure of Wrangel Island (1925), all published in the Canadian Historical Review (which succeeded the Review of Historical Publications in 1920), show an ever more negative spirit. In the last review he made it plain that he regarded Stefansson as dishonest. Even Leacock, faithful at heart to the imperialist version of Canadian history, was not willing to echo Stefansson’s criticism of Franklin, but only to gently mock his own uninformed response to exploration narratives.

Stefansson was largely ignored in Canadian publications during the late 1920s. A few intermittent articles appeared in MacLean’s, Saturday Night, and Canadian Forum, but Stefansson’s 1929 “That ‘Frozen’ North!” in MacLean’s met a blunt rejoinder in Lloyd Evans’s “There is a Frozen North” a few months later. The dearth of Canadian material was not compensated for by American periodical coverage. National Geographic published nothing by or about Stefansson after 1922. During the early 1920s, a substantial number of articles appeared in journals, including Harper’s, Collier’s, Outlook, and The World’s Work, but in the second half of the decade coverage dropped dramatically. This decline in Stefansson’s credibility and popularity left the field to the admirers of British heroism. The archipelago continued to be seen as a remote and grim region, and Franklin grew in stature as a Canadian hero. This seems to have been almost paradoxically linked to the greater optimism about the possibilities of northern development which Stefansson had roused.

70 Stefansson’s claim that the archipelago had potential commercial value garnered little support. Charles Camsell of the Geological Survey had declared in 1916 that, though Arctic expeditions had their uses, “it seems so much more reasonable and even imperative that explorations should be carried out in the more accessible parts of our unexplored territory ... on the chance of finding
journalists and popular writers spoke with pride of the vast resources contained in their country’s north, and they also celebrated the hardy qualities which would be required to exploit them. As Sir Edmund Walker, the president of the Bank of Commerce, had proclaimed in MacLean’s in 1912, “we would not exchange our winter for the suns of any sub-tropical country, and in the character of our natural resources, and the strength of the effort necessary to secure them lies the main assurance of our national character.”71 Fearing that growing prosperity might soften and corrupt the Canadian character, Walker viewed the hardships involved in northern development with approval. Five years later, Roderick MacBeth agreed that “Not in equatorial lands where a dreamy existence can be dragged out or shuffled through ... have the great peoples of the earth been cradled, but in the north where there is some need for effort.... Hence Canada should be glad that she is finding an ever-widening horizon and that a hitherto unknown and wonderful northland is coming to the front to be the nursing-mother of a virile people.”72 The fear of degeneration was a common one,73 and Franklin and the other heroes who had faced the dangers of the something on which to build productive industries and to open fresh outlets for our national energy” (Camsell, “The Unexplored Areas of Continental Canada,” Geographical Journal 48 [Sept. 1916]: 256). After the furore of excitement caused by Stefansson’s discoveries and theories had died down, for the most part this pragmatic attitude prevailed. Canadian ventures in the archipelago, such as the annual Eastern Arctic Patrols (inaugurated in 1922), were undertaken to maintain sovereignty, not in the hope of commercial development. However, the spirit of boosterism was very strong in publications about the subarctic: the Peace River district, the Mackenzie valley, and the shores of Hudson Bay were the subjects of many optimistic magazine articles. For example, see A.H. de Trémaudan, “The Unknown North,” Canadian Magazine 62 (Feb. 1924): 281-84; “Canada’s ‘Barren Lands’ Productive,” Saturday Night 7 Mar. 1925: 22; Arthur Lowe, “The Empire of the North,” Canadian Magazine 72 (Aug. 1929): 3-4, 39; “Canada’s Faith in Future Grows as Golden North Opens,” Saturday Night 2 Nov. 1929: 29-30. Fine geographical distinctions between different parts of the north were not often made in popular literature, and, as a result, the discursive link between the courageous spirit of the nineteenth-century British voyagers and resource development in the subarctic was a strong one.

73 Concerns about physical and moral degeneration resulting from material progress had been expressed in both Europe and North America since the late nineteenth century. See J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, eds., Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress (New York: Columbia UP, 1985). Canadians were convinced that their rugged “northern character” made them less susceptible than
archipelago were therefore seen as ideal role models for Canadians in the early twentieth century. Their stoicism and perseverance in the face of adversity evidently had far greater appeal at this time than Stefansson’s representations of a “friendly Arctic,” a preference that was expressed through print culture.

Many books intended for a juvenile audience, such as historian W.S. Wallace’s *By Star and Compass: Tales of the Explorers of Canada* (1922), conveyed the message that Franklin’s “gallant spirit” could serve as a model for Canadian youngsters to emulate. Nevertheless, Charles La Nauze, a Royal North-West Mounted Police inspector with extensive northern experience, complained in a 1925 *Canadian Magazine* article that not enough Arctic history was taught in Canadian schools. La Nauze pointed out that Franklin was “not even named” in some history textbooks, though he noted with approval that the Canadian government had recently placed a memorial “at the entrance of the then unknown waters [Franklin] so dauntlessly surveyed,” and that a new Arctic research ship had been named in the explorer’s honour. The relative lack of Arctic teaching material began to be rectified in the following years. In 1930, a short biography of Franklin by historian and former Rhodes Scholar Morden Long appeared in the Ryerson Canadian History Readers series. It was endorsed not only by the provincial departments of education but by the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. Long commended Franklin’s “buoyant bravery and cool resourcefulness,” and concluded that his fame as an explorer “is secure against all threat of time. It is written large across the geography of [the] Arctic wastes, and it will remain fresh in human memory as long as the world loves to hear of the deeds of brave men.”

Interest in Franklin was also strengthened by the exploits of another Canadian Arctic explorer, Major Lachlan T. Burwash. Burwash came

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77 Morden H. Long, *Sir John Franklin* (Toronto: Ryerson, [1910]), 8, 27. This was a small book with a soft cover; it was later reprinted in *Stories of Adventure*, ed. Lorne Pierce (Toronto: Ryerson, 1932), part of the hardcover series *Our Dominion: Stories of Character and Incident.*
from a prominent Ontario family (he was the son of Nathanael Burwash, the chancellor of Victoria College). A mining engineer, he had extensive northern experience dating back to the Yukon gold rush. In the early and mid 1920s, as an employee of the Department of the Interior, he carried out explorations on Baffin Island and the east coast of Hudson Bay. Then in 1928 and 1929 Burwash searched the King William Island area for traces of Franklin’s ships. The only written record of the expedition ever found indicated that the Erebus and Terror had been deserted by their crews in the spring of 1848, but on the basis of Inuit oral tradition, Burwash concluded that at least half the 105 men returned to the ships, and that one of the vessels was wrecked with a crew on board. He believed that survivors of the wreck might well have lived on for some time. Burwash’s article “The Franklin Search,” detailing these theories, was published in an early issue of the newly founded Canadian Geographical Journal.78

In 1930 Burwash returned to King William Island in search of Franklin’s grave. For decades, there had been persistent rumours that Franklin, who died a year before the ships were deserted, was buried in a “cemented vault” on King William Island. This belief had originated with an Inuit story told to Nova Scotian whaler Peter Bayne, a member of Charles Hall’s 1864-69 expedition.79 The Canadian government purchased a written record and sketch map based on Bayne’s recollections for $1,000, and sent Burwash north to investigate. No grave was found, but the expedition did collect a number of relics of the lost expedition. These provided welcome material for newspaper stories. So intense and overblown did the publicity become that a photograph of some seal bones appeared in the New York Times, with the caption “Where an Arctic explorer lay down to die nearly a hundred years ago: the bones of one of the 128 companions of Sir John Franklin.”80 A civil servant who could hardly have been pleased by such wild claims, Burwash restricted himself to publishing a short, dry official narrative of the expedition. However, the response to his exploits clearly demonstrates the intense curiosity that still surrounded Franklin’s fate. Jean Mitchell Smith’s November 1930 article in the Canadian Magazine emphasized the mystery of the lost expedition and the interest felt in it by the Canadian public. “Throughout the Dominion the hope

80 Richard Finnie, Lure of the North (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1940), 65.
was entertained that [Burwash] would find documents," she wrote. Smith’s article appeared in the same month as Burwash’s account of his 1928-29 expedition in the *Canadian Geographical Journal*, and the two pieces were both noteworthy for the number and high quality of their illustrations. Both were accompanied by several interesting and well-chosen pictures, including portraits of Franklin and other explorers, engravings reproduced from British narratives, and the record found on King William Island. During the 1920s Canadian publications on nineteenth-century northern history, like the earlier works by Roberts, Leacock, and Grant, had contained few or no illustrations; the two articles thus marked a movement in Canadian print culture towards a far more sophisticated and effective visual presentation of Arctic exploration history, and Smith’s piece in particular would have reached a wide audience.

This was the article that contributed to Pratt’s choice of Franklin as the subject for a Canadian epic. During Pratt’s lifetime, Canadian print culture had produced nothing to compare with the beautifully printed and illustrated narratives of Franklin and Parry. Nor did the great majority of Canadians have any pressing personal reasons to take an interest in the Arctic, a region that few of them would ever see. However, building on the foundation of British literature, available in a cheap and accessible form from American publishers, Canadian writers had gradually constructed a compelling vision of the nineteenth-century quest for the Northwest Passage as one of the most romantic and heroic episodes in Canada’s past. If it did not in the end inspire Pratt to actual poetry, this saga later provided material for such diverse Canadian writers as Richard Lambert, Leslie Neatby, Farley Mowat, Al Purdy, Gwendolyn MacEwen, Mordecai Richler, Pierre Berton, Peter Newman, Margaret Atwood, Rudy Wiebe, and Ken McGoogan. That it not only remained of interest to some individuals but was perceived as an essentially Canadian story owes much to the relatively unknown work of writers, editors, and publishers in the decades before 1930.

**SOMMAIRE**

Avant les années 1890, peu de titres furent publiés au Canada concernant l’histoire de l’exploration de l’Arctique. Même s’il se

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trouva des lecteurs canadiens vivement intéressés par ce sujet, ceux-ci l’envisagèrent non pas dans une perspective historique propre à leur pays mais bien plutôt comme un exploit héroïque à l’honneur de la Grande-Bretagne. La documentation britannique sur l’Arctique fut d’ailleurs si répandue aux États-Unis qu’il en résulta des réimpressions à bon marché facilement accessibles au Canada. Dans les années précédant la décennie 1890, des problèmes reliés au droit d’auteur empêchèrent les éditeurs canadiens de se mesurer au marché américain de la réimpression. Les améliorations réalisées au niveau du droit d’auteur coïncidèrent avec la sensibilisation accrue des Canadiens au grand nord en tant que partie intégrante de la nation. L’intérêt porté par les Canadiens aux explorations nordiques revêtit au tournant du siècle un caractère de plus en plus nationaliste. Des hommes tels que sir John Franklin et autres explorateurs navals britanniques qui partirent à la recherche du passage du Nord-Ouest furent graduellement considérés comme des héros nationaux grâce notamment à une panoplie d’ouvrages comprenant des œuvres d’imagination ou de poésie, des études historiques, des livres pour la jeunesse, des articles de revue et divers récits rapportés par des explorateurs canadiens qui suivirent les traces de Franklin et commémorèrent son souvenir. Cet article examine comment l’exploration du passage du Nord-Ouest est devenue incidemment et par la force des choses « un thème canadien majeur » selon Northrop Frye. L’intérêt exprimé pour l’Arctique semble de plus en plus faire partie de la réalité canadienne. Et cette vision nationale du grand nord, on la doit en fait à des ouvrages relativement peu connus d’écrivains et d’éditeurs diffusés durant les premières décennies du vingtième siècle.