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**Closing the Front Door of the Arctic:
Capt. Joseph E. Bernier's Role in Canadian Arctic Sovereignty**

**by
Season L. Osborne**

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication

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Abstract

Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic Archipelago was not gained by conquering swashbucklers. It was established with understated measures by government officers, patrolling northern waters and implementing legislation to secure the Archipelago for Canada.

One of the key figures in this quiet nation building was the veteran French-Canadian sea captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier. Early in the 20th century, the Dominion government commissioned Bernier to patrol the icy Arctic straits. He made four trips between 1904 and 1911 to the Arctic Archipelago, claiming each of the islands for Canada.

In 1922, at the age of 70, Bernier was again commissioned to take the helm of the Canadian Government Ship *Arctic* for the Eastern Arctic Patrol, which set up mounted police posts in the High Eastern Arctic.

This journalistic style thesis examines how the Canadian government established jurisdiction in the Arctic and Bernier's role in this. His flag-raising efforts are the cornerstones of Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

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An especially enormous thanks goes to my adviser, Dave Tait, for his encouragement, support and ability to clearly see the big picture when it got out of focus. I am most grateful for his superb editor's eye and talent for noticing when my apostrophes were backwards.

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I am grateful to Callista Kelly and Karen Robertson, at Carleton University's Interlibrary Loan Services, who achieved minor miracles in acquiring the Navy Department documents from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for me.

This thesis could not have been completed without the kind assistance of Janet Osborne (my mom), Karen Arp-Osborne and Cathy Allison who offered magnificent suggestions about how to tell Bernier's story better. Most of all, I owe an enormous thanks my husband, Fraser Smith, who listened patiently for hundreds of hours to my tales of Kapitaikallak and Arctic sovereignty.

Closing the Front Door of the Arctic:
Captain Joseph E. Bernier's Role in Canadian Arctic Sovereignty

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Prologue

I was looking for 1940s American army trucks buried to their axles in thawed permafrost mud. Instead, I found a wooden ship buried to its gunwales in ice and snow.

In the 1925 album, tiny paper corners help the black and white photographs adhere feebly to the heavy black construction-paper pages. The photos are of an old, three-masted wooden ship with a web of empty rigging. There is obviously no need for sails. The ship is frozen in the midst of an Arctic bay.

The album also included photographs of rocky, barren landscapes and men in heavy Melton coats and caps standing in awkward groups on deck. The most curious picture, though, was of a portly man sitting on a swing contraption suspended 20-metres above the deck as he is hoisted to the crow's nest. This is 73-year-old Capt. Bernier and the ship is the *CGS Arctic*.

I stumbled upon this album in 1999 in the National Archives of Canada in downtown Ottawa while I was searching for photographs to go with a story on the CANOL pipeline for *Above and Beyond* magazine. Between 1942 and 1944, American military personnel built a 1,500-kilometre pipeline from the oil fields in Norman Wells, N.W.T., to Alaska to fuel heavy tanks and trucks for defence against a possible Japanese invasion. The Japanese never invaded and the pipeline was never used.

The CANOL Project photographer was Richard Sterling Finnie. The album with the photos of the *Arctic* in it is part of his collection. Finnie accompanied Bernier as assistant radio operator aboard the 1924 and 1925 Canadian government Eastern Arctic Patrols, and celebrated his 18th birthday above the Arctic Circle. The budding amateur photographer unknowingly documented a crucial piece of Canadian history on those

summer expeditions to the Eastern Arctic.

I had no idea about these government patrols or who Capt. Bernier was, but I was intrigued by the photographs. A search in the Encyclopedia Canadiana revealed that Bernier was a veteran French-Canadian sea captain who had commanded three Dominion government expeditions to the Arctic: 1906-07, 1908-09 and 1910-11. He landed at almost every island, raising the Dominion flag and erecting wooden crosses. In July 1909, he claimed the entire Arctic Archipelago for Canada.

I found Bernier's autobiography *Master Mariner and Arctic Explorer* in the public library, read it and was hooked. It was a seafaring tale, starring a captain of the same mettle as the fabled Horatio Hornblower – the way he told it at least. Bernier seemed an important figure in Canadian history and I had never heard of him, nor had anyone else I talked to.

I decided that a biography of the captain needed to be written. Bernier was an extraordinary seaman who navigated oceans around the world, but it was the latter half of his life, when he made his voyages to the Arctic, that was most intriguing. With further research, however, I discovered that this was more than just one man's story. Bernier's Arctic expeditions were part of a complex government plan to establish Canadian Arctic sovereignty.

This seemed an ideal topic for a thesis, so I decided to focus on how Arctic sovereignty was asserted during Bernier's lifetime; he was active in northern affairs between 1900 and 1925. Bernier was the man on the ground, the one carrying out the acts to reinforce sovereignty. However, he was following guidelines set down by the Government of the Dominion of Canada.

The ones behind Bernier's sailing orders, the government men, are more absent from the history books than Bernier is. These men are difficult to flesh out. I came across their names in memos and minutes, but found little else to tell me who they were. Men such as James B. Harkin, the commissioner of the Dominion Parks, and Deputy Minister of the Interior W.W. Cory, whose given names, William Wallace, eluded me for months, were the brains behind northern policy. Bernier did the groundwork, but the plans to assert sovereignty were devised in the boardrooms on Parliament Hill.

My search to uncover the story of Arctic sovereignty began in the archives. Most of the information I found there came from different archival collections: letters, government documents and memos of bureaucratic meetings, as well as personal journals written by men aboard the *Arctic*. The National Archives of Canada has a very limited file on Bernier. Apparently, his diaries and thousands of his photos are in the archives at the College in Lévis, Que., but, unfortunately, this collection is not accessible to the public. Bernier's published reports and autobiography were important sources, but I was unable to find information that would give a more personal insight into him.

Bernier died in 1934, and all the sailors who sailed north with him are also gone. There is nobody alive now who was on those voyages. As a piece of journalism, this presents a problem because first-hand accounts are so vital. However, Richard Finnie, Robert Logan and Dewey Soper all published articles about their experiences aboard the Eastern Arctic Patrol. These sources were invaluable in offering a glimpse of life onboard the *Arctic*.

I also interviewed a wide-range of experts who could round out the story of Arctic sovereignty, such as Capt. Patrick Toomey, who has 30 years experience navigating

icebreakers in the Arctic. I also tracked down people who have studied Bernier or are admirers of him. Everyone I interviewed was eager to talk about a subject close to their hearts: the Arctic.

The interviews with francophones that I included here were conducted in English. I have used the interviewees' exact words, which they might have said differently in their own language. If this story is published as a work of popular nonfiction, I plan to redo the interviews in French and have them properly translated. However, it is the essence of what they are saying that is important here and that, I hope, is what I have captured.

One issue I did not explore in this thesis is the French-English relations of the time. Several francophones I interviewed claimed that Bernier was passed over in his bid to lead a North Pole expedition, and then later was denied a knighthood, because he was French-Canadian. I found no evidence of this in any of my archival research, but prejudice is difficult to trace. And Bernier lived during a strong Imperial British period. As I could neither reject nor support these comments, I chose not to delve into the issue at all. In a more popular work about Bernier, this would be important to address, though.

Another aspect I did not highlight is the relationship between the crew and the Inuit who lived near their winter quarters at Cape Fullerton, on Hudson Bay, and Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay, on northern Baffin Island. The Inuit assisted the crew to adjust and survive in this foreign, icy frontier. They also played a role in sovereignty by inhabiting the area Canada claimed.

My original thesis plan was to include an Inuit perspective on the sovereignty story. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain funding to go north for research, and I felt it wasn't possible to properly tell a northerner's story without such a trip. The stories about

Inuit that I have included in the thesis are from southerners' points of view, and from information that I gathered from journals and interviews.

I realize, too, that the geography and place names mentioned in the thesis are not familiar to most people. Many of these places, such as Port Burwell and Craig Harbour, no longer exist. I have included maps for easy reference.

As there is a complicated number of people involved in this quarter century of wrangling over sovereignty, I have included a list of people who feature in this thesis. I realize that I have missed a few, but this is a reference for the majority of them.

This is not a biography of Bernier. In fact, very little of his private life is included. I was more interested in the public figure, the man who believed that the Arctic rightfully belonged to Canada. He was the common thread in the assertion of sovereignty during the first quarter century in the Arctic. He was part of the first sovereignty patrol in 1904 and the one in 1925 that proved a turning point for Canada, strengthening its claim in the archipelago.

Arctic sovereignty is an enormous issue and I have barely scratched its icy surface. This thesis is not the entire story, but it is one significant part.

Chapter One

Looking Northward

Let me begin with a definition. Sovereignty is a concept of law. It is the legal condition necessary for the inclusion of particular lands and waters within the boundaries of a particular independent country. It is a matter of who is in charge.

– Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs
Carleton University, Oct. 18, 1988¹

A brown “giant beaver” sits on Dr. Dick Harington’s office filing cabinet. It is 10 centimetres tall, a plastic model of the extinct 2.5-metre beast that roamed, or gnawed, around Canada between two million and 10,000 years ago.

Harington, a recipient of the Order of Canada, is curator emeritus at the Museum of Nature in Ottawa. He joined the museum in 1965, doing research on large arctic mammals such as polar bears, muskox and caribou. Now, he is a paleobiologist, studying fossilized mammals extinct for thousands of years.

For the last 10 summers, Harington has been working in the Strathcona area on southwestern Ellesmere Island in the High Eastern Arctic.

“They’ve got a very interesting beaver pond site that dates back to four million or so years,” he says. “Actually, it’s an ancestor beaver, probably the first easily recognized ancestor of the giant beaver... but smaller than our present castor Canadensis – our Canadian beaver.”²

A beaver in the High Arctic is fitting. The beaver is noted for being a hardy,

¹ Joe Clark, “Sovereignty in an Interdependent World,” Carleton University, Ottawa, Oct. 18, 1988.

² Dick Harington. Personal interview, June 7, 2003.

industrious creature, going about its work in an unthreatening manner, quietly constructing dams – a symbol of Canadian sovereignty.

It's amazing that at 77 degrees north, where the tallest foliage is barely 30 centimetres high, a beaver pond has been discovered. How then did beavers in the Arctic build dams?

Surprisingly, the temperature at this high latitude was once between 12 °C and 15 °C, and remains of ancient forests have been found throughout the Arctic. One of the best examples is the 45-million-year-old fossilized boreal forest on northeast Axel Heiberg Island to the west of Ellesmere Island.

This site is “one of the largest, oldest and most exquisitely preserved of its kind in the world,” wrote Ed Struzik in a 1999 *Canadian Geographic* article on the forest. “Some of the specimens are so perfectly preserved that they are almost indistinguishable from the litter on the floor of a modern coniferous forest.”³

The forest is technically not fossilized, or embedded in stone. It is actually mummified.

“You could burn it if you wanted,” says Harington.

Harington was asked to visit the site after a contentious situation erupted in the summer of 1999, when a group of American scientists from the University of Pennsylvania took samples of the forest back to their laboratories in the United States.

The Americans went in with chainsaws and dug trenches in the permafrost to cut out the largest trees. Canadian researchers from the University of Saskatchewan, who had studied the forest for the previous 13 years, were appalled at the invasive manner in

³ Ed Struzik, “Requiem for a Fossil Forest,” Canadian Geographic. Nov./Dec. 1999: 44.

which the Americans removed the invaluable specimens.⁴

The fact that irreplaceable scientific specimens are being removed from the Canadian Arctic is not a recent phenomenon, but it is an ongoing dilemma.

The explorer Robert Peary was renowned for bringing hundreds of Arctic artifacts back to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. His most infamous artifacts were a group of living specimens. He enticed six Greenland Inughuit south in 1897. Five of them died of colds within a year.⁵

The removal of scientific information is something that gets Brig.-Gen. Keith Greenaway's dander up.

Greenaway, 83, was with the Royal Canadian Air Force for 30 years and became a pioneer of aerial navigation in high polar regions. After retiring from the air force in 1971, he was senior science adviser in the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

His small office in his penthouse condominium on the Ottawa River is wall to wall with shelves. Greenaway is impeccably neat and organized. He searches the book-lined shelves as he talks, and pulls out file folders tied with string and labelled. He sets a folder on his desk and unties the string on his sovereignty file.

"We still have a very wide open door to foreign scientists coming in," he says. "It's okay, but we haven't got a good internal framework. The bureaucracy may say I'm way off base, but the results we're getting has confirmed my view. We're a wonderful laboratory for foreign science."

⁴ Struzik 44.

⁵ In 1897, Peary brought six Inughuit from Greenland. He abandoned them at the museum where, for a short period, they lived in the basement. Five died of colds. Only the little boy, Minik, survived. He was adopted by William Wallace, the museum's superintendent, and experienced a bizarre cultural immersion. Minik eventually went back to his home in Cape York, northern Greenland, but never re-adjusted to the traditional way of life. He returned to America and died in 1918 of influenza. Kenn Harper, *Give Me My Father's Body*. 2nd ed. Iqaluit: Blacklead Books, 1998.

Greenaway explains that the American scientists who worked on Axel Heiberg paid the Nunavut and federal governments for scientific licences.

“That’s why I say science is a commodity. But in the early days, we were too preoccupied by problems with our east-west development of the country. The northern hinterland was ignored, but countries that had a large scientific pool, well-established countries, were in the North.”⁶

Harington examined the state of the forest on Axel Heiberg after the Americans had left and says, “My conclusions were they’d done a pretty good job of patching things up, in fact. I suspected the worst, but really you could see they had filled in their trenches.”

He adds that taking artifacts as souvenirs from the Arctic is pretty common.

“I suspect that there is a good deal of foraging by a good deal of Americans and Canadians and probably other foreigners in our Arctic, but it’s so difficult to police,” says Harington.

Both Harington and Greenaway feel strongly that Canadian scientists working in the North are necessary to maintain Arctic sovereignty.

“If we had a continual network of scientific projects and bases throughout our Arctic islands, that would greatly strengthen any claim, should our claim be questioned,” says Harington.

He says the financial support for research in the North is waning and this is why American researchers with big budgets are getting in.

“It’s important to have people on the ground,” Harington says.

Having people on the ground has always been one of the greatest challenges the

⁶ Brig.-Gen. Keith Greenaway. Personal interview, May 7, 2003.

Canadian government has faced in terms of establishing and maintaining sovereignty in the Arctic.

Canada's Title to the Islands

In the last century, Canada managed to establish jurisdiction over the Arctic islands by carrying out basic, symbolic acts of sovereignty. Men were hired by the government simply to go into the Arctic for the purpose of raising flags and building stone cairns. They established a presence in the most unobtrusive and unoffending way possible.

These men were not dashing adventurers. They were heroes of a modest kind – scientists, policemen and administrative officers. They were government men who carried out their civic duties quietly, asserting sovereignty in the North with flags and legislation.

To understand Canada's exercise of sovereignty in the Arctic, it is necessary to understand how it first became landlord of this vast, northern territory.

British seafarers, who had explored and discovered the Arctic islands between 1576 and the 1860s, had laid claim to the region for Britain. After the Napoleonic War in 1816, the British Navy had to find work for a large number of career officers. A solution was to use the men to expand the British Empire's "details of geographical and hydrographical science."⁷ This included employing the Royal Navy to explore the Arctic.

Sovereignty, by international law, requires discovery to be followed up by occupation. This second key requirement for sovereignty was not met, however, because the Arctic's harsh climate and geographical conditions made it inhospitable for European

⁷ Fergus Fleming, Barrow's Boys. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998: 1.

daily life. This is possibly why the shaky British claim to the entire Arctic went unchallenged. No other country was interested in the region either.

The lucrative whaling industry had been carried out in the waters off Baffin Island since about 1821, when British whalers discovered that the region was rich with their principal game, the bowhead whale.⁸ With the advent of steam-powered ships in 1850, they were able to attempt the ice-clogged ocean not previously navigable by sailing vessels, enabling them to advance deeper into Arctic waters.

The presence of whalers in Canadian Arctic waters, in the early 19th century, did not cause the Dominion government great concern as one might expect. Because whaling was exercised on the open sea, the visits of whalers from different nations was not perceived as a threat to Canada's sovereignty, and whalers were left to operate unimpeded by the government.⁹

In 1845, the British Admiralty sent an expedition of two ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, under the command of Sir John Franklin, into the Arctic to find the Northwest Passage. He and his 128 men sailed into Lancaster Sound, north of Baffin Island, and were never seen alive again by their countrymen. The British government, and later Lady Franklin, spared no expense in sending expeditions to search for Franklin and his men.

Twelve years later, Leopold M'Clintock's expedition returned to England with evidence of the death of Franklin's crews from unknown causes. However, in those 12 years, 35 ships and five overland expeditions explored the archipelago in their search for Franklin and greatly increased the knowledge of the Arctic frontier. Only the most

⁸ Between 1820 and 1840, more than 13,000 whales were slaughtered in Eastern Arctic waters. Mike Vlessides, Kekerton Territorial Park, Nunavut Tourism Web site, Sept. 20, 2002 www.arctictravel.com/chapters/kekparkpage.html

⁹ W. Gillies Ross, "Whaling, Inuit, and the Arctic Islands," Interpreting Canada's North, Selected Readings. Eds. Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison, Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989: 246.

northern islands remained unexplored at the end of the 19th century.¹⁰

“The terrible irony is Franklin, by getting himself lost, was responsible for far more exploration than he ever did when he was alive,” says Robert Headland, head archivist of the Scott Polar Research Institute at Oxford.

The search parties explored and mapped more of the Arctic Archipelago than Franklin could have accomplished in his lifetime.¹¹

Britain’s transfer of Rupert’s Land and the North-Western Territories in 1870 gave Canada all the land west of Hudson Bay and its entire western frontier. The Arctic islands were not included in this transfer and very little was done about them as they were perceived as a vast frozen wasteland of little or no value.

In 1874, Lieut. William A. Mintzer of the U.S. Navy Corps of Engineers applied to the acting British consul in Philadelphia for a grant of land “20 square miles” on Cumberland Sound, in central eastern Baffin Island, to mine “a deposit of a useful mineral” he had found there when he was on the *Tigress* searching for the ill-fated *Polaris*, the 1871 polar expedition ship that was crushed by ice.¹²

A subsequent report by the British Admiralty’s Chief Hydrologist revealed that the British government had minimal information on the area Mintzer was inquiring about. Not only that, but very little information existed about the rest of the Arctic claimed by Britain’s explorers.

¹⁰ These exploration parties fit nicely into the American vision of Imperialist expansion coined “Manifest Destiny,” which was cited with surprising regularity by 19th century explorers and government officials as the key reason behind the majority of the northern expeditions. The goal was to explore the Arctic to stake or claim new land for the United States with an eye to the potential wealth of natural resources in the North. Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration and International Relations*, Fairbanks: U of Alaska P, 1992: 10. Low, *Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic Islands on Board the D.G.S. Neptune, 1903-1904*, Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1906: 96.

¹¹ Robert Headland. Phone interview, April 25, 2003.

¹² W.A. Mintzer. Letter to George Crump, Acting British Consul, Feb. 10, 1874. *New York Times*, July 12, 1876, MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

In a secret memo of Jan. 6, 1875, Lord Carnarvon, secretary of state for the colonies, wrote Governor General Lord Dufferin:

From this minute it appears that the boundaries of the Dominion towards the north, northeast and northwest are at present entirely undefined and that it is impossible to say what British Territories on the North American continent are not already annexed to Canada under the order-in-council of the 23rd June 1870, which incorporated the whole of the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company as well as the North-Western Territory in the Dominion.¹³

The British government was concerned that the Americans would claim the area when they discovered how uncertain the British title to it was. Britain decided to transfer the entire archipelago to Canada where the Dominion's administration of it would be seen as less threatening to the Americans.¹⁴

The matter of the Dominion of Canada accepting the administration of the Arctic was agreed upon and on Oct. 9, 1874, the Governor General sent a memorandum with the Privy Council's approval of the transfer. However, as the acquisition of the additional territory would "entail a charge upon the revenue of the country,"¹⁵ the Dominion government needed the sanction of the entire Canadian Parliament, so requested more time to convince it of the value of the transfer. The subject was not addressed in the next session of Parliament, though, and the transfer process stalled.

When Mintzer received no response to his 1874 inquiry, he went ahead with his mining project. An Oct. 27, 1876, *New York Times* article announced the successful

¹³ Lord Carnarvon. Secret memo to Gov. Gen. Lord Dufferin, Jan. 6, 1875, N.A.C., MG30 B-57, Vol. 1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

¹⁴ Despite objections to the transfer because of the costs it would incur, the official opposition led by John A. Macdonald approved Canada's accepting the territory. He suggested that the region would incur minimal costs to administer but would eventually produce revenue to offset its expenses, saying, "If Canada did not wish to take it over, Britain would be entitled to abandon its sovereignty and the United States would simply occupy the region *gratis*." MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

¹⁵ MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

return of Mintzer's six-week mining expedition, which had excavated 15 tonnes of mica.

"The sailors named their diminutive village of three wooden structures 'Mintzerville' in honor of their commander," the article said.¹⁶

The Americans were making use of land claimed by Britain with no reaction from either the British or Canadian governments.

Negotiations between the Dominion and British governments were drawn out over six years, mainly because they could not agree on the method of transfer. The Canadians wanted the land to be transferred by an Imperial act of Parliament, but the British government was firm that an order-in-council would effectively accomplish the same thing.¹⁷

Andrew Smith, a history PhD candidate at the University of Western Ontario, has spent the last two years researching the corporate interests in the origins of Confederation. He says, "For something that important, they would want an Imperial act. An order-in-council can be challenged even by a private individual and there have been cases where it happened."¹⁸

David Elliott, an associate professor of law at Carleton University, echoes Smith, saying Canada wanted the transfer to be effected by an Imperial act, or a statute, not necessarily because of the legal status of it, but because it would be more permanent. Elliott says an Imperial act is harder to change; a statute requires going through the British Parliament to make changes to it.

Elliott also says the Crown can legislate without need for a statute when dealing

¹⁶ New York Times, Oct. 26, 1876, MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

¹⁷ Official correspondence between the British and Dominion governments: February 1878- April 1879, MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

¹⁸ Andrew Smith. Personal interview, May 20, 2003.

with the Crown's own property in an order-in-council. The Arctic islands were perceived as Crown property, and so an Imperial order-in-council seemed sufficient for the transfer.¹⁹

The British were nervous that an Imperial act published in the press would draw unwanted attention from the United States, which would then leave the transfer open to challenge, especially as the British were uncertain about the limits of the lands they were transferring. The British were cautious about raising the ire of the Americans, whom they had squared off against within living memory in the War of 1812, and animosity still raged between the two countries over British sympathies with the South during the Civil War.²⁰

Finally, while holding court at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight on July 31, 1880, Queen Victoria sat down to put her signature to the order-in-council.

She read:

From and after the first day of September 1880, all British territories and possessions in North America, not already included within the Dominion of Canada and all islands adjacent to any such territories or possessions, shall (with the exception of the colony of Newfoundland and its dependencies) become and be annexed to and form part of the said Dominion of Canada; and become and be subject to the laws for the time being in force in the said Dominion, in so far as such laws may be applicable thereto.²¹

With the royal signature, the Arctic islands were officially transferred to Canada.

With the transfer, the country increased by an impressive 2.4 million square kilometres in size. But what exactly did that mean? The legalese does not disguise the

¹⁹ David Elliott. Telephone interview, May 22, 2003.

²⁰ John Bovey, "The Attitudes and Policies of the Federal Government Towards Canada's Northern Territories, 1870-1930," MA Thesis, U British Columbia, 1967.

²¹ Copy of Imperial order-in-council, July 31, 1880, MG 30-B-57, Vol.1, File Despatches 1874-1923.

vagueness of the wording of the transfer.

“The Imperial government did not know what they were transferring and on the other hand the Canadian government had no idea what they were receiving.... They could not define, that which in their own minds was indefinite, and hence the language and order-in-council was indefinite,” said a 1921 report on Canada’s title to the Arctic islands.²²

“Taking the passage quite literally, one would be justified in concluding that it referred to British Honduras, Bermuda, and the British West Indies as much as to the islands of the Arctic Archipelago,” wrote sovereignty expert, Gordon W. Smith, in his article *Sovereignty in the North*.²³

The order was published in the *Canada Gazette* on Oct. 9, 1880.

As the region was not policed, it was completely open to interlopers. Whalers and exploration parties continued to operate unimpeded in the Arctic. Canada did nothing to obstruct activity in its Arctic, and so its claim went unchallenged.²⁴

An order-in-council of 1882 recommended that nothing be done to legislate the northern region until “some influx of population or other circumstances” made it necessary to do so.

“Fortunately for the Dominion, no other power challenged the Canadian claim by establishing effective occupation on any part of the archipelago. If any country had, Canada might easily have forfeited its patrimony,” writes J.L. Granatstein in his article on

²² Hensley Holmden, “Memo to the Arctic Islands, 1921,” RG 15, Vol. 2, N.A.C.

²³ Gordon W. Smith, “Sovereignty in the North,” *The Arctic Frontier*, 1966: 204

²⁴ Zaslow 254.

Canada's interest in the North.²⁵

Fifteen years after the transfer, in 1895, the Dominion government finally defined the boundaries of the four districts into which the North-Western Territories, including the islands of the Arctic Archipelago to latitude 83¼ degrees north, was divided: Ungava, Franklin, Mackenzie and Yukon. It was the first attempt to legislate for Canada's northernmost territories.²⁶

Before then, the only official interest in the North was the potential of using Hudson Bay as a direct shipping route to supply Europe with wheat from the Prairies. The feasibility of this was raised in a House of Commons committee in 1884. Money was provided for a three-year study and Lieut. R.A. Gordon, deputy superintendent of the Canadian Meteorological Service, was commissioned to charter the Newfoundland sealing ship *Neptune* to Hudson Bay.

Once the nationalistic Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier was elected in 1896, efforts were made to more firmly unite Canada and make its presence felt in the Arctic.²⁷

In the summer of 1897, the first overt step to assert Canadian sovereignty was taken when an official government expedition under William Wakeham, a former naval officer in the Fisheries Service, was sent to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island in the whaler *Diana*. Wakeham's key mission was to confirm Gordon's assessment of the duration of the shipping season and navigation conditions in Hudson Bay for wheat exports.

He was also there for sovereignty reasons. In a ceremony at the Scottish whalers'

²⁵ J.L. Granatstein, "A Fit Of Absence Of Mind: Canada's National Interest in the North to 1968," The Arctic in Question, Ed. E.J. Dosman, Toronto: Oxford UP, 1976: 15.

²⁶ Granatstein 30.
Smith 205.

²⁷ Granatstein 15.

base on Kekerton Island, in Cumberland Sound, Wakeham formally proclaimed Canada's authority over Baffin Island and the Arctic islands.

“He landed and hoisted the Union Jack in the presence of the agent, a number of officers, crew and Inuit, declaring in their presence that the flag was hoisted as evidence that Baffin’s Land with all the territories, islands and dependencies adjacent to it were now, as always had been since their first discovery and occupation, under the exclusive sovereignty of Great Britain,” writes historian Morris Zaslow in *Opening of the Canadian North*.²⁸

The Arctic Frontier

At the end of the 19th century, Canada felt its title to the Arctic islands was reasonably solid. But the High Arctic was still a region of mystery, an exciting place, comparable to the intrigue of space today. In 1900, the Arctic was the final frontier.

Two main geographical prizes had yet to be attained: the North and South Poles. It became an international race to see which country’s flag would be the first to be raised at the North Pole. It was these scientific and geographical parties exploring in the Arctic at the turn of the 20th century that brought the issue of sovereignty back to the government’s attention.

“Well, with hindsight our government should’ve been interested from the beginning when they inherited that territory from the British government, but, you know, people like Sverdrup²⁹ made tremendous contribution to the geographic knowledge and geological and other knowledge of our Arctic islands,” says paleobiologist Harington.

²⁸ Zaslow 260.

²⁹ Between 1898 and 1902, the Norwegian Otto Sverdrup carried out scientific investigations of Ellesmere, Axel Heiberg, Ellef Ringnes and Amund Ringnes islands in the High Eastern Arctic.

One Canadian who believed that the prize of the North Pole belonged to Canada was Capt. Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, a veteran sea captain from the Lower St. Lawrence River. He felt that attaining the Pole would, in the eyes of the rest of the world, secure all the land between that point at 90 degrees north, and the rest of the mainland for Canada.

Bernier felt that he was the man to reach the Pole for Canada. He was so confident in his ability to claim this prize that in 1898 he had calling cards printed with two eagles, American and Scandinavian, hovering threateningly over a wooden pole with a Russian bear approaching from the left on the ice below, while a beaver gnaws away at the pole's base. These animals symbolized the three international threats to the North Pole. However, it is the Canadian beaver industriously chewing away at the base of the Pole that is obviously the successful conqueror of it.³⁰ (See Fig. 3)

A hundred years before Harington and his team of scientists found evidence of beavers on Ellesmere Island, a lone French-Canadian used the animal to symbolize Canada's title to the Arctic.

"The one gentleman that I admire in the North was Bernier," says former science adviser Greenaway. "Bernier took the load of the Canadian government right on his shoulders of preserving a national interest and sovereignty. And," laughs Greenaway, "he always went around the North with a stack of flags and whenever they went ashore, he put the ensign up."

Bernier never realized his dream to reach the Pole, but he made a far more valuable contribution to Canadian Arctic sovereignty under the employ of the Dominion government. He was commissioned to claim all the Arctic Archipelago for Canada,

³⁰ Description of calling card that Bernier used since 1898. Item in the Musée Maritime du Québec, L'Islet, QC.

which he did, ceremoniously raising the Red Ensign, the flag of the Dominion, on the islands.

During the period of 1900 to 1925, the government of the Dominion of Canada made the first serious efforts to establish its claim to the Arctic islands. It did this with practical, unassuming methods, sending a small sailing-steam ship into the North to patrol the icy waters. Over this quarter century, a number of different men were in charge of the expeditions, but Bernier was always at the helm as captain of the ship.

The achievements of these stalwart men are remarkable, but none of them have succeeded in getting more than a mention in the history books. Though they deserve recognition, their low-key efforts are not of the mythological grandness that is the stuff of extreme adventure stories.

Bernier, however, stands out from the corps of government men who played a role in establishing Arctic sovereignty. Through his efforts, the Canadian beaver kept the American eagle at bay. This is the story of early Canadian Arctic sovereignty and Bernier's involvement in it.

Chapter Two

The Arctic's Open Door

I wish now to state that we have among Canadian navigators a nautical man, whose experience, whose courage, whose length of service in seafaring life, and whose knowledge of all the conditions pertaining to Arctic exploration, probably render him better fitted than any other man in this country, and as well fitted as any in the world, to take command of an expedition and attempt to reach the North Pole. I refer to captain Bernier.

– John Charlton, MP, North Norfolk
House of Commons address, May 1, 1902¹

Martin Caron sits in his big padded armchair, arms crossed over his chest, hands tucked under his armpits.

“It is sure, the way Bernier had planned, that in 1906 he would probably have reached the Pole,” he says.

From his living room window is a view of the St. Lawrence with the grey blue of the north shore mountains in the distance across the river.

Caron has lived in L’Islet sur Mer, an hour east of Quebec City, for most of his 75 years. As a young boy, the passing of ships in the southern channel in front of his house intrigued him. He’d see the old sailors in the town and hear them talking.

He says “les anciens matelots,” the old sailors, “were using a special language and it was English words they said, ‘wheelhouse, fo’c’sle head, fishing the lead,’ things like that. You don’t understand as a kid that wheelhouse is the place where the wheel was, and so when we were growing up, we wanted to see what mystery was hiding behind the ships we saw sailing along the river.”

¹ John Charlton, House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1902, Col. 3954.

As a young boy, this mystery made him want to go to sea.

Caron says the majority of men in the region became either farmers or sailors. He became a sailor and sailed to the Arctic on Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers, the *CD Howe* and *d'Iberville*.

Working in High Arctic waters is not an unusual profession for men along the St. Lawrence River. At the beginning of the 20th century, men from L'Islet and towns along the Côte de Sud volunteered to go to the Arctic. These men are famous here. But it is their captain, Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, who is L'Islet's most celebrated citizen.

Benoit Robitaille lives upriver in Quebec City. He worked in the Arctic for years as a geographer before becoming an adviser to René Lévesque, when Lévesque was the Quebec minister of natural resources in the early 1960s.

Robitaille had a friend who was related to Bernier's second wife, Alma, and had access to her house after she died in the '60s. Robitaille and his friend went to Bernier's house in Lévis before all the contents were sold or thrown out, and he says he took home 10 or 15 boxes of Bernier's documents.

"Bernier was a big name in the North and for the federal government. He made official voyages up north and had taken symbolically, more or less, the Arctic islands. So, in the Quebec area here, Bernier had a reputation of being a great explorer," says Robitaille.

"People had a great admiration for Bernier and, of course, many of the crews of the icebreakers come from the Quebec area, lower St. Lawrence and north shores. So, Bernier was a kind of symbolic person for them. I think, as a matter of fact, Bernier was responsible, without knowing it, for many generations of seamen of coast guard and

icebreakers and federal crews going up north every summer.”

Bernier is the stuff of myth and legend, a larger than life character.

He was below medium height but built like a bear. He had a massive neck, and muscular arms and shoulders from a life of hauling ships’ rigging and sails. He stood very straight-backed with his stomach out in front like a salt pork barrel, and his feet planted widely apart from years of steadying himself against the roll of the ship.

A *Toronto Daily Star* reporter described him in 1901 as “about five-feet-eight in height, weighs 195 pounds, and he shakes hands in proportion...He has dark, short hair, [Bernier was 49 and at this point was bald on top] fierce waxed moustachios, speaks quickly, firm lipped, firm jawed, quietly dressed, except for a diamond which speaks for itself from the little finger of his left hand. His eyes bluish-grey, pierce you. They know you in a moment.”²

In the many photographs of Bernier, he rarely looks directly at the camera. His head is always slightly turned toward some point outside the frame, as if looking for the next harbour to drop anchor. He never smiled for the camera, but if he had, he would have revealed an array of gold bridgework. Off camera, he was renowned for his humour and easy laughter.

He was very imperialistic, admired everything British and spoke English as much as possible, even to other francophones. Apparently, though, he spoke neither language well and tended to get English expressions mixed up, such as “this is a wild chase-goose.”

² “His Eyes on the North Pole,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Feb. 26, 1901, front page.

“Bernier was pro-British,” Robitaille says. “He started his career at the end of the colonialism period. So Bernier was a man of that era. He really admired everything that was British.”

Bernier was brought up to a life at sea. He knew how to give orders and was accustomed to having them obeyed. He was fair to his men, though, and many of his crew sailed with him for years. He was charming, warm-hearted and a likeable fellow. But like all heroes he had faults, too, and some found him vain and dogmatic.³

A Canadian North Pole Expedition

Caron’s version of the story about Bernier contains all the elements of a Dickens novel: the hard-working French-Canadian, pulled up by his bootstraps to win the favour of the prime minister.

“When Bernier, you know, succeeded in convincing Laurier, the prime minister, to buy a ship to open an expedition in the North, the aim was to be the first to reach the Pole. Peary and Captain Bartlett was in the line,” says Caron, explaining that Bernier purchased a ship and supplies for his five-year voyage.

“But, when it was time to leave, he opened his envelope [the sailing orders] and it said, ‘Captain, you are in charge of this vessel under the command of an RCMP officer. You are going into Hudson Bay. That is all you are doing.’ ”

“It was finished then, in 1904. In fact, Peary and Bartlett reached the Pole five years after.” Caron shrugs resignedly.

Like a Dickensian tale, Bernier was purportedly thwarted by a twist of fate at the

³ Profile compiled from various readings and stories. Good description of Bernier found in Richard Finnie’s, “Farewell Voyages, Bernier and the Arctic,” The Beaver, Summer 1974: 46.

last minute.

This is more than just a local legend, though. It has made it into the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, as the entry for Bernier reads:

Finally Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier agreed to fund an expedition to the North Pole. Bernier purchased a German ship, renamed it the *Arctic* and made meticulous preparations. At the last minute, the expedition was diverted to a minor policing expedition in Hudson Bay.⁴

This is the popular version that Bernier promoted. However, the actual historical record reveals a much more complex story.

Bernier was born New Year's Day 1852, in L'Islet sur Mer, into a family of seafarers. As Caron says, his father, grandfather and uncles had all been sailors and ships' captains. He made his first ocean voyage at age two. He left school and was "apprenticed to the sea" at 14 as ship's boy on his father's vessel. By age 17, Bernier was captain of his own ship, the youngest sea captain in the British Empire.⁵

Bernier became an astute marine businessman who not only captained merchant ships between European and North American ports, but also made a profit buying and selling ships, and salvaging wrecks. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean 44 times in his career of more than 269 voyages.

In November 1870, when Bernier was 18, he married his childhood sweetheart,⁶ 15-year-old Rose Caron, in the huge grey stone church in L'Islet on the shore of the St. Lawrence. Rose travelled with him on several of his transatlantic voyages, but stopped

⁴ James H. Marsh, editor, *Canadian Encyclopedia*, *Ottawa Citizen*, July 8, 2002.

⁵ 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: 116.

when she suffered a miscarriage on board ship. They never had any children of their own, but later, in 1885, Bernier and his wife adopted his cousin Philomène's 10-year-old daughter, Almina Caron, to be a companion to Rose while he was away at sea.⁷

In May 1871, while they were on their honeymoon in Washington, D.C., the *Polaris* was launched from the navy shipyard where it had been overhauled. The *Polaris* was being prepared for Charles Francis Hall's polar expedition.

Bernier saw the schooner-rigged screw tug and examined the drawings of it published in the newspapers. His knowledge of the ice in the Gulf of St. Lawrence led him to believe that this ship was not built to withstand ice.⁸

The *Polaris* sailed that July from New London, Conn. The expedition was plagued with disaster. Capt. Hall died of a stroke⁹ in Robeson Channel between North Greenland and Ellesmere Island. The *Polaris* then headed south. The ship ran aground near Etah, Greenland, and was crushed in the ice. The whaler *Tigress* picked up the 19 survivors on April 30, 1873.

Bernier keenly followed the expedition in the newspapers and this disaster led him to study the problems of Arctic navigation. His interest in the North was ignited and he read everything he could from explorers' published journals to scientific reports. In his memoirs, he wrote that from 1872 on, his cabin library consisted mainly of books about

⁶ In his autobiography, Bernier notes that he married, " 'my little Rose,' whom I had known and loved since I was ten years of age." She would have been seven. They were happily married for 47 years and she died to Bernier's "great grief" when he was "thousands of miles away above the Arctic Circle." Bernier 126-127.

⁷ Magdeleine Bourget. Personal interview, Aug. 13, 2003.

⁸ Bernier 264-65.

⁹ The official cause of death as announced by the inquiry set-up by the Secretary of the British Navy, was apoplexy, or a stroke, but Hall, himself, was suspicious that he was being murdered. In August 1968, Chauncey Loomis, Hall's biographer, and Dr. Franklin Paddock exhumed the frozen and well-preserved body at Thank God Harbour on northern Greenland. The autopsy and analysis of Hall's fingernail clippings showed that he had been poisoned with arsenic.

Arctic travel.¹⁰ Reading these books written by British and American explorers was an accomplishment for a francophone with a Grade 6 education.

Bernier lived at a time when the Arctic was exciting and exotic. He was a toddler when British and American expeditions, backed by geographical societies, were searching the Arctic wasteland for Franklin and his crew. Conquering the Arctic had a romantic appeal and published accounts of explorers' adventures guaranteed their fame. These highly-publicized stories fed the public's imagination.

The Arctic had a rugged mystique about it, and it was one of the last unexplored regions of the earth, says Chris Trott, professor in the native studies department at University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg.

"You're getting an incredible Boy's Own magazine adventures of the North, and you're getting this incredible emergence of an ideological notion of Canada being a northern country and I think that guys like Bernier are responding to that," Trott says.¹¹

One of the books Bernier read was the posthumously published diary of Capt. George Washington DeLong, an American Arctic explorer commissioned to lead a scientific and geographical expedition to the Pole through Bering Strait.

His ship, the *Jeannette*, left San Francisco in July 1879, and by September was beset, or enclosed on all sides by ice off Wrangel Island, north of the Siberian coast. The ship drifted for 21 months before being crushed by the ice in June 1881. The 33 crewmembers headed for Siberia dragging lifeboats and stores over the treacherous ice

Pierre Berton, The Arctic Grail: The Quest for the Northwest Passage and the North Pole, 1818-1909. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988: 391.

¹⁰ Bernier 265.

¹¹ Chris Trott, Personal interview, Feb. 14, 2003.

pack. Only 11 of the 33 survived. DeLong was not one of them.¹²

When pieces of the wreck of the *Jeannette* were discovered on the eastern coast of Greenland three years later, scientists began musing about this apparent polar drift. The Norwegian zoologist Fridtjof Nansen theorized that if he purposely allowed his ship to become frozen in the pack ice of the western Arctic Ocean, the wind and polar currents would carry it to the warmer Atlantic.

He was correct.

Nansen and his ship, the *Fram*, sailed northeast in September 1893. He allowed his ship to be frozen in the ice off the coast of Siberia. It moved west with the drifting ice and emerged, in August 1896, in open water north of Spitsbergen, the island northeast of Greenland.

Nansen and another crewmember had left the ship prior to its return in order to make an over-ice sledging attempt on the Pole. He and his companion, Hjalmar Johansen, failed to reach the Pole after 15 weeks and were picked up at Franz Joseph Land by a British explorer. Nonetheless, Nansen's mission was a scientific success. His 1897 description of the polar sea was accurate as “a continually breaking and shifting expanse of drift ice.”¹³

Bernier decided he would use this polar drift theory and attempt his own North Pole expedition.

In February 1895, Bernier was offered the position of governor of the Quebec gaol, on the Plains of Abraham in Quebec City. He took the job, finding it an opportunity

¹² “*Jeannette*,” *Dictionary of American Fighting Ships*. Vol. III, 1968, Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Washington, D.C. Online posting. June 5, 2003. <www.ibiblio.org/pub/adademic/hisoty/marshall/USN/misc/jeannette.txt>

to pursue his Arctic studies and develop his plan to reach the North Pole.

He spent hours in his office within the thick, grey stone walls, studying every Arctic-related book he could get his hands on. He focused particularly on information about currents and the drift of ice across the Pole.¹⁴

One day in 1898, he called a prisoner, doing time for forgery, to his office. Bernier had the man draw up a map of the Arctic, incorporating what was then known of the islands and waters. The completed map was an enormous 3.6-square metres in size. It showed the Arctic from the top of the world, with all the circumpolar countries ringed around the centre.

One of the things Robitaille found in Bernier's vacant house was this 1898 map. He says it was worn around the edges and the paper was very thin. Years later, when he gave a three-hour lecture on Bernier as part of his geography course at l'Université de Laval, he used the map. It was so big, he says, it practically covered the wall.

When Bernier was confident that he had a solid plan, he accepted an invitation to lecture before the Quebec Geographical Society. That Saturday night in December 1898, he presented his plan for a polar expedition and used his new map to demonstrate his proposed route. He gained the unanimous support of the society and its president, Maj. Nazaire LeVasseur, became his champion.

LeVasseur sent letters to people well-connected in Quebec society and politics, petitioning money for Bernier's project. On behalf of Bernier, LeVasseur also wrote a letter of introduction to Prime Minister Laurier.

In his first letter to Laurier, Bernier laid out his North Pole expedition plan in a

¹³ Ned Rozell, "Farthest Voyage Changed Opinion of the Northern Ocean," Alaska Science Forum. Nov. 22, 2000, Article #1517, U of Alaska. June 5, 2003. <www.gialaska.edu/scienceforum/ASF15/1517.htm>

20-paged report neatly handwritten, oddly enough, in English. No doubt Bernier had dictated the letter, perhaps to the secretary of the geographical society, as his own handwriting was large, uneven and childlike and would not have impressed the prime minister.

In his report, he proposed to take an ice-strengthened ship around Cape Horn, up the west coast of the Americas and enter the Bering Strait above Alaska. There he would follow Nansen's example and allow the ship to become frozen in the pack ice. However, Bernier felt that he had more accurately calculated the longitudinal location to make an over-ice attack on the Pole and would thus succeed where Nansen hadn't.

He wrote:

If most of the expeditions undertaken up to the present have miscarried it is because they were directed in seas where the current ran towards the south...At a cost of terrible hardship, they march towards the North and during this time, the slow current drives towards the south the ice floe on which they thought they were advancing.¹⁵

Bernier received a polite thank you note from Laurier, suggesting he seek other financial support before approaching the government.¹⁶ This was encouragement enough and Bernier embarked on an extensive lecture tour across the country and abroad.

In early 1901, Bernier addressed both the prestigious Royal Colonial Institute and the Royal Geographical Society in London, England.

"He was very well received when he went to Britain," says Robitaille. "I would have liked to be there when Bernier gave a speech before the Royal Geographical Society; ...at that time there were still survivors of the search for Franklin – admirals and

¹⁴ Bernier 289.

¹⁵ J.E. Bernier. Letter to W. Laurier, March 5, 1898, Laurier Papers, C-754, 21269-90, N.A.C.

very important people. And Bernier spoke before those people.

“He was not ashamed of anything. He feared nothing. He had a great importance of himself.”¹⁷

One can imagine Bernier confidently handing out his calling card with the beaver chewing away at the North Pole, symbolizing the colonial Canadian’s pending success.

As someone who had never been to the Arctic, Bernier must have been a captivating orator and a persuasive visionary to convince these old veteran explorers of the soundness of his plan. Both royal societies verbally endorsed his project.

Back in Canada, Bernier’s public campaign for a polar expedition was gaining support. By February 1901, the Ontario Land Surveyors Association forwarded a letter to Laurier, stating that the association supported Bernier’s expedition and “would respectfully urge upon the Dominion government the desirability of bearing all expense in connection with fitting out the expedition and equipping the same.”¹⁸

Bernier realized the value of publicity and eagerly gave interviews. In February 1901, a *Toronto Daily Star* reporter wrote, “Undaunted by the fact that the way to the Pole is, since 1596, strewn with crushed hopes, bones and vessels, Captain Bernier said: ‘I have been around the earth, I will go to the top of it.’”¹⁹

If nothing else, Bernier can be credited with indefatigable tenacity.

In March, he presented his project to Governor General Lord Minto and was informed by Minto’s secretary: “His Excellency has much pleasure in giving you

¹⁶ W. Laurier. Letter to J.E. Bernier, April 1898, Laurier papers, C-754, N.A.C.

¹⁷ Benoit Robitaille, Personal interview, May 27, 2003.

¹⁸ V. Sankey, secretary of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors. Letter to Laurier, Feb. 28, 1901, MG30, B21, file Correspondence 1898-1900, Maj. N. Levasseur Fonds, N.A.C.

¹⁹ *Toronto Daily Star*, Feb. 26, 1901.

permission to make public the fact that he has become the patron of your exploration.”²⁰

This was the best sort of endorsement a Canadian could have.

The subject was even raised in the House of Commons when Frederick D. Monk, Conservative MP for Jacques Cartier, Que., asked the prime minister if the government had plans to “equip a vessel for a polar expedition under the conduct of Captain Bernier.”²¹

Laurier answered, “It is a matter which the government has had under consideration, but I am not prepared to say that we have reached any conclusion yet.”²²

The government did not reach a conclusion at all in 1901. A year later, Bernier was still appealing to those with power and money to press the government to support his venture.

He had calculated that the cost of the five-year expedition would be about \$150,000. Bernier succeeded in raising only \$20,000 from private sources. This included \$5,000 from Lord Minto, \$1,000 from Manitoba’s Premier Rodmond Roblin, and similar donations from the mayors of Victoria, Halifax and Ottawa. The only way he could hope to finance an expedition of this magnitude was to receive a grant from the Dominion government.

On April 12, 1902, Bernier forwarded a petition to the prime minister, which included six pages of signatures, tallying 113 members of Parliament and senators in favour of his polar project.²³

²⁰ Secretary to the Governor General. Letter to Bernier, March 20, 1901, MG30, B21, File Correspondence 1898-1900, Maj. N. Levasseur Fonds, N.A.C.

²¹ F.D. Monk, House of Commons Debates, March 29, 1901, Hansard, Col. 1798.

²² Laurier, House of Commons Debates, March 29, 1901, Col. 1798.

²³ J.E. Bernier. Letter and petition to W. Laurier, April 12, 1902, Laurier papers, Microfiche reel, C-792, 64244-64251, N.A.C.

Still, the government deferred his request.

A cartoon on the front page of the *Toronto Daily Star* on Friday, July 10, 1903, shows an English Bobby-style policeman directing a line of perspiring men, in shirt sleeves and suspenders, on a city sidewalk outside a brick building. The sign on the building the men are entering says, "Wanted, Recruits for Captain Bernier's Expedition to the North Pole."²⁴ (See Fig. 4)

Judging by the cartoon, during the mid-summer heat there was no lack of volunteers for his North Pole expedition. The public was behind Bernier.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre has been researching and writing a biography of Bernier for four years. She says, "Bernier was the most famous Canadian navigator of the time. He was a vedette, a star. He really was a star. Everybody wanted to go with him up north. People wrote from England, from the States, from France, from everywhere, and from Canada. They all wanted to go because it was adventure, and all the young men wanted to live adventure. So for a young man, Bernier represented, not just the hero, but the ultimate adventurer, and everybody wanted to go with him."²⁵

The idea of the North Pole being reached by a Canadian held great appeal. No other Canadian stepped forward with a proposal of such glorious stature. Still no benefactor came forward, either, with enough money to fund it.

Laurier and his cabinet were still reticent. The northern extreme of Canada was an unknown frontier, but so also was a great deal of the western region of the country. Laurier was concerned, more practically, with an east-west expansion rather than a northern one.

²⁴ Cartoon, *Toronto Daily Star*, Friday, July 10, 1903, front page.

²⁵ Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, Personal Interview, Aug. 13, 2003.

Canada was not yet 40 years old and its population was just over seven million people. The boundaries of the country were still amorphous. Alberta and Saskatchewan were not yet considered provinces and the gold rush in the Yukon was of greater concern to Laurier and Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton than reaching the Earth's nebulous northern axis.

However, the idea of a Canadian reaching the Pole outweighed more practical considerations for most MPs. On May 1, 1902, a long, protracted discussion about the search for the North Pole took place in the House of Commons.

Liberal MP John Charlton (North Norfolk, Ont.), whose name appears on Bernier's petition, delivered a long well-constructed speech in support of Bernier's North Pole Expedition to the House:

Aside entirely from the reputation that would accrue to this country from the settlement of a geographical problem which has engaged the attention of maritime nations for generations, we would establish our right to all the territories and islands and seas that might lie between our present northern boundary and the North Pole itself – all that vast region between the 141st parallel of longitude on the west, and Baffin's Bay and Grantland [northern Ellesmere Island] on the east.²⁶

Only two MPs objected to the project, saying the cost was too exorbitant and that Canada already had more territory than it knew what to do with.²⁷

Laurier also spoke: "If a son of Canada were to plant the flag of his country at the North Pole, if he were to achieve what so many brave men have struggled in vain to

²⁶ John Charlton, House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1902, Hansard, Col. 3952.

This pie shaped section of territory follows the longitudes from the mainland of Canada between the Yukon's 141st parallel, in the west, and Ellesmere Island at the 60th parallel, in the east, up to the North Pole. It was known as the sector principle and used to describe the territory within Canada's jurisdiction. Bernier likely put forth this theory at his presentation to the MPs on March 22, 1901.

²⁷ House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1902, Col. 3966.

achieve, there is not a Canadian heart that would not beat with pride at the thought of it.”²⁸

However, Laurier added that he had expected Bernier to raise more in private funds than \$20,000. He concluded in a typically bureaucratic noncommittal style that the government would give the project “due consideration.”²⁹

A contribution of \$100,000 seemed exorbitant to the government at a time when the total budget for immigration was \$400,000.

Bernier must have felt some confidence that his plan would be commissioned, though. In November 1902, he had C. Baillarge, a civil engineering firm in Quebec, draft plans for a ship for his North Pole expedition. It was called the “*Indestructible*.”³⁰

The ship was never built, but in early September 1903, Bernier began looking for an existing ice-worthy ship. He contacted B. Nordahl, a ship’s broker, in Christiana, Norway. Bernier was interested in either the *Fram* or the *Gauss*, which was “expected back in November.” Nordahl did some inquiring for Bernier and found that the *Gauss*,³¹ which was built for a German scientific expedition to the Antarctic, was for sale.

On Sept. 30, 1903, his ally Charlton made a second long, impassioned plea in the House of Commons for support for Bernier’s Canadian North Pole Expedition. Charlton compared Bernier’s persistence to Christopher Columbus going from court to court to

²⁸ Wilfrid Laurier, House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1902, Col. 3977.

²⁹ Laurier, Col. 3977.

³⁰ Cross section plans for *Indestructible*, MG30, B21, 1898-1909, File J.E. Bernier, Levasseur Fonds.

³¹ The *Gauss* was built in Kiel, Germany, as a research ship to gather magnetic and meteorological information. It was part of an international team set-up to study the Antarctic. Prof. Erich von Drygalski was in charge of the German team. Robert F. Scott was in charge of a British team with two ships, the *Discovery* and the *Scotia*, and the Swedish contingent was led by Otto Martinskjöld’s, *Antarctic*. Unfortunately, collaboration between the three parties failed and Drygalski ended up being the only one who published his research findings in an impressive 20 volumes and two atlases, *Deutsche Sudpolar Expedition, 1901-03*. Drygalski was unable to gain the appreciation of the Kaiser, since the ship had advanced only as far as 66° 2’ in the south, while the English had reached 82° 17’.

seek a patron for his voyage of discovery.³²

He argued that the ship could later be used for other government purposes: “She would be the kind of vessel that would be exactly wanted in patrolling the Hudson Bay, making voyages among the islands north of Hudson Bay, and taking possession of newly discovered lands in the region.”³³

Charlton failed to convince the government to finance an expedition to the Pole, but it is possible that his suggestion of using the vessel for other Arctic work was taken up.

In a memorandum dated Jan. 2, 1904, NWMP comptroller Fred White wrote to the minister of the Interior with a suggestion to continue the service of the *Neptune* and the mounted police in Hudson Bay. Six months later, White noted:

In that memo the undersigned suggested that supervision be extended to the whole of the extreme northerly portion of the Dominion, and that the territory, waters and islands be divided into two districts –to be known as the Eastern and Western. That for the Eastern District a suitable vessel should be purchased or chartered, to be employed continuously on patrol service with police detachments on shore.³⁴

By March, Parliament had voted to spend \$200,000 on Arctic exploration.³⁵

Foreigners in the Arctic

The race for the Pole by foreign expeditions was not as serious a matter to the government as the fact that these exploration parties were operating in the North with

Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research. March 16, 2000. <<http://www.awi-bremerhaven.de/AWI/drygalski-e.html>>

³² John Charlton, House of Commons Debates, Sept. 30, 1903, Col. 12806.

³³ Charlton, Col. 12807-12808.

³⁴ Fred White. Memorandum July 6, 1904, RG 42, Vol. 105, File 25 447, N.A.C.

³⁵ Morris Zaslow, Opening of the Canadian North, 1870-1914. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971: 261.

potential of claiming land. Their very presence in the High Arctic, however, revealed the need for government jurisdiction there.

Two main exploration parties were in the High Eastern Arctic without Canadian intervention. The American Robert Peary had mounted a private North Pole expedition in 1898. It was based out of Etah, northwest Greenland, but he made an attempt on the Pole from Fort Conger on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island.

Otto Sverdrup, who had been captain of Nansen's *Fram* when he made his polar drift across the top of the world, was also conducting scientific work in the Eastern Arctic, between 1898 and 1902.

The 16-man Sverdrup expedition had originally intended to explore Greenland, but a jealous Robert Peary had "warned them off."³⁶ Sverdrup moved to the east coast of Ellesmere Island and anchored the *Fram* as a base. From there they made expeditions over ice and land. They discovered Axel Hieberg, Amund and Ellef Ringnes islands and mapped 2,816 kilometres of coast in an impressive area of 160,900 square kilometres.³⁷

Yet no official acknowledgement of these expeditions was made by the Dominion of Canada. A lack of official presence in the region meant that the extent of whaling and exploration activities was unknown down south. Even if the Dominion government had been aware of these activities, though, the fledgling country did not have the resources, financial or human, to address them.

Canada's relations with its southern neighbour were also getting increasingly

³⁶ Zaslow 260.

³⁷ Unlike Peary, Sverdrup was more concerned with making contributions of geographical and scientific knowledge than self-glorification. He published two volumes about his research and hoped his expedition would establish a national claim for Norway to the area. Fortunately for Canada, his sovereign King Oscar II and the Swedish government were uninterested. Sverdrup later renewed his claim with the government of Norway when it separated from Sweden in 1905, but Norway was not interested either.

tense as things were unwinding with the Alaska-Yukon boundary.

The United States Secretary of State, William Seward, had signed the papers to purchase Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million (about two cents an acre) on March 30, 1867, the day after Queen Victoria signed the British North America Act, which effectively created the Dominion of Canada. The United States was not going to let Britain get a stronghold, or monopoly, in the northern regions of the continent.

As historian John Bovey notes in his thesis, “Before confederation could even become a reality or the new Dominion take the first steps to acquire the interior of the continent promised to her, the U.S. was outflanking her inheritance.”³⁸

Originally, the boundary between Alaska and Canada had been drafted in a treaty between Russia and Britain in 1825 when Britain sold the territory to Russia. The eastern boundary of Alaska had been fixed at the 141st meridian, but the southern boundary, known as the Panhandle, was difficult to establish because it ran through mountainous and uncharted terrain, which included the coast and its many islands and inlets. The land was not accurately surveyed, leaving the 1825 treaty open to interpretation.

The boundary between the two countries went unresolved for decades. A number of efforts were made over the intervening years to survey the area, but the two countries could not agree on splitting the costs and the land was never officially surveyed.³⁹

It didn’t become a contentious issue, however, until gold was discovered in the Yukon in 1896, and the influx of 30,000 people into the area created a panic to settle the boundary. The major access to the Yukon gold fields was through the Panhandle’s

³⁸ John Bovey, “The Attitudes and Policies of the Federal Government Towards Canada’s Northern Territories,” MA History Thesis, University British Columbia, 1967: 15.

³⁹ Ryan Madden, “Alaska Boundary Dispute,” Encyclopedia USA: Past and Present. Academic Press, Gulf Breeze, 1995. Western Washington U. June 19, 2002. < <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~jay/pages/dan.html>.>

coastal region and the United States gained a monopoly on all access routes.

The American government had assumed control in this disputed southern region, taking “what Russian maps showed as Alaska to be theirs. Russian maps showed more land belonging to them than stipulated by the treaty of 1825, which was the last document to have set the boundary.”⁴⁰

If the United States had only taken the land specified in the treaty, there probably would have been no dispute.⁴¹

On Jan. 24, 1903, the United States and Canada agreed to boundary dispute arbitration. Britain was involved in resolving the dispute on Canada's behalf.

In April 1903, Sverdrup, back from his expedition, was honoured at the Royal Geographical Society in London and received the R.G.S. Gold Medal for his work in the Arctic. Sir Clements Markham, Admiral Sir R. Vesey Hamilton, and Sir Leopold M’Clintock, veteran Arctic explorers who had participated in the Franklin search, were present at the event.

M’Clintock rose to make a speech:

We looked upon that part of the Arctic as so peculiarly our own that we spoke of it as if the Queen’s writ was free to run through it to the North Pole. But we can no longer make that boast: Captain Sverdrup has been there and he has discovered other lands farther north, so that we cannot look for any immediate increase to the British Empire in that direction.⁴²

⁴⁰ Madden, Online posting. June 19, 2002.

Robert Craig Brown, “The Alaska Boundary,” Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1964: 281-322.

⁴¹ Madden, Online posting. June 19, 2002.

William R. Morrison, “Eagle over the Arctic: Americans in the Canadian North,” Interpreting Canada’s North, Selected Readings. Eds. Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison, Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989.

⁴² Excerpt of Sir Leopold M’Clintock’s speech, taken from T.C. Fairley, Sverdrup’s Arctic Adventure. London: Longman’s Green and Co., 1959: 263.

Sir Leopold's remarks made the Dominion government nervous. It was an embarrassment to Canada that a Norwegian had mapped a large section of High Arctic land that Canada was supposed to have been in control of since 1880, yet no Canadian had even set foot on any of the territory that Sverdrup had surveyed.

At the same time in the Western Arctic, American whalers were also hunting in Canadian waters unhampered by customs regulations and without liquor restrictions. The value of the whales they killed was considerable, yet they were not expected to pay tariffs or have whaling licences. It was a free enterprise.⁴³

These men had no interest in claims to Canadian territory, only in making money. On Herschel Island, 145 kilometres north of the Yukon, they built warehouses and dwellings, and by 1892-93 there were 160 whalers on the island.

The government was helpless should the United States or any other foreign country decide to exert its power in the Arctic.⁴⁴ Complaints also reached Ottawa from missionaries in the area that American whalers in the Western Arctic were corrupting the Inuit, teaching them how to make alcohol, using the women for immoral purposes and destroying their social structure.

This became the impetus for Canada to flex its sovereign muscles to preserve its nationhood. Herschel Island, near the Alaskan coast was, therefore, targeted as an ideal spot to establish a police outpost.⁴⁵

In May 1903, Minister of the Interior Sifton "rose from his seat in the House of

⁴³ The first whale was reputedly taken in the western Arctic in 1891. That same year, the ship, the *Hume*, returned to San Francisco with \$400,000 of cargo. Within five years, 13,450 whales had been caught with a value of \$13,450,000 and another \$1,400,00 was added with furs traded with the natives. Nancy Fogelson, Arctic Exploration & International Relations, 1900-1932. Fairbanks: U Alaska P, 1992: 73.

⁴⁴ William R. Morrison, Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925. Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1985: 71.

Commons and walked across the floor, and showed the opposition leader Robert Borden, a confidential memorandum.”⁴⁶ Sifton explained the Canadian government proposed to send a Northwest Mounted Police detachment to set up a post on Herschel Island and another expedition to set up a second NWMP post in Hudson Bay to establish Canadian government authority in the North.

Sifton told Borden that for reasons of state, there would be no discussion of the cost of these expeditions in the House for fear of “drawing still more attention to the dangerous weakness of Canada’s position in the Arctic.” Borden agreed and the item went through without debate.⁴⁷

At noon on Aug. 23, 1903, the old sealer *Neptune* quietly slipped its moorings at a dock in Halifax and headed north on a government expedition to Hudson Bay. The police detachment was under the authority of Maj. John Douglas Moodie, but Albert Peter Low, geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, was in charge of the expedition because of his extensive experience in the northeastern part of Canada.⁴⁸ Though the expedition was specifically to assert Canada’s authority in the Arctic, it was also a scientific expedition with input from the Survey, the scientific arm of the Canadian government.

Alaska Boundary Resolution

Meanwhile, an arbitration tribunal was being set up to resolve the Alaskan Boundary dispute. Each side was to appoint three impartial judges. President Theodore

⁴⁵ Morrison 71.

⁴⁶ Fairley 275.

⁴⁷ Fairley 276.

⁴⁸ In 1894-95, Low studied, surveyed and explored on foot and by canoe, a total of 20,000 kilometres of the Labrador Peninsula. “For more than 60 years, officers of the Survey had been as much explorers as geologists, preceding settlers, mining companies, and other developments into many areas of the country.”

Roosevelt appointed Elihu Root, Secretary of War; Henry Cabot Lodge, Senator from Massachusetts; and George Turner ex-senator from Washington. The British appointed Sir Louis Jette, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Quebec; Allen B. Aylesworth, King's Counsel from Toronto; and Baron Alverstone, Lord Chief Justice of England. Canada agreed to this, confident that "they would receive British support due to the help they gave the British in the Boer War."⁴⁹

Roosevelt applied his motto "speak softly and carry a big stick" with regard to the settling of the dispute. He sent word that if the panel didn't "find correctly," he would send marines in to secure U.S. rights. Britain was more concerned with its relations with the United States than with Canada. It needed American steel and sympathies for an arms race with Germany.⁵⁰

On Oct. 20, 1903, after three weeks of discussion, the dispute was resolved in favour of the United States with Baron Alverstone casting the deciding vote. Canadian commissioners on the tribunal, Aylesworth and Jette, refused to sign the majority decision and published their own dissenting opinion.⁵¹

Despite their objections, the tribunal's resolution to the dispute was passed and as a result, Canada wound up with virtually no coastline or coastal port that would give direct access to northern British Columbia and, from there, the Yukon. This was a humiliation for Canada. The Dominion government felt that had it asserted its sovereignty in the Alaskan Panhandle, it would have been possible to keep the region.⁵²

Christy Vodden, No Stone Unturned: The First 150 Years of the Geological Survey of Canada. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1992: 19.

⁴⁹ Madden, Online posting. June 19, 2002.

⁵⁰ Fogelson, Arctic Exploration & International Relations, 1900-1932. Fairbanks: U of Alaska P, 1992: 55.

⁵¹ Bovey 117.

⁵² William R. Morrison, "Eagle Over the Arctic," Coates, K.S. and W. R. Morrison, Interpreting Canada's North. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989:175.

In his introduction to *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*, historian Richard Diubaldo writes, “It was no longer considered politic, nor in the national interest, to have Canadian matters settled by policies emanating from London, which seemed to ignore Canadian sensibilities in favour of global considerations.”⁵³

On Nov. 19, 1903, Toronto’s *Globe* ran a piece which said, “One result of the Alaskan award will be the financing of Capt. Bernier’s proposed arctic expedition by the Canadian government on condition that the British flag be hoisted on the most northerly islands of the Arctic Archipelago.”⁵⁴

For days after the Alaska Boundary Dispute resolution, it was the lead front-page story in newspapers across the country. The papers hyped up the fear that the Americans would not stop at claiming land along the west coast of what should have been the Yukon and move into Canada’s Arctic.⁵⁵

The public was very aware of the necessity of establishing sovereignty in the Arctic. So were key members of Parliament.

Sifton was a nationalistic force in Laurier’s government and took an anti-American stand. After the outcome of the Alaskan Boundary Dispute, he commissioned Chief Astronomer Dr. William F. King to compile a report on Canada’s title to the Arctic islands.⁵⁶

Though King’s report was published in 1905, a confidential preliminary version was issued to the Department of the Interior on Jan. 23, 1904, for senior ministers such as

⁵³ Richard Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1978: 5.

⁵⁴ “What other flag?” *The Globe*, Nov. 19, 1903.

⁵⁵ “Greenland and Newfoundland: How would the Dominion look with them added? Movement at Ottawa to check the aggressive policy of the United States.” *The Globe*, Dec. 21, 1903: 2.

⁵⁶ D.J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton: Vol. Two, A Lonely Eminence, 1901-1929*. Vancouver, U British Columbia P, 1985: 124-126.

Sifton and Laurier to read. Rather than dispelling the government's concern, it revealed fractures in Canada's supposedly solid claim in the Arctic.

In his report, King analyzed the documents and maps held in the Dominion archives regarding the transfer of land to Canada by Britain in 1880. He showed that Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait were Canadian waters, but concluded: "That Canada's title to, some at least of the northern islands, is imperfect. It may possibly be best perfected by exercise of jurisdiction where any settlements exist."⁵⁷

King's report, the resolution of the Alaskan boundary, Sverdrup's four-year presence in the Ellesmere area, as well as the continual presence of whalers and American explorers in the North forced the government to realize that something had to be done before a foreign country decided to lay claim to the Arctic Islands.

The government needed an official presence patrolling the North. Bernier, who had petitioned for an Arctic expedition, was an ideal candidate.

A Ship for Bernier

Bernier wrote in his autobiography, "Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir Robert Borden and the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen co-operated in securing a vote of \$200,000 to outfit a Canadian Polar Expedition under my command."⁵⁸

The government gave Bernier the go-ahead in March 1904 to purchase a vessel. Bernier recommended the German ship the *Gauss*. It was fortuitous that it was for sale at the time that Bernier was shopping for an ice-strengthened boat.

Dr. Robert Headland, archivist at the Scott Polar Research Institute, says the

⁵⁷ W.F. King. Confidential document, Report Upon the Title of Canada to the Islands North of the Mainland of Canada. Ottawa, Jan. 23, 1904, RG 15, Vol. 2, N.A.C.

Gauss was for sale because the 1901 scientific Antarctic expedition had not been a great success.

“They couldn’t get to the coast. They had a bad ice year, they were stuck about 80 kilometres from the coast,” Headland says. “But when she came back, it was not a very successful expedition. There was not a lot of public interest and Germany just didn’t follow it up, so there was a good polar ship for sale.”⁵⁹

When Bernier had inquired about the *Gauss* in September 1903, Nordahl had informed him it could be bought for £12,000. The Canadian government paid the German government directly for the ship, but strangely ended up paying more: a sum of \$75,000 or £15,000.⁶⁰

The *Globe* reported on March 5, 1904:

The *Gauss* will not go immediately to the arctic region. As early as possible, say about the end of May or June, she will take relief stores and coal for the government steamer *Neptune*, at present wintering in Hudson’s Bay. The two vessels will meet at Lady Job’s Harbour, on the Northwest coast of Labrador, in July next. After transferring her cargo to the *Neptune*, the *Gauss* will be engaged in survey work on the coast of Labrador until about October. She will then start on her long, journey to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. Proceeding due south, the *Gauss* will weather Cape Horn, and then steam north until she reaches Bering Sea. The drift of the eastward current and her own steam will carry her swiftly through the straits into Beaufort Sea. On arriving off the mouth of the Mackenzie, Captain Bernier will report to the commander of the mounted police post. Flying the British flag, she will cruise in northern waters and assert British sovereignty. Illegal trading on the part of American sealers⁶¹ will be suppressed, and customs duties collected for goods brought into Canadian Territory.⁶²

⁵⁸ Bernier, *Master Mariner* 305.

⁵⁹ Robert Headland, Telephone interview, April 25, 2003.

⁶⁰ Nordahl’s commission for finding the ship was one per cent. He was never paid for his assistance, and in 1909 he sent letters to the Dominion Government, enclosing the telegrams exchanged between himself and Bernier. Why it took him five years to try and collect is unknown. Bernier was in the Arctic when this correspondence came, but the issue was resolved when he returned. RG 42, B-1, Vol. 52, File, 14981, Marine Branch, N.A.C.

⁶¹ This is the first reference that I came across to sealing in the Arctic. All other references to American hunting or fishing activity in the North has been with regard to whaling.

⁶² “Vessel for Bernier,” *The Globe*, Saturday, March 5, 1903: 23.

The newspaper had spelled out the government's plan, Bernier would head into the Arctic to establish sovereignty. An article in the *Globe* three days later hints that Bernier knew he would be called upon to perform sovereignty duties:

Captain hopes that now he has been placed in charge of the German polar exploration steamer *Gauss* he may be able to make a dash for the north pole after bringing supplies to the Canadian expeditions in Hudson's Bay and the mouth of the Mackenzie River. He therefore asked all who have promised subscription to him to have the amounts in readiness.⁶³

The North Pole is not mentioned in the March 5 article. Nor was it included in Bernier's instructions to go to Germany to pick up the *Gauss* and sail it back to Canada. In these sailing orders of April 9, 1904, F. Gourdeau, the deputy minister of Marine and Fisheries, wrote:

You will be careful not to take any unnecessary supplies or coal on board in Germany for this trip. I should think that about two months' supply would be sufficient, as it is the intention of the Department that you should thoroughly outfit in Halifax for the Northern Expedition.⁶⁴

As his orders specified that he was to "outfit in Halifax for the Northern Expedition," not polar expedition, Bernier must have suspected, before he left to retrieve the ship from the Bremerhaven docks in April 1904, that he probably would not be making his polar expedition that summer.

Saint-Pierre, Bernier's biographer, says she believes the government was stringing Bernier along, letting him think that he would be going to the Pole "because he would've bought his own ship" if he had known that he was not going. However, Bernier

⁶³ *The Globe*, Wednesday, March 8, 1904.

was in no position to purchase his own ship. He had succeeded in raising only \$20,000 in private funds over five years. Without the government's help, Bernier could not carry out a polar expedition and he was too nationalistic to take his project to American sponsors.

He told a Toronto newspaper in December 1903 that he had just declined the offer to command an expedition backed by "Chicago men." The article said, "The Captain, however, has declined the offer as he is determined to make the dash for the pole at the head of a Canadian expedition."⁶⁵

Bernier sailed the *Gauss* up the St. Lawrence to the dry dock at Lévis in May. He personally oversaw it outfitted for the Arctic. The *Gauss*'s hull was built of oak and pitch pine with a covering of a dense hard wood, called greenheart. Bernier had copper sheathing added to the bow and stern for extra protection against ice before it was repainted a battleship grey with white above the waterline.⁶⁶ The ship was launched and re-christened the *Arctic*.

Bernier was still planning for his polar expedition and had the ship supplied for a three-year voyage. In April, an article in the [Ottawa] *Citizen* mentioned, "Capt. Bernier's hopes are that when he has victualled his ship at Herschell island he will be able to steer his course due north, keeping to the 30th meridian of west longitude and so reach the pole."⁶⁷

But these were clearly Bernier's "hopes." Nothing in his orders from the government indicated that the ship would be permitted to make a polar cruise after

⁶⁴ F. Gourdeau, Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries. Shipping order to J.E. Bernier, April 9, 1904, RG 42, Vol. 105, File Arctic crew 1904, Marine Branch, N.A.C. Courtesy M. Saint-Pierre.

⁶⁵ "Captain declined," *The Globe*, Dec. 21, 1903: 2.

⁶⁶ Description compiled from Wiegand's diary, June 26, 1912, Bernier's autobiography and Appleton's description.

A water line is painted around the ship to denote its calculated optimum level of water when loaded. Garth Wilson. Personal Interview, July 16, 2003.

visiting Hudson Bay. In fact, the expedition was known as the “Hudson Bay and Mackenzie River Expedition” in government correspondence and the newspapers at the time.⁶⁸

Benoit Robitaille, who collected the documents from Bernier’s house, says he believes that Laurier had no intention of sending Bernier on a North Pole expedition.

“He [Laurier] was a kind of visionary person. What was practical was to extend Canadian jurisdiction over the northern islands and the project of discovering the North Pole, to Laurier, was not important, I think,” Robitaille says.

“There was also the presence of the Norwegians in the same year – Sverdrup, they wintered for three years. So this must have weighed on Laurier and his cabinet. They must have thought that there was a ‘menace’ from both sides, Americans and Norwegians,” he says.

“They needed a good ship.”⁶⁹

The government was cautious with its money. A glory mission to the North Pole was something better left to private enterprise than public funds.

“Although, Laurier never intended to send the captain to the North Pole, he could not just drop the whole thing without suffering political backlash from the Opposition,” says Saint-Pierre.⁷⁰

Whether Laurier deliberately waffled about sending the expedition is uncertain. He never publicly said the government did not support a polar expedition, but he never officially agreed to send one, either. The Laurier government had maintained a

⁶⁷ *The Citizen*, April 11, 1904.

⁶⁸ Letters of application to NWMP Comptroller Fred White for employment aboard the *Arctic* on the 1904 “Hudson Bay and Mackenzie River Expedition.” RG 42, Vol. 105, File Arctic crew 1904, Marine Branch.

⁶⁹ Robitaille interview.

noncommittal stance on the project for five years.

However, Laurier's intentions were clear by the end of July 1904, when he addressed the House of Commons:

The *Neptune* is to come back and be relieved and be replaced by another boat, the *Arctic*, which will be under the command of Captain Bernier and which is to sail on August 15. This boat will carry an officer and ten men from the mounted police... Their instructions are to patrol the waters, to find suitable locations for posts, to establish those posts and to assert the jurisdiction of Canada. The government has been induced to come to this action because it is evident that the time has come when our interests in these northern waters should no longer be neglected.⁷¹

It had been officially announced. The *Arctic* would replace the *Neptune* and patrol the waters. Laurier's speech hinted that this would be an annual effort to extend government jurisdiction in the North.

By July 29, Bernier, still hoping to be directed to take the ship to the Beaufort Sea, had loaded it with three years of supplies. Most of this had to be put ashore and room on deck found for the building materials for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police⁷² posts.

His disappointment must have been acute when he stood on the deck of his ship and surveyed the cargo, so recently loaded, being removed and piled on the King's Wharf where the ship was anchored.

By this time, Bernier must have known why his expedition had been commissioned to bring mounted police north, yet, in his autobiography, he offers no explanation: "Without warning I was suddenly ordered to put ashore three years supplies

⁷⁰ Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, Faxed correspondence, Aug. 21, 2003.

⁷¹ Wilfrid Laurier, House of Commons Debates, July 29, 1904, Col. 8229.

and proceed to Hudson Bay.”⁷³

Still, Saint-Pierre says, Bernier did not give up his dream of going to the Pole. He just deferred it for another year. “Bernier had promised the world that he was going to the Arctic, so he had to go. In his practical mind, the trip to Hudson Bay would be a run-through for the real thing, next season,” she says.⁷⁴

The ship was not quite ready to leave by mid-August; the departure date was postponed and Bernier waited patiently for his sailing orders.

Dashed Hopes

On the 1903 *Neptune* expedition, Maj. J.D. Moodie, who was in charge of the mounted police, had chosen Fullerton Harbour, on the northwest coast of Hudson Bay, as the best place to establish the police post.⁷⁵ The post was built and the ship spent the winter of 1903-04 at Fullerton. When it departed the following July, five young RNWMP officers were left behind to spend the next year there.

At Port Burwell on northern Nunavik, Arctic Quebec, they met the re-supply ship, *Erik*, and Moodie returned to Ottawa aboard it as his work setting up the police post had been accomplished. Low and his team from the Geological Survey of Canada stayed with the *Neptune*.

The Low expedition continued up the east coast of Baffin Island to Cape Herschel, Ellesmere Island, where a document was read taking formal possession in the

⁷² The Northwest Mounted Police were given royal designation in 1904, and became the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. RCMP Web site. < http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/history/history_e.htm/>

⁷³ Bernier 306.

⁷⁴ Saint-Pierre interview.

⁷⁵ A.P. Low, Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic Islands Aboard the D.G.S. Neptune, 1903-1904. Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1906: 25.

name of King Edward VII for the Dominion of Canada and a flag was raised and saluted. The document was placed in a rock cairn to notify future foreign exploration parties. The crew also raised the flag on Beechey and Somerset islands. At Cape Sabine on high Ellesmere Island, they landed and explored the abandoned base camps of the American expedition parties of Greely⁷⁶ and Peary.

Low, the impeccable scientist, commented in his official report:

The pluck and daring of such men are to be admired, but the waste of energy, life and money in a useless and probably unsuccessful attempt to reach the pole can only be deplored, as no additional scientific knowledge is likely to be gained by this achievement.⁷⁷

This sentiment could well have been the feeling shared by the government at the time, which may also have been part of the reason that Bernier wasn't encouraged to pursue his polar project with government money.

They returned home to Halifax on Oct. 12, having surveyed a distance of 3,284 kilometres.⁷⁸

"The northerly extensions of this voyage were unnecessary except in view of the recent Norwegian exploits, and in making them the *Neptune* became the first Canadian government ship to touch any part of the Queen Elizabeth Islands," wrote Fairley in his

⁷⁶ The International Polar Year of 1882-1883 involved three of 15 scientific stations around the world being established in the Canadian North: a German base at Kekerton, Cumberland Sound; a British station at Fort Rae on Great Slave Lake; and an American base at Fort Conger on Ellesmere Island. The American team of 24 men led by Lieut. Adolphus Greely, attempted to explore the interior of Ellesmere and the west coast of Greenland, but tragedy struck when relief expeditions failed to arrive. In 1884, Greely was one of seven men who survived and were rescued. The ordeal was also clouded by rumours of starvation, cannibalism and execution. After this disaster, American government-funded Arctic exploration ceased for a number of years. Fogelson 20-22.

⁷⁷ Low 46.

⁷⁸ Morris Zaslow, Reading the Rocks: The Story of the Geological Survey of Canada, 1842-1972. Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1975: 173-175.

biography of Sverdrup.⁷⁹

Moodie left Port Burwell on the *Erik* on Aug. 2. He would have arrived in Ottawa two weeks later with news of the new police post in Hudson Bay and tales of the whalers he had met. His report to the government may have been the deciding factor to send the *Arctic* to Hudson Bay under his command.

“Now the challenge in Hudson Bay was that was where whalers were wintering over,” says historian Shelagh Grant. “So all of a sudden Moodie’s report from Fullerton said, ‘Oh, maybe we do have a problem here’ and that’s when Bernier thought he was going to the North Pole; it seemed more important to do these cairns and identify and investigate how many whalers were wintering over on Baffin Island and points north.”⁸⁰

On Sept. 12, 1904, Bernier received his sailing orders, a memorandum detailing that the object of the expedition was to patrol and explore Hudson Bay’s islands and waters to administer and enforce the laws of Canada. The orders stated:

After very serious consideration, the government has deemed it advisable that permanent stations should be established at different places on shore in these northern parts of the Dominion and to carry this out in the best and most effective manner, the sole charge of the expedition has been placed under the command of Superintendent Moodie, of the R.N.W.M.P., an officer very experienced in these northern regions both on water and on land.

Your duties are to be as follows: You will be held responsible for the navigation and the safety of the *Arctic* in every way, but in all other respects she is to be subject to the commands of the Officer in Charge of the Expedition.⁸¹

Bernier was relegated to sailing master.

He had been convincing in his crusade for a Canadian North Pole expedition. He

⁷⁹ Fairley 276.

⁸⁰ Shelagh Grant, Personal interview, May 4, 2003.

⁸¹ F. Gourdeau, Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, Sailing orders to Bernier, Sept. 12, 1904, Courtesy M. Saint-Pierre. Dorion-Robitaille 30.

had gained the financial and moral support of numerous Arctic experts, politicians and the public. His lectures with lantern-slides and maps were impressive. However, his experience was that of navigator and ship's captain. He had never commanded an expedition. He did not have the education of other explorers; Peary, Cook, Nansen, and his Canadian contemporary, Low, all had carried out scientific research as well. Even Moodie, as the shipping orders state, was "an officer very experienced in these northern regions both on water and on land." Bernier was not.

Bernier was denied the post of commander which he had worked so hard to secure. He was furious but, mainly, he was humiliated. So he resigned.

A Sept. 13 telegram to Bernier from Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries F. Gourdeau read: "It is rumoured that you are unwilling to accept position of sailing master of 'ARCTIC' for northern expedition under Major Moodie. Wire your acceptance or refusal."⁸²

The *Toronto Daily Star* reported on Thursday, Sept. 15:

Not prepared to play second fiddle to Superintendent Moodie of the North-West Mounted Police and to act as sailing master only, Captain Bernier has refused to go with the 'Arctic' to Hudson's Bay and another navigator will be appointed in his stead. Captain Bernier yesterday refused to confirm the above statements, but they are believed to be correct.⁸³

The government was scrambling to find another navigator to take the *Arctic* north when Bernier changed his mind. He had worked so hard for a northern expedition that he couldn't turn the opportunity down. He swallowed his pride, and on Monday, Sept. 19, Bernier was on the bridge of the *Arctic* when Minister of Marine and Fisheries Raymond

⁸² F. Gourdeau. Telegram to J.E. Bernier, Sept. 13, 1903, RG 42, Vol. 105, File 25447, Marine Branch.

Préfontaine made his departing speech. He was reconciled to his role as ship's master for this first Arctic voyage.

The public was as disappointed as Bernier that his dream was not to be realized. The *Toronto Daily Star* wrote, "The captain may be sure that he has our sympathy. The whole world is disappointed at a good man being kept down. And the North Pole openly exalts now that its duly serious pursuer is removed."⁸⁴

Bernier was finally going to the Arctic, although regrettably, not on a North Pole expedition as he had dreamed. But he would not be kept down, though, and would soon make his own valuable contribution to Arctic history.

⁸³ "Bernier will not sail on Arctic: Refuses to act as sailing master under Major Moodie," *Toronto Daily Star*, Thursday, Sept. 15, 1904: 10.

⁸⁴ "The Troubles of Captain Bernier," *Toronto Daily Star*, Tuesday, Sept. 16, 1904.

Chapter Three

Raising the Flag for Canada

For him, asserting sovereignty in the Arctic was not only to show the flag; it had to go through active and concrete actions and doing business as a Canadian in the Arctic was a way to say, 'Hey, this is Canadian territory and we are here as traders or business people and as business people we also look after things.'

– Stéphane Cloutier
January 12, 2003¹

Maps are spread out over Capt. Patrick Toomey's dining room table. There is more blue and white than green on these maps, more water and ice than land.

Toomey is an ice master. He has navigated through most of the ice-congested seas on these Arctic maps. For almost 30 years, he captained Canadian Coast Guard icebreakers. Now, his expertise in Arctic ice is highly sought after. From his home base in Kingston, he flies south in the winter to work as an ice pilot aboard cruise ships in the Antarctic. In the summer, he navigates vessels in the Arctic.

"When I first started going out of Quebec in 1968, the send-off for the North was unbelievable. All the ships in the port sounded their whistles as you sailed and they dipped their flags, and guns were fired from the fort. Oh, it was absolutely a big deal," he laughs. "I thought what's all the fuss about, we'll be back in three months. When we came home, the same repetition, as if we'd gone to the ends of the world."²

Toomey says it was probably a carry-over from the days when expeditions, like Bernier's, would be gone for over a year with a very real chance that they might not return.

¹ Stéphane Cloutier. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

² Capt. Patrick Toomey. Personal interview, Dec. 18, 2002.

It was a similarly impressive send-off for the 1904 expedition to Hudson Bay. The *Arctic* sailed on Sept. 17 from the King's Wharf at Quebec City. Newspaper reports at the time said thousands of people crowded the wharves to see the ship off. Fabien Vanasse, the ship's historiographer from 1904-11, wrote:

All of the ships at anchor in the roads were in full dress. Canada's colours were atop the tall white mast, which stood watch near the cannons that had been turned upside down to be used as bollards. The *Arctic* carried its flags aloft on its three masts. The brass band from the Citadelle Battery was on the dock serenading our commander. Cheers could be heard from the docks, terraces and ship's bridge as the honorable Minister of Marine arrived.³

It would always be known as Bernier's ship. Though he had purchased it for the government of Canada, Bernier's name had for so long been associated with a polar expedition that, in the eyes of the public, the ship Bernier sailed northward on was his.

The *Arctic* is considered small by today's standards. It was 50.2 metres long, not quite half a city block long. Modern icebreakers are five times that size.

The *Arctic* was a three-masted barquentine, which meant its foremast was rigged with square sails, and the main and mizzen masts were rigged with the triangular fore and aft sails. It also had a 275-horsepower auxiliary steam engine to assist going through ice or when there was no wind. With a strong wind the ship could make seven knots, but rarely travelled faster than four knots, or a good walking speed.

If steam power was used on a windy day, then a fine black powder from the exhaust of the coal-fired boiler would cover everything and everyone downwind of the smokestack.

The *Arctic*'s sides and bottom were over a metre thick. Its hull was curved like an

³ Fabien Vanasse, Relation sommaire du voyage de l'Arctic à la baie d'Hudson, 1904-05. Ottawa, 1905.

egg, which was lauded as a special design so that when pinched by the pack ice, the ship would rise out of the ice rather than be crushed by it as the V-shaped hulls of whaling ships often were.⁴

Toomey says, “Even as late as 1914, Shackleton had the *Endurance* built out of wood on a model of a whaler. The whalers were very good ships but it was building on past experience, rather than building for the future. And when Bernier came along with this ship the *Arctic*, he had advanced a bit because he was using a much better ship than the old whaling design.”

Garth Wilson, curator of marine and forestry at the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa, says the *Arctic*’s curved hull might not have been specifically designed for ice worthiness as has been suggested. He says the curved hull is a traditional design of ships built in the Baltic Sea region. Kiel, where the *Gauss/Arctic* was built, is on the northern tip of Germany close to Denmark and the Baltic Region.

Even so, Wilson says the ship was ice strengthened by having more ribs, set closer together than the average ship.⁵ The shipyard drawings showed that its midship section was “a highly complicated assembly of relatively small pieces of timber fitted together.”⁶

“The main virtue of the *Arctic* lay in her endurance,” wrote marine historian Thomas Appleton in *Usque Ad Mare*. “She could carry 400 tons of coal in the bunkers, hold and ‘tweendecks and, when piled up in the waist, which it always was on leaving Quebec, she could take over 500 tons, a lot for a ship only 165 feet long. With this, and

⁴ Description compiled from Wiegand’s diary, June 26, 1912; Bernier’s autobiography and Appleton’s description.

⁵ Garth Wilson. Personal interview, July 16, 2003.

⁶ T. E. Appleton. Letter to R.S. Finnie, Nov. 18, 1974, MG 31, C. Vol. 9, File, Arctic 1974-78, 1923-27.

by shutting down except for stoves, she could hold out for two years or more if necessary.”⁷

Conditions aboard ships like the *Arctic* had changed little since the days of Franklin.⁸

The saloon, galley and all of the living quarters, except the captain’s cabin, were below the waterline and there were no portholes or ventilation. The main quarters and saloon, where the men were served meals and spent much of their free time, were panelled in a rich, dark oak with shiny brass kerosene lamps for when the electricity wasn’t working. Tables and armchairs were bolted down, and there was a plush covered bench on one side of the room against the port wall. Above the bench were racks of novels and travel books.⁹

Officers’ sleeping berths were cramped, barely two square metres in size, with narrow bunks built into the curve of the ship with a shelf over each bed. Each room had a locker, clothes hooks, desk, chair and washbasin. The sailors and mechanical crew shared two long rooms fitted with bunks, tables, benches, clothes cupboards and clothes hooks and two washbasins. There were two closet-sized toilets (one for officers only) and a common urinal for the 40 men aboard. The toilets were pumped out at least once a week.

There was no running water on board, no bathtub or laundry facilities. Laundry was difficult in the High Arctic anyway, as the water froze in the bucket before the clothes could be rinsed. Most of the table and bed linens were filthy, so bed bugs were rampant. The men were issued new underclothes twice a year and presumably what they

⁷ Thomas E. Appleton, Usque Ad Mare: A History of the Canadian Coast Guard and Marine Services. Ottawa: Department of Transport. 1968: 68.

⁸ Appleton 248.

⁹ Richard S. Finnie, “Farewell Voyages, Bernier and the Arctic,” The Beaver. Summer 1974: 47.

had been wearing for the months previous were thrown away or burned.

The ship had 18 iron water tanks that held about 45,460 litres of water. The crew took turns at the onerous task of filling the tanks every couple of weeks. During the summer, the ship would moor up to an ice floe and water from the thawed salt-free pools on the floe's surface would be pumped into the tanks with two hand-pumps. During the winter months, ice from lakes was cut and thawed to fill the tanks.

However, the *Arctic* had steam radiator heat and electric lighting. The ship was equipped with a dynamo to generate electricity, though apparently the lights were no brighter than a candle, forcing the crew and staff to use kerosene lamps that gave off fumes, which helped camouflage the smells on board.¹⁰

In 1901, though, it was a state-of-the-art vessel and better than many that the crew had sailed on before.

To Hudson Bay

Bernier must have been exhilarated to finally stand on the bridge, sailing north through scattered floes of ice, passing icebergs and pack ice with huge chunks of old ice piled up in pressure ridges of three metres or more.

Bernier would direct the ship to slice through large pans of newer, year-old ice, going over any that got in its way, splitting them into pieces. Sometimes bumping into other large pans would jolt the boat and set it off course a few feet. Crashing through almost solid ice from 36 centimetres to a metre thick must have been as thrilling then as it

¹⁰ Robert A. Logan, "Staking Canada's Arctic Claim," *Sentinel*. Ottawa: Canadian Forces Publication, November-December 1970: 54.

is to passengers of Arctic-going vessels today.¹¹

On Oct. 1, 1904, an hour after the Halifax-bound *Neptune* arrived at Port Burwell, on the northeastern tip of the Ungava Peninsula, the *Arctic* anchored alongside, having been at sea for two weeks.

In his report *Cruise of the Neptune*, Low notes the *Arctic* “left again that evening, being in a great hurry to reach Fullerton before the harbour froze over.”¹²

Bernier sent his last message back to Ottawa with the *Neptune* before disappearing into the Arctic with his little ship. It was a memo to Préfontaine, the minister of Marine and Fisheries, thanking him for the opportunity to be part of the expedition. He officially held no ill will toward mounted police Staff Sgt. Maj. J.D. Moodie.¹³

In reality, though, there was great animosity between the two men. Bernier viewed Moodie as having usurped him of his rightful position as commander. Bernier bristled at the prospect of playing second fiddle on an expedition he had worked towards for five years.

Moodie had won the government’s confidence and appointment as commander of the *Arctic* because of his previous year’s experience aboard the *Neptune*, setting up the first Royal Northwest Mounted Police Post on Hudson Bay. Moodie was apparently also a domineering man, accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed. He had clashed with Low on the *Neptune* and so it was less surprising that he and Bernier locked

¹¹ Description of moving through ice, W.H. Grant’s diary, Aug. 9&12, 1922, MG 30, B129 Vol. 1, N.A.C.

¹² A.P. Low, Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic Islands on Board the D.G.S. Neptune, 1903-04. Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1906: 70.

¹³ J.E. Bernier. Telegram to J.R. Préfontaine, Oct. 1, 1904, RG 42, Series B-1, Vol. 105, File 25447, N.A.C.

horns from the first.¹⁴

Moodie had also boarded the *Arctic* with his wife, Grace, who would accompany them on the voyage as commander's secretary.¹⁵ This was another unexpected addition to the expedition and not necessarily a pleasant one – a woman on board a ship had always been considered bad luck by mariners.

The *Arctic* pushed its way through heavy storms along the coast of Labrador and Hudson Strait and finally reached Fullerton Harbour on Oct. 16, 1904. The ice in the bay at Fullerton would soon close in around them and hold the *Arctic* in its long winter grip.

The instructions for the expedition were to “patrol and explore Hudson’s Bay and the islands and waters north thereof; and to administer and enforce the laws of Canada therein.”¹⁶ However, because the ship had left so late in September, the impending freeze-up of Hudson Bay forced them to head immediately to Fullerton Harbour to prepare to winter over. There was no time to “patrol and explore” the waters.

The American whaler *Era* was already anchored there for the winter. Ironically, the RNWMP were at Fullerton to keep an eye on American whalers, yet stuck in the ice together the police and crews of both ships were on good terms. Capt. Comer of the *Era* and Bernier also became friends.

Monitoring whaling activities was the responsibility of Moodie and the police. All that Bernier could do at Fullerton was to gather information from Comer about whaling activities in the Arctic, which was information he would use on his next expedition.

¹⁴ “To Photograph the Arctic Frontier, Part VI,” *The Archivist*, Jan./Feb. 1978: 2 Vol. 5 – No. 1

¹⁵ In her 1972 book, *Bernier capitaine à 17 ans*, Gilberte Tremblay notes that Moodie arrived with his wife and son, but this is the only reference I found to a child accompanying them on the 1904 voyage.

¹⁶ F. Gourdeau, Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries. Instructions to Bernier, Sept. 12, 1904, Yolande Dorion-Robitaille. *Captain J.E. Bernier’s Contribution to Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic*. Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978: 39.

Bernier also learned a lot about Arctic ice conditions from Comer.

Robitaille, who has pored over the documents he collected from Bernier's house, believes that without Comer's valuable information about Arctic conditions, Bernier would not have been able to navigate in the Bering Sea or make it to the Pole had he been given government permission that year to carry out his polar expedition.

"Bernier had no direct experience, you know, of sailing, of navigating in the Arctic," says Robitaille. "Nansen had done his experience with ice. He had been with Norwegian whalers. He knew about those things, but not Bernier. He knew how to navigate in ice on the St. Lawrence River. It's not the same ice at all."¹⁷

It was Bernier's first winter frozen in the Arctic. At last, he had the opportunity to put into practice all he had read about in the explorers' published accounts. There was a lot to do to prepare for the long, dark winter with the ship locked in the ice and Bernier kept his crew busy.

A covering was constructed over the ship's deck, so that men could use that area to get exercise. Once the ship was frozen in the ice, the anchor was no longer needed, so it was raised and put on shore. Snow was then banked up around the ship's sides for insulation. (See Fig. 5)

The men were required to saw blocks of ice from a nearby frozen lake and stockpile it for a supply of fresh water for drinking and for use in the steam engine. As well, they piled stones on shore to be used for ballast to replace the weight of the coal and supplies they would use over the winter.

Fire aboard a wooden ship was a serious hazard. Bernier ordered the men to put extra clothes in bags and store them in an igloo on shore along with cached food. In the

¹⁷ Benoit Robitaille. Personal interview, May 27, 2003.

event that a disaster struck, the men would at least have clothes and something to eat.¹⁸

When the long dark night settled in, keeping the men occupied without regular sailing duties was a challenge. Bernier encouraged concerts in the saloon and gave lectures on reaching the North Pole, complete with lantern-slides. He even had a telephone line installed from the ship to the customs office at the onshore detachment, where Moodie and his wife were staying.

On March 18, 1905, two Inuit arrived by dogsled from the Norwegian ship *Gjoa*, which was anchored on the southeast coast of King William Island, northwest of Hudson Bay.¹⁹ The men brought letters addressed to Moodie, Comer and Bernier from the explorer Roald Amundsen, who was wintering there on his attempt to traverse the Northwest Passage. Bernier wrote back and sent newspaper clippings, which Amundsen later thanked him for profusely.²⁰

When the ice broke up in early July, the *Arctic* crossed Hudson Bay and navigated along the southern shore of Hudson Strait, and along the coast of Nunavik (northern Quebec). One hundred and thirty kilometres east of Digges Island, Capt. Bernier made his first Arctic discovery: a little bay known by the local Inuit as Salluk, where the community of Salluit now stands.

Robitaille sets the scene: “There was a big ceremony on the ship, and I think they used their rifles to underline that they had taken possession. So he thought that he was the first white man to have been there.”²¹

¹⁸ Macdonald’s 1910 diary details winter preparations at Arctic Bay, which were standard practice and carried out whenever a ship overwintered in the Arctic.

¹⁹ Gjoa Haven, Uqsuqtuuq, the community of 900 on southeastern King William Island, was named after Amundsen’s ship.

²⁰ Roald Amundsen. Letter to Bernier, May 22, 1905, J.E. Bernier, *Master Mariner and Arctic Explorer*. Ottawa: LeDroit, 1939, 398.

²¹ Robitaille interview.

Vanasse, the ship's historiographer, recorded the July 20 ceremony on deck. The Canadian Navy flag was raised and Commander Moodie, in full uniform, "declared that henceforward the bay would bear the name of Préfontaine Bay in honour of Raymond Préfontaine, Minister of Marine and Fisheries, that the immense cape with the towering and graceful features would henceforth be named Cape Laurier in honour of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada...The commander's pronouncement was followed by a hearty round of cheers to honour these illustrious patrons after which the ceremony ended."²²

Robitaille laughs about the story's denouement. When Bernier returned, he was disappointed to learn that Low had already been to the fiord the previous year and taken possession. Not only that, but it had been visited by the *coureur de bois*, Pierre Radisson, in the 17th century.

The ship anchored at the King's Wharf, in Quebec, in early October 1905. The expedition proved that more active patrolling of the Arctic was necessary to assert Canadian government jurisdiction there.

In Quebec, Bernier received a letter from Fridtjof Nansen, which was dated September 1904, and had arrived after he had left for Hudson Bay the previous summer. Nansen had heard Bernier intended to sail through "Behring Strait" and drift across the North Polar Basin, and encouraged him in his expedition.²³ This was all Bernier needed to fire up his enthusiasm for a North Pole expedition once again and he began to launch a publicity campaign.

He petitioned the government throughout the winter of 1905, but this time the

²² Vanasse 6-7.

²³ Fridtjof Nansen. Letter to Bernier, Sept. 10, 1904, taken from Bernier, *Master Mariner* 392.

new Governor General, Lord Grey, refused him support. In the spring of 1906, it became clear that the Department of Marine and Fisheries had planned another expedition to patrol Arctic waters and this time Bernier would be commander.

Bernier was now 54 years old and a run at the Pole was becoming physically less of an option for him. He reassessed his career and decided that patrolling the Arctic for the government was “work of greater importance than any attempts to reach the pole so far as Canada was concerned.”²⁴

Cruise of the *Arctic*, 1906-07

On July 13, 1906, while the *Arctic* was preparing for its second northern expedition, Parliament amended the Fisheries Act, asserting, “Hudson Bay is a wholly territorial water of Canada and therefore the licence of fifty dollars per annum will be chargeable on all vessels... British or foreign.”²⁵

Bernier was not only commander of a government expedition, but he was also appointed fishery officer, which gave him authority to issue licences and collect fees from whalers and fishermen, as well as act as justice of the peace.²⁶

In *Whose North*, R.A.J. Phillips quips, “He was made a fishery officer. In the building of empires, that is the quiet Canadian way.”

The ship sailed from Quebec July 28, 1906. Bernier was at last commander of his own Arctic expedition.

²⁴ Bernier 307-308.

²⁵ Amendment to 1904 Fisheries Act, July 13, 1906 (4 Edw.VII, c.13), RG 25, Vol. 2668, File 9057 C-40.

²⁶ By 1906, however, the whaling industry was vanishing from the Eastern Arctic. The demand for whalebone was reduced because of changing women's fashion. Whalebone corsets were going out of style. Electricity had begun to replace the need for whale oil used in lamps. But largely, a century of uncontrolled whaling had harvested practically the entire whale population. William R. Morrison, “Eagle Over the Arctic,” *Interpreting Canada's North, Selected Readings*. Eds. Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison, Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989: 172-75.

Bernier's 1906 cruise orders required him to call at Port Burwell, check in on the whaling stations at Cumberland Sound, then move up towards Lancaster Sound, stop at "Pond's Inlet"²⁷ on north Baffin Island and push as far west as possible, "visiting lands on either hand" and examining the old depots, or cairns left by previous explorers.²⁸

His orders clearly stated, "It will be your duty to formally annex all new lands at which you may call, leaving proclamations in cairns at all points of call."²⁹

Sovereignty was his mission.

Arctic biologist David Gray is also an avid Arctic historian. His research on muskox led him to read Bernier's reports for information on the status of muskox in the early 1900s.

About the 1906 sovereignty mission Gray says, "Formally the islands were transferred from Britain to Canada in 1880. You would think it wasn't necessary to do it again, but with Norwegians and Americans traipsing through the Arctic looking for new lands, and all that sort of thing, it probably made sense for the government to do that, redefining the establishment of sovereignty over the Arctic islands by Canada."³⁰

Because there were no phones, satellite communications or any other means of contacting the outside world, expeditions left written records about their activities and details about where they were going inside piles of rocks called cairns, which were erected on islands or along the shoreline and visible from the sea. In these rock mailboxes, generations of explorers left records of their main northern points of call, and

²⁷ The community of Pond Inlet, Mittimatalik, (population 1,200) on North Baffin Island, was known at the turn of the 20th century as Pond's or Ponds Inlet, and was named by John Ross after the British Astronomer Royal John Ponds.

²⁸ F. Gourdeau, Deputy Minister Dept. of Marine and Fisheries. Cruise orders to J.E. Bernier, June 23, 1906, MG 30, B-57 Vol.1, File 1903-1912, J.D. Craig papers, N.A.C.

²⁹ 1906 cruise orders.

³⁰ David Gray. Personal interview, Dec. 30, 2002.

where they intended to land next.

Bernier was ordered to do the same, “so that in case of any accident your movements could be traced by a relief ship which would be sent next season.”³¹

Bernier made it his mission to return with all the records he could find of previous Arctic expeditions. He also collected a variety of objects for the Victoria Memorial Museum³² that he thought might be of scientific interest, from pieces of wood and stones to bits of rope and empty bullet casings left behind by past expeditions. (See Fig. 7)

In his book on exploration in the Queen Elizabeth Islands, Andrew Taylor writes, “No expedition has ever returned with such a wealth of historical relics and records.”³³

Gray is familiar with these historical relics. Most of the artifacts are stored on the fifth floor of the administrative building at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau. At the back of the collection storage area are rows of metal lockers and cabinets that hold small artifacts.

Gray pulls out a shallow, wide metal drawer that contains a variety of items: a small metal flask, a small gunpowder horn, a flat stone with a crewmember’s initials carved on it, and an empty metal cylinder which once held an explorer’s record in it. Each artifact has a little white tag on it. Gray puts on white cotton gloves and picks up a piece of rope about 20 centimetres long. The original tag in Bernier’s handwriting states, “Rope found at Bay of Mercy, *Investigator*, 1850-51-52.” Bernier had a reverence for the Arctic’s history and its explorers.

³¹ 1906 cruise orders.

³² The Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa was the first Canadian government museum. The castle-like, grey stone edifice on Metcalfe Street also housed the Geological Survey of Canada until the Survey moved to its present location on Booth Street, in Ottawa, in 1959. When the Parliament buildings were destroyed by fire in 1916, the Senate and House of Commons temporarily moved to the museum. Vodden 16.

³³ Andrew Taylor, *Geographical Discovery & Exploration in the Queen Elizabeth Islands*. Ottawa: Geographical Branch, Department of Mines and technical Surveys, 1955: 117.

On Aug. 5, 1906, they stopped at Beechey Island, off the southwest corner of Devon Island, where in 1845 Franklin's expedition had spent their first winter. Three of his men are buried there.³⁴ Bernier's crew cemented the Franklin monument tablet in place beneath the wooden cenotaph.

The large marble slab was a tribute to Franklin and the crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror* from the citizens of the United States. It had been left at Disko, Greenland, in 1855, and brought by M'Clintock to Beechey in 1858, and left lying on the rocky beach.

George Hobson, former director of the Polar Continental Shelf Project, has spent many summers in the Arctic islands and visited Beechey.

"You've got to thank Bernier for setting the marble plaque," Hobson says it would otherwise have been removed "as a souvenir." He jokes that it might have made a nice coffee table.³⁵

On Aug. 21, Bernier began annexing the islands for the Government of Canada. He first took possession of Canada Point on Bylot Island across from Pond Inlet. The name *Arctic* was chiselled into a large boulder where the possession ceremony took place.

Then they claimed Griffiths' Island, Cornwallis Island, Bathurst Island, Byam Martin Island, and the west coast of Melville Island in the Western Arctic, Prince Patrick Island, Eglinton Islands and those adjacent to them, and Lowther and Russell islands in Barrow Straits, making the last claim on Aug. 30.

³⁴ In 1985, Edmonton anthropologist Owen Beattie opened the sailors' graves and found the men preserved in the permafrost as if they had been buried the week before. Autopsies proved that the men had died of lead poisoning from the solder used to seal the canned food purchased for Franklin's expedition. It is widely believed that this was the cause of the entire crew's strange behaviour and their eventual deaths. Owen Beattie and John Geiger, Frozen in Time: The Fate of the Franklin Expedition. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1998.

³⁵ George Hobson. Personal interview, Jan. 17, 2003.

For each annexation, there was a ceremony. The crew built a cairn of rocks or cast one out of cement if no rocks were readily available. Then the Union Jack or Red Ensign was raised. Bernier would read a proclamation document and make a speech about the island coming under the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada. Then the document would be sealed in a tin, or a jar, and left in the cairn. A photograph of the crew and cairn would be taken for posterity, and the island would be officially claimed.

On the King's birthday, Nov. 9, 1906, they took possession of all of "Baffin Land," a repeat of Capt. Wakeham's 1897 ceremony. The photo of 40 unsmiling sailors and Inuit looks anything but celebratory. The sailors still wearing Melton coats and caps, not warmer skin parkas, sit on a snowy hump, which is presumably the cairn. Capt. Bernier stands at the back, closest to the flag, wearing his white captain's cap and an open overcoat. (See Fig. 11)

They wintered that year at Igarjuak, or Albert Harbour, near Pond Inlet, a favourite whaler overwintering spot. The only other ship there, coincidentally, was the Scottish whaler sloop *Albert*, though there is no indication that the harbour was named after this whaler. Bernier collected fees and issued a licence to Capt. Mutch of the *Albert*, and also took the opportunity to tap the veteran captain's knowledge about the region and activities of Scottish whalers.

There was an Inuit community nearby and Bernier made a point to include them when there were feasts or celebrations aboard the *Arctic*. All holidays were celebrated. Christmas was a big event and the locals were invited to dine and dance on board. Bernier was fun-loving and the Inuit affectionately called him Kapitaikallak, the stout little captain.

Stéphane Cloutier is a Bernier buff. He grew up in L'Islet but spent seven years in Iqaluit and Igloolik where he discovered the northern connection to Bernier. He also talked to people from Igloolik and Pond Inlet who remember stories from their parents and grandparents about Bernier's annual visit to Pond Inlet.

"People, when they knew the ship was coming in, knew that festivities were coming and people would rejoice just to know the *Arctic* was coming," he says.

"Once they told me that... during Christmastime there was a qamutik, a sledge. He asked the men to sit on it, like it's about 20-feet long, quite long. So, he asked his men to sit on it and he decided he was going to lift everybody with one hand. So he put a leather belt around himself. He put his left hand behind himself and he took the sledge, everybody was sitting on it, and he lifted everybody. But while he was lifting his belt broke open and people laughed," recounts Cloutier laughing too.

The only unfortunate incident to cloud an otherwise successful winter in the Arctic was the death of Frederick Brockenhauser, the ship's oiler³⁶ who died Feb. 11, 1907, of heart disease. The funeral service was as close to a southern one as possible, attended by all crewmembers and a large number of Inuit, with Bernier reading the service.

The health of a ship's crew had always been a serious issue on Arctic expeditions. Months without fresh fruit or vegetables meant that scurvy was a potential threat. Lime juice was issued daily to all hands.³⁷

Bernier was also strict about all men taking daily outdoor exercise. A notice

³⁶ A ship's oiler is in charge of overhauling, repairing and maintaining the ship's engine and machinery.

³⁷ The British explorer William Edward Parry referred to lime juice in his reports for its vitamin C and ascorbic acid qualities to combat scurvy. Bernier, a fan of British exploration, followed his lead. However, in *Barrow's Boys* (64), Fergus Fleming says lemon juice was "often referred to wrongly as lime juice."

posted aboard ship on Sept. 28, 1906, read, "Commencing to-morrow, stewards, waiters and cooks, will be given liberty and must, if they value their health, go out for one hour's exercise every day, they can go after their work is done, say from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., in pairs, during storms they can be about on upper deck."³⁸

In July 1907, the ship was set free of its icy winter home and sailed out into Lancaster Sound to continue annexing the islands.

On Aug. 12, they landed off North Lincoln Land and two officers were sent ashore with a proclamation. Their captain recorded that they claimed: "North Lincoln Land, King Oscar's Land, and the adjacent islands discovered by Captain Sverdrup, as part of the Dominion of Canada; the officers deposited a copy of our proclamation on the island, and returned on board."³⁹

Bernier had made a blank proclamation, though neither he nor his men set foot on any of the Sverdrup Islands they had claimed.

When Sverdrup got wind of this in the fall of 1907, he wrote to the Norwegian Foreign Office demanding to know how the Sverdrup Islands would be saved for Norway. Sverdrup was informed that they could do nothing until the Canadian government formally challenged the claim that Sverdrup had published in the last paragraph of his book *New Land*.⁴⁰

The Canadian government made no open challenge to Sverdrup's claim nor officially backed up Bernier's work, and went about quietly assuming its control in the Arctic without causing any international disputes.

³⁸ J.E. Bernier, Report on the Dominion government Expedition to Arctic Islands and the Hudson Strait on Board the C.G.S. Arctic, 1906-1907. Ottawa: C.H. Parmalee, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1909: 37.

³⁹ Bernier, Cruise of the Arctic, 1906-07 49.

⁴⁰ T.C. Fairley, Sverdrup's Arctic Adventure. London: Longman's Green and Co. 1959: 277.

While Bernier was stuck in the ice in Pond Inlet that winter, one of his supporters, Senator Pascal Poirier, put forth a motion in the Senate on Feb. 20, 1907:

That it be resolved that the Senate is of the opinion that the time has come for Canada to make a formal declaration of possession of the lands and islands situated in the north of the Dominion, and extending to the North Pole.

That question of title will, some day, be brought up one way or another and it is, I believe, proper that we should preclude our friends to the south, and assert in as public a manner as possible our dominion over those lands...

From 141 to 60 degrees west we are on Canadian territory... I hold that no foreigner has a right to go and hoist a flag on it up to the North Pole.⁴¹

This pie-shaped northern region, described by Poirier, was thereafter known as the sector theory. It was not an original idea but it was the first time a government legislator had suggested it be adopted officially. It did not receive support in the Senate, though, and never reached the House of Commons.⁴²

Bernier agreed with Poirier that Canada should publicly assert its title to the Arctic Archipelago. But Laurier favoured a quiet establishment of government presence before making any proclamations. Minister of the Interior Sifton also didn't want to arouse suspicions about government actions in the North.⁴³

Cruise of the *Arctic*, 1908-09

Despite this, Bernier's trips were well publicized, at least in part through his own advertisement of them.

A full front-page story, "Another Northern Cruise for Captain Bernier," ran in the

⁴¹ Senator Pascal Poirier. Speech, Feb. 20, 1907, Senate Transcripts, Ottawa, 1907: 267.

⁴² Though the Canadian government did not adopt Poirier's sector theory, the government of Tsarist Russia did. In 1917, it asserted that all islands (including those not yet discovered), between its mainland and the North Pole were claimed by Russia.

R.A.J. Phillips, *Canada's North*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967: 103.

⁴³ D.J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton: Volume Two, A Lonely Eminence, 1901-1929*. Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1985: 126.

Quebec Daily Telegraph on June 13, 1908. It said Bernier “expected to annex the balance of land in the far north” on his expedition that summer.⁴⁴

Quebec City was celebrating its 300th anniversary in July 1908 while Bernier and his crew were preparing to depart. British naval vessels and foreign ships from around the world arrived in port for the celebrations. The Prince of Wales (later George V) was there aboard the *HMS Indomitable* and his flotilla entourage was anchored alongside. Bernier was honoured to be invited aboard to meet the Prince.⁴⁵

The *Arctic* left to incredible fanfare on the 28th. As it steamed out of port, it saluted and all the vessels in sight returned the salute as it passed between them down the length of the harbour. Bernier wrote in his autobiography:

The magnificent band of the *H.M.S. Indomitable*, the prince’s flag-ship, played *Auld Lang Syne*, and we were thrilled by the kindly spirit suggested in selection of music by the men who were serving under the same flag, which our little ship was starting out to again plant upon the heights of the far northern lands. The band of each ship broke into music as we came abreast, and we spontaneously joined in a chorus of cheers.⁴⁶

On Aug. 19, they landed provisions for Dr. Frederick Cook (Peary’s polar rival), at Etah on the northwest coast of Greenland. From there, they sailed west through Lancaster Sound to Melville Island.

Ten days later, they entered the 80-kilometre-wide M’Clure Strait, the most northerly of the Northwest Passage routes, which runs into the Beaufort Sea. Scouting the strait from the crow’s nest, the lookouts reported it to be free of ice as far as they could see.

⁴⁴ “Another Northern Cruise for Captain Bernier,” *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, last edition, front page, Saturday, June 13, 1908.

⁴⁵ Bernier, *Master Mariner* 325.

⁴⁶ Bernier, *Master Mariner* 326.

In his report on the expedition, Bernier writes he felt confident that had his orders been to traverse the Northwest Passage he could have done it, but as he did not have official permission to proceed through, he was forced to turn back.⁴⁷

On Aug. 28, the *Arctic* pulled into an ice-free Winter Harbour and anchored in eight fathoms of water. Winter Harbour was made famous by William Edward Parry, who had wintered there with his two ships in 1819-20. When Parry had arrived, almost a century before, his men had to cut a channel in the ice for the ships to advance into the bay.

From where the *Arctic* was anchored they could see Parry's Rock high up on a rocky ridge above the shore.⁴⁸

Parry's Rock is a four-metre sandstone block, the size of a house. It stands alone, shoved up on a rise of rugged, barren land by a receding ice shelf 10,000 years ago. The rock overlooks the secluded bay and broad gravel beach. There is nothing within a kilometre radius that rivals it in size and it can be seen from any point in the bay.⁴⁹ It is the sandstone sentinel of Winter Harbour: a physical and historical landmark.

Bernier "immediately visited the historical Parry rock for records," noting the inscription of the names of Parry's ships, *Hecla* and *Griper*, were as readable as the day they were carved 89 years previous.⁵⁰ The scheme for annexing all the islands was

⁴⁷ 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: 2.

⁴⁸ On Feb. 15, 1909, William E. Jackson, the meteorologist on board, placed a datum on Parry's Rock for a tidal benchmark. "The distance of the rock from the ship was measured by me with a pedometer, and found to be 5,094 feet [from where the *Arctic* was anchored in the bay]; the top of the rock itself was 52 feet above sea level." Bernier, Cruise of the Arctic, 1908-09 112.

⁴⁹ Description of Parry's Rock given by Douglas Hodgson. Personal Interview, Jan. 13, 2003.

⁵⁰ Winter Harbour was named by Parry because his expedition spent the winter of 1819-20 in this bay. The names of his ships *Hecla* and *Griper* were carved into the side of the enormous boulder by the ships' physician, and it became known as Parry's Rock. Leopold M'Clintock also engraved the name of his ship

distilling in Bernier's mind.

"Why Winter Harbour?" says Robert Headland, archivist at the Scott Polar Research Institute, who visited the "windy, godforsaken spot" in 2001 when he was guest lecturer aboard the passenger icebreaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov*.

"Historically that's a significant one. Parry's Rock was very well-known on all the charts as it unified the Northwest Passage. And if you're going to do anything as ceremonial as taking possession – which usually involves preferably discharging a canon, or rifles will do; it involves a flag, it involves a declaration, and it usually involves several bottles; it's got to be a public, well-known, very overt type of ceremony. Good excuse for a party – so you might as well do it at probably the best place going. I think Winter Harbour in that part of the world was."⁵¹

It was on this rock that Bernier made his auspicious proclamation that secured his place in Canadian history.

After lunch on Dominion Day, July 1, 1909, 34 men and a baby muskox left the ship, trooped 1.5 kilometres across the still frozen bay and scrambled up the gravelly beach to the rock for the most important ceremony yet. Capt Bernier led the procession.

The officers were dressed in shirt and ties with their pea coats done up officially with the double line of brass buttons down the front. Bernier wore his captain's cap and navy blue coat, which had three gold stripes on the sleeve cuffs.

One man carried a Union Jack; another, the Red Ensign; a third, a heavy camera and tripod; and chief engineer John van Koenig carried the neatly-wrapped, bronze

Intrepid in the sandstone in 1852. Parry was awarded £1,000 for reaching the furthest point west, 112° 51' northwest. His was the first British expedition to overwinter in the Arctic. Fleming 70. Pierre Berton, *The Arctic Grail: The Quest for the North West Passage and the North Pole. 1818-1909*. Markham: Penguin Books, 1989: 45.

⁵¹ Robert Headland. Telephone interview, April 25, 2003.

plaque he had spent the winter engraving.

When the men were assembled before Parry's Rock, the captain made a patriotic and moving speech, saying they had annexed a number of islands one by one and that they now claimed all islands and territory for Canada. With ceremony, Bernier unveiled the plaque that Koenig held and it was secured to the sandstone rock. The men gave three cheers in honour of the prime minister and the minister of Marine and Fisheries.

The crew then assembled in two awkward lines with the newly fastened plaque on the rock behind them. The flag bearers stood on either side of the plaque with the flags unfurled. The baby muskox stood in front, licking Bernier's hand. Their photograph was taken and the men dispersed to enjoy their holiday, "picking wildflowers, which grew in abundance, and securing objects of interest."⁵² (See Fig.8)

The plaque is still there today. On the top left-hand corner is an ornate carving of the Red Ensign Canadian flag with its Union Jack and the Dominion coat of arms. Below the flag on the bottom left is a relief picture of the *Arctic* steadfast in the ice. On the right-hand side of the plaque is the description that reads:

This Memorial, is Erected today to Commemorate,
The taking possession for the "DOMINION OF CANADA"
of the whole "ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO,"
Lying to the north of America from
long. 60° w. to 141° w. up to latitude 90° n.
Winter Hbr. Melville Island, *CGS Arctic*. July 1st 1909.
J.E. Bernier. Commander.⁵³

Bernier's plaque spelled out the same pie-shaped sector that Poirier had promoted in the Senate.

⁵² Bernier, *Master Mariner* 343-344.

⁵³ This exact transcript of the plaque is taken from a photograph in Bernier's *Cruise of the Arctic, 1908-1909*, 195.

One of the crewmembers, Claude Vigneau, described the day in his journal:

Thursday, July 1st 1909. It is a big day for us all today. We set the flags up at 8 a.m. Cool wind from the N.W. It is cloudy. At 2 p.m. we went to Parry's Rock. The captain made a speech. He had pictures taken of us. We brought the baby muskox along. After the ceremony, six of us went to write our names on another rock, 20 steps from Parry's Rock. We got there at 4:30 p.m. On our rock, are the names of C. Vigneau, W. leBel, A. Bourget, R. Goulet, G. Gosselin and W. Vaillancourt, 1909. Le capitaine treated us tonight. Everybody is gathered in the 'salon' - songs and piano.⁵⁴

It was the captain's finest hour. He did not have government authorization for such a proclamation, but had performed it of his own accord, confident that the importance of his actions would be recognized and praised by politicians in Ottawa.

Asserting Canada's Laws

The *Arctic* was released from its icy winter quarters on Aug. 12, 1909, and sailed east on its journey home.

Turning from explorer to his more mundane role of fishery officer, Bernier issued his first hunting permit on Sept. 5, when they stopped at Clyde River on eastern Baffin Island and anchored alongside the schooner *Jeannie*, which had been chartered by a New York multi-millionaire, Harry Payne Whitney, to hunt muskox and polar bear. The hunting party was cordially welcomed by Bernier and spent three hours aboard the *Arctic*.

"I accordingly issued the licence and received the fee. We exchanged a quarter of musk oxen meat for some magazines by Mr. Whitney," Bernier wrote in his 1909

⁵⁴ Claude Vigneau. Diary entry, July 1, 1909. Courtesy of Stéphane Cloutier. Cloutier says the diary is written in an old French slang from "La Pointe-aux-Esquimaux," today known as Havre St-Pierre, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River.

report.⁵⁵

In *Musk Ox Land*, Lyle Dick writes, “The exchange of muskox meat with the American big game hunter was ironic, as the protection of this animal soon became the vehicle for Canadian efforts to assert its sovereignty in response to perceived incursions by American explorers.”⁵⁶

This irony was surprisingly lost on Bernier, who wrote in the same report, “The American expeditions have been accustomed to kill and use large numbers of muskoxen on Ellesmere land, estimated within the last 27 years to be about 800, which has had a tendency to decrease their numbers very rapidly.”⁵⁷

In Whitney’s book *Hunting With Eskimos*, published in 1910, he mentions his encounter with the Canadian fishery officer:

I was a poacher therefore, in the eyes of Canada, though I had known nothing of this far-reaching law until Captain Bernier informed me of its existence. Never have I willingly poached, and so in exchange for fifty dollars I received the requisite license from the captain, permitting me to hunt, chase, kill and obtain anything from hares or trout to bears or whales; and to exchange, barter and trade with the said and aforesaid natives of the wide and limitless Arctic Dominions of Canada with a free and law-abiding hand.⁵⁸

This tongue-in-cheek comment shows how virtually irrelevant the licencing system was. It was neither well publicized, nor properly controlled. However, implicit in Whitney’s account is the acceptance that he was hunting on Canadian soil and his recognition of Canada’s right to regulate activities, the essence of sovereignty.

“Bernier was really the first sovereignty patrol as such,” says ice master Toomey.

⁵⁵ Bernier, *Cruise of the Arctic*, 1908-09 273.

⁵⁶ Lyle Dick, *Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact*. Calgary: U Calgary P, 2001: 269.

⁵⁷ Bernier, *Cruise of the Arctic*, 1908-09 16.

⁵⁸ Harry P. Whitney, *Hunting with Eskimos*. Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1910: 442-43.

“He didn’t seem to have any force behind him. If they decided not to pay for a licence, what was he going to do about it? But it looked good on paper that somebody was paying attention to that sort of thing.”⁵⁹

When they stopped in Pond Inlet on their way south, Bernier and the crew heard the news that Cook and Peary had each claimed to have reached the North Pole. At Father Point, near Rimouski, when the *Arctic* picked up the river pilot to navigate up the St. Lawrence to Quebec, Bernier sent Cook a telegram, “Felicitation on your success. Regards to family.”⁶⁰

Bernier was proud to keep a collection of his correspondence with explorers such as Fridtjof Nansen, Roald Amundsen and Frederick Cook. He realized that they weren’t actual threats to Canadian Arctic sovereignty. The purpose of their expeditions was not to claim the lands for their country as much as defeat the challenge of Arctic exploration.

The *Quebec Daily Telegraph* announced the *Arctic*’s arrival on Oct. 6:

The government steamer *Arctic* arrived this morning at 8 o’clock. They steamed up the harbour looking as neat and trim as the day she sailed from the port of Quebec 14 months ago. As soon as the little vessel came alongside the King’s Wharf and a gangway was placed in position a number of relatives of the crew hastened aboard, and for a time all was confusion on the ship’s deck. Captain Bernier and every member of the crew looked the picture of health and were in the best of spirits.⁶¹

Reporters from across the country were also anxious to get Bernier’s reaction to the news about the Pole.

“The Americans have the honour of locating the Pole. I wish it had been a Canadian instead, and would have like to be afforded the opportunity,” Bernier told the

⁵⁹ Toomey interview.

⁶⁰ J.E. Bernier. Telegram to F. Cook, Oct. 3, 1909, Dorion-Robitaille 67.

⁶¹ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 6, 1909, front page.

press.⁶²

Bernier went on to Ottawa to make his report to the government. He also delivered a lecture on his recent expedition at the Canadian Club that was enthusiastically well-attended by local dignitaries including Prime Minister Laurier. Bernier put forth a suggestion for internationally dividing up the polar regions into sectors as Poirier had suggested in 1907.

“When he came back to Ottawa, he was very popular. He was at the summit of his glory,” says Robitaille.

“But then this act of taking possession [at Winter Harbour], he had no authority to do. Nevertheless, it was used by the federal government later to show, during the 1970s when the American tankers tried to go to Prudhoe Bay [in Alaska] and the problems of Canadian jurisdiction became acute, more than they were before, I think. Then the federal government used Bernier’s declaration, among other things to show that Canadian jurisdiction was clear, well established. So it served, it helped. He had not been ordered to do this. He did that on his own.”⁶³

That winter, Bernier embarked on a lecture tour, which started at Massey Hall in Toronto on Dec. 2, 1909, with lantern-slides of his Arctic trips. This time he wasn’t drumming up interest in a bid for the Pole, but riding the wave of excitement that Cook and Peary had generated, discussing his own adventures in the North. He was a Canadian Arctic celebrity in his own right.

⁶² *The Globe*, Oct. 8, 1908, front page.

⁶³ Robitaille interview.

Cruise of the *Arctic*, 1910-11

When the *Arctic* weighed anchor on July 7, 1910, on its fourth official voyage, Bernier again stood on the bridge as commander.

Spirits were high after the success of the previous year's trip. The Hon. Joseph E. Caron, the Quebec provincial minister of agriculture, made the farewell speech. A crowd of about 200 members of the crew's families and other locals were on the dock to wave them off. Flags of other ships in the harbour were hoisted in honour of the event and they saluted the *Arctic* with their steam whistles as it passed down the harbour. It was not as moving a departure as the royal fanfare of 1908 but worthy of a northern expedition.

Bernier's official instructions for this trip were to patrol the same northern waters he had travelled in 1908-09, and as well, he received the coveted permission to attempt the Northwest Passage if conditions allowed.⁶⁴

An article in the *Globe*, July 26, 1910, shows the magnitude of the instructions:

Captain Bernier, Canada's Polar navigator, whose ambition it has been for many years to reach the north pole, is to have an opportunity for at least as distinguished a bit of Arctic exploration. With the government steamer *Arctic*, provisioned for a two years cruise Captain Bernier is now en route to Canadian Polar waters, with the government's permission, to attempt the Northwest Passage and bring his vessel around to Victoria, BC. A feat which was unsuccessfully attempted by Parry, Ross, Franklin and other polar navigators from the past century.⁶⁵

He'd lost forever the chance of attaining the North Pole, but the Northwest Passage offered him a glorious place in marine history.

Many of the crewmembers were back for their fourth northern trip with Bernier.

⁶⁴ A. Johnston D.M. of Marine and Fisheries. Instructions to J.E. Bernier, July 5, 1910, Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to the Northern Waters and Arctic Archipelago of the D.G.S. "Arctic" in 1910. Ottawa: Department of Marine and Fisheries, 1911: 2.

⁶⁵ "Try Northwest Passage, Instructions for Capt. Bernier," The Globe, July 26, 1910:7.

O.J. Morin, who had served on the last two voyages as second officer, was promoted to first officer. Two newcomers, second officer Robert Janes from Newfoundland and third officer Edward Macdonald from Prince Edward Island, were unilingual anglophones, which proved to be a problem as over two-thirds of the crew were francophone.

The expedition made directly for M'Clure Strait, six weeks away, to attempt the Northwest Passage. They collected fees from whalers along the way and proceeded to Winter Harbour where they built a cache. In the event that they would be caught in the ice on their way through the Passage, they could retrace their steps and survive on the supplies they stored there.

The cache still stands, a small shed, 3.6 by 4.8 metres, with a plain, wooden board exterior and a window on each side. Aside from a few broken windowpanes, it looks as if it was built only a few years ago. The wood is still a newly-sawn beige colour and is only greyed around the bottom where rain has splashed up and snow gathered. It has weathered its 90 years far better than similar wood houses in Quebec or Ontario.⁶⁶

Inside the hut, Bernier's crew left a gun, ammunition, a barrel of coal, tins of flour, biscuits, pemmican, Bovril, sugar, coffee, tobacco and other useful supplies.⁶⁷ Outside, they left large items such as an ice boat⁶⁸ that would be of use to shipwrecked explorers. It would be a veritable treasure trove to Stefansson and his small expedition when they crossed Melville Island seven years later.

Leaving Melville Island, the *Arctic* was forced to head west along the coast rather

⁶⁶ Photo reference, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Biology Department Web site. June 4, 2003. <<http://www.mun.ca/biology/delta/arcticf/images/parry3.jpg>>

⁶⁷ Edward Macdonald. Diary entry, Aug. 31, 1910, Microfiche reel M5506, N.A.C.

⁶⁸ Garth Wilson says this type of small rowboat is unusual and specific to the St. Lawrence River. It is pointed at both ends, unlike most rowboats, which have a gunwale at one end, and commonly used during the winter months to cross the St. Lawrence River. Bernier introduced these iceboats to the North.

than straight out into the channel as the ice pack stretched from the south as far as they could see. Unlike the previous year, the Northwest Passage was blocked with ice and it was impossible to get through, as Bernier noted in his autobiography:

Second Officer Janes was sent to the mast-head to make an official report to me. He said in part: 'On September 2 at noon, while 30 miles south from Cape Providence, we were stopped by a floe from 50 to 60 feet thick with hills on it as high as any berg. As far as could be seen the floe extended westward, unbroken.' I gave up hope of crossing McClure Strait. We had reached the farthest point in this direction of any vessel.⁶⁹

He had read enough Arctic history and accounts of explorers whose vessels were crushed to know the danger of old ice to wooden ships.

Edward Macdonald's 500-page diary recounts his 15-month experience aboard the *Arctic*. Macdonald's Sept. 2 account is critical of the decision at M'Clure Strait: "At 9 p.m. ice very heavy. Commander thinks it is impossible to force a passage. Turned back heading eastward. I do not know much about ice conditions in the North but I think we should have tried a little harder before turning back."⁷⁰

Macdonald was obviously disappointed, as was the rest of the crew, about this failed attempt. Macdonald was a novice when it came to Arctic travel, though. He also did not go up to the crow's nest to see the unbroken ice floe that Janes reported. It was his first time in the North encountering ice conditions, so his comments are not as exact and informed as more seasoned hands would have been.

Of the Northwest Passages, Bernier thought that M'Clure Strait, the most northern route, was also the most direct route to the Bering Sea. He was correct, but it is rarely free of ice. It was simply an anomaly that this passage had been mostly open water the

⁶⁹ Bernier, *Master Mariner* 355.

⁷⁰ Macdonald, Sept. 2, 1910.

year before.

“I worked in those areas on Prince Patrick Island when I was with the federal government,” says Robitaille. “You can see from Melville Island, from the top of the hill on a very clear day, the amount of ice. There is a big concentration of ice blocking M’Clure Strait between Banks Island, Prince Patrick Island and Melville Island. It’s choked with ice in a normal year.”⁷¹

The chance of the *Arctic* making this northerly passage was close to nil. Until recently, the transit of this Northwest Passage was possible only by submarine. The first ship to successfully traverse this route was the powerful Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *Louis St. Laurent* in 1998. It is highly unlikely that Bernier could have made it then in his little wooden ship.⁷²

After this defeat, the ship headed back and wintered in Arctic Bay off Admiralty Inlet on northwest Baffin where the small community of Arctic Bay (population 700) is now located. The bay is named after the whaling vessel *Arctic* that surveyed the area in 1872. Again, Bernier may have chosen this as a wintering spot because of its name, romanticizing Arctic history.

He was also a topnotch navigator and it was an ideal winter harbour. Capt. Toomey says with its protected harbour, Arctic Bay is one of the best places to winter.

“It’s a gorgeous little place with a mountain on the side that looks like a wedding cake. The only trouble is, the ice takes a long time to get out of there in the summer, so

⁷¹ Robitaille interview.

⁷² Today, large steel-hulled icebreakers use the southern route through Prince of Wales Strait between Banks and Victoria Islands. To date, only 114 ships have ever made the Northwest Passage. Headland interview. Brian MacDonald, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, “Summary of Transits of the Northwest Passage, 1903 to 2002.”

you can't get in till quite late in the season, but it stays open late," he says.⁷³

Thirty-eight dogs had been purchased and brought on board in Igarjuak, near Pond Inlet. Once the bay had frozen over, the dogs were tethered on the sea ice. Macdonald comments in his diary on Sept. 15, "We landed all the dogs today. It is a great relief to us as the deck was always in a terrible mess with them and they would be fighting and barking all the time."⁷⁴

Several exploration and mining expeditions were carried out by qamutik, or dogsled, from where the ship was frozen in the bay to as far as Pond Inlet and Igloolik, distances of 480 kilometres and 445 kilometres. These expeditions collected minerals, but there was no way to determine properly if they were worth anything. So the crew loaded tonnes of unidentified rock to take back for analysis by the Geological Survey.

J.T.E. Lavoie, the geologist on board the *Arctic*, discovered lead-zinc in the mountains several kilometres from the harbour. In 1971, after a feasibility study, the Nanisivik mine opened outside Arctic Bay to mine this lead-zinc core. Nanisivik closed in September 2002. Twenty million tonnes of ore were mined in its 30 years of operations.⁷⁵

Life Aboard Ship

The sun went below the horizon on Nov. 9, and did not appear again for 91 days. Keeping the crew occupied in the dark winter nights was a challenge. Bernier again arranged concerts in the saloon and lent his phonograph or they played the piano and men sang songs – English, French and Inuit songs, depending on the singer.

⁷³ Toomey interview.

⁷⁴ Macdonald, Sept. 15, 1910.

⁷⁵ Breakwater Nanisivik Web site, June 11, 2003. <<http://www.breakwater.ca/oper/nani.htm>>

Bernier also encouraged the men to take exercise and fresh air by trapping foxes in their spare time. The men took him up on the suggestion and Bernier also benefitted by this activity, as he owned the fox traps. The men arranged to give him half the furs they caught in exchange for using his traps.

Macdonald and Vanasse both reported the number of times the Inuit visited the ship to trade. On April 13, Macdonald wrote, "A large party of Esquimaux arrived at the ship this afternoon from Ponds Inlet. I have been thinking for some time that this is more like a fur trading voyage than anything I can compare it to."

Later, Macdonald noted, "Skins seem to be the principle thing on board and everybody seems to be after them. If one of our puppies die he soon loses his skin. I overheard one of the stewards remarking a few days ago 'if one of the crew would happen to die it is very likely he would be skinned too.'"⁷⁶

Despite the various activities Bernier organized to keep his men occupied, the *Arctic* was a small space to live, eat and sleep with the same group of young energetic men. Sometimes tempers flared and occasionally a fist fight broke out. On Jan. 15, Macdonald recorded the first of several fights between the chief cook and the second cook:

There was a free fight in the galley this morning about 6 a.m. It seems that some of the quartermasters were in the habit of getting coffee at the galley early in the morning, which is not allowed as nobody except the cooks and watchmen are supposed to be up before 8:45 a.m. The 2nd cook was giving them some coffee. The chief cook seeing him giving it to them tried to stop him and a fight started. The chief and 2nd cook clinching and falling on the stove and I suppose the others were giving a little help to the 2nd cook when required. The chief officer hearing the uproar went to the galley and succeeded in making peace.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Macdonald, Friday, April 28, 1911.

⁷⁷ Macdonald, Sunday, Jan. 15, 1911.

By the end of the trip, Macdonald wrote that the cooks had a fistfight about once a month that had to be broken up by one of the officers. Yet, as he saw it, neither one was severely punished.

Macdonald felt Bernier was soft on discipline. His own form of punishment, he wrote, included a flogging while Bernier settled for dire warnings. Bernier treated the men fairly. They were brought before him for any wrongdoing with an opportunity to explain themselves. Macdonald noted that Bernier's method was all bark and no bite: "There was lots of loud talking but I don't think he punished them beyond a reprimand."⁷⁸

However, Bernier's methods went a long way to ensuring his crew was not disgruntled. Being trapped in the ice for nine to 10 months, it was necessary that bad feelings weren't allowed to fester between the men. His methods proved successful as many of his crew returned to accompany him on subsequent expeditions. Napoléon Chassé, the quarter-master on the 1906-07 expedition, continued to sail under Bernier for 15 years.

The crew still had chores to do during the week, but Saturday afternoons they had a half day off. On Sundays there was always "divine service" led by Capt. Bernier after which the men had the rest of the day off. Traditionally, by virtue of his position, the captain was the religious leader. Flags were also raised on Sundays, which signalled to the Inuit that they could visit for dinner.

"Sunday is a very lonesome day and we find it very hard to get the time in. The crew had a game of baseball on the ice this evening and a few of the esquimo came from

⁷⁸ Macdonald, Jan. 16, 1911.

the village to call on us and get a good feed,” wrote Macdonald in his diary.⁷⁹

These visits were reciprocated by some members of the crew, as Macdonald noted in his diary that many of the men visited the nearby Inuit community after lights out.

Bernier frowned on this and forbade the men to go as Macdonald wrote:

Some of the men have been going to the Esquimaux village in the night directly against the orders of the captain for the purpose of trading no doubt. The Captain found some of them out today and had them brought before him in his office and gave them a very severe talking too and promised six months imprisonment to the next one disobeying his orders. He is a great man for promising that sort of thing but never puts his promise into effect.⁸⁰

Despite the threat of six months’ imprisonment for disobeying orders, the transgressors continued to visit the “village,” and likely not for trading purposes.

Descendants of the children of sailors from the *Arctic* still live in Igloolik, Pond Inlet, Arctic Bay and Iqaluit today.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, Bernier’s biographer, denies the rumour that Bernier fathered a child on one of his last trips. She says, “It was against his personality. All his life he said, ‘You must be master of your own self to be able to succeed.’ And when you’re master of the ship you must be a model for the others. So it went against beliefs.”⁸¹

Bernier was a devout Catholic. As well as building stone cairns on the islands they stopped at, Bernier also erected crosses. While they were in Arctic Bay he had a large square-timbered cross raised on the long, rocky spit that juts into the entrance of the bay. Bernier felt this cross would guide future vessels in deep water. Attached to it was a

⁷⁹ Macdonald, Sunday, Nov. 27, 1910.

⁸⁰ Macdonald, Tuesday, April 18, 1911.

⁸¹ Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, Personal interview, Aug. 13, 2003.

small lead plaque roughly inscribed with “Holy Cross,” the name *Arctic* and the date in April 1911 when it was erected.

Hereafter, Bernier referred to the spit as Holy Cross Point. Johanne Coutu, the wildlife officer in Arctic Bay, says the point got renamed Chopped-off Cross Point in the '90s when a “disturbed (mentally) young man in his early thirties chopped down the cross.

“I believe that the stone cairn is still there and the cross was chopped off leaving the butt end still intact,” says Coutu. “The cross is missing – burned maybe. The previous wildlife officer picked up the broken plaque with the name and date on it. It is still in my office somewhere. I have been meaning to turn it in to the Nunavut Archeological Trust in Iqaluit.”⁸²

As Toomey noted, the ice was slow to leave the bay and the ship finally departed on Aug. 21 and steamed into Admiralty Inlet. Fury and Hecla Strait was blocked by ice, so they were forced to go back up north and around Baffin. They stopped at Igarjuak, near Pond Inlet, on the return trip. Bernier boarded the whaling ships there and collected fees for fishing licences. They visited the whaling stations on Blacklead and Kekerton islands off eastern Baffin, and issued licences and collected custom duties on traded merchandise such as furs.

Journeys End

The *Arctic* arrived back in Quebec City on Sept. 25, 1911, having travelled 16,000 kilometres and covered a total of 6,400 kilometres on sledging trips alone.⁸³

⁸² Johanne Coutu. E-mail correspondence, May 21, 2003.

⁸³ Taylor 119.

Bernier had recommended in his 1906 report that because the Pond Inlet area was teeming with salmon, it would be an ideal place for a trading post. The government did not take him up on this suggestion, so Bernier purchased the Igarjuak whaling station buildings. He also leased 388 hectares in the vicinity of Pond Inlet from the government, making him the first owner of land on northern Baffin Island. He called his trading post Berniera.⁸⁴

Bernier was making plans for his departure from government service. He had claimed all the islands for Canada, so it looked like his job would now be relegated to that of fishery officer. His course of action was also determined when in October 1911 the Liberals, his political supporters, were defeated in the federal election.

Bernier was a shrewd businessman and had made numerous successful financial ventures in the early part of his marine career. Now he would be in the fur trading business.

“The change in government in the autumn of 1911 did not stop the Dominion’s efforts to extend Canadian authority over the Arctic islands, though the new government followed a different approach and turned its attention to a different part of the region. The system of ceremonial flag waving and licence collecting expeditions was discontinued,” writes historian Morris Zaslow in his book, *The Opening of the Canadian North*.⁸⁵

But there were other reasons why Bernier’s services were no longer required by the government.

Bernier enthusiast Stéphane Cloutier says, “There was lots of complaints that he was almost discredited about it: trading with the Inuit. Even during his official

⁸⁴ Dorion-Robitaille 91.

⁸⁵ Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971: 271.

expeditions, he would still trade with the Inuit because for the Inuit you cannot be a ship stuck in the ice. You are useless if you don't trade."⁸⁶

Robitaille says that when the *Arctic* returned in 1911, Assistant Steward Joseph Mathé told a Quebec newspaper that Bernier had misappropriated government funds by trading government goods for personal gain.

"Bernier was accused of having made money, of having used government caches up North, which was true," he says. "Caches that Bernier himself had set on the ground in case people got lost or a ship would be crushed in the ice. There were a network of caches containing food, sometimes there were whaleboats, so people could extract themselves from dramatic situations. But on that last trip, Bernier pilfered, if I may say, some of the big caches."⁸⁷

One of the whistleblowers was the historiographer Fabien Vanasse. His diary accounts are filled with biting comments about the captain and other crewmembers. His savage slant makes for interesting reading but calls into question his role as objective documentor.

"You must take and leave most of the things that Vanasse says. He was ferocious," says Robitaille. "He is an enemy, and he is one of those who reported on Bernier's last trip – reported to Ottawa that he had pilfered the caches belonging to the federal government, that he had made big profits with the furs."

Bernier resigned in the winter of 1911-12.

"The following spring a public inquiry heard stories about how Bernier had refused to proceed through the Northwest Passage, neglected his sovereignty and

⁸⁶ Cloutier interview.

⁸⁷ Robitaille interview.

scientific responsibilities, forced the crew to rent the ship's fox traps and then confiscated any furs they caught," writes historian Shelagh Grant in *Arctic Justice*.

"Although some of the accusations were verified by Macdonald's diary entries there was no provision in Bernier's contract forbidding him to trade for personal benefit."⁸⁸

Bernier's flag-waving days were over. Though his achievements had been impressive. He had spent three winters in the Arctic, travelled over 48,200 kilometres, and enforced government authority and jurisdiction by collecting customs duties and issuing hunting and fishing licences.⁸⁹ Most importantly, he had helped secure Canada's claim to the entire Arctic by annexing the archipelago for the Dominion – even though that claim was far from solid as the 1912 sailing season approached.

⁸⁸ Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923*. Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's UP, 2002: 39.

⁸⁹ Dorion-Robitaille 71.

Chapter Four

Exploration and Commerce

The principal object of this party will be the exploration of the Beaufort Sea. Every endeavour should be used to ascertain whether this vast unknown area is in reality a sea or whether it contains islands or lands.

Should any such lands be discovered, they should be taken possession of and annexed to His Majesty's Dominions. The position of these lands should be fixed, and all information which can be gathered about these lands should be procured.

– Cruise Orders for the Canadian Arctic Expedition
to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, May 29, 1913¹

A long, narrow cardboard box leans in the crook behind Douglas Hodgson's open office door. It has been there a long time. The box is tattered at the ends and bound up with masking tape.

Hodgson pulls it out and extracts a long wooden pole. Made of rough, old wood, it has a rusted metal spike attached to one end and a blunt metal bit on the other.

"Well, I call it a pike actually," Hodgson says. "I'm not sure what the correct designation is but that's what I'm calling it for now. It was on a beach. And it was to the west of Winter Harbour, probably 20-30 miles, because we found it near another camp further down the coast."²

Hodgson is a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada. In the summer of 1980, he spent six weeks camped near Parry's Rock on Melville Island, mapping the surface deposits that the glacier had left 10,000 years ago. Hodgson believes that the pike is a relic from Bernier's 1909 stay at Winter Harbour.

¹ G.J. Desbarats, Deputy Minister, Department of Naval Service. Cruise Orders for Canadian Arctic Expedition to V. Stefansson, May 29, 1913, MG 30, B-57, J.D. Craig papers, N.A.C.

² Douglas Hodgson. Personal interview, Jan. 13, 2003.

“In his account he mentions that they used poles with flags on to mark sledge routes along the shore. So this wasn’t on the sea ice, which is probably where they were marking, but they may have been running inshore or it fell off the sledge or something. It doesn’t look like an Inuit tool because there’s no way to attach a line onto it. I could be wrong, but I don’t think anyone else sledged along there, maybe Stefansson, but I don’t think it could’ve been anyone else,” he says.

On his exploratory and flag-raising voyages, Bernier had ardently collected souvenirs of past expeditions. Whether he was mindful of it or not, he had left his own relics in the Arctic. By 1912, his exploration days were over, but he was already working on new plans to secure sovereignty for Canada by establishing a fur trading post and settlement in the Pond Inlet region on the land granted him by the government in May 1910.

Bernier’s fur trading plans got sidetracked, though, when news broke in Newfoundland papers that Robert Janes had found gold in the Salmon River near Pond Inlet.

Three gold-digging expeditions headed to Pond Inlet in 1912: Bernier and Alfred Tremblay, one of his 1910 crewmembers, purchased the ship *Minnie Maud* together; Janes and Lucky Scott, a veteran mining promoter, hired the *Neptune*; and British Capt. Henry Toke Munn went north in the *Algerine*.³

None of them came back richer. The gold turned out to be non-existent. The *Algerine*, holed by ice, sank. Janes, abandoned by Scott, ended up crazed and was eventually murdered in 1920 for threatening the Inuit he was trading with.

³ Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2002: 51-55.

Bernier was not the first to be sucked into a search for gold in the Arctic. British explorer Martin Frobisher was convinced that the rock he had brought back from Baffin Island in 1577 contained gold. It was iron pyrite – fool’s gold.

The fur trading in the Pond Inlet area, however, was profitable. Bernier was able to purchase his own ship, the *Guide*, and made two more voyages to Igarjuak. Between 1912 and 1917, he set up three fur trading posts: one on Button Point, Bylot Island across from Pond Inlet, and two on his property on northern Baffin Island.⁴

“There were still whalers at the time, his friends from Scotland, and he had a network of Inuit working as trappers for him,” says geographer Benoit Robitaille, whose wealth of information on Bernier comes from the documents he collected at the captain’s house before it was sold in the 1960s.⁵

Munn and Janes also set up their own posts in the vicinity, competing with him for furs.

On his second trip north as an independent trader, in 1914-15, he left his 27-year-old second cousin, Wilfrid Caron,⁶ in charge of the post. Bernier intended to send a ship the next year, but the Great War started and no ship went north. Caron was stuck in Pond Inlet for more than three years.

When Bernier took a ship to Europe as part of a convoy in 1918, he met up with Munn in England and sold him his Igarjuak properties with the condition that Munn

⁴ Yolande Dorion-Robitaille, Captain JE Bernier’s Contribution to Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic. Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978: 91-93.

⁵ Benoit Robitaille. Personal interview, May 27, 2003.

⁶ Wilfrid Caron is mentioned in Arctic Justice (36), as Bernier’s nephew. However, he was actually the brother of Bernier’s godchild, Almina Caron. Bernier and his first wife, Rose, adopted 10-year-old Almina as their daughter in 1885. Almina and Wilfrid’s mother was Bernier’s first cousin, which makes Wilfrid, Bernier’s second cousin. In his 1922 diary, W.H. Grant also refers to Caron as Bernier’s nephew, but this may have been an easy way to explain a complicated relationship between Caron and the captain. Magdeleine Bourget (Almina’s granddaughter). Personal interview, Aug. 6, 2003.

ensure Caron safe passage home.⁷

Though Bernier was not in the Arctic on official government business, his trading post had effectively maintained sovereignty. In a sense, by having people living and working in the region, he actually met the criteria of occupation better than his earlier government patrols had.

Soon afterwards, Bernier gave up long distance sea voyages to stay closer to his home in Lévis and his new wife. Ever the patriot, Bernier's wedding to Alma Lemieux took place on Dominion Day, July 1, 1919. Bernier was 67 and his second wife was 39.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, who is writing a biography of Bernier, says Alma gave birth to a stillborn son a year later.

"Today, it's dangerous to have a child at 39, so imagine then," Saint-Pierre says. "The neighbour found her one day dressed up as a man and sawing wood. So she was not very conscious of the care she should be taking to give birth to a child.

"To him that was one of the worst moments of his life; to lose a son. He would've loved to have a son," she says.⁸

The bedtime adventure stories he would have been able to tell are enviable.

The *Arctic* went north again in 1912, without Bernier, on a non-publicized four-month meteorological expedition to Hudson Bay. W.E.W. Jackson, the meteorologist on Bernier's 1908-09 trip and later head of the Toronto Observatory, led the expedition.

W.B. Wiegand was a 23-year-old from Toronto hired to be Jackson's magnetic assistant on this expedition, and he kept a well-written, almost poetic journal of his trip.

⁷ Stéphane Cloutier. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

⁸ Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, Personal interview, Aug. 13, 2003.

The only reference to the *Arctic*'s previous voyages is in his conversation with Paul Tremblay, who is on the 1910-11 expedition crew list as the waiter.

“Trembley, the second mate, is a very droll chap. He was telling me about Bernier's northern trips. All the sailors used every night (against orders) to steal off to an Eskimo village where dusky Eskimo belles entertained them,” wrote Wiegand.⁹

Episodes of men disobeying Bernier to visit the local Inuit women were mentioned in Macdonald's diary, though Tremblay's claim of “every night” is an exaggeration, judging by what Macdonald recorded.

After the 1912 voyage, the *Arctic* was used as lightship No. 20 on the Lower Traverse of the St. Lawrence River. Government-operated lightships were manned mobile lighthouses. The ship's mizzen mast was removed and replaced with a tower that had a powerful fresnel-lensed searchlight on it. The lightships were anchored in dangerous waters to aid marine traffic navigation and provide additional guidance into port.¹⁰

The Canadian Arctic Expedition

Bernier had accomplished a great deal with his patrols and cairn building. The islands had been claimed. A scientific examination of them was now necessary, and Vilhjalmur Stefansson had introduced this idea, and himself, to the Canadian government.

Stefansson was born to Icelandic parents in Arnes, Man., in 1879, but his family

⁹ W.B. Wiegand, diary entry, Saturday, July 6, 1912, MG 31 C6 Vol. 6, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

¹⁰ Thomas E. Appleton, Usque Ad Mare: A History of the Canadian Coast Guard and Marine Services. Ottawa: Department of Transport, 1968: 116-121.
Garth Wilson. Personal interview, July 16, 2003.

moved to the Dakotas when he was two. He graduated from Harvard with a degree in anthropology and made several expeditions to the North. Though the dark-haired Stefansson was a slight man, he had extraordinary stamina to survive and succeed in both the isolated, formidable North and the complex world of southern government.¹¹

He earned recognition for his 1908-12 exploration of the Central Arctic and his discovery of “blond Eskimos.” The Copper Inuit, on Victoria Island, had reddish hair and light eyes, which Stefansson believed was proof the Vikings had reached that far west in the Arctic.

In 1912, Stefansson planned to spend several years making a comprehensive scientific survey of the whole southwestern Arctic, as well as explore the polar continental shelf between the North Pole and Siberia, an area which had remained unexplored.

For this extensive research, he required a ship and a scientific crew. The American Museum of Natural History, in New York, and the National Geographic Society, in Washington, agreed to fund it. Stefansson soon realized that the \$45,000 these sponsors were putting up was inadequate to finance the expedition, so he approached Reginald Brock, director of the Geological Survey in Ottawa, to contribute \$25,000 towards it.

Brock had given Stefansson a small grant for his 1908-12 expedition, and had been impressed with his work. He convinced the government to take over the project completely, as Stefansson would be exploring Canadian territory and any discovery that

¹¹ Jennifer Niven, The Ice Master: The Doomed 1913 Voyage of the Karluk. New York: Hyperion, 2000: 12.

Stefansson might make would then be credited to Canada and not the United States.¹²

Concordia professor emeritus of history Richard Diubaldo has written extensively on Stefansson. He says that the government saw this scientific expedition as paramount to maintaining Arctic sovereignty.

“I think everything was subordinate to it, not only exploration but all these things enhanced it. ‘We have found new species, we have found new rivers, we have found mineral deposits and we are reporting on it as agents of a government agency.’ And this would reinforce this whole concept in international law,” Diubaldo says.¹³

In February 1913, the government paid out the two American sponsors and the project was named the Canadian Arctic Expedition. It would be comprised of two scientific teams; a northern party, which would explore the Beaufort Sea area, and a southern party which would carry out research along the Central Arctic coast.¹⁴

Stefansson was appointed overall commander and head of the northern team.

Rudolph M. Anderson had worked for the American Museum of Natural History and been Stefansson’s sole partner on the 1908 expedition. Stefansson recommended him and Anderson was appointed to head up the southern Geological Survey team.

The Feb. 22, 1913, order-in-council that spelled out the terms of the expedition said, “Any new or partly unknown lands which the expedition would touch would be observed, positions fixed, and the British flag be planted on these islands.” One expedition member would also be appointed customs and fishery officer.¹⁵

¹² Morris Zaslow, Reading the Rocks: The Story of the Geological Survey of Canada, 1842-1872. Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1975: 320.

¹³ Richard Diubaldo. Personal interview, May 10, 2003.

¹⁴ Zaslow 321.

¹⁵ R. Boudreau, Clerk of Privy Council, order-in-council, Feb. 22, 1913, P. 34, Vol. 1, 84-2-1, MG 30, B-57, JD Craig papers, N.A.C.

This was a replacement for the northern patrols that Bernier had commanded. Though it was largely a scientific expedition, the government sent a couple of flags along to raise on any new lands discovered.

The order-in-council specified that all expedition information and scientific data would be property of the government, stating, “The members of the party will not engage in any private trading, or make any private collections of specimens or of photographs.”¹⁶

This was no doubt fallout from Bernier’s 1910-11 trip when he had traded with the Inuit. The government was ensuring there would be no confusion about this.

The expedition had more serious problems, though. Unlike Bernier, Stefansson was a believer that improvisation would take care of the details and didn’t properly organize things. Stefansson spent much of his time prior to departure promoting the project with publishers and at conventions.¹⁷

He also purchased two ships. The *Karluk* was the larger ship, so it took the majority of supplies, equipment and men. The smaller ship, *Mary Sachs*, transported the balance of supplies and the southern team.

The ships left Esquimalt, B.C., on Tuesday, June 17, 1913, to head to the Beaufort Sea. The ships were to meet at Herschel Island and distribute the supplies between the parties before going their separate ways. This didn’t happen.

The *Karluk* was under Stefansson’s control but captained by Bob Bartlett, who had been master of several of Robert Peary’s explorations. Bartlett ignored Stefansson’s advice to take the *Karluk* into a cove for shelter and instead moored it in the open sea where it subsequently froze in the ice.

¹⁶ Cruise Orders for Canadian Arctic Expedition, May 29, 1913.

¹⁷ Diubaldo, Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1978: 76

In Stefansson's opinion, Bartlett was not as adept at reading arctic ice conditions as he should have been. By August, the ship was locked in the ice pack halfway between Point Barrow, Alaska, and Herschel Island.

Stefansson and three other shipmates went ashore to hunt caribou. Returning several days later, they saw the ice pack, with the ship in its midst, drifting away. The stranded men then set out to meet up with the southern party and were never reunited with their ship.

Stuck in the drifting ice, the powerless *Karluuk* travelled north for several hundred miles. In January 1914, ice crushed its hull and all hands abandoned ship. Capt. Bartlett stayed on deck playing records on the Victrola gramophone. As it started sinking, he put on the final record and leaped off. The ship went down to Chopin's *Funeral March*.¹⁸

The 28 marooned by the *Karluuk* did not fare well. Stefansson was confident that they would be able to live off the land. Unfortunately, no one had Stefansson's Arctic experience to do so. After the ship sank, the crew split into several parties and each trekked across the ice to Wrangel Island; one party of four never made it.

By March, Bartlett and Kataktovik, one of the Inuit guides, decided to walk the 300 kilometres over the frozen polar sea to Siberia to get help. They eventually got to Alaska and convinced a captain of an American ship to rescue the occupants of Wrangel Island.

Of the 24 who had reached Wrangel Island five months earlier, only 12 survived and were rescued on Sept. 7, 1914. Four bodies were found on nearby Herald Island in 1929, and were identified as the missing members of the expedition.¹⁹ (See Fig. 12)

¹⁸ Farley Mowat, The Polar Passion. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967. Based on R. Bartlett's diary.

¹⁹ Zaslow 322.

Meanwhile, Stefansson's attempt to persuade the southern Geological Survey party to take up the work of the northern party met with bitter opposition. They questioned the wisdom and value of his plan to cross the Beaufort Sea on drifting ice floes and live off the resources of the sea, which they regarded "as being nothing more than a useless journalistic stunt with little or no scientific merit."²⁰

Diubaldo says that Stefansson, as chief commander of the expedition, was within his rights to request this, but he had such poor interpersonal skills and leadership qualities that he failed to convince the men that his would be a superior project to the one that the Geological Survey had commissioned.²¹

Not easily deterred, Stefansson eventually acquired some equipment from the grudging southern team and he and two other men, Storker Storkerson and Ole Andreason, set out on March 22, 1914, to explore the north Beaufort Sea.

Stefansson and his men crossed the sea ice from Banks Island to Melville Island with two sleds loaded with gear, and came upon the cache Bernier's men had left in 1910.

Arctic biologist David Gray is working on a virtual museum exhibit about the Canadian Arctic Expedition. He located the expedition's artifacts in the Canadian Museum of Civilization's collection to photograph for the Web site exhibit. He talks about Stefansson's men finding Bernier's cache: "Stefansson prided himself on being able to live off the country and as long as he had seals and caribou, that was all that he really needed," says Gray. "But some of the men with him were accustomed to having jam with their bread. They went to the cache when they discovered it was there and they brought back all kinds of preserves, jam and sugar and syrup and all kinds of different

²⁰ Zaslow 323.

²¹ Diubaldo 84.

things, as well as extra fuel for their primus stoves. So it was a real windfall.”

“The other interesting point,” says Gray, “is that the shoeing on one of their sleds had become quite worn and damaged, and they actually took the metal strapping from the bottom of one of the ice boats that Bernier had left at Melville Island and used it to resole the runner of one of their sleds.”

One of these sleds is housed in the museum collection storage area in Gatineau. The other is in the Prince of Wales Museum in Yellowknife. There is a 50-50 chance that the sled that was fixed up is the one at the museum in Gatineau, but Gray says its difficult to determine if it is, adding, “Anyway, it is a neat thought of how one expedition helps out another.”²²

In November 1914, with the onset of the First World War, the government ordered the expedition parties to discontinue work and return. The RCMP delivered the orders to the southern party. The instructions arrived too late in 1915 to sail south. The party returned to Ottawa after completing its summer work in September 1916.

Stefansson, who was in the High Arctic at the time, learned that he was supposed to stop work and return, but went out of his way to avoid getting the mail.²³

Stefansson and his men returned in January 1918. Far from being “a journalistic stunt,” his expedition had succeeded in exploring and mapping approximately 105,000 square kilometres of Arctic Ocean and 4,900 square kilometres of land northeast of Patrick Island. He discovered the last major land in the world and claimed it for Canada:

²² David Gray. Personal interview, Dec. 30, 2002.

²³ Richard Diubaldo. E-mail correspondence, Aug. 22, 2003.

Brock, Borden,²⁴ Meighen and Lougheed islands. Stefansson corrected the existing maps of the northwestern Arctic Archipelago and did more to extend the boundaries of northern Canada than anyone since the mid-19th century.²⁵

The southern party had made detailed surveys and mapped 960 kilometres of Arctic coastline, the Mackenzie River and the Alaska boundary.²⁶ They documented an incredibly large amount of information on Canada's relatively unknown northern lands, and the published report spanned 14 volumes. The scientific research carried out by the southern party had also increased Canada's presence in the North.

The Survey staff harboured such animosity against Stefansson over the expedition that they refused him involvement in any way in the publication of the reports. They also would not include his data or the work of the northern party. Stefansson decided to present his work from his own point of view and eventually published *The Friendly Arctic* in 1921, which many felt to be libelous.²⁷

Ten months after returning south, Stefansson embarked on a lecture tour that started at Carnegie Hall in New York, on Oct. 31, 1918.

"In these lectures, and in his subsequent book, Stefansson did not understate his heroic role, and to heighten his achievements, he cast sometimes unnecessary and unfair aspersions on his associates," writes historian Morris Zaslow.²⁸

Not surprisingly, relations with the Survey leader R.M. Anderson disintegrated.

²⁴ While doing aerial surveys of the High Arctic in 1947, Keith Greenaway discovered that Borden Island was actually two islands. The larger was named Mackenzie King and the smaller one kept the name of Borden Island.

²⁵ D.M. LeBourdais, *Stefansson: Ambassador of the North*. Montreal: Harvest House, 1963.

²⁶ Jeannette Mirsky, *To the Arctic! The Story of Northern Exploration from Earliest Times to Present*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1934: 289.

²⁷ Zaslow 325.

²⁸ Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1870-1914*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971: 276.

Isabel Purdy, Anderson's only living daughter, was born in 1924, six years after the Canadian Arctic Expedition. She remembers growing up on the prestigious "Driveway" along the Rideau Canal in Ottawa, as her father's career burgeoned at the Geological Survey. Her father continued to go north almost every summer for research, but she says he never talked about the Canadian Arctic Expedition. Though, she says, her parents harboured hard feelings over it.

"Stefansson became a dirty word in our household," Purdy says.

"I feel that it discoloured their lives. I'm more of the philosophy, you've got to put it behind you and get on with things. Yes, I remember, because every time Stefansson's name was mentioned it would stir up the pot."²⁹

No Man's Land

The Canadian Arctic Expedition, originally budgeted at \$75,000, ended up costing the government \$512,628, not to mention the value of the lives lost.

Though Bernier's expeditions were much smaller in scale, they were not plagued with the same kind of infighting or disorganization. In fact, as a sea captain, Bernier had learned how to prepare for life away from urban convenience for months at a time.

More importantly, he had brought the government ship and its crew back safely each time. Bernier was proud of his record of not having lost a man to the hazards of arctic climes.

"The remarkable success of Bernier's voyages was primarily the result of the Captain's extraordinary ability to organize. It should be remembered that before 1904, Captain Bernier had had no direct contact with life as it was in the Far North, despite his

²⁹ Isabel Purdy. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

far-reaching experience on the seas prior to that time. All of Captain Bernier's success, both in polar navigation and in exploration, can be attributed to his ingenuity and methodical planning," writes Yolande Dorion-Robitaille, who compiled into a book the documents her husband, Benoit Robitaille, found in Bernier's house.³⁰

In 1919, 10 years after Bernier had claimed the entire archipelago, Canada's title to the islands was again questioned. The hunting of muskox on Ellesmere by foreign parties revealed Canada's weakness in the North.

On early government expeditions, Bernier, Low and Moodie had all witnessed how excessive hunting by exploration parties could lead to the extirpation of arctic game, especially muskoxen, which are easy targets. They protect themselves against predators by huddling together in a pack facing the enemy, a defence tactic that is useless against guns and makes them easy slaughter.³¹

Bernier reported in 1908-09 that hundreds of muskoxen were killed by foreign hunters for use by the expedition party and for dog food.³² The government's solution to protect arctic game at the time was to make it mandatory for hunters to procure permits.

However, in 1916, Stefansson found a note that American explorer Donald B. MacMillan had left in a cairn a few months earlier on Ellef Ringnes Island, which told about hunting muskox.³³ Stefansson sent a report of this hunting back to Ottawa, which did prompt an amendment to the Northwest Game Act that stated, "muskoxen shall not be hunted, trapped, taken, killed, shot at, wounded, injured, or molested at any time, except in such zones and during such period as the Governor in Council may prescribe."

³⁰ Dorion-Robitaille 73.

³¹ Ed Struzik, "Mystery of Banks Island Muskoxen," *Above and Beyond*, Sept./Oct. 2000: 29.

³² Bernier, *Report on the Dominion of Canada Government Expedition to the Arctic Islands and Hudson Strait on Board the D.G.S. Arctic, 1908-09*. Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1910: 16.

³³ Peter Schledermann, "The Muskox Patrol," *InfoNorth, Arctic*. Vol. 56, No. 1, March 2003: 102.

This excluded hunting by Inuit of the region for meat to prevent starvation.³⁴

Parks Canada historian Lyle Dick writes that these new regulations were another step in asserting Canadian Arctic sovereignty. This supported the government's earlier efforts of reinforcing sovereignty by exercising control and enforcing laws as Bernier had done in his role as fisheries officer, issuing licences and collecting duties and fees from whalers.³⁵

In his lecture before the Empire Club at Massey Hall on Nov. 11, 1918, Stefansson proposed a domesticated reindeer and muskox industry in Canada similar to the successful Alaskan venture that had been started in 1890. Stefansson forecast that the raising of muskoxen would make Canada a world meat supplier.

He won Conservative Leader Arthur Meighen over to his plan and Meighen arranged for him to address the Senate and House of Commons on his project on Tuesday, May 6, 1919. Stefansson, like Bernier, was a convincing, charismatic speaker and two days later, the Musk-ox and Reindeer Commission was established to investigate the potential of this industry from a "business and national standpoint" with the goal of demonstrating that the Canadian North was capable of becoming a meat and wool producing area.³⁶

In July 1919, Stefansson got wind of the Danish Fifth Thule Expedition plans to explore and set up trading posts on islands north of Lancaster Sound, which included Devon and Ellesmere. Stefansson believed that the intention was also to colonize the region with Inughuit of Greenland, which would mean the killing of muskox for food and sale purposes.

³⁴ Lyle Dick, Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact. Calgary: U Calgary P, 2001: 273.

³⁵ Dick 273.

³⁶ Diubaldo 143-145.

Stefansson and James B. Harkin, commissioner of Dominion Parks, brought this before the commission emphasizing how many muskox would be killed for the posts. The Musk-ox and Reindeer Commission urged the government to respond.

On July 31, 1919, the Canadian government, informed the Danish government that the muskox was protected under Canadian game laws and requested that Denmark “restrain Greenland Eskimos in the matter of killing muskox on Ellesmere Land.”³⁷

Knud Rasmussen, head of the Fifth Thule Expedition and founder/manager of the Thule trading station in western Greenland, wrote directly to Stefansson: “There is no question of our breaking Canadian game laws because we are not coming to Canada, but a part farther north. It is not under Canadian jurisdiction.”³⁸

Denmark’s official response contained a formal letter from the Danish authorities and a second enclosure prepared by Rasmussen.

Rasmussen’s letter said, “It is well known that the territory of the Polar Eskimo falls within the region designated as ‘No Man’s Land’ and there is therefore no authority in the district except that which I exercise through my station.”³⁹

The attached Danish correspondence further inflamed the government by stating, “Having acquainted themselves with the statement in question my government think that they can subscribe to what Mr. Rasmussen says therein.”⁴⁰

This was a blatant denial of the Dominion government’s sovereignty over Ellesmere Island.

³⁷ V. Stefansson address to the Advisory Technical Board, Oct. 1, 1920, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1.

³⁸ K. Rasmussen. Letter to V. Stefansson, mentioned at Advisory Technical Board meeting, Oct. 1, 1920.

³⁹ K. Rasmussen. Communication transmitted by Lord Milner, Sec. of State for the Colonies, April 26, 1920, RG 15, Vol. 2, N.A.C.

⁴⁰ O.S. Finnie. Information contained in confidential memo to W.W. Cory, Feb. 16, 1922, RG 85, Vol. 583, File 571, Pt. 3, N.A.C.

On July 13, 1920, almost a year after the first letter was sent, the Governor General formally protested Denmark's assertion that Ellesmere Island was 'no man's land,' saying, "My government considers if Denmark fails to take steps to remedy the destruction complained of, it will be necessary for Canada to establish mounted police posts in Ellesmere island for the purpose of stopping this slaughter and of asserting Canadian authority."⁴¹

No reply was received from Denmark.

The Canadian government set up the Advisory Technical Board to examine this question of sovereignty and report to the Department of the Interior.⁴²

In 1919, the Danish government claimed the whole of Greenland and asked the leading allied nations to recognize this sovereignty. The United States purchased the Danish West Indies (now the U.S. Virgin Islands) with the agreement that it would forego any claims to Greenland.

Denmark had not exercised occupation or administration over most of Greenland and recognized its claim was open to attack, which was why it approached the allied nations for support. But it also made it clear to the Dominion government that Denmark was aware of the weakness of a sovereignty claim such as Canada's in the Arctic.⁴³

On Friday, Oct. 1, 1920, at a meeting of the Advisory Technical Board, Harkin, said, "The whole issue seems to me to be; Are the northern islands worthwhile, or not? That is the first issue. Do we want them, or do we not? Apparently if we want them we

⁴¹ Governor General, Memo to Viscount Milner, July 13, 1920, MG 30, 571- Vol. 3 File 1921-1922, J.D. Craig Papers, N.A.C.

⁴² Grant 95.

Minutes of the board in the National Archives of Canada call it the Advisory Technical Board, though both Grant and Diubaldo refer to it as the Technical Advisory Board. The discrepancy in title is not clear, so, based on archival sources, the committee is referred to in this thesis as the Advisory Technical Board.

⁴³ RG 15, Vol. 2, N.A.C.

have to do something to establish our title.”

The United States and Norway also had equal claim to Ellesmere, but Harkin said, “None of us have occupied Ellesmere Land; we have no population; only a muskox population; but that is all.”⁴⁴

The Advisory Technical Board felt the urgency to defend Canada’s title to the Arctic Islands. At a meeting later in October, it was voted that “immediate action should be taken in the matter of occupation and administration of Ellesmere Land for the purpose of definitely establishing Canadian sovereignty therein.”⁴⁵

It was decided that the best way to deal with the situation was, as the government said through the Governor General’s letter to Denmark, to establish mounted police posts. A special mounted police expedition would go the summer of 1921 to set up posts on Bylot and North Devon islands, with an additional three on the south, east and north sides of Ellesmere Island, points from which police patrols could extend surveillance over Axel Heiberg and the Ringnes islands.

Constables would also be appointed customs and immigration officers. It was also recommended that a post office be set up at each station, as the establishment and maintenance of a post office is a high act of administration.⁴⁶

A final suggestion was that “the government should transfer Eskimos from other Canadian areas to establish small centres of population.”⁴⁷ This suggestion was implemented 30 years later in the mid-1950s, and has been a controversial issue since.

The technical board urged the government to send a ship that autumn of 1920 to

⁴⁴ J.B. Harkin. Address to Advisory Technical Board, Oct. 1, 1920, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1, N.A.C.

⁴⁵ Advisory Technical Board minutes, Oct. 27, 1920, MG30-B-57, file correspondence 1903-1922, N.A.C.

⁴⁶ Technical Board minutes, Oct. 27, 1920.

⁴⁷ Technical Board minutes, Oct. 27, 1920.

Bylot Island with an aeroplane, which could then immediately fly to Ellesmere to start occupying and administrating the island. If this was not possible, the board suggested contacting the British government to transport a Canadian party of mounted police to Ellesmere by airship/dirigible or hydroplane in January 1921.⁴⁸

This was a desperate case of southerners trying to administrate for a North they had no clue about. None of the board members had ever been to the Arctic, or they would have known that the sea ice made it impossible for a ship to get into Baffin Bay at that time of year. Also, the High Arctic would then be enveloped in 24-hour darkness. In an era when aerial navigation required visual aids, the idea of sending a surveillance plane into the Arctic in midwinter was ludicrous.

Stefansson had more practical suggestions. He wrote to the surveyor general:

I want to suggest that as a part of your inquiry you ought to find out from the Department of Marine how long it would take to put the *Arctic* in seaworthy condition and also a rough estimate of the cost. She is one of the three best ships in the world for use in our northern icy waters, and as she belongs to our government already she is really the logical vessel.⁴⁹

The Department of the Interior agreed. By Nov. 30, 1920, the *Arctic* was moved to the government docks at Sorel, Que. Capt. Harris C. Pickels of Nova Scotia, who had some Arctic experience, was hired to supervise the refitting of the ship and captain it the following summer.

Bernier was not asked to take on the job of refitting the *Arctic*, though he was the logical choice.

Robitaille hypothesizes that there were several reasons for this: he was quite old

⁴⁸ Technical Board minutes, Oct. 27, 1920.

⁴⁹ V. Stefansson. Letter to E. Deville, Surveyor General, Nov. 3, 1920, MG30, B-57, File Correspondence 1903-1922, J.D. Craig papers, N.A.C.

[68], still in a kind of semi-disgrace from his improper trading, and the Conservatives were in power under Arthur Meighen. Bernier's expeditions had been under the Liberals.

On Dec. 1, 1920, John Davidson Craig, secretary of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Interior, was appointed to oversee the department's Arctic sovereignty issues and expedition preparations. Craig was given the innocuous title of advisory engineer, which suggests the secrecy of the whole project.⁵⁰

The Department of the Interior proceeded with preparations for a 1921 summer expedition to Ellesmere. In February 1920, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police had absorbed the Dominion Police, the federal police force in Eastern Canada, and changed its name to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Like the 1903-04 and 1904-05 expeditions, the mounted police would be a big part of this expedition, and the RCMP began preparations to establish posts in the High Arctic.

The Air Board⁵¹ was interested in transporting a 13-metre fixed-winged plane on the *Arctic*. Pickels measured and found that a crated plane could be carried on-board.⁵²

Pickels' assessment of the 20-year-old *Arctic* was not good:

Whole ship in bad shape, need new wiring, new water tanks, new kitchen range, heating system found in bad condition would need all steam pipes gone over and renewed where bad, new radiators where old ones worn out or gone.⁵³

The ship needed an extensive overhaul and re-rigging.

Another Arctic expedition also added to the concern that Canada's title was not

⁵⁰ Craig was an experienced engineer and surveyor who had been the Canadian member on the International Boundary Commission to survey the new Alaskan Boundary after the dispute had been settled. He eventually became the Surveyor General for Canada.

⁵¹ The Air Board was Canada's first governing body for aviation. It was responsible for devising a means of air defence, as well as controlling all civil/government flying operations. Greenaway interview, May 2003

⁵² Memo to W.W. Cory, March 19, 1921, RG 85, File 571, Vol. 2, 1921, N.A.C..

⁵³ Pickels report on the *Arctic*, MG30, B-57, File Correspondence 1903-1922, J.D. Craig papers, N.A.C.

respected internationally. The American explorer Donald B. MacMillan was again heading north. MacMillan had accompanied Peary on his successful 1909 polar trek, and then mounted his own expedition to Canada's Arctic in 1913-17, known as the Crocker Land Expedition.⁵⁴ This latest foray into the Arctic caused great speculation that it was an official United States expedition.

Memos were sent off to Washington.

The British embassy in Washington telegraphed to say, "Although MacMillan's expedition is sponsored by the Geological Society of Philadelphia and other American Scientific organizations, it is not in any sense backed by the United States Government although the latter may appoint a representative to take magnetic observations."⁵⁵

This would not be the last time that MacMillan's name would ring alarm bells over sovereignty in the Eastern Arctic.

Despite evidence to the contrary, in 1921, the government was still jumpy about these northern expeditions and the Department of the Interior prepared to prove and uphold Canadian sovereignty.

It had a report drawn up.

Hensley Holmden, who was in charge of the maps division at the National Archives, led the research on Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago. Holmden's report was basically an updated version of W.F. King's 1905 report on Canada's title to the Arctic islands. Unfortunately, Holmden's report showed that Canada's title was no more solid than King had revealed it to be 20 years earlier. Despite

⁵⁴ Donald B. MacMillan's 1913-17 Crocker Land expedition set out to visit and map the land that Peary had seen to the north of Axel Heiberg Island in 1906. MacMillan proved that Crocker Land was actually an ice mirage.

⁵⁵ T.P. Porter. Letter to J. Joyce Broderick, British Embassy in Washington, March 2, 1921, MG 30, B-57 Vol. 1, File Despatches 1874-1923, N.A.C.

efforts made by Bernier and Low, without occupation Canada's title to the islands was still tenuous.

Stefansson was not involved in the planning for the upcoming expedition. Hoping to be considered for the position of commander, he wrote to Sir Robert Borden, the opposition leader and supporter of his 1913-18 trip.⁵⁶

Stefansson was an asset as a government adviser. His knowledge and experience in the North were invaluable, but his personal style was grating and his constant self-serving interests eventually brought his downfall. Harkin, who worked closely with Stefansson on the Musk-ox and Reindeer Commission, was suspicious of him and warned the government to be wary.

While preparations proceeded for the 1921 expedition, a celebrated British explorer suddenly appeared on the scene in Ottawa.

Sir Ernest Shackleton told the *Ottawa Citizen* in an interview at the Chateau Laurier Hotel in early February, "I do desire to explore some more but I shall not go back to the South Pole."⁵⁷

Sir Ernest was in Ottawa to meet the Prime Minister and senior Department of the Interior bureaucrats to solicit financial assistance for a northern expedition.

He had formulated this plan the summer before and explained in a letter to his friend Capt. Evans, "My eyes are turned from the South to North, and I want to lead one more expedition. This will be the last....Amundsen, I know from the Siberian side is planning to reach the North Pole. Why should I not get there before him?"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ V. Stefansson. Letter to R. Borden, Jan. 8, 1921, Meighen papers, Microfiche reel C-3129, 7385-7388, N.A.C.

⁵⁷ *The Ottawa Citizen*, Feb. 7, 1921.

⁵⁸ E. Shackleton. Letter to Teddy Evans, Aug. 9, 1920. Taken from *Shackleton* by R. Huntford, 1985: 678.

On Feb. 7, 1921, Shackleton met with several members of the Advisory Technical Board with his proposal to “explore the last unknown sea of the world, the Beaufort Sea.” Shackleton was convinced that a land mass or cluster of islands larger than the United Kingdom stood at the centre of the Beaufort. He intended to discover it.⁵⁹

The technical board agreed that the expedition would add scientific data to the Arctic, but decided there was no urgency to acquire this information, and the government could not afford another expedition.

Shackleton, however, left with the impression that if he succeeded in raising a large portion of the funds, “Canada would be justified in making a grant towards the expedition.”⁶⁰

Stefansson accused Shackleton of using his own polar plans. He may have been right.

“It was not wholly implausible,” notes Roland Huntford in his biography of Shackleton. “For over a decade, Stefansson had been exploring the Arctic. He had become the loud-spoken prophet of a rich and profitable north. Shackleton could hardly fail to have been apprised of his opinions.”⁶¹

Early in 1920, Stefansson had been entertained by Shackleton at the Marlborough Club, in London, where he revealed detailed plans to explore the Beaufort Region.

“I sat talking freely and behaving like a simpleton, lulled by the feeling that he was an Antarctic man who cared nothing for anything but outdoing Scott and

⁵⁹ His proposal included letters of reference, a list of officers he intended to take with him, curriculum vitae and a letter of recommendation from the Royal Geographic Society.

E. Shackleton, General Plan of the Expedition, February 1921, RG 85, Vol. 583, File 571, Vol. 2, 1921.

⁶⁰ J.D. Craig, Confidential Memo to W.W. Cory, RG 85-1673, File, 371 Vol. 1, 1921, N.A.C.

⁶¹ Roland Huntford, Shackleton, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1985: 680.

Amundsen,” Stefansson later wrote in his autobiography.⁶²

The conversation at the Marlborough Club must have been interesting. One polar hero was noted for his excellent leadership qualities, surviving incredibly formidable weather conditions without losing any of his men. The other was known for his poor leadership and had a reputation that would forever be tarnished by the fact that 21 men had died on three of his expeditions.⁶³

In April, Shackleton again checked into the Chateau Laurier Hotel. His almost illegible handwritten letter, on Chateau letterhead, to Loring Christie, the Canadian government’s legal adviser, said, “Following our conversation...this expedition will be entirely featured as Canadian and the word ‘Canadian’ will be in its official designation.”⁶⁴

Shackleton needed \$100,000 from the Canadian government. He had a promise of \$25,000 from a friend, and Sir John Eaton of Toronto “promised \$100,000 without any conditions.”⁶⁵

Shackleton was willing to do whatever was necessary to accommodate the government in order to get financing for his trip. He had agreed to use the name “Eaton-Shackleton Canadian Arctic Expedition,” and even offered to moor his ship off Ellesmere Island as a sovereignty station.

The government deliberated. Memos of cost comparisons of the *Arctic* versus Shackleton’s expedition were drafted. Refitting and outfitting the *Arctic* amounted to

⁶² V. Stefansson, *Discovery*, 238, taken from Huntford 680.

⁶³ Two of the 11 men who died on the *Karluik* had been Shackleton’s companions on his earlier trip on the *Nimrod*. James Murray, marine biologist, and Alistair Forbes Mackay, surgeon, died together on the Chukchi Sea attempting to cross to Wrangel Island. Huntford 680.

⁶⁴ E. Shackleton. Letter to Loring Christie, April 1921. Meighen papers, microfiche reel C-3129, 7443.

⁶⁵ E. Shackleton. Letter to April 5, 1921, Microfiche reel C-3129, 7425-7435.

over \$81,000. Additional expedition costs to the *Arctic* would be only \$30,000, but Shackleton's would be \$100,000 and no police posts would be established.

Shackleton, meanwhile, proceeded to organize his trip as if he had received government approval, as perhaps he was led to believe.⁶⁶ In early May, Shackleton sent a few desperate telegrams to Prime Minister Meighen requesting confirmation of government financial support in order to complete preparations for his trip. Meighen put him off, saying the government had made no definite commitment.⁶⁷

The government was still divided about which expedition to send. Both could not go. The Department of the Interior felt that "conditions made it imperative that action be taken for the securing of Canadian sovereignty" and the *Arctic* scheme appeared to be the surest and cheapest possible.

The *Arctic* was nearly ready and a crew hired. No commander had yet been chosen, but Stefansson was the likely candidate. There was a perceived potential for danger if Shackleton were chosen over Stefansson for an Arctic expedition, though.

In a memo to William Wallace Cory, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Harkin wrote:

Stefansson knows the weakness of Canada's claims as well as we do. He is generally regarded as being more of an American than a Canadian. If he should decide to throw in his lot with the Americans his information would be disastrous to Canadian interests...As Canada is neither occupying nor administering the northern islands the United States could quite properly claim it was not an unfriendly act for it to undertake occupation.⁶⁸

Minister of the Interior Sir James Lougheed addressed the Privy Council on May

⁶⁶ E. Shackleton. Telegram to Prime Minister Meighen, Microfiche reel C-3129, 7471-7476.

⁶⁷ A. Meighen. Telegram to E. Shackleton, May 9, 1921. Microfiche reel C-3129, 7479.

⁶⁸ J.B. Harkin. Letter to W.W. Cory, May 26, 1921, RG 85, 571 Vol. 3, File 1921-22, N.A.C.

18, 1921. The *Arctic* was scheduled to depart June 1, and Lougheed stressed how “it was absolutely necessary that a decision should be arrived at as to whether we should not carry out our original plan.”⁶⁹

Council was still divided. The best way out of the predicament was not to send an expedition at all. So, the Privy Council decided that no expedition would go to the Arctic that year.⁷⁰

Pickels was given the task of discharging the crew and getting the *Arctic* ready for dry dock until further notice about an expedition the following year.

The Eaton-Shackleton Canadian Arctic Expedition was also not to be. Shackleton decided to attempt another South Pole expedition. It was, as he had foretold in his letter to Evans, “the last.” He died of a heart attack on Jan. 5, 1922, off the coast of South Georgia. He was 48.

Despite the government’s desire to keep the summer Arctic expedition secret, the newspapers ran stories about the expedition’s cancellation. On May 30, 1921, the [Winnipeg] *Free Press* ran an article titled, “Canada gives up race for Arctic Islands:

The *Quebec Chronicle* which publishes the news, adds that the *Arctic* was not being prepared for patrol service on the Mackenzie River as was thought all along, but for a more important mission. The plan was, it is said, to have her sail for Arctic Islands in the region of Ellesmere Land, where a wealth of oil and coal has been discovered, and to plant the British flag there.

The *Chronicle* also learns that the United States and Danish governments are organizing expeditions to race for the possession of the islands in question, and says that under such circumstances it is all the more incomprehensible why the Canadian government is abandoning the expedition.⁷¹

A month after the expedition plans were shelved, the secretary of state for the

⁶⁹ O.S. Finnie. Memo to R.A. Gibson, Feb. 20, 1922, RG 85, vol. 583, File 571, pt.3, N.A.C.

⁷⁰ Huntford 681.

⁷¹ “Canada gives up race for Arctic Islands,” *Free Press*, May 30, 1921.

colonies in London sent a telegram to the Department of the Interior regarding the Fifth Thule Expedition that had sparked the controversy about Canada's title to Ellesmere in the first place. The telegram said, "Danish minister has submitted memorandum containing definite guarantee by government of Denmark that expedition has no political or mercantile aims but is of entirely scientific character. And that no acquisition of territory whatsoever is contemplated in regions in question."⁷²

There was no longer an immediate threat from that direction to Canada's Arctic islands. However, the government's attention had been alerted to the fact that its title was weak. There had been no acts of administration or jurisdiction since the last patrol of the *Arctic* in 1910. Canada still needed to take steps to change this and strengthen its claim, but deferred it for another year.⁷³

Stefansson's Schemes

Meanwhile, the success of the Musk-ox and Reindeer Commission was marginal. The commission's published report about raising muskox for wool and either reindeer or muskox for meat, was cautious and not as enthusiastic as Stefansson had hoped. He was certain that such an industry would be successful, so he decided to start a private venture.

In March 1920, he applied for a lease of land on Amadjuak Bay, southwest Baffin Island for grazing privileges. He resigned from the commission in May, as his new endeavours were a conflict of interest. The government granted Stefansson the lease of land on June 1, 1920, and he approached the Hudson's Bay Company to be a business partner.

⁷² Viscount Milner. Telegram to Governor General, June 9, 1921, RG 85, Vol. 583, File 571, Pt. 3, N.A.C.

⁷³ O.S.Finnie. Confidential memorandum to R.A. Gibson, Feb. 20, 1922, RG 85, Vol. 583, File 571, Pt. 3.

It agreed and the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company was formed. The company purchased 687 reindeer from Norway in the summer of 1921. The reindeer were loaded on the Hudson's Bay's rugged steam freighter *Nascopie*, but by the time they landed at Amadjuak Bay, in November 1921, 137 reindeer had died.⁷⁴

Stefansson's attitude of details taking care of themselves had again proved disastrous. The project had not been properly planned out. Heading into winter was the worst time to introduce the animals into a foreign environment. The land also proved unsuitable. The climate was harsh and the feeding grounds poor. Within a year, the population had dwindled and the whole project was abandoned as a failure.

While the reindeer project was proceeding, Stefansson had embarked on another scheme. This time to establish claim to Wrangel Island, which he saw as a crucial and strategic point of access to the Arctic region, though it is actually much closer to Russia than to Canada.

The flag had been raised on Wrangel, in 1914, by the stranded crew of the *Karluk*. It was doubtful whether the flag was raised with the intention of claiming the island for Canada, but Stefansson interpreted it as such.

The Advisory Technical Board thought the matter should be referred to the Imperial government for action.⁷⁵

Stefansson mounted a private expedition to claim Wrangel. Four young men enlisted for the cause to occupy the island. Three were Americans. The token Canadian, 23-year-old Allan Crawford from Toronto, was given the role of leader as the island was being claimed for Canada. Ada Blackjack, an Inuit seamstress, accompanied the young

⁷⁴ Diubaldo 148-158.

⁷⁵ Advisory Technical Board. Memorandum to W.W. Cory, Nov. 10, 1920, MG 30, B-57 File Correspondence 1903-1922, J.D. Craig papers, N.A.C.

men to Wrangel.⁷⁶

On Sept. 16, 1921, an Alaskan schooner dropped the party off on Wrangel. As instructed, Crawford immediately raised the Red Ensign flag “in the name of King and Empire” as soon as they landed. The Americans on board the schooner, thinking the Canadians had found something valuable there, protested the claim.

Stefansson failed to secure financial assistance to get supplies to the party on Wrangel the following summer. Consequently, no relief ship went to the island in 1922.

When the Canadian government deliberated about claiming the island, Stefansson approached the United States government. In the summer of 1923, a second party of 12 Alaskan Inuit with their American leader, Charles Wells, left to take over from the small 1921 expedition and inhabit the island. Tragically, they arrived on Wrangel to discover that the four men had perished, and only Blackjack was found alive.⁷⁷

R.M. Anderson’s daughter, Isabel Purdy, recalls that for years, Allan Crawford’s mother, in Toronto, contacted the Andersons whenever Stefansson’s name appeared in the news.

“Her son was one of the men, boys – they were university students – who was lost on Wrangel Island due to Stefansson. She was so bitter that these young men were led to their deaths. It was so uncalled for,” says Purdy. “I’m sure it spoiled her life needlessly. I was too young to appreciate it all. And afterwards, I think back, that didn’t help my parents’ lives at all.”⁷⁸

In August 1924, the Russian warship, *Red October*, removed the 12 Inuit and one American from Wrangel Island. It claimed that the group was operating on Russian

⁷⁶ Diubaldo 171-72.

⁷⁷ Diubaldo 182.

⁷⁸ Isabel Purdy. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

territory without proper authorization. The colonizers were taken to Vladivostok where Wells died of pneumonia. The Inuit were eventually returned home to Golovin Bay, near Nome, Alaska.⁷⁹

The new Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King quickly distanced the Canadian government by referring to it as an Imperial matter.

The whole episode had been a disastrous, international embarrassment. Canada, Britain and the United States were originally content to see the island recognized as Russian, but Stefansson's meddling had created an atmosphere of apprehension and mistrust.

Diubaldo, who wrote about Stefansson's exploits in the Arctic, states Canada "concluded that the island was not worth keeping, both because of its limited value to Canada and because recognition of her claims there might have put in question her own tenuous claims to the Arctic Archipelago."⁸⁰

In April 1926, Wrangel Island was decreed an integral part of the U.S.S.R and the Soviet government incorporated the sector theory into its national legislation to protect Arctic interests.⁸¹

Stefansson was ostracized. He had proved himself to be more of a danger than a service to the country. The scorn and negative fallout from the public and Canadian government was so harsh that he retired to the United States, where he focused on the American Far North rather than the Canadian Arctic. He became a celebrity American explorer.

When Diubaldo was researching his book, he visited Stefansson's gravesite in

⁷⁹ Diubaldo 185.

⁸⁰ Diubaldo 187.

⁸¹ Diubaldo 186.

New Hampshire. He says, “They have on his tomb, a rock. They brought down a rock from Stefansson Island.”⁸² And of course, my musings at the time were ‘this is to make sure he doesn’t get up.’ ”⁸³

⁸² Stefansson Island is a small island off the northern peninsula of Victoria Island in the Western Arctic.

⁸³ Diubaldo interview.

Chapter Five

The First Eastern Arctic Patrols

If this series of police stations is established it will effectually close up what might be called the front door of the Arctic Archipelago. This is specially true if police stations on Bylot, North Devon, and the south end of Ellesmere Island are instructed to deal with Lancaster and Jones sounds as territorial waters in the event of any foreign ships attempting to enter these passages.

– Advisory Technical Board Report, 1921¹

In the 1970s, zoologist Rick Riewe specialized in large arctic carnivores such as wolves and polar bears. After months spent on the land hunting with Inuit, he realized he was actually studying the top carnivore: man.

Over the past 25 years, he has developed close ties with people and places in the North. He studied the impact oil companies have on the land and people. He spent two years helping to put the Nunavut Atlas together for the land claims agreement talks and was invited to be involved in the land claims.

Working on the land claims and issues of Northern territory has heightened Riewe's awareness of Arctic sovereignty issues.

"We can put up post offices and Mountie stations. As you remember, back in the '20s they put those Mountie stations on Ellesmere and Devon Islands to show sovereignty," Riewe says.

"To keep the Mounties alive they brought in Greenlanders. They were there to stop Greenlanders from hunting on Ellesmere Island, but they were still dependent on them to keep them alive. Ellesmere was a hunting area by the Thule people. So you had

¹ Advisory Technical Board report on sovereignty issues, 1921, RG 15, Vol. 2, P. 3-A, N.A.C.

that interesting arrangement, but they were doing it to raise the flag, putting the Mounties up there.”²

In the third week of July 1922, the first Eastern Arctic Patrol was quietly preparing to depart for Ellesmere Island. The expedition, like the one cancelled in 1921, had been kept secret and out of the press. The government was taking no chances that a foreign country would get wind of Canada’s tentative sovereignty status in the Arctic.

Only family members were on the dock on July 18, to wave farewell to the 43 souls aboard, which included 10 mounted policemen. J.D. Craig was commander of the mission and Capt. Bernier was captain of the ship.

Capt. Pickels had died suddenly of a massive heart attack in October 1921, and so the position of captain was open when the expedition got the go-ahead in the spring of ’22. Bernier had done no work for the government for a decade, but his name had recently resurfaced in the Department of the Interior in two letters.

On July 29, 1921, the patriotic Bernier wrote Prime Minister Meighen expressing deep concern:

Mr. MacMillan, an American, has left with the schooner *Bowdoin* to explore this country of ours, and I fear that with the well-known enterprises of the Americans, they might probably take away from us, what belongs to our country...

I will hold myself in readiness to discuss this matter further with your government, as I feel that it is urgent for us to prevent Canada from being despoiled of her very valuable territory.³

A few months later, Bernier again teamed up with Alfred Tremblay, his former crewmember and co-owner of the *Minnie Maud*, to form the Arctic Exchange and Publishing Limited. The company’s mandate included fur farming, similar to what the

² Rick Riewe. Personal Interview, Feb. 14, 2003.

³ J.E. Bernier. Letter to A.. Meighen, July 29, 1921, Meighen papers, Microfiche reel, C-3129, 7504-7507.

Publishing Limited. The company's mandate included fur farming, similar to what the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company had attempted under Stefansson. The "publishing" part of the company published Tremblay's book the *Cruise of the Minnie Maud*.

In a February 1922 letter to the Department of the Interior, Tremblay applied for a 30-year lease (a similar time period was given to the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company in 1920) on all the Arctic islands, except Victoria, Banks and King William and part of Baffin Island, for the sole rights to hunt and raise muskox.

Tremblay also requested, "the appointment of our company for the maintenance of the Canadian law and rights, in all the Arctic islands, and the said company to report each year to the honourable Minister of the Interior." Tremblay also requested use of the *Arctic* for this purpose, which would be commanded by Bernier.⁴

Craig wrote rather disparagingly of the request to R.A. Gibson, Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. However, Tremblay's letter put the government in an embarrassing light, pointing out sovereignty issues in the North that the government had not properly dealt with the year before.

"The Arctic Exchange and Publishing Ltd. is evidently familiar with the difficulties that have arisen in connection with the question of Canadian sovereignty in the northern islands and apparently is advancing its request for monopoly of the Far North with the idea that in exchange for the monopoly asked for the company should take steps calculated to definitely establish Canadian Sovereignty," wrote Craig to Gibson.

This was a similar proposal to that which Shackleton had offered, except that he was taken more seriously because of his high profile.

⁴ A. Tremblay. Letter to Craig, Dept. of the Interior, Feb. 22, 1922, MG30, B-57, File Correspondence, J.D. Craig papers.

“The government has its own ship,” continued Craig, “now practically ready for the voyage, and rather than entrust the north to indirect administration through a trading company, it would seem only natural that the necessary steps should continue to be undertaken by the government itself by means of a patrol made by its own ship, and the establishment of its own administrative officers.”⁵

Tremblay’s request was turned down, but the letter did, at any rate, suggest Bernier’s name to department officials as a replacement for Pickels, as Deputy Minister Cory explained to the new Minister of the Interior Charles Stewart:

The *Arctic* was put in shape last year by Captain Pickels, who was in command, and died. It is quite probable that Captain Bernier whose name is mentioned in connection with the Arctic Exchange and Publishing Co. would be glad to take command of the *Arctic* for the government.

If the government sends an expedition to the north, a responsible officer of the permanent staff of the Department of the Interior should take command of the whole expedition. Under his discretion should be placed the captain, who is in charge of the boat.⁶

In June 1922, upon Cory’s suggestion, Stewart gave command of the expedition to J.D. Craig, who had been closely involved with the organization of the expedition from the beginning. Bernier, now 70 but still spry, accepted the post of captain.

Craig, like most of the government staff and RCMP on board, had never been to the Arctic before. Though he was expedition commander, he deferred to the more experienced Bernier for most decisions.

⁵ J.D. Craig. Letter to R.A. Gibson, Feb. 22, 1922, MG30, B-57, File Correspondence, J.D. Craig papers.

⁶ W.W. Cory. Letter to C. Stewart, Minister of the Interior, March 8, 1922, RG 85, Vol. 596, docs no. 928.

The 1922 Eastern Arctic Patrol

The object of the 1922 voyage was to establish an RCMP post at Pond Inlet on northern Baffin Island and a second one on eastern Ellesmere Island, at Bache Peninsula, opposite Etah on northwest Greenland, which was commonly used as a base by American exploration parties. The expedition would, like Bernier's earlier northern voyages, patrol the Arctic, issue hunting and fishing permits, and collect duties from foreign vessels.

The expedition included nine RCMP officers and their commander, Superintendent C.E. Wilcox, who would build and occupy the two new High-Arctic police posts for the next year.

Final approval didn't come through for the expedition until June, so preparations for the voyage were hurried, despite the ship having been outfitted the previous year. Craig blamed the continuous engine trouble and the numerous other mechanical problems on the rush to get the ship ready to depart.

"The cause of course was the need of haste, as every day lost in Quebec meant two working days lost in the north, and this counts very heavily in the short northern season and no boat but a government boat would have been allowed to sail in the condition the *Arctic* was in," Craig wrote in his diary on Aug. 5.⁷

Though the ship had been freshly painted the year before, there was still a general feeling that it was a dingy, old vessel. Maj. Robert A. Logan's description of his first encounter with the *CGS Arctic* gives a sense of this:

I first saw the masts of the ship tied up to a wharf just below the Chateau Frontenac. I could not see the ship because of the piles of lumber and coal on the deck, but on that day, 12 July 1922, I surely could smell it. And even on this 8th

⁷ J.D. Craig diary entry, Aug. 5, 1922, MG 30, B129, Vol. 1, W.H. Grant Fonds.

day of May 1970, I can still smell it. Two score and eight years of smells in many parts of the world have not erased the odours that I absorbed that first night on board the *Arctic*. Disinfectants, dead rats, dead fish and rotten vegetables combined with a temperature of over 90 degrees made it a night to remember.⁸

Logan was a 30-year-old First World War veteran fighter pilot, and was the Air Board representative on the 1922 expedition to assess flight conditions in the Arctic and determine appropriate landing sites, particularly on Northern Baffin Island, North Devon and Ellesmere Islands. He was in charge of the Canadian Air Force (later the Royal Canadian Air Force) Ground Schools at Camp Borden when he received orders to take passage aboard the *Arctic* on July 6, 1922. The vessel was scheduled to depart July 18, a further example of the secrecy and haste of the mission.

As Logan mentioned, the ship's deck was overloaded. Canvas tarps lashed down with four-centimetre-thick rope covered several tonnes of lumber, needed for the building of the two police detachments, and bags of coal to be used for both heating the police posts and powering the ship.

All the RCMP constables shared a room off a corridor at the foot of the stairway to the deck. It had enough bunks to accommodate 10, with a few chairs and a table on which they ate, wrote, and played cards.

Logan shared with Dr. Leslie Livingstone, the 33-year-old medical officer, a tiny cabin in the bowels of the ship with no porthole. "We also had a leaky roof until we finally got rid of enough deck load to enable us to find the leaky seams on the deck and to plug them," he later wrote.⁹

Logan wasn't the only one to comment on the odour. William H. Grant, Craig's

⁸ R.A. Logan. "Staking Canada's Arctic Claim," *Sentinel* November-December 1970: 53.

⁹ Logan 53.

22-year-old secretary, wrote in his diary, “There is an awful smell down below and as soon as it hits you you feel like you want to give up all that you possess, or pay your income tax to old Neptune as Major Logan puts it.”¹⁰

The problem was, for the most part, solved two weeks into the expedition when the forehold was cleared and “a couple of hundred pounds of over dead fish was discovered” and put overboard, virtually getting rid of the obnoxious smell.¹¹

Grant kept a typed diary, which offers a more personal view of shipboard life than Craig’s official one. One of the entries that did not appear in Craig’s diary was the salubrious behaviour the night before the ship left port.

Because it was stiflingly hot in his cabin, Grant dragged blankets up to sleep on deck under the stars with the RCMP officers. He wrote:

All the mounted policemen got lit up and came home to the ship about 11 p.m. They had several sailors with them and they all got into a pillow fight, one sailor was knocked between the *Arctic* and the *Belle Chasse* resulting in three cuts on the head and a broken collarbone. He was knocked senseless for about five minutes. The doctor fixed him up.¹²

Bernier must have been in his element as master of the *Arctic* once again. The veteran navigator readily told the young men tales of adventure on the high seas and of raising the flag for Canada on the Arctic islands. On July 31, he took the opportunity to give an instructional lecture in the saloon on life in the North for the benefit of the RCMP heading up to live at the Dominion’s highest northern posts.

His lecture offered the men practical advice, suggesting they should learn to build their own snowhouse and hunt seals. He also gave tips on how to get along with each

¹⁰ W.H. Grant. diary entry, July 23, 1922, MG 30, B129, Vol. 1, Diary 1922, W.H. Grant Fonds, N.A.C.

¹¹ Craig, Diary entry, Aug. 4, 1922.

¹² Grant, Sunday, July 16, 1922.

other:

Do not eat too much at any time, take plenty of exercise, read good books, and do not become lonely, every dark cloud has a silver lining. Do not make a hill out of a mountain and speak in a friendly manner to those that you consider are not your social equal; especially during the dark days take care not to become dirty where there is so much snow which will make very fine water.¹³

On the Arctic patrols, the mounted police were called upon to do more than what was normally considered to be in the line of duty. Grant wrote in his diary on July 25, “The mounted police are passing coal aft and they sure look pretty much like a bunch of coal heavers. They get a bucket after work is finished and have a good wash.”

The next evening Grant reported, “Mounted police peeling potatoes and carrying coal in a.m. They are at present singing in the forecastle it being 10:05 p.m.”¹⁴

The young officers on those early Arctic assignments were probably not even aware of what their lives would be like in the North or what they would be required to do as part of their job.

Bob Pilot, now mayor of Pembroke, was a young RCMP officer who worked in the Eastern Arctic in the 1950s. Not much had changed for Mounties at isolated Arctic posts in 30 years.

“There were no nurses or anything. And we also ran the little store that was there, a little trading post. Of course, the RCMP was the post office. We were the customs officers. We were the nurse, the doctor or dentist. We did it all.”¹⁵

Pilot says regular police work was not part of the job at all.

“In the smaller communities, like where I was, you served the needs of the

¹³ J.E. Bernier. Speech to RCMP aboard *Arctic*, July 30, 1922, Grant diary 1922, MG 30, B129 Vol. 1.

¹⁴ Grant, July 16, 1922.

¹⁵ Bob Pilot. Personal interview, May 17, 2003.

people. There was no police work. I never had a file. When I was transferred south I had to learn how to do police work because I never did police work. I never had to go and investigate a murder. There was no such thing as theft, so you didn't have to go and investigate a theft," he says.

Bernier had first gone to sea almost 60 years before and was still using the sextant his father had given him to take sightings off the horizon. It had served well for centuries as the instrument of marine navigation and Bernier was resistant to the new technologies.

Logan used a bubble sextant, which allowed him to take measurements from the sun. This was more advantageous in the Arctic where there is often fog or mist on the water from the field ice and taking sightings off the horizon isn't always possible.

One foggy day, Logan used his bubble sextant and calculated that they were 72 kilometres north of where Bernier thought they were. Logan told Bernier that they were headed for rocks, shown on the chart.

"He assured me that I was wrong and who was I to try to offer advice to a sailing master. So I did not," wrote Logan. "But strangely within half an hour the Captain sailed due west for about a mile to the edge of the ice field and tied up to the ice, 'to let the chief engineer make an inspection of the boiler' where we waited until the fog lifted some four hours later. Then we saw the rocks of the chart, less than five miles ahead of us. After that I had the run of the ship as chief navigator and the captain was my good friend for the rest of his life."¹⁶ (See Fig. 13)

Bernier's reaction to the young man's suggestion was not unusual for someone in his position. The captain's word was law and never questioned.

¹⁶ Logan 54.

Ice navigator Capt. Patrick Toomey has a master mariner's ticket, the modern equivalent of what Bernier had.

"I still subscribe to the idea of 'Master after God.' There is nobody tells me what to do," Toomey says.

"In Quebec City I received sailing orders one time. You will sail at 10 o'clock on such and such a date. I said, 'I will sail on that date but I will go when I'm ready.' I left at two in the afternoon.

"Some clerk in an office telling me I'm sailing at 10. He doesn't know when my stores are going to be delivered or what time tide is or anything at all. I know when I'm going to be ready. And that's what you sign when you sign your sailing certificate, when you leave. You say, ship ready for sea in all respects, that's what you put in the logbook."¹⁷

Bernier is to be commended, at least, for his willingness to test Logan's calculations that they were off course and respect his advice, thereafter, in navigating with a different instrument.

The trip north progressed smoothly. They arrived in Pond Inlet and Wilfrid Caron, who had been hired by Capt. Munn, after Munn purchased Bernier's post, and was still at the trading station, came aboard. Caron reported to Craig that Rasmussen's men were at Strathcona Sound during the winter trading, and had sent some mail in to Pond Inlet, but nothing had been heard of MacMillan's expedition.¹⁸

Caron encouraged the RCMP to take along an Inuit family to the post to help the Qallunaat, white men, adjust to living in the North by showing the RCMP how to hunt,

¹⁷ Patrick Toomey. Personal interview, Dec. 18, 2002.

¹⁸ Craig diary entry, Aug. 15, 1922.

make igloos, and drive a qamutik or dogsled. The woman would be able to make winter clothing for the officers. Craig and Caron persuaded one of the men, Qattuuq, to move north to the new post on Ellesmere Island. Qattuuq agreed and Grant was sent ashore with him in the rowboat to pick up his family of four children.

Grant later described the incident in his diary:

After some protest on the part of Kaktoo's [Qattuuq's] wife [Ulaajuk] regarding packing up the house and moving, which was decided by the ship whistling very sharply, Kaktoo's family packed up house and worldly goods in less than ½ hour without any notice and assisted by the camp in general. Moved them down to the boat and we cast off leaving Caron behind.¹⁹

This is one of the first instances of the government uprooting and transplanting people farther north. Qattuuq and Ulaajuk were vital to the RCMP surviving at the new post and so were instrumental in asserting Arctic sovereignty.

The ship carried on to Ellesmere Island and made an attempt to sail up the east side to Buchanan Bay, across the Nares Strait from Etah. The way was blocked with ice and the ship was forced to retreat.

A post on Ellesmere was imperative for a show of Canadian administration over the island, however symbolic it might be. So, on Aug. 21, the ship landed at a southern point of Ellesmere that had a shallow harbour, 2.5 kilometres wide and just as deep. At the end of the bay was a valley left by retracting glaciers, which was assessed as a suitable temporary location for setting up the post. Bernier also noted that from there he could see with binoculars the cairn he had built on King Edward VII Point.

The supplies and lumber were unloaded onto the rowboats and the men made numerous trips ashore. All able hands were required to build the 6.7-by-7.8 metre

¹⁹ Grant, Aug. 18, 1922.

building. The RCMP had no experience of living in the High Arctic and consequently the posts were built with a southern design.

The Department of Public Works had created prefabricated buildings, which were disassembled for transport on the *Arctic* and reassembled on site. The buildings were of wood-frame construction with a gabled roof. The insulation was merely a thin canvas burlap tacked to the inside walls and ceiling. The idea of dead air space trapping heat was soon proved wrong.²⁰

It took a week to build the police post. Bernier and Dr. Livingstone suggested the detachment be called Craig Harbour after their commander.

As a young RCMP officer, Bob Pilot was posted at Craig Harbour in 1955.

“Craig Harbour is quite beautiful,” he says. “Mountains, of course, huge mountains – two, three thousand-foot mountains, and the harbour being the mouth of a bay just off of the straits of Lancaster Sound or one of those sounds. It didn’t have much protection. There was an island out in front of the harbour, which I think was called Cone Island, as it came to a peak right in front of the detachment. But surrounded by mountains with a large glacier coming down behind the detachment, quite nice.

“In the wintertime we used to get some pretty violent storms and I can recall we had some pictures of the detachment being covered with snow. Just bury us right in and we had to burrow our way out. But you took that as part of life, you didn’t think of it, really,” Pilot says.²¹

Logan determined it would be suitable to build an aerodrome, or small airport, and landing field in the valley nearby. On Aug. 27, he dressed in formal uniform and took

²⁰ Lyle Dick, Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact Calgary: U Calgary Press, 2001: 277-278.

²¹ Pilot interview.

his air force flag ashore. He planted the large flag in a pile of stones and had his picture taken on location of what he hoped would be the world's most northerly airstrip.

In his official report on the trip, Logan suggested investigating further west for a better spot for an airfield. He suggested a more central location such as Cornwallis Island, although he thought climatic conditions on Melville Island would be more favourable. Today, Resolute on Cornwallis Island, is the main Central Arctic airport.

Logan also recommended that a small air force detachment be sent up in 1923 to remain throughout the winter to study the conditions for flying in the Arctic year round. He said flying every day would give information about winds, upper air temperature, velocity of air currents and methods to be employed for longer trips.²²

Logan's report was ahead of its time. His suggestion to spend a year in the High Arctic doing test flights was turned down. He was informed such experiments would not be carried out for several years. (Though his plan to test daily flying conditions did not make allowances for the total darkness.) A discouraged Logan went south and did aerial mapping in Central Africa before moving to the United States.

Logan was a big proponent of how aircraft could be useful to the RCMP, especially on long cross-country flights. The RCMP did not get planes until the '60s and were left to travel hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres by qamutik and dogs.

Thirty years later when Pilot was at Craig Harbour, patrolling by qamutik was still the only means of transportation for the RCMP.

"Patrolling was constant. It was our enjoyment. That was our relaxation," he says. "You get up in the morning, like a day like today [a sunny, warm spring day], I'd say to

²² R.A. Logan. Report on Aviation in the Arctic Carried Out During the Summer of 1922. (60), MG 30, B-57 Vol. 1., J.D. Craig Papers, N.A.C.

Glen,[the corporal in charge] I think I'll take the dogs out today, and I'd hook up the team and get some food in a box and my snowknife and my saw and my gun and take off and be gone for two or three days, hunt seals, travel and build an igloo."²³

Zoologist Riewe says, "Even in the '70s, when I went up to Grise Fiord, the Mounties would still go on patrol. The patrol was just going off on a caribou hunt and they talk about how many wolves they saw and how many muskox they shot. And that was used for sovereignty - proof of waving the flag."²⁴

Arctic paleobiologist Dick Harington agrees with Riewe that the patrols were symbolic means of reinforcing sovereignty.

"This was to show that we, the country Canada, was claiming this area. It was just to put the stamp on, really, obviously token, but, nevertheless, it was an effort on behalf of the government through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It continued for some time, and there are mounted police still in the Arctic islands. That trend has been maintained, though not so strongly. For instance, there is a Mountie at Grise Fiord on Eastern Ellesmere Island," says Harington.²⁵

The Craig Harbour post, 1,300 kilometres from the Pole, included a post office to show that administration of government was taking place. This was purely a symbolic act and not a practical one. It was not for the benefit of mailing letters anyway, as the ship that would deliver and take out mail arrived only once a year.

When the *Arctic* weighed anchor to head back to Pond Inlet, the new residents of Craig Harbour stood on the shore to watch the ship leave. Sgt. Wilcox was left in charge of the detachment with six other men and Qattuuq's family.

²³ Pilot interview.

²⁴ Riewe interview.

²⁵ Dick Harington, Personal interview, June 7, 2003.

The *Arctic* established a second post at Pond Inlet. Sgt. A.H. Joy, who had been sent to Pond on the Hudson's Bay ship *BayEskimo* the year before to investigate the murder of the Newfoundland trader Robert Janes by three Inuit men, would be in charge of the detachment with three other RCMP officers.

Finding a suitable spot for the post was tricky. As Logan pointed out, Bernier's old trading post (then owned by Munn) had the best location with easy access by ships to the area for re-supply.

Logan had two survey posts placed, reserving land for the government's military or aviation use before the Hudson's Bay Company decided to survey the area and claim it for themselves.²⁶

Bad weather forced the *Arctic* to depart on Sept. 6 before the detachment was finished. The RCMP officers left behind would continue with construction. Bernier wanted to get going before the ice moved into the bay and they were stuck there for the year.

The expedition arrived back in Quebec on Oct. 1, 1922, having, in four months, set up two police posts in the Arctic. Government administration and police supervision of Canada's Far North had begun.

The 1923 Eastern Arctic Patrol

In June 1923, the American explorer Donald MacMillan launched another expedition with plans to put a large bronze plaque commemorating the Greely expedition on Pim Island at the entrance to Buchanan Bay, Ellesmere Island, near where the Greely

²⁶ Logan, Report on Aviation 57.

expedition had come to grief. He did not inform the Canadian government, or request permission to either land there or to hunt and trap. Rasmussen, whose Fifth Thule Expedition was still carrying out studies in Canada's Arctic, reported in 1924 that MacMillan and his men had killed 12 muskoxen on northwestern Ellesmere Island.

"When questioned by officials regarding Rasmussen's testimony, MacMillan flatly denied killing any animals in Canadian Territory," writes Lyle Dick in *Muskox Land*. "An examination of MacMillan's unpublished journals contradicts the explorer's denials, as his diary of a sledge excursion to Ellesmere Island during this expedition records his Inughuit companions having killed muskoxen."²⁷

Genevieve Lemoine, curator of the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum in Brunswick, Me., says there are records that MacMillan "denied hunting muskox. And then we have film, not of him killing muskox, but of the people he took up there killing muskox. He was manning the camera," she laughs.²⁸

Regardless, it is ironic that four years earlier the Canadian government had been suspicious of Rasmussen, yet his accounts of other foreigners in the North were respected once he was no longer perceived as staking out the Arctic for Denmark. Rasmussen's reports, however, further reinforced the necessity of having a northern patrol.

The *Arctic* left Quebec City again on July 9, 1923, on the second annual Eastern Arctic Patrol. Bernier was again captain of the ship. On this voyage, the ship carried up the court officials to try three men in connection with Janes' murder.

"For the Department of the Interior a trial at Pond Inlet would serve two purposes. Although the stated objective was to show the Inuit that Canadian laws must be

²⁷ Dick 281.

²⁸ Genevieve Lemoine, Telephone interview, May 15, 2003.

respected, a court trial in the high Arctic presented a unique opportunity to show the world that Canada was fulfilling the legal obligations required to maintain sovereignty,” writes Shelagh Grant, whose book *Arctic Justice* examines the Janes trial extensively.²⁹

Riewe agrees with Grant: “Also, the records of the murder case – when you send the Mounties in you’re showing sovereignty over the area. So it wasn’t so much that the Inuit killed a couple of guys that was important. It was the importance of having a court case to have the Mounties showing them they are Canadians and waving the flag.”³⁰

The expedition was once more under the command of Craig. This year, his wife, Gertrude, was an unofficial passenger. She had accompanied the ship in 1922 as far as Father Point where she had disembarked with the pilot before the ship entered the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Mrs. Craig was allegedly going to get off again at Father Point, but didn’t. As Grant notes in *Arctic Justice*, “Her name is not on the passenger list, but she appears in various photographs taken over the course of the expedition.”³¹

Craig may have spent the winter talking enthusiastically about his trip and the stunning Arctic scenery, which encouraged her to see it for herself the next summer.

Judge Lucien Dubuc also brought along his wife on the 1923 expedition, as well as his children and their nanny.³²

The ship’s company included 26 crew, a six-man scientific team, the judicial party of five and six RCMP officers. The ship also had an official cinematographer on board to capture the expedition for posterity. He would take extensive re-enacted footage of the trial proceedings.

²⁹ Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2002: 154.

³⁰ Riewe interview.

³¹ Grant 156.

³² Grant 157.

J. Dewey Soper³³ was the naturalist on the expedition for the Victoria Memorial Museum, under the supervision of R.M. Anderson. Soper would bring back numerous flora and fauna specimens for the museum, including two dead polar bears.

A terrible tragedy befell the ship that first evening just outside of Quebec City. Wilfrid Caron, who had returned to L'Islet the previous autumn on the Hudson's Bay ship and was now serving as third officer on the expedition, fell overboard. Craig's secretary, Desmond O'Connell, who was in the lifeboat lowered to save Caron, jumped into the water to rescue him. Both men drowned and neither body was found for several weeks.

Caron's death was also a terrible loss to the court case, as he was to testify at the trial as a witness for the defence.

The ship could not afford to delay, so sorrowfully carried on to Craig Harbour. Its arrival was the first outside contact the detachment residents had had since they were dropped off the year before.

It had been an awful year for Qattuuq and Ulaajuk as well. Two of their four small children had died of influenza that winter.³⁴ Not surprisingly, they wanted to return to their families in Pond Inlet.

The *Arctic* took everyone aboard and departed. The plan was to temporarily close the Craig Harbour post and set one up at Bache, on the eastern side of Ellesmere. The ship called first at Etah and received permission from the Greenland Danish authorities to recruit two Inughuit families to settle at the new detachment, as they were better adapted

³³ J. Dewey Soper, 1893-1982, spent eight years between 1923-1931, exploring over 75,000 kilometres of Baffin Island. The Dewey Soper Migratory Bird Sanctuary on the southern half of western Baffin Island was established in 1957 in his honour. It is the nesting grounds of over 43 species of birds. Online posting. June 2003. <<http://www.aina.ucalgary.ca/scripts/minisa.dll/144/proe/proeyd>>

³⁴ Thirteen more people died of influenza in Pond Inlet in the early spring of 1924.

to the long, dark winter than the more southern Inuit who didn't experience 24-hour darkness.³⁵

On their approach to Bache, however, they got trapped for two days in the heavy floes spanning Smith Sound. On the third day, the pack ice began to ease off and when a lead partially opened, the ship "warped around" to head down a side channel between high rugged ice.

The ship was stopped again by ice, "but now this barrier was blown apart by explosives, enabling the ship to pass along another open lead and into looser fields of pack ice. Presently with full sail and steam, after eight hours of fighting the ice, the ship plunged forward to a wide lead and finally into the open sea a little south of Etah," Soper wrote in his memoirs.³⁶

Establishing a police detachment on northeast Ellesmere was again thwarted by ice. The ship returned to Craig Harbour and the detachment was reopened, this time with only three officers and the two Inughuit families being left there.

Heedless of the people waiting at Pond for the trial, the ship detoured to Beechey Island. With all the southern officials and wives on board it became almost a sightseeing tour. They had a small ceremony on Beechey where the Union Jack was raised in honour of the British Navy men who died during "acts of discovery."

The guests took pictures, of course, and Insp. Wilcox had his photo taken with Mrs. Craig, in her fur-collared coat and wide-brimmed hat, standing inside the hull of the boat *Mary*, which had been left by a Franklin search party and hauled up on the beach by Bernier's crew in 1906.

³⁵ Dudley Copland, *Livingstone of the Arctic*. Lancaster: Canadian Century Publishing, 1978: 27.

³⁶ J.Dewey Soper, *Arctic Recollections: Baffin Island, 1923-1931*. Ed. Shirley Milligan, Saskatoon: Institute for Northern Studies, U Saskatchewan, 1981: 5.

The *Arctic* finally reached Pond Inlet on Aug. 21, six weeks after leaving Quebec.

The murder trial with its southern legal traditions was almost farcical with the judge and court in long black robes, a strange formality in a small Inuit village where the people could not speak English, let alone understand the judicial proceedings. As Grant points out, the whole affair was a miscarriage of justice because of the lack of understanding between the two cultures.³⁷

Of the three men on trial, only Nuqallaq was found guilty of manslaughter. As there was no prison in the Northwest Territories, he was sentenced to 10 years in the Stony Mountain Penitentiary, 25 kilometres north of Winnipeg. Ululijarnaat was given two years hard labour in Pond Inlet for a lesser involvement in the murder, and Aatitaaq's charges were dropped.

Nuqallaq was taken south on the *Arctic* and served two years before he was released in ill health. He returned to Pond Inlet aboard the *Arctic* in 1925, suffering from tuberculosis, and, tragically, introduced the disease to the population of Pond Inlet.

The disease is exacerbated by lack of light, which means that the long, dark winter aggravated it and it infected many. For years, tuberculosis was widespread in the North, imported in similar sorts of incidents.

Heading south, the *Arctic* stopped at Pangnirtung, on the east side of Baffin Island. Lumber, coal and provisions were shipped ashore for another police post, which was erected near the Hudson Bay post. A week later, a snowstorm deposited several centimetres on the shore and the unfinished RCMP buildings. By Sept. 21, despite foul weather, the post was completed. Forty tonnes of rock was then brought aboard for

³⁷ Grant 154-186.

ballast to compensate for the amount of stores that had been used or removed from the ship since it had departed over three months previous.³⁸

Pangnirtung was also the site of the first surgical operations by the Eastern Arctic Patrols. Dr. Livingstone used the mess table in the ship's saloon as he amputated the crushed fingers of one man and put 50 stitches in the torn scalp of another. Surveyor Maj. L.T. Burwash and an RCMP constable assisted at the operations. The saloon of the *Arctic* was hardly a sterile operating room. The *Arctic's* lighting was dim and the dark wood-panelled walls undoubtedly didn't help.³⁹

The *Arctic* reached the King's Wharf, Quebec, on Oct. 4, 1923, having accomplished major sovereignty tasks of erecting another police post and holding the first court trial in the Canadian Arctic.

The 1924 Eastern Arctic Patrol

The government was still determined to establish more posts on Bache Peninsula and Devon Island. The third annual patrol in 1924, therefore, had to be provisioned with enough supplies for the ship to last two years in the event it would be caught in the ice, as well as carrying supplies for the three existing RCMP posts already in the North and enough lumber, coal and stores for a fourth post. The deck was burdened down with 900 tonnes of cargo.

Capt. Bernier, now 72, once again dominated the scene, pacing the bridge, scrutinizing the cargo-handling and gruffly shouting orders.⁴⁰

Frank D. Henderson, who had been aboard the 1923 expedition as government

³⁸ Soper 10.

³⁹ Copland 41.

⁴⁰ Richard S. Finnie, "Farewell Voyages, Bernier and the Arctic." *The Beaver*. Summer 1974: 46.

surveyor, was now in command of the expedition. He was a mild-mannered man who rarely, if ever, took issue over anything.

Photos of the sunny day in July when the ship was preparing to depart also show a young fellow boldly standing on the roof of the bridge, wearing a boater hat, dark suit jacket and bowtie. Dick Finnie was the 17-year-old son of Oswald S. Finnie, director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior. Finnie Senior had secured a place for his son on the trip as assistant radio operator. Finnie Junior had studied Morse code traffic procedures and basic wireless operations to prepare for the job.

The *Arctic* had been equipped with a standard marine wireless transmitter and receiver radio since 1922. The equipment proved to be of little use beyond 300 kilometres. The radio room was beside the captain's cabin and young Finnie was often invited in for a chat. He recounts the veteran mariner saying, " 'If you want to be a man you must master yourself. I was captain of my own ship when I was 17 years of age.' Already approaching 18, I felt that I was not doing well, at least nautically, as a callow assistant wireless operator."⁴¹

Finnie was fascinated by Bernier and was still writing about him 50 years later. His memories of the captain are those of a 17 or 18-year-old and sometimes his comments lack mature insight. He became somewhat of an Arctic aficionado and later pursued a career in journalism and photography.

Brig.-Gen. Greenaway met Finnie in the '70s and recalls he was "quite a character, a little bit eccentric in later years, but quite an interesting individual. He ended

⁴¹ Finnie 46.

up living in California... And being in California he was always referred to as this Arctic man type, the fact was that he was many, many years out of date,” Greenaway laughs.⁴²

The expedition left Quebec on July 5, and encountered a vicious storm in the North Atlantic that almost capsized them. The waves washing over the deck saturated the coal, which added weight until the ship was dangerously low in the water. All aboard worked steadily through the night to jettison 200 tonnes of deck cargo, coal and lumber to lighten the load.

Bernier ordered the wireless operator, Bill Choat, to radio an SOS. He did, but they were too far away for any ship to hear or come to their rescue.

“Long afterward, we learned that an alert amateur radio operator in Arlington, Va., picked up one of our distress signals and promptly notified one of the government departments in Ottawa – by letter,” wrote Finnie years later.⁴³

They survived the storm, though, and carried on to Craig Harbour.

At Craig Harbour they discovered the three police officers had been living in the 3-by-3.5 metre blubber house where their stores were kept, since February when their living quarters had burned down. The fire had started when the burlap lining of the ceiling ignited from the overheated stovepipe.

The frozen contents of the two fire extinguishers were useless. The men concentrated on salvaging whatever items they could, hurling sleeping bags, clothes, rifles and ammunition out the windows. The two Inuit special constables were credited with “heroic efforts” in assisting to save the contents of the building, suffering serious

⁴² Keith Greenaway. Personal interview, May 7, 2003.

⁴³ Richard S. Finnie, “Those were the Days, No. 2 – Voyaging to the Eastern Arctic in the 1920s,” CBC Radio Northern Service, MG 31, C-6, Vol. 19, File 19-6, Finnie Fonds.

frostbite in the process as the temperature was noted at -51°F (-46°C).⁴⁴

The government knew that a post on the southern end of Ellesmere could not adequately exercise sovereignty over the whole island, so another attempt to establish a post at Bache was made.⁴⁵ The police were then taken aboard to head farther north up the coast of Ellesmere. Once again the ice-clogged Kane Basin halted their progress. They satisfied themselves with building a small cache 240 kilometres from Craig Harbour. They called this the Kane Basin post and it was stocked with supplies which the police would use during their winter patrols. The constables and Inughuit families were returned to Craig Harbour where the supplies to build the Bache detachment were used to rebuild the Craig post.⁴⁶

One of the objectives of the 1924 trip was to also establish a fourth post on the southeast coast of Devon Island at the entrance to Lancaster Sound. In 1922, the *Arctic* had briefly stopped at this bay to assess its suitability for a post. Maj. Logan wrote in his report, "This appears to be a very good harbour, well sheltered from the open waters of Lancaster Sound and apparently the first harbour of the North to become clear of ice."⁴⁷

In the summer of 1924, police and crew of the *Arctic* constructed the now standard RCMP police post outbuildings at Dundas Harbour. At the flag-raising ceremony, the new detachment was named in honour of one of the leading expedition members: Bernier.

When Ottawa officials learned of this they quickly changed the name to Dundas Harbour, but not before a sign was hung over the door that said, "RCM Police – Bernier

⁴⁴ Dick 278. Copland 33.

⁴⁵ William R. Morrison, Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925. Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1985: 168.

⁴⁶ Copland 35.

⁴⁷ Logan. Report on Aviation. MG 30, B68, Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

Det. – North Devon.” RCMP records also detailed operations at the Bernier Detachment for three months.

The post was short-lived. In 1933, it was closed and the buildings leased to the Hudson’s Bay Company. Craig Harbour continued to be a two-man detachment with a corporal in charge. An Inuk special constable and his family lived there until 1956 when it moved to Grise Fiord, 55 kilometres east, where eight Inuit families had been relocated in 1953.

The Dundas Harbour buildings are now windowless, abandoned wooden shacks. Photographer Lee Narraway was aboard the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *Des Grosseliers* when it visited the desolate post in the summer of 2002.

“As you’re coming down around the corner at Devon, it’s an iceberg birthplace. There’s a lot of icebergs which would’ve been tricky for ships in the olden days to navigate through,” she says. “There’s not a lot of vegetation in Dundas itself. It’s mostly rock and high steep hills right around the shore. Basically, the little encampment backs onto the hills.

“We climbed up the hill and there’s a small graveyard there with three graves in it and it’s been maintained by the RCMP. So I believe there are two RCMP officers and one Inuit who worked for the RCMP that are buried there,” says Narraway.

“When you’re sitting, looking down on the encampment and the bay and you picture being left there... oh, it’s pretty bleak. It’s very bleak.”⁴⁸

Neither the RCMP nor the federal government considered the practicality of living in the High Arctic. Building police posts was a necessary activity. Occupation was

⁴⁸ Lee Narraway, Personal interview, July 14, 2003.

paramount to establishing and maintaining sovereignty. But occupation meant putting people in the loneliest places on the planet.

“We were a flag detachment,” says Pilot, speaking of Craig Harbour. “What we called a flag detachment. We’d put the flag up every day and take it down every night. In the summer time you put it up sometime in May and took it down again sometime in October. You know, 24 hours of daylight. But that was the purpose of the detachment.”⁴⁹

The first Eastern Arctic Patrols had met their mandate. They successfully put men on the ground to reinforce sovereignty in the High Arctic.

But life was bleak for people living at the posts. They were forced to endure months of isolation and extreme weather conditions.

Each post had jurisdiction over vast areas of inhospitable land where no one lived, and police at these posts had little ability to enforce Canadian jurisdiction. Foreigners could come into the territory unimpeded. The amazing thing was that more didn’t.

⁴⁹ Pilot interview.

Chapter Six

The Etah Incident

We are asking for this amendment [to the Northwest Territories Act] in order that we may have authority to notify parties going into that country that they must obtain a permit of entry, thereby asserting our ownership over the whole northern archipelago.

– Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior,
House of Commons Debates, June 1, 1925¹

Though the American explorer Donald B. MacMillan had proved that Crocker Land north of Axel Heiberg was a mirage, there was still a belief that a large land mass existed at the North Pole.

“Until quite late, people believed there was land up there. In fact, some believed there was open water up there. Actually, this belief was held until the 1920s when airplanes could show there was nothing,” says Capt. Toomey, who speculates that with global warming there may indeed one day be open water at the Pole.²

An aerial survey was thought to be the best possible means of discovering land near the Pole. Unfortunately, the Canadian government did not see the importance of this. The American government did.

The British Embassy in Washington forwarded a March 31, 1925, *Washington Star* article to the Dominion’s Department of External Affairs. It promoted another polar venture. Roald Amundsen, who had made the Northwest Passage in 1903-06 and beat Scott to the South Pole in 1911, had his sights set on flying to the North Pole. His partner was the wealthy American, Lincoln Ellsworth.

¹ Charles Stewart, House of Commons Debates, June 1, 1925: 3772.

² Patrick Toomey. Personal interview, Dec. 18, 2002.

Shortly after the article appeared about Amundsen's intended flight, MacMillan announced he was also mounting an Arctic expedition that would use airplanes to explore the Polar Region.

At that time, planes had a short flying radius and in order to cover long distances, needed to land at points along the way to refuel. For MacMillan, flying from an air base at Etah, Greenland, meant that "points along the way" would be Canadian Arctic islands.

Two professors, John Bryant at Oklahoma State University and Harold Cones of Christopher Newport University in Virginia, were researching their third book on amateur radio in the late '90s when they came across a rusted old filing cabinet in the Zenith Radio Corporation warehouse in Chicago that turned out to be a treasure chest of information about MacMillan's Arctic Expedition of 1925. The files consisted of unpublished documents and correspondence about the expedition of which Zenith Radio President Eugene McDonald was second in command.

Bryant and Cones also looked through National Archives files in Washington and the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Their book *Dangerous Crossings* is a detailed and interesting narrative about the 1925 expedition, which included anecdotes of the personal struggles and triumphs of the commanders.

In their research they came across a February 1925 letter from McDonald to Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur, outlining the expedition. In it, McDonald said:

As we all know, Canada arbitrarily lays claim to all lands north of Canada explored or unexplored and we [the Americans] have sat passively by, offering no objection in the past because of the supposed uselessness of this land. But with progress of planes and dirigibles in the past ten years a new value now presents itself, and if there is undiscovered land in the Arctic it should be under

United States flag.³

Two days later, McDonald met with President Calvin Coolidge to request assistance in arranging for the navy to loan them planes for the Arctic expedition.

Bryant says, “He had to have told the president some important things. We don’t know what they were. But what we do know is exactly what he told Wilbur, the secretary of the navy, which I think by inference he would make the same case to the president, probably twisting it a little bit, highlighting strategic national concerns.”⁴

Bryant suggests the idea of planting the stars and stripes on new land in the Arctic may be the reason the president arranged for three planes to be transferred for use by the expedition.

“My guess, and of course it can only be that,” says Bryant, “is if there had been another big island up there, the size of Baffin or Ellesmere, and it had been set out in the Arctic Ocean a little ways, like they thought it was, not only would the U.S. have claimed it for sure, that is open and shut, but they would’ve claimed Ellesmere too and might have had more interest in Northwest Greenland. Once they had one piece up there they needed another piece to connect.”⁵

Bryant says they didn’t claim Ellesmere originally when Greely was there because it wasn’t worth anything, but by the time it was perceived to be of strategic value, Canada was solidifying its sovereignty over it.

“The intense hostility to American explorers in 1925 appears to have been founded less on actual American goals and more in response to reports in the press which

³ E.F. McDonald. Letter to Curtis Wilbur, February 1922, Naval Dept., Courtesy John Bryant.

⁴ John Bryant. Personal interview, Jan. 10, 2003.

⁵ Bryant interview.

continually stressed the historic mission of the U.S. to be the first to find and claim territory, establish air bases, and participate in whatever else may have had economic or prestige value,” writes Nancy Fogelson in *Arctic Exploration & International Relations*.⁶

That may be so, but the Canadian government was still uneasy about inherent threats in what the press reported of the United States’ ambition to claim the Arctic. It was concerned enough to set up a committee to investigate American presence in the Canadian North, such as the MacMillan Arctic Expedition.

On April 24, 1925, the first meeting was held of the Interdepartmental Northern Advisory Committee. It was made up of senior bureaucrats from various departments. Several members – Harkin, Cory and Craig from the Department of the Interior, Skelton from External Affairs, Desbarats from National Defence, and Cortlandt Starnes of the RCMP – were already familiar with MacMillan, having dealt with his earlier expeditions when they were involved with the Advisory Technical Board.

On April 25, 1925, the Canadian Department of National Defence issued a report detailing new legislation for air travellers in the Arctic. Any American wishing to bring an aircraft into Canada had to obtain permission from the Royal Canadian Air Force and give detailed technical information about the pilot, airplane and flight plans in order to obtain the permit.⁷

In May 1925, Deputy Minister of the Interior W. W. Cory was sent to Washington. He called on Wilbur and informed him of the new legislation and that

⁶ Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration and International Relations 1900-1932*. Fairbanks, U Alaska Press, 1992: 107.

⁷ National Defence Report, April 25, 1925, RG Vol. 2668, File 9058-40, N.A.C.

“Canada’s permission should be obtained before MacMillan landed on Canadian soil.”⁸

A memorandum to the chief of naval operations from Rear Admiral W.A.

Moffett, chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, about Cory’s visit read:

He made it plain to Lt.-Cmdr. Byrd that he felt that since, the navy flyers proposed to fly into Axel Heiberg Land, the Canadian government thought that Canada’s permission should be obtained....It is not known whether or not this Government recognizes Canada’s claim to these lands, but since it is intended to fly over Ellesmere Land to Axel Heiberg Land and probably Grant Land with the United States Navy planes going with the MacMillan expedition, this matter is referred to the department for such action as it may deem appropriate.⁹

On June 1, 1925, in the House of Commons, Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior, moved to pass the second reading of his Bill 151, an amendment to the Northwest Territories Act, which was to provide for the issuing of licences and permits to scientists and explorers wishing to enter the Northwest Territories.

Stewart talked about the necessity to legislate permits, as explorers from foreign countries were going into Northern Canada for scientific and research purposes. Some were requesting permits voluntarily, but, Stewart added, not all explorers were:

We are getting after men like MacMillan and Dr. Amundsen, men who are going in presumably for exploration purposes but possibly there may arise a question as to the sovereignty over some land they may discover in the northern portion of Canada, and we claim all that portion.¹⁰

MP Brown said dubiously, “We claim right up to the North Pole.”

⁸ William R. Morrison, Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925. Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1985: 169.

⁹ W.A. Moffett, Rear Admiral USN, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics. Letter to Chief of Naval Operations, May 28, 1925, N.A.

¹⁰ Charles Stewart, House of Commons Debates, June 1, 1925: 3772.

Stewart answered, “Yes, right up to the North Pole.”¹¹

Less than two weeks later, MP H.H. Stevens, from Vancouver Centre, brought to question period a *New York Times* clipping about the MacMillan-Byrd Scientific Expedition and read it in the House:

To ask Canada for a permit for Commander Byrd’s planes to land on Axel Heiburg land would, of course, imply recognition by America of the Canadian claim of sovereignty over that land, and seems to necessitate decision by this government – that is, the United States government – as to whether it considers Canada has a valid claim to that region.¹²

Stewart responded:

This government is very much alive to what we claim to be the possession of Canada in the Northern Territory adjacent to the Dominion. Indeed, I made the statement in the House the other evening that we claimed all the territory lying between the meridians 60 and 141.¹³

Nearly 20 years after Poirier first proposed the sector theory, the government was eagerly adopting it to support its claims.

An official letter was prepared for the British Ambassador in Washington, H. G. Chilton, to deliver to Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg. It detailed the legislation that required scientific and exploration parties in the Canadian North to secure permits prior to entering the region, and stressed the need for MacMillan to request permits for “exploring and flying over Baffin, Ellesmere, Axel Heiberg, and certain other islands within the territories of the Dominion.” The note referred to the four established RCMP posts in the Eastern Arctic and generously offered assistance “within the power of the

¹¹ House of Commons Debates 3773.

¹² H.H. Stevens, House of Commons Debates, June 10, 1925: 4069.

¹³ House of Commons Debates, June 10, 1925: 4069

Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other Canadian officers in the North.”¹⁴

The American government did not respond or request permits because by doing so they would “imply recognition of the sector position” and Canada’s title to the islands.¹⁵

MacMillan’s plans went ahead without any acknowledgement of Canadian jurisdiction. The National Geographic Society, Zenith Radio Corp. and the Naval Department sponsored the expedition. MacMillan was overall commander, Eugene F. McDonald was second in command, and Lt.-Cmdr. Richard E. Byrd was in charge of naval operations, which were the three open-cockpit biplanes that would do a series of aerial surveys. Byrd was planning to fly to the North Pole and intended to set up several caches on Ellesmere Island and Axel Heiberg.

The MacMillan Arctic Expedition left Wiscasset, Maine, on June 20, 1925, aboard the schooners *Bowdoin* and *Peary*. They arrived at their base camp at Etah, Greenland, on Aug.1.

The Loening Amphibian planes, NA-1, NA-2 and NA-3, were carried North in crates on the decks of the smaller ship *Peary*. Once at Etah, they were floated ashore strapped between outriggers from the dories.

“Once onshore, each fuselage was hauled up to the top of the beach tail-first by a party that included most of the members of the expedition and some of the local Inughuit population,” wrote Bryant and Cones. “Each wing assembly was then bolted in place while balanced on the backs of the crew. After each plane was assembled, it was floated

¹⁴ Chilton. Letter to Kellogg, June 15, 1925, RG 59, 800:014, N.A.

¹⁵ D.H. Dinwoodie, “Arctic Controversy : The 1925 Byrd-MacMillan Expedition Example.” Canadian Historical Review March 1972: 57-59.

out in the harbour and moored.”¹⁶

Within three days the planes were making test flights.

Byrd wrote in his official report to the Navy Department on Aug.14:

Left Etah for western end of Flagler Fjord 175 miles from Etah. Reached objective at 1:15 and found at last place to land in water. Got planes fifty yards from beach and waded ashore with supplies. Deposited one hundred yards from beach two hundred pounds of food and one hundred gallons of gasoline, five gallons oil, primus stove, camping outfit, smoke bombs, rifle and ammunition, one gallon kerosene and can of matches.¹⁷

They had landed on Canadian soil without permission.

The 1925 Eastern Arctic Patrol

The fourth Eastern Arctic Patrol left Quebec on July 1, an early departure date even by today's standards. Its mission was to intercept the American expedition and establish further occupation in the High Arctic by building a fifth police post at Bache Peninsula, across the Nares Strait from Etah.

Bernier was again at the helm of the *Arctic*.

The commander of the expedition this time was 52-year-old RCMP Staff Sgt. George Paton Mackenzie. Mackenzie had had a prestigious career as gold commissioner in the Yukon before he was seconded to the Eastern Arctic Patrol. His appointment had caused some objection in the House of Commons as he was doing such a fine job in the Yukon and had neither Arctic nor marine experience.¹⁸

Harwood Steele, son of the famous Sir Sam Steele who founded the Northwest

¹⁶ John H. Bryant and Harold N. Cones. Dangerous Crossings: The First Modern Polar Flights. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000: 99.

¹⁷ Bryant and Cones 111.

¹⁸ George Black, House of Commons Debates, June 10, 1925: 4091-92

Mounted Police, was Cmdr. Mackenzie's secretary. Insp. Wilcox was again aboard the vessel, in charge of the RCMP officers heading up to their Arctic posts.

Dr. Livingstone was on his fourth tour, and 18-year-old Dick Finnie was also back as assistant radio operator under Robert M. Foster, a Canadian Westinghouse technician. Most of the crew was back and several, like Napoleon Chassé, were returning for their eighth government Arctic expedition under Bernier.

The 1925 expedition had reverted to a police-led operation rather than a Department of the Interior administrative one. Mackenzie was of good tough police stock with a domineering manner.

"He was a stout-hearted burly man who could be intimidated by no one but his wife, and she fortunately was not on the ship," wrote Finnie years later.¹⁹

Whereas Craig and Henderson had deferred to Bernier on the previous patrols, Mackenzie, like Moodie, took his role as commander of the expedition more literally and took charge. Not surprisingly, he and Bernier clashed early in their travels together.

Mackenzie kept a record of the expedition in a tiny notebook. His daily account is written in tight little letters in heavy pencil. The journal was small enough to keep in a breast pocket of his coat. Mackenzie would then be able to conveniently flip it open and with his stubby pencil, note the wind direction, ship's speed and any activity on board.

His first run-in with Bernier occurred the third week in July when the ship was discovered to be off course. The veteran mariner, rather than admit this to Mackenzie, tried to cover up. Bernier's error, and poor attempt to hide it, cast doubt on his navigation

¹⁹ R.S. Finnie. Letter to R.A. Logan, January 26, 1972, MG 31, C-6 Vol. 10, File Robert A. Logan Correspondence, R.S. Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

skills.²⁰

Mackenzie mistrusted Bernier's judgment for the rest of the voyage.

On Aug. 15, he wrote:

The captain's view that the ice we went through yesterday was the end of Melville Bay pack was evidently wrong as we have been in ice most of the night and are at 8 a.m. off our course to Cape York in an attempt to get around the pack...All the captain's predictions have been merely guesses and poor ones at that.²¹

Bernier was 73-years-old and perhaps starting to show his age. He would not admit this, of course, and still insisted on scouting the sea and ice from the crow's nest. He could no longer make his way up to it by climbing the ratlines or rope ladder in the rigging, so he was hoisted aloft in a bosun's chair.²² (See Fig. 14)

The *Arctic* arrived at Etah on Aug. 19. It was a perfect, calm day with a light fair wind. Ice was visible about 10 miles to the west but they had clear sailing up the Greenland coast to Etah. They dropped anchor at 3 p.m. beside the *Peary*. Second in command of the expedition Eugene McDonald gave three blasts of the *Peary*'s whistle in salute and came aboard immediately to welcome them. (See Fig.15)

McDonald had been told by the United States government to broadcast a call for the *Arctic* 10 days earlier, but the short-wave radio aboard the *Arctic* wasn't functioning properly and they had been unable to receive or send messages. McDonald later wrote about the arrival of the *Arctic* in a 1950 *Beaver* magazine article:

²⁰ G.P. Mackenzie. Diary entry, July 26, 1925, MG 30, F 529, Vol. 1, Diary of Eastern Arctic Patrol, George P. Mackenzie Fonds, N.A.C.

²¹ Mackenzie, Aug. 15, 1925.

²² A bosun's chair is a board with ropes on each end like a swing that is rigged to the top of the main mast and used by the bosun (boatswain- officer in charge of equipment and crew) to fix the rigging for the sails.

I went over and paid my respects to that great old Canadian commander, Capt. Joseph E. Bernier, of Lévis, Quebec. I told him that the Canadian government had been calling him on the radio and that they were very much worried. His answer was interesting, 'Damn it, they never used to worry about me until they got this confounded new gimmick – radio! I could go away for a year and my people would not worry, but with our radio transmitter, that went out of commission weeks ago, they worry their heads off because they don't hear from us.'²³

McDonald offered his Super-Zenith short-wave equipment for the *Arctic* party's use. Mackenzie accepted, but was warned to limit his message to their safety and location and not give any code information about the American expedition. The National Geographic had exclusive rights to the expedition story and the Americans were worried that the Canadians would leak it first to the newspapers.²⁴

The radiomen from the *Peary* worked through the night with Foster and Finnie to get the *Arctic*'s radio equipment up and running properly. However, two days later Mackenzie reported that the radio had again failed to work.

Dr. Davidoff, the physician on MacMillan's expedition, wrote about the Canadians' arrival and pasted in the pages of his typed journal photographs of the "SS *Arctic*" and Dr. Livingstone, with whom he spent time:

This afternoon the *SS Arctic* carrying building material for mounted police quarters to be built near Cape Sabine, drew into port. She is a very old wooden hulk – making only about 5 knots at maximum speed, and she was 20 days coming through the ice in Melville Bay. In addition to this her radio failed to function and for at least 30 days she had not been heard from by either the world at large or ourselves. It was therefore with the greatest gratitude that her commander Mackenzie accepted our offer to send out a report of safe arrival to the world.²⁵

²³ E.F. McDonald. "First Short-wave in the Arctic." *The Beaver*. December 1950.

²⁴ Mackenzie, Aug. 19, 1925.

²⁵ Leo M. Davidoff. Diary entry, Aug. 19, 1925, Personal diary from MacMillan Arctic Expedition 1925, MacMillan Collection, Bowdoin College and Archives, Brunswick, Me.

Davidoff mentions having supper aboard the *Arctic*:

They certainly do not eat better than we, but it was good to get a change of diet anyway. I like the interior of the old ship. It has heavy bulkheads and shiny brass lamps of those complacent old days when ship builders and kings thought their plans so correct that they built their ships and kingdoms with a view toward having them last for all eternity.²⁶

The Americans who could get away from their duties were all invited to spend the evening aboard the *Arctic* watching the moving pictures that the cinematographer had made of previous trips to Canada's Arctic.

That night, Mackenzie dined aboard the *Peary* with McDonald. Mackenzie mentions nothing in his diary about discussing permits over dinner with McDonald.

MacMillan and Byrd ate aboard the *Arctic*. Bernier's own version of the encounter in his autobiography notes, "Richard Byrd was also here with his flying machine, preparing to fly over the Pole. It was on this occasion that I advised him against making the attempt so late in the season, and suggesting that he should take off from the Spitzbergen side the following year."²⁷

Whether this had any affect on Byrd is unknown, except that he did take off from Spitsbergen, the island east of North Greenland, the following year on his May 9, 1926, apparently successful flight over the North Pole.²⁸

In *True North*, Fairley and Israel cast Bernier as diplomatic ambassador:

Over coffee Bernier presented his guests with detailed charts of the Arctic, together with copies of Canadian patrol reports. He drew their attention to the location of RCMP posts, where travelers could seek aid if they needed it. He

²⁶ Davidoff, Aug. 19, 1925.

²⁷ Bernier, *Master Mariner and Arctic Explorer*. Ottawa: LeDroit, 1939: 388.

²⁸ Greenaway and Bryant are of the widely-held opinion that without proper instruments, Byrd had no way to accurately ensure that he had arrived at the Pole, though he probably got closer to it than Peary or Cook.

showed them movies in which Canada's administration of the northland was clearly displayed...After giving this time to sink in Bernier ever so gently suggested that perhaps conditions were not quite right at this time for a flight to the Pole ...Nothing more was said. The next morning the *Arctic* moved out of the harbour to complete her patrol. A few days later the MacMillan-Byrd expedition packed up and returned to the States.²⁹

There is no transcript of the dinner conversation aboard the *Arctic* on Aug. 19, so it is impossible to confirm Fairley and Israel's accuracy. Marjolaine Saint-Pierre, who is writing Bernier's biography, says that Fairley interviewed Bernier's second wife, Alma, for the book. Saint-Pierre says Alma repeated the story to Fairley that Bernier would have told her when he came home from the expedition in the fall of 1925.³⁰

The Canadian ship, however, steamed out of the harbour at midnight on the 20th and not on the morning of the 20th as Fairley and Israel state.

A visit from another ship in the High Arctic is certainly a noteworthy event; yet, MacMillan barely mentions the encounter with the Canadians. He kept a journal in a grade-school type lined notebook, and in his small, round, even handwriting he noted on Aug. 19: "In the afternoon the *SS Arctic* arrived on her way to establish a police station at Cape Sabine...Tonight we were the guests of the *Arctic*, being entertained by motion pictures."

On August 20th he wrote, "Sayer and [name indecipherable] up tonight in NA3 with her new engine and new wing. Byrd, Bennett and Francis fail to rise in NA1....The *Arctic* sailed about midnight for Cape Sabine."³¹

²⁹ T.C. Fairley and Charles E. Israel, The True North: Story of Captain Joseph Bernier. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1959: 154.

³⁰ Marjolaine Saint-Pierre. Personal interview, August 13, 2003.

³¹ Donald B. MacMillan. Diary entries, Aug. 19 & 20, 1925, MacMillan Collection, Bowdoin College and Archives.

In fact, this meeting with the Canadians is so absent from expedition records that Bryant and Cones' book, which discusses the expedition in detail and even mentions Bernier meeting MacMillan at Etah in 1922, mentions absolutely nothing about the Canadian contingent arriving in 1925.

Bryant's answer is simply: "We didn't know about it."

He says in all their research they never came across anything about the meeting. McDonald stopped writing his diary in Battle Harbour, Nfld., and Byrd's was unreliable.³²

How much influence Bernier actually had over the expedition is uncertain. MacMillan, however, on Aug. 20, notified the National Geographic by wireless that his expedition was discontinuing the plan of aerial exploration. He cited poor weather conditions.

Historian D.H. Dinwoodie wrote, "The *Arctic*'s presence had confirmed MacMillan's resolve to end the exploration. With little animus towards the Canadians but much friction among themselves, the Americans took leave of Etah."³³

Recalling the meeting in a 1974 magazine article, Finnie writes, "We left Etah on 21 August and crossed Kane Basin to Ellesmere Island. The next day while we were off loading supplies at the RCMP post on Rice Strait, 78° 46' north latitude, two airplanes appeared from the direction of Etah and circled above us for a few minutes before turning back."³⁴

The surveillance by the two American planes has an ominous feel, but Finnie

³² Bryant interview.

³³ Dinwoodie 63.

³⁴ Richard S. Finnie, "Farewell Voyages: Bernier and the Arctic," The Beaver. Summer 1974: 52.

wrote this 50 years later, and his memory of seeing the two planes is questionable. Only one plane was actually still functioning by Aug. 18 and, according to the article Byrd wrote for the *National Geographic*, their last exploratory flight was made on the 19th. The *Bowdoin* and *Peary* set sail for Maine on Aug. 21.

Cmdr. Byrd's records showed the planes had logged "a total of 75 hours and 50 minutes flying time, which at 80 miles per hour equals 6,066 total miles flown.... Approximately 30,000 square miles were seen from the planes on these flights. Of course, many of the flights were made over the same course south and southeast of Bay Fiord, extending for 70 miles."³⁵

Byrd's impressive flight distances were actually a calculation of the total mileage of all three planes and the majority of the flights were made over the same territory around Etah.

"The 1925 expedition's primary issue was potential air bases, not actual sovereignty over territory," writes Fogelson. "Canadian fears of U.S. expansion were on target in terms of influence and one only has to go ahead to American establishment of military bases in the Canadian Arctic and the controversy over use of waterways between Arctic islands and the Canadian mainland in the 1980s to see how tenacious this goal of the U.S. was.

"MacMillan had instructions to explore and gather data – no attempt to annex territory was part of his orders, so in that regard, the Canadians were fighting a previous battle. Mac followed all protocols to the letter – he was an extraordinarily modest man

³⁵ Donald B. MacMillan, "The MacMillan Arctic Expedition Returns," *National Geographic*, November 1925: 475.

with little personal ambition – and so made for rather tame study.”³⁶

Fogelson is perhaps looking at this from an American point of view. MacMillan did not follow all protocols, as he did not obtain permission from the Canadian government for any part of his expedition. In the Canadian archives are detailed accounts of what may have actually been the critical element in turning the Americans southward. It may even have been a critical turning point in securing Canada's very ownership of the Arctic.

Sometime during the visit at Etah, Byrd informed Mackenzie that he had made a number of flights over Ellesmere and landed stores at Flagler and Sawyer bays on the east coast of Ellesmere not far from where the patrol intended to erect the post at Bache. Byrd also admitted that because of the ice conditions along the west coast, he was unable to land there or on Axel Heiberg.

One wonders if Mackenzie spent a sleepless night thinking this over. He knew that when they had left Quebec, the MacMillan expedition, which had left two weeks before, had not then been issued permits from the Canadian government. Here was Byrd admitting that he had landed on Canadian soil.

Byrd may have mentioned these caches innocently or he might have been brazenly thumbing his nose.

After lunch on Aug. 20, Mackenzie sent Steele, his secretary, over to speak to Byrd about a permit and inform him that if he didn't have one that Mackenzie would, on behalf of the Canadian government, issue him one to conduct flying operations over the Canadian islands. Steele boarded the *Peary* and met Byrd.

“On my asking Commander Byrd whether the expedition had such permit, he

³⁶ Nancy Fogelson. E-mail correspondence, Dec. 6, 2002.

replied that he didn't think they had. I then told him that, on application, Commander Mackenzie would be glad to issue such permit. Commander Byrd stated that he would see Commander MacMillan and if, on inquiry, he found that no such permit had been issued, he would come on board the *Arctic* and formally apply for it," reported Steele.³⁷

Byrd, ever charming, thanked Steele and told him to tell Mackenzie "in a short time, he would proceed on board the *Arctic*."³⁸

Within an hour, an officious-looking Byrd, in full naval uniform replete with medals and cap, came aboard the *Arctic*. He met Mackenzie on deck and thanked him for the offer of a permit made through Steele.

Mackenzie noted in his diary that when Byrd came aboard he "thanked me for my kind offer and told me he had just talked the matter of the permit with MacMillan who informed him that a permit had been issued by our Government after they left for the north and the fact had been published in the press. Bird said further that he had taken the matter up with his Chief before leaving and he was told 'You are busy enough getting ready, better leave the diplomatic end to others.'"³⁹

Mackenzie was in a corner. He knew that no permission had been granted to the Americans before the *Arctic* had left Quebec and he had a hunch that no permit had been granted after they departed, but then the radio had not been working and perhaps the message had failed to come through. Byrd was also aware that the Canadians' radio had been out of service.

First Officer Lazare Desire Morin, 43, from L'Islet was on deck when Byrd came aboard and Mackenzie called him over as a witness. In front of Byrd, Mackenzie told

³⁷ Harwood Robert Steele, Affidavit Nov. 3, 1925, MG30, E529, Vol. 1, N.A.C.

³⁸ G.P. Mackenzie affidavit, Nov. 3, 1925, MG 30, E529, Vol. 1, N.A.C.

³⁹ Mackenzie, Aug. 20, 1925.

Morin to take special note of Byrd's statement as he considered it of importance.

Morin did. He noted that at 2:20 p.m. Byrd had come aboard. Mackenzie summarized for Morin what Byrd had told him.

Morin said, "After Commander Mackenzie had made his summarization, he asked Commander Byrd if his understanding of the conversation was correct. To this question Commander Byrd replied, 'Yes. That is correct.'"⁴⁰

It was an awkward situation for Mackenzie. Both expeditions were meeting in Greenland waters, not Canadian, and because the radio wasn't working, Byrd's assertion that MacMillan had obtained a permit (presumably being notified of it by radio en route) could not be confirmed or denied. Mackenzie was certain that Byrd was wrong, though.⁴¹

At four o'clock that afternoon, Byrd received a coded, confidential telegram message from Naval Operations:

PLEASE CONVEY THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO MACMILLAN
QUOTE TO AVOID EMBARRASSING DIPLOMATIC SITUATION IT IS
ESSENTIAL YOU OBTAIN LICENSE FROM MACKENSIE OR BERNIER
OF CANADIAN STEAMSHIP *ARCTIC* TO LAND AND EXPLORE BAFFIN
LAND OR OTHER TERRITORY SOUTH OF ELLESMERE ISLAND STOP
SUGGEST MAKING REQUEST INFORMAL AND PERSONAL STOP IF
SUCH LICENSE IS NOT OBTAINED BY YOU WE CANNOT ASK FOR IT
FROM WASHINGTON STOP SITUATION MOST DELICATE STOP PLEASE
ADVISE RESULT OF YOUR EFFORTS.⁴² (See Fig. 16)

What Byrd did with this information is a mystery. Barely two hours earlier, he had told Mackenzie that they already had permits to land on Canadian territory. It would look strange for him to then request permits, so he didn't. It is apparent from later correspondence between the American and Canadian governments that Byrd kept the

⁴⁰ LD Morin. Affidavit, Nov. 3, 1925, MG 30, E529, Vol. 1, N.A.C.

⁴¹ R.S. Finnie. Letter to R.A. Logan, May 26, 1972, MG 31, C-6, Vol. 10, N.A.C.

⁴² PGNav. Coded message to Byrd, Aug. 20 1925, SC 111-99:3, N.A.

whole thing to himself.

The Naval Department had sent the telegram coincidentally that afternoon, knowing that the Canadians were at Etah and would expect the Americans to have permits to land on Canadian-claimed Arctic islands.

At midnight, the *Arctic* pulled out of Etah Harbour. No permits had been requested or issued. In the months to follow, Byrd's indiscretion was to become the sort of "embarrassing diplomatic situation" the American government had hoped to avoid.

It appears that none of the American expedition commanders thought the meeting with the Canadians at Etah of enough importance to include in their journals or reports – or perhaps found their own handling of it too potentially damaging to record. But the meeting was not the end of the story. When the *Arctic* returned south, Mackenzie learned that the MacMillan expedition did not have permission to land on Canadian territory, nor had they ever requested any.

"It appears the permission Byrd referred to was ambiguous at best and probably a fabrication," Fogelson writes. "The State Department reviewed the episode when the expedition returned and MacMillan testified that he had neither a licence from Canada nor had he received any instructions to obtain one."⁴³

Byrd had lied to Mackenzie. Not only had he lied, but he embellished the lie by saying the issuing of permits had been published in the press.⁴⁴

"Byrd lying through his teeth yet again...he wouldn't have lost a minute's sleep over that one. Just tell them whatever you want to tell them," says Bryant, the co-author of *Dangerous Crossings* about the 1925 MacMillan expedition. "He would do most

⁴³ Fogelson 96.

⁴⁴ Byrd later rose to rank of admiral and was acknowledged as an American hero for his flights over both North and South Poles.

anything, because he thought he might get to the Pole or might discover this great strategic base that might be called 'Byrdland,' so the fact that he might have to put on his uniform and go over and lie to some Canadians was no big deal."⁴⁵

It was a big deal to the Canadian government, though, and the meeting between Mackenzie and Byrd became known as the "Etah incident." A week after the *Arctic* docked in Quebec City, Mackenzie was called to report on the incident before the Northern Advisory Board.

On Monday, Oct. 19, 1925, a meeting was held in the Deputy Minister of the Interior's office. Mackenzie explained the situation at Etah and also informed them that the MacMillan squadron had flown over Ellesmere and saw Axel Heiberg. They did not land, but air photographs were taken. He strongly suggested that the RCMP should include an Axel Heiberg patrol during the coming winter.⁴⁶

"I don't think the Americans had any territorial ambitions in the Canadian Arctic at all," says William Morrison, a history professor at University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, B.C.

Like Fogelson, Morrison doesn't think the Americans were a threat in the Arctic, "which doesn't mean that the government wasn't nervous about it. It was pretty far away and they had other fish to fry. It was also poor and you know how many votes were there in the Eastern Arctic? None."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bryant interview.

⁴⁶ Minutes of sixth meeting of the Northern Advisory Board, Oct. 19, 1925, RG 30, E529 Vol. 1, File Documents concerning the career of George P. Mackenzie, N.A.C.

⁴⁷ William Morrison, Telephone interview, Nov. 6, 2002.

An Arctic Paper Trail

The Canadian government was not the only one concerned about the Americans' nonchalance over exploring in the Arctic, though. Maj. Robert Logan, the Air Board representative on the first Eastern Arctic Patrol in 1922, was then living in New York and a member of the Explorers Club. After hearing lectures at the club by Byrd and MacMillan, he wrote to his friend Lewis Cory, in Ottawa, saying he was "convinced that MacMillan has no respect of Canadian jurisdiction over northern Ellesmere or Axel Heiberg and is trying to get this government mixed up over them just as Stefansson tried to get Canada mixed up with Wrangel Island. If Canada draws first and does something definite to the 'unoccupied sections' the U.S. government may not back MacMillan any more than Canada backed Stefansson."⁴⁸

Which, in fact, is what happened.

Logan was so disturbed about what he heard that he wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King in early June 1925 with a suggestion for securing the High Arctic islands:

In view of the fact that certain countries appear, from recent official newspaper dispatches at least, to be unaware that Canadian sovereignty extends to the Pole, and believing that if the Canadian government were to lease certain areas of land in the Far North and to issue licenses for air harbours (or air stations), such action would materially strengthen the claims of Canada regarding that region between Greenland and the 141st meridian of longitude, I hereby make application for leases and air harbour licences for four tracts of land in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.⁴⁹

Logan's application to lease land and operate aircraft bases also included "so far undiscovered islands" within the pie-shaped area between the Canadian mainland and the

⁴⁸ R.A. Logan. Letter to T. Lewis Cory, June 19, 1925, MG 30, B68 Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

⁴⁹ R.A. Logan. Letter to Mackenzie King, June 5, 1925, MG 30, B68 Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

North Pole, the northern tip of the sector.

Logan also sent an informal letter to Oswald S. Finnie, director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior and father of Bernier's young assistant wireless operator, to elaborate on his intentions. Logan's name was already familiar to the department because of his involvement in the 1922 voyage.

He wrote that he was concerned about MacMillan spreading stories of mineral and oil wealth in the High Arctic:

I would not be at all surprised if he tries to prove his claim that Grant Land is a separate island from southern Ellesmere and if he brings back any aerial photographs indicating there might be a channel clear across the island, which is possible, he may create quite a following here to make it U.S. territory, in spite of Canada, and they might establish a base and leave behind on this trip a number of men to hold possession.⁵⁰

Logan told Finnie that he did not have money to construct air harbours in the Arctic and had no intention of doing so. His purpose in applying for a grant of land was only to leave a paper trail so that it would look like the Canadian government was administering the High Arctic.

"I thought it might be helpful some time in the future if the Archives could show that as far back as 1925 the Canadian government had received and had officially dealt with an application from a resident of a foreign country for a lease of a section of unoccupied Canadian territory," Logan wrote years later about the incident to Richard Finnie, after Finnie Senior had passed away.⁵¹

The official response from the Department of National Defence said:

⁵⁰ R.A. Logan. Letter to O.S. Finnie, Director N.W.T Branch of Dept. of Interior, June 24, 1925, MG 30, B68, Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

⁵¹ R.A. Logan. Letter to R.S. Finnie, May 9, 1972, MG 31, C6, Vol. 10, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

Your continued interest in the development of this part of the Dominion is greatly appreciated and the department is prepared to grant temporary licences for air harbours in the districts mentioned in your letter. Such licences to be terminable on three months notice from either party, providing the Department of the Interior has no objections to leasing you the necessary land.⁵²

Logan wrote his friend T.L. Cory, legal adviser of the Northwest Territory and Yukon Branch, about his request:

All Canada has to do is to either issue a temporary lease or/and licence and publish the facts or simply say that such are pending. No attempt need be made to survey the land and at the end of 21 years the land would revert to the government. In the meantime the rest of the world would have been sufficiently advised of Canada's intentions to hold and develop the land. No leases of air harbour licences would likely be issued until applied for. Therefore, I have made the necessary application of whatever action may be taken.

I have no desire for the land nor am I out for publicity. All I desire is to do what I can to help Canada get full title to all the islands, which rightfully belong to it...No one else is in on this, and, besides yourself, I have mentioned it to no one except Capt. Bernier, – I wrote him a note today.⁵³

Once Logan's application was approved, he contacted the *New York Times* with the story. It ran on April 23, 1926:

The top of the world buzzing now with the excitement of many hazardous plane dashes, will settle down within a few years to the prosaic life of a commercial airport. This last outpost, which long has cast its spell of romance and glamour, will be a completely equipped stop over station in an airway for flying crafts traveling between the East and West.⁵⁴

Logan didn't know Byrd in 1925 when he sent his letter to the prime minister. He met him later as a member of the New York aviators organization, the Quiet Birdmen.

In a letter to Richard Finnie in 1975, Logan wrote that before Byrd left on his

⁵² G. Desbarats, D.M., Department of National Defence. Letter to R.A. Logan, June 19, 1925, MG 30, B68 Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

⁵³ R.A. Logan. Letter to T. Lewis Cory, June 19, 1925, MG 30 B68 Vol. 1, Logan Fonds, N.A.C.

⁵⁴ "An Airport on Top of the World," *New York Times*, April 23, 1926, MG 30, B68 Vol. 1, Logan Fonds.

famous 1926 flight to the North Pole they had a talk. Logan showed Byrd the documents he had received granting him authority to operate airports on Ellesmere Island and environs and did his best to explain the international legal system to Byrd:

Half in fun and all in earnest, I made an agreement with him. I told him that I would give him permission to use my airports free of charge for landing fees, etc., with one condition; if any damage was done to his aircraft due to my not having runways sufficiently free of boulders... he would not sue me for any damage to his aircraft. He swore that such conditions were unacceptable to him and would do his best not to do any damage to my airports. We laughed and shook hands on it.

We both looked on this verbal agreement as a joke because there had been much publicity about his being all set to start from Spitzbergen.⁵⁵

Right after his return from his polar flight, Byrd made a speech at a Quiet Birdmen meeting:

Last year I started out to fly to the North Pole from the north tip of Ellesmere Island. You may wonder why I didn't go there this year. Well, the reason is that this damned man Logan sittin' here in front of me, had leased from the Canadian government the only good piece of land I could take off from. And he wouldn't let me use it. So I had to go to Spitzbergen.⁵⁶

Everybody laughed, Logan recalled.

This is an obscure bit of Arctic sovereignty business, but it shows how the Government of Canada and patriotic Canadians made quiet efforts to uphold sovereignty. As an aside, Logan's note to Bernier shows that Logan was aware of how important issues of Arctic sovereignty remained to the nationalistic old sea captain. Though he was retired by then, Bernier remained an active champion of the Canadian North.

⁵⁵ R.A. Logan. Letter to Finnie, May 22, 1975, MG 31, C6, Vol. 10, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

⁵⁶ R.A. Logan. Letter to Finnie, May 22, 1975, MG 31, C6, Vol. 10, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

The Northern Advisory Board drafted a letter, which was transmitted via the British Embassy to Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg on Dec. 21, 1925. It included Mackenzie's description of the meeting with Byrd aboard the *Arctic*, and enclosed affidavits from Steele, Morin and Mackenzie detailing the incident.

The letter found its way to the National Geographic Society and was brought before MacMillan and Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew. A memo of the conversation between them revealed more than Byrd lying about permits:

Commander MacMillan today stated that he had not told Commander Byrd that he had ever received a license from Canada. He says that the question was fully discussed before leaving the United States with the National Geographic Society and with naval authorities and it was decided that no permission should be asked from Canada since it was not admitted that Canada had any claim to that portion of Ellesmere Island across which it was intended to fly, or to Axel Heiberg Island on which it was intended to place a flying base. Commander MacMillan says that Commander Byrd knew perfectly well that the expedition had not received a permit from Canada but that he supposes Commander Byrd thought that the only way out of the difficulty was to make the statement he did.⁵⁷

MacMillan's suggestion was that Byrd did not ask for a permit because he thought he knew that the United States government's position held that requesting a permit would mean admitting Canada had claim to Ellesmere, so he managed to uphold the government's position by lying.

MacMillan was insistent in the meeting with Grew that Canada had no claim to the northern part of Ellesmere Island since its only occupation was a police post at Craig Harbour on the southern tip and a small building for a cache at Cape Sabine.⁵⁸ He said,

⁵⁷ Memorandum of conversation between Under Secretary of State J. Grew and D.B. MacMillan, Feb. 27, 1926, Department of State, RG 59031 11 M221 N.A.

⁵⁸ Ironically, MacMillan talks about flying over Ellesmere to locate "the hut and provision station built by the Canadian government in 1924 with a view to the establishment of a Northwest Mounted Police station."

Canada “has failed at the present to establish a post there or leave personnel” and had never patrolled or visited Axel Heiberg or other High Arctic islands west of Ellesmere.

MacMillan was correct in saying this. However, RCMP patrols over the next several years would change that.

Grew concluded that what had happened at Etah was a “misunderstanding” and decided “not to do anything more unless the Canadians raise the question again.”

He said, “It appeared, however, that what was intended by the Canadians was the putting on record of their request made to Commander MacMillan that he take out a license and in general a statement of the happenings at Etah.”⁵⁹

In effect this was true. The papers sent to the State Department were simply the Canadian government’s administrative assertion of authority over the Arctic. It was intended to be a paper trail, similar to the one created by Logan.

It was another example of symbolic sovereignty. And it worked.

Despite MacMillan’s protests, the United States government did not support his position and he was obliged to acquire permits for his 1926 and subsequent expeditions before he left the United States to conduct studies in Canada’s Arctic.

In May 1926, Byrd and Floyd Bennett flew from Spitsbergen to the North Pole in a tri-motor Fokker plane. Several days later, Amundsen, Ellsworth and Nobile completed a flight from Spitsbergen to Alaska in the dirigible *Norge*. In 1927 and 1928, the Australian-American team of George Wilkins and Carl Eilson completed a reverse of the *Norge* route in an airplane.

MacMillan wrote that it would be an “emergency station for us if need be, for we knew that our brother Canadians would not object to our using these supplies if it came to a matter of life or death.”

MacMillan, “The MacMillan Arctic Expedition Returns,” *National Geographic*. Nov. 1925: 505.

⁵⁹ Memorandum of conversation between Under Secretary of State J. Grew and D.B. MacMillan, Feb. 27, 1926, Department of State Memo, RG 59031 11 M221 N.A.

None of the flights discovered land near the North Pole.

Historian D.H. Dinwoodie notes in his article on the Etah incident that the United States Department of State “accepted the expanding Canadian role in the Arctic only after the aircraft had failed to locate polar terrain.”⁶⁰

Canada was able to secure its sovereignty without protest from foreign countries simply because those governments had not bothered to officially contest the claims made on Canada’s behalf, banking instead on finding new land farther north. By the time they learned there was no new land, Canada had a thin but real presence on the islands and a paper trail showing the Americans in particular had acknowledged Canadian control.

⁶⁰ Dinwoodie 64.

Chapter Seven

After Etah

I am now 75 years old, but am still going strong. I pity those who have nothing to do. I am now preparing for another voyage, which will be a private commercial venture. My pictures today will show you the amount of energy I have spent in conquering all those islands in the north.

– Capt. Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, F.R.G.S.
Empire Club of Canada, Oct. 7, 1926¹

The room is quiet. White banners hang from the ceiling. Each one describes some aspect of Bernier's Arctic expeditions. They tell the story about one man in three languages.

A simple song plays continuously. An accordion accompanies a woman singing a traditional Inuit song, but there are recognizable French words in it – matelot, sailor.

The Ilititaa exhibit at the Musée Maritime du Québec in L'Islet is a testament to Bernier's northern accomplishments. The exhibit includes several artifacts: a sailor's journal, sealskin pants, a caribou parka, an old sextant, a calling card with a beaver gnawing on the North Pole.

The exhibit is more than a collection of artifacts, though, it is a celebration of the languages and cultures that mingled in the North, the cross-cultural exchange between Bernier and his crew and the Inuit of Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay. This exhibit highlights this Inuit connection, a connection that still exists.

“My mother-in-law doesn't speak English and doesn't speak French, she speaks

¹ J.E. Bernier, “Our Northern Heritage,” Empire Club of Canada, Toronto, Thursday, Oct. 7, 1926.

only Inuktitut,” says Bernier enthusiast Stéphane Cloutier, who helped put the exhibit together.

The song that is playing is the traditional one his mother-in-law sang to him over the phone one day, long-distance from Igloolik.

“Afterwards, I told her, ‘What you have been singing is French. It’s a French sailor’s song I learned myself when I was a kid and everybody knows that song,’ ” says Cloutier. “But she thought it was an Inuk song, a kid’s song.”²

It was a nonsense song to her, just funny words she thought the elders had put together with a tune. Cloutier says the lyrics are in French but they are “Inuktitutized” – French lyrics with an Inuktitut accent.

“Ilititaa” is the first line of the song and is an Inuktitized version of “Il était un petit navire (There was a little boat).” It is an example of how the cultures have mixed.

The French version was sung by the crew at the parties on the ship and by Wilfrid Caron when he lived in Pond Inlet. The song has now been passed down through three generations of Inuit. It is Bernier’s living inheritance – an inheritance that is stronger in the North than in the South.

Amélia LeMay is communications officer at the Musée Maritime du Québec. She grew up in the next village but went to high school in L’Islet sur Mer.

“We never heard about Capt. Bernier or his crewmembers or his story,” she says. “Of course, we know the name Capt. Bernier because every time I would pass in front of the museum by school bus. But we never heard about him and it’s kind of sad because it’s part of our history.”³

² Stéphane Cloutier. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

³ Amelia LeMay. Personal interview, May 26, 2003.

Bernier's name is no longer widely known in southern Canada.

"You know why?" asks former L'Islet mariner Martin Caron.

"He did not discover Canada. He didn't discover anything. He was just a good man," he says. "White man that leave a name like that with some other race, that's quite rare. And that's what Bernier did. He, unfortunately, did not discover anything."⁴

Cloutier explains that in 1999, after living in Iqaluit and hearing the elders' stories about Bernier, he went to the Bernier Maritime Museum⁵ on the main street of L'Islet. Bernier's name was on the front of the three-storey grey stone building, but there was hardly anything inside about him. Cloutier approached the museum curator to change that.

The result is Ilititaa. The exhibit focuses on Bernier's early Arctic sovereignty expeditions, 1904-1910, and touches on the Eastern Arctic Patrols.

His life after the patrols is not as well known.

Demise of the *Arctic*

When the *Arctic* docked below the Chateau Frontenac at the King's Wharf in October 1925, it was the last patrol for both Bernier and his ship.

Bernier was 73. Maj. R.A. Logan had been aware, in 1922, that Bernier's navigational skills were not as good as they should have been. Cmdr. G. P. Mackenzie's more serious documentation of Bernier's errors in 1925 was no doubt the reason he was not asked to return as captain of the 1926 Eastern Arctic Patrol.

A survey of the *Arctic* that winter revealed serious structural weakness that made

⁴ Martin Caron. Personal interview, May 25, 2003.

⁵ The Bernier Maritime Museum, which opened in 1968, changed its name to Musée Maritime du Québec in 2002 to have a broader appeal to tourists.

it unfit for future work among ice floes. The *Arctic* was too old for northern service and it too was retired.⁶

After a visit to the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Bayeskimo* at Pond Inlet in 1922, Craig had written:

Once again we were impressed by the fact that the *Arctic* is an old boat and old fashioned in many ways although almost perfect in design of hull. At the same time when one visits another modern ship and sees what can be done in the way of comforts and accommodation one is rather ashamed of the old boat and feels that something is wrong that the government cannot afford to have the very best boat sailing in these northern waters. Government prestige suffers not only with companies doing business here but with the natives.⁷

Craig was vocal about the government needing a more up-to-date ship and one that could perform better in the High Arctic ice. The old wooden *Arctic* with its cramped, old-fashioned quarters was worn out by attempts to force its way through ice floes, especially its annual unsuccessful endeavour into the heavy ice to establish a post at Bache Peninsula.

"In 24 years of service this sturdy wooden ship had served in both the Antarctic and Arctic. Tremendous ice-pressures had weakened her hull," wrote Dudley Copland in his biography of Dr. Livingstone.⁸

The government purchased the larger 2,660 tonne steamship *Beothic* as a replacement. This steel hulled ship was able to penetrate the ice of Kane Basin and on Aug. 26, 1926, supplies and building materials were finally unloaded at Bache Peninsula for the most northerly police post.⁹

⁶ G.P. Mackenzie, "In the Shadow of the Pole," Canadian Club, Edmonton, Nov. 27, 1926.

⁷ J.D. Craig. Diary entry, Sept. 5, 1922, MG 30, B129 Vol. 1, W.H. Grant Fonds, N.A.C.

⁸ Dudley Copland, *Livingstone of the Arctic*. Lancaster: Canadian Century Publishing, 1978: 42.

⁹ Lyle Dick, *Muskox Land: Ellesmere Island in the Age of Contact*. Calgary: U Calgary P, 2001: 285-6.

The *Arctic* was no longer needed. With no regard for its historic significance, it was condemned and removed from service. Unlike its famous polar contemporary the *Fram*, which was preserved in a museum in Oslo, the *Arctic* was put up for sale.

Bernier was in charge of winterizing arrangements for the *Arctic* and received a request from a salvage officer on June 29, 1926, to send the ship's bell to Dr. Livingstone, who would present it to Oswald Finnie, director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior, as a souvenir.¹⁰

Bernier removed the brass bell that hung from a bracket on the outer wall of the wheelhouse. The name *Arctic 1904* was engraved on the side that faced outward. There was a hole in the bottom part of the 4, which had been plugged with a brass rivet and looks like it was made by a stray bullet. On the other side, *Gauss 1901* was engraved.

For 25 years the bell had rung the watches for officers and crew. Now it would be a memento in a civil servant's house.

Bernier was informed that the ship had been sold.

The Hudson's Bay Company bought it for \$9,000 in late July 1926, and the bill of sale was signed Aug. 20 by R.B. Bennett, then acting minister of the Interior and later Prime Minister of Canada. Ralph Parsons, manager of the St. Lawrence Labrador district, wrote to Fur Trading Commissioner Angus Brabant, the Hudson's Bay Company manager in London:

The main object of purchasing the vessel was that no other competitor should secure her for the far northern trade. A group in Quebec, one of whom is Captain Bernier, [Arctic Exchange and Publishing Ltd.] were desirous of purchasing the *Arctic* for a trading vessel in Northern waters commanded, of course, by Captain

¹⁰ H. Beer, Salvage Officer. Letter to J.E. Bernier, June 29, 1926, MG 31, C6, Vol. 9, File: "Bernier and the Arctic 1974-78, 1923-27," Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

Bernier. Enquiries were being made in Quebec and Ottawa by Col. Cornwall with reference to the purchase of the ship for use in the Western Arctic, therefore, the vessel was purchased by the Company to prevent her from falling into the hands of competitors.¹¹

The company placed a watchman aboard the ship while it was lying at the King's Wharf until it was determined what to do with it. An appraiser determined that it would cost at least \$75,000 to put the *Arctic* back in full working order, but for about \$5,000 it could be repaired and used as a moveable Hudson's Bay post in the North.

By February 1927, Parsons had two alternatives for the *Arctic*. It could be used as a mobile northern post or it could be sold for scrap. Parsons calculated the sale of the equipment on board would bring in \$4,000 and the hull would yield \$5,000, a total of \$9,000, which amounted to the purchase price of the vessel.

The company's head office agreed to the sale of the ship "provided Parsons could guarantee that the vessel would be broken up and not resold to a third party."¹²

On July 15, Parsons wrote to the company's governor and committee informing them:

The *SS Arctic* had been dismantled and a large part of her fittings and equipment taken for use at various Hudson's Bay posts. The anchors and chains had been sold for approximately \$1,000 and the ship had been sold for \$1,000 to the Gulf Iron and Wrecking Company of Quebec for breaking up purposes.¹³

In the Hudson's Bay Company's annual report of Feb. 20, 1928, C.H. French, the company's fur trade commissioner, noted the financial loss simply as "*SS Arctic* -

¹¹ Angus Brabant. Letter to P.D. Stirling, HBC London Manager, Dec. 9, 1926, SF "SS Arctic," L029717, Dec. 20, 1973. Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

¹² "Summary of *SS Arctic*," Dec. 20, 1973, L029717, SF "SS Arctic," Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

¹³ R. Parsons. Letter to Canada House, July 15, 1927, Correspondence, No. 19, Transfer File 20, SF Ship "SS Arctic," H.B.C. Archives.

\$10,128 - Purchased and later broken up.”

However, the Gulf Iron and Wrecking Company did not succeed in completely “breaking up” the ship and her hull was towed and abandoned with other hulks on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River.

Thomas Appleton, who wrote about Canada’s marine history, said, “I have the German shipyard drawings of the *Gauss* and her midship section shows a highly complicated assembly of relatively small pieces of timber carefully fitted together – a perfect breeding ground for dry and wet rot, and not at all the kind of structure to last without extensive maintenance in areas which are virtually impossible to get at.”¹⁴

Garth Wilson, at the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa, says that such a complex hull structure would be labour intensive to dismantle and if it had extensive dry rot, which was likely, would not be worth the cost of salvaging.¹⁵

“I cannot take leave of the *Arctic* without trying to find a better berth for her,” wrote Bernier in his autobiography. “She was sold to the ship-breakers who, however, found it too expensive to attempt to tear her to pieces, so well had she been put together. She now lies waiting for nobler uses.”¹⁶

Ironically, the floating cemetery where the *Arctic* had been towed was in sight of Bernier’s house in Lévis.

In July 1929, William Choat, the 1924 radio operator, visited Bernier at his home. The captain, almost in tears, pointed out the derelict hull lying in shallow water alongside other smaller hulks. The masts and gear were gone and the shell of the ship was

¹⁴ T.E. Appleton. Letter to R.S. Finnie, Nov. 19, 1974, MG 31, C6 ,Vol. 9 File- Bernier and the Arctic, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

¹⁵ Garth Wilson. Personal interview, July 16, 2003.

¹⁶ J.E. Bernier, Master Marine and Arctic Explorer, Ottawa: LeDroit, 1939: 389.

wallowing on its side.

Bernier said to him, “Bill, don’t look at her too long. It will make you sad as it does me.”¹⁷

For its captain, a ship is more than just a vessel on which to travel from port to port.

“To me a ship is a living being,” says Capt. Toomey. “I saw the *Empress of Canada* burn in Liverpool docks in 1953 or ’54. I was on a passenger ship and the ship was in the docks at the time. And that ship caught fire alongside the dock and the firemen came aboard and flooded it with water and she turned over and she capsized.

“They put the fire out, but she capsized and she lay against the dock and it was like an animal falling over and dying like that. You could weep at the thought of it. I hate to see it.

“To me a ship is a living being. I don’t like to see them mistreated. I don’t like to see them die.”¹⁸

Bernier must have felt the same way looking at the hulk of his *Arctic* rotting on the sandbar at Lévis. The ship encapsulated his life-long ambition to explore the Arctic, and his love for the North and the country he served so patriotically.

Dick Finnie, the 1924 and 25 expeditions’ teenage assistant wireless operator, inherited the *Arctic*’s bell when his father died, and it hung in his house in California for years. He mentioned this in a letter to W.B. Wiegand, who had been on the meteorological trip of 1912.

¹⁷ William F. Choat. Letter to R..S. Finnie, March 19, 1974, RG 12, Vol. 3855, File: Appleton, N.A.C.

¹⁸ Patrick Toomey. Personal interview, Dec. 18, 2002.

Wiegand replied:

If you are ever in the vicinity of Quebec and should be talking to the harbour-master who, I believe, knows all about the hulk of the *Arctic*, you might put in a word for me as regards securing the crow's nest. I think my name is carved along with many others in the ship's barrel, and nothing would give me more pleasure than to secure this as my relic of the ship. I spent some most uncomfortable hours in this barrel when the ship was rolling and pitching, as she certainly could do, and I have lost my lunch from this position more often, probably than from any other in my many travels. Perhaps the second most exciting spot on the *Arctic* to the ship's barrel is the toilet, which in stormy weather, can better be imagined than described! I will not ask you to endeavour to locate the latter on my account!¹⁹

Appleton and Finnie corresponded about the fate of the *Arctic* and Appleton's postscript may have encouraged Finnie to donate the bell. "PS: When you have no further use for the *Arctic's* bell, would you consider returning it to Canada? The U.S. already has Champlain's astrolabe and the bell of the Queen Victoria!"²⁰

When the *MV Arctic* icebreaker-cargo ship was built in 1978, Finnie brought the bell up to Port Weller, Ont., for its christening. The icebreaker was called *Arctic* "after a Canadian government ship of the same name which played a historic role in Arctic exploration earlier in the century," states a 1975 Transport Canada news release.²¹

Finnie took the bell on the *MV Arctic's* maiden voyage that July to the Polaris mine at Nanisivik near Arctic Bay. In October, after the voyage, Finnie donated it to the museum in L'Islet.

It is now part of the Ilititaa exhibit and hangs in a Plexiglas case, so that both names *Gauss* and *Arctic* are visible.

¹⁹ W.B. Wiegand. Letter to R.S. Finnie, Jan. 5, 1945, MG 31, C-6 Vol. 6, File- Bernier and the Arctic 1975.

²⁰ Thomas Appleton. Letter to R.S. Finnie, Nov. 18, 1974, MG 31, C6, Vol. 9, Finnie Fonds, N.A.C.

²¹ Transport Canada news release, Nov. 2, 1975, RG 12, Vol. 529-593, N.A.C.

Retirement

Bernier went into semi-retirement after the 1925 Eastern Arctic Patrol, but he continued to give slideshow-lectures on his work up North. In October 1926, he was in Toronto to give a speech to the Empire Club of Canada:

I have always taken the position that the Arctic up to the Pole belongs to Canada. That the north land used to be a kind of air route for aviators but in the future we shall collect \$50 for a permit from them. Our northern limit, according to me, is 90 degrees north. We take the whole Arctic Archipelago from Baffin Land as far north as 82 degrees. This is not a place of desolation, as my hearers might regard it, but is a territory of great value to the Dominion of Canada.²²

In 1927 he was commissioned by the Department of Railways and Canals to pilot a large tugboat and lead a convoy of barges transporting coal from Halifax to Port Burwell. Ships working in Hudson Bay would refuel at the coal depot there.²³

“They had an awful trip up the coast of Labrador, they almost all died, you should see the report,” says Benoit Robitaille referring to the documents he found in Bernier’s house. “Bernier finally reached Port Burwell. They lost a couple of barges, I think, with the coal, so there was an inquiry into that and Bernier was cleared. On the contrary, there were members of the inquiry commission said Bernier did a magnificent job saving all the people first of all, and then not losing all barges. He was old then.

“Then afterwards he stayed in Lévis,” says Robitaille. “And there was the *Arctic*. From his house he could see his ship on the bank of the river rotting. So it was very hard for Bernier to see his *Arctic* there. It just crumpled on the shore there and nobody to care

²² Bernier speech, Empire Club, Thursday, Oct. 7, 1926.

²³ Yolande Dorion-Robitaille, Captain Bernier’s Contribution to Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic. Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1978: 109.

for the ship except Bernier.”²⁴

Bernier had always been a tireless self-promoter as well as a promoter of Canada’s North and sovereignty issues. It was through his efforts in the early part of the 20th century, travelling across Canada to petition for his North Pole expedition, that people were made aware of Canada’s North and the need to secure title to it. But by the end of his days as captain of Arctic expeditions, the government was nervous about his openness with the press.

The government wanted to maintain secrecy about the Eastern Arctic Patrols until all the police posts had been set up in the North, demonstrating Canada’s administration there. This was why the grand sendoffs of the pre-war voyages were not repeated for the first Eastern Arctic Patrols.²⁵

In March 1925, Craig wrote to Oswald Finnie that the sovereignty patrols were so well established that there wasn’t the same necessity of secrecy. He suggested that perhaps it was time for “publicity of the right sort.”²⁶

But when the *Montreal Star* wrote on May 6, 1925, that Harwood Steele would accompany Bernier to the Arctic, rather than referring to it as a government venture, Craig was frustrated.

He wrote, “I sometimes wonder if this is a government expedition. Too bad we can’t get decent publicity.”²⁷

Bernier was a high-profile personality, the Marc Garneau of his day.²⁸ However,

²⁴ Benoit Robitaille. Personal interview, May 27, 2003.

²⁵ Shelagh Grant, *Arctic Justice*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2002: 131-134.

²⁶ J.D. Craig. Memo to O.S. Finnie, March 1925, RG 85 Vol. 610 Doc. 4764, J.D. Craig Fonds, N.A.C.

²⁷ Craig to O.S. Finnie, March 1925.

²⁸ In the event that future Canadians forget our modern heroes as Bernier has been forgotten, Marc Garneau was the first Canadian astronaut. His first “expedition” was in 1984 aboard the space shuttle *Challenger*. Garneau completed two other space missions in 1996 and 2000.

the government wanted the expeditions to be low profile and present an image of serious administration. It was always concerned about how much or what Bernier might say to the press. Before the 1925 departure, Oswald Finnie wrote to Bernier asking him not to talk to the newspapers. Craig was more adamant about it, wanting Finnie to tell Bernier he might lose his job if he gave any more interviews.²⁹

When Bernier did retire, he was given a small government pension.

Dick Finnie wrote to Muriel Scott, G.P. Mackenzie's niece, in July 1969:

Bernier was a remarkable man whose service to Canada was never fully appreciated or understood in his lifetime. His \$2,400 per year pension, even in a period when money was worth a good deal more than it is today, was a pretty shabby reward. However, Bernier was so shamelessly bombastic that he antagonized many people, including government officials whom he persistently importuned.³⁰

Bernier's sovereignty patrol days had ended but what he had begun in 1906 and again in 1922 was continued with the Canadian government's ongoing annual Eastern Arctic Patrols. RCMP posts had become vital in the North. It was often part of a young officer's training to do a tour of duty in the Arctic for several years.

The RCMP carried out extensive patrols of the area, much of which was totally uninhabited. Staff Sgt. Alfred Herbert Joy, the officer who investigated the Janes murder case in 1922, carried out two remarkable long sovereignty patrols that practically gave him hero status.

On March 26, 1927, Joy left the Bache detachment with one constable, three Inuit and four dog teams. He crossed Ellesmere Island to Axel Heiberg, Amund Ringnes,

²⁹ Claude Minotto, "Frontière du Canada: Les Expéditions de Joseph Elzéar Bernier, 1895-1925," MA History Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 1975.

³⁰ R.S. Finnie. Letter to Muriel Scott, July 10, 1969, MG 30 E529, Vol. 1, G.P. Mackenzie Fonds, N.A.C.

King Christian, Cornwall and Graham islands, and returned to the post May 18, covering an incredible distance of 3,250 kilometres.

As an inspector two years later, Joy beat his own record and travelled from Dundas Harbour to Bache Peninsula via Melville Island, crossing Lougheed, Ellef Ringnes, Cornwall and Axel Heiberg and Ellesmere islands. He left March 12, 1929, and returned May 31, travelling a route that covered an impressive 4,250 kilometres.³¹

Historian William Morrison writes, “Although none of the land traversed by Joy could be classed as terra incognita, since it all had been discovered by others, the patrols were remarkable for their length and their speed; even Stefansson, it is fair to say, could not have done better.”³²

A.H. Joy’s long patrols firmed up, superficially at least, Canada’s surveillance of these islands. Between 1922 and 1932, patrols by other officers at other posts covered all the islands of the archipelago. Within a decade, the police had successfully established occupation and carried out administrative duties that consolidated Canada’s claim in the Arctic.

Sverdrup’s Settlement

In March 1925, the Norwegian Consul General enquired of the Department of External Affairs as to the Canadian government’s claim to the Sverdrup Islands. The letter went unanswered. Four more letters from Norway received either no reply or a vague response. Finally in April 1929, Otto Sverdrup himself wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Norway was willing to relinquish its claim to the Sverdrup Islands if

³¹ William R. Morrison, Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925. Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1985: 170.

³² Morrison 170.

the Canadian government would compensate him for expenses occurred during his expedition.

Sverdrup sent his representative, Eivind Bordiwick, with power of attorney to settle the matter of compensation. Sverdrup estimated the cost of his 1898-1902 voyage was about \$420,900. Sverdrup said he would be satisfied with \$200,000.³³

Bordiwick met with the Northern Advisory Board, who decided the best way to handle Sverdrup's request was to set up a subcommittee to look into the matter.

The subcommittee meeting resolved:

While Norway had no good claim to sovereignty over the so-called Sverdrup Islands, Captain Sverdrup obtained valuable data pertaining to the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and that the information had been of value to the Canadian government. In this connection it was pointed out that in his patrols Inspector Joy of the RCMP had taken with him a copy of Sverdrup's narrative [*New Land*] covering his exploration of the territory and found the account to be quite accurate and of considerable service."³⁴

T.C. Fairley, in his biography of Sverdrup, notes for 24 years the Canadian government depended entirely on the accuracy of Sverdrup's charts. "Without them, Ottawa would have remained ignorant, for who knows how long, of the simple fact that the islands were there, in need of 'saving' for Canada."³⁵

The subcommittee agreed that the amount of compensation "not exceed \$25,000 or, if in the form of an annuity during the lifetime of Captain Sverdrup, \$2,400 (which is the amount of the pension now granted to Captain Bernier), it being made perfectly clear that this gratuity or annuity would be granted as compensation for the work he had done

³³ History of Question of Ownership of Sverdrup Islands, subcommittee report, April 22, 1929, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1, N.A.C.

³⁴ Minutes Northern Advisory Board subcommittee meeting, April 22, 1929, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1.

³⁵ Fairley, Sverdrup's Arctic Adventure. London: Longmans Green and Col., 1959: 285.

in Canada's Northern Archipelago and for the additional data he is prepared to turn over to the Canadian government."³⁶

After negotiating with Sverdrup, the government agreed to pay him a considerably smaller sum than he had requested but more than the subcommittee's paltry recommendation. In November 1930, Sverdrup was presented with a cheque from the Canadian government for \$67,000 in exchange for his documents and maps.

Notice of this was made to the press on Nov. 11, and an article titled "Sovereignty over Sverdrup Islands Duly Recognized" was published in the government's periodical *Natural Resources*.

Sverdrup's recognition had come 27 years too late. Sverdrup died 15 days later. He was 76. Some of the money helped his widow ease her last five years. Sverdrup's original diaries were returned to his family after the Second World War. A monument to Sverdrup was raised in Steinkjer, Norway, in 1957. Norwegian-born Henry Larsen, captain of the RCMP vessel *St. Roch*, represented Canada at the ceremony.³⁷

The question is what would have happened if Sverdrup had died several months before the Canadian government purchased his documents. The Northern Advisory Committee was confident that Norway's claim of discovery would not stand up in international court. It was felt that Norway's rights had lapsed, but rather than take it to arbitration, a grant to Sverdrup for the scientific knowledge gained by his efforts was seen as a gesture of appreciation. The move also conveniently solidified Canada's title to the Sverdrup Islands.³⁸

"I like the way we got it in the first place," says Prof. Riewe. "Sverdrup explored

³⁶ Minutes Northern Advisory Board subcommittee meeting, April 22, 1929, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1.

³⁷ Fairley 285. Dane Lanken, "The Norwegian Connection," *Canadian Geographic*, Sept./Oct. 1999: 52-58.

³⁸ Minutes Northern Advisory Board subcommittee meeting, April 22, 1929, RG 85, Vol. 347, File 201-1.

the Queen Elizabeth Islands. After he'd been there for four years he claimed it for Norway. Canada said, 'Oh no, it's Canadian territory but we've never been there.' Sverdrup said 'Okay, then pay me for my exploration costs.' Twenty years later, Canada paid him, the year of his death, half of what it cost him and that's how we obtained it. We didn't do it by force. We didn't do it by waving flags. We didn't do it by doing anything, just el cheapo standards."³⁹

The annual Eastern Arctic Patrols continued to carry supplies and RCMP officers to High Arctic police posts, such as Craig Harbour on Ellesmere Island, and various Arctic communities until the Canadian Coast Guard took over in the 1960s. Today, icebreakers still visit communities once or twice a year and bring supplies to the remote High Arctic villages where ice prevents the privately operated "sea lift" cargo ships from getting in.

Honouring Bernier

In October 1933, the High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain sent a telegram to Sir Joseph Pope, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, informing him that Bernier, now 81, and his wife, Alma, had arrived in London, intending to personally present the King with a gift of his book, *The Cruise of the Arctic, 1908-09*, and a 1929 chart of the Arctic islands. The commissioner wrote, "Captain Bernier...feels that he should have some Royal recognition because he claims that he has added considerably to His Majesty's territories by his Arctic voyages."⁴⁰

Bernier expected to be knighted. It wasn't too unrealistic an expectation, either.

³⁹ Rick Riewe. Personal interview, Feb. 14, 2003.

⁴⁰ High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain. Telegram to Sir Joseph Pope, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Oct. 16, 1933, RG 25, Vol. 1673, File 748, N.A.C.

He had made a significant contribution to securing Canada's islands and his expeditions were as risky as any previously made by foreign explorers. Men had also been knighted for less. Today, individuals are given the title of "Sir" for their contribution to the music industry.

The high commissioner's telegram set off a flurry of interdepartmental memos about the appropriateness of this presentation to the King. The secretary of state's response is curiously naïve about the establishment of Arctic sovereignty:

It is deemed advisable care should be taken to avoid any reference to his claim to having added considerably to His Majesty's territories by his Arctic voyages. I regret to say such claim is not acceptable and it is felt reference thereto in any way, if permitted, might convey entirely erroneous impression as to Canada's position. While Captain Bernier is readily recognized as an able navigator and a valourous explorer who has rendered valuable service to his country, you may be aware that, as far as discovery is concerned, Canada's title to Northern islands rests on the fact that with few exceptions all the known insular areas in the Canadian Arctic were discovered and formally taken possession of by British commissioned navigators from a century to three-quarters of a century ago...

Under these circumstances, it is desired that presentation of Book and Chart should be supervised discreetly.⁴¹

On Nov. 6, arrangements were made for Bernier to present a specially-bound copy of his book and the chart to Sir Clive Wigram, the King's personal secretary.

Wigram was more gracious than the Canadian government had been, but his letter to Bernier, after the interview, suspiciously echoed some of the wording of the telegraphed reply from Ottawa that urged discretion:

I am commanded to convey to you the expression of the King's sincere thanks for this interesting work. His Majesty realizes what valuable services you have rendered to your country both as an able navigator and valourous explorer, and hope you may be spared for many years to enjoy your well-earned leisure after so

⁴¹ Secretary of State for External Affairs. Confidential Telegram to the High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain, Nov. 6, 1922, RG. 25, Vol. 1673, File 748, N.A.C.

active and strenuous a life.

The King well remembers, as Prince of Wales, seeing your Ship "The Arctic" at Quebec in 1908, when you were about to start for the North.⁴²

This letter from Buckingham Palace must have meant a lot to Bernier, especially the comment that the King had remembered his 1908 departure from Quebec City.

Bernier still hoped to be honoured with a knighthood. On Nov. 21, 1933, he wrote to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett about being recommended to the King. He concluded his letter: "It would give me supreme happiness if you would solicit from him some expression of his favour towards one of the most devoted of his Canadian citizens of French lineage and blood."⁴³

Bernier was not knighted by the King of England, but in December 1933, he made his final crossing of the Atlantic Ocean to receive a special benediction from Pope Pius XI in Rome. On his return to Quebec in January 1934, he was decorated by Archbishop Cardinal Villeneuve with the title of Knight of the Equestrian Order of Jerusalem for his work in religion and science. Bernier must have been in his glory during the parochial celebration, with all the pomp and pageantry of the ceremony. He wore a cape, sword and plumed bicorn hat.⁴⁴

While the Canadian government offered Bernier a meager pension and wrote him off as a dutiful civil servant, the geographical societies of Quebec, Canada and Britain bestowed the recognition due him for his work in the Arctic. He was very proud to put the initials F.R.G.S. after his name – Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society – a title that had been bestowed upon such eminent explorers as Parry, McClintock and Shackleton.

⁴² Clive Wigram, King's Secretary. Letter to J.E. Bernier, Nov. 18, 1933, RG 25, Vol. 1673, File 748.

⁴³ J.E. Bernier. Letter to R.B. Bennett, Nov. 21, 1933, RG 25, Vol. 1673, File 748-33, N.A.C.

⁴⁴ L'Evenement, Wednesday, Dec. 6, 1933, RG 25, Vol. 1673, File 748-403, N.A.C.

He was also vice president of the Arctic Club in New York and an honorary member of the Arctic Society of Canada.

Bernier was also awarded the prestigious silver Back Grant trophy from Britain's Royal Geographic Society, in 1925, in "recognition of exploration carried out over a long term of years in Arctic waters." In his lifetime, only one other Canadian had been bestowed with this honour: Captain Robert A. Bartlett of *Karluk* fame who received the Back grant in 1918.⁴⁵

Bernier suffered a stroke on Dec. 16, 1934. He passed away 10 days later.

"Bidding farewell with his eyes and pressing his wife's hand, staring at the Madonna, the Star of the Sea. That is the way knights and Christian captains died in olden days," reads the epilogue of Bernier's autobiography *Master Mariner and Maritime Explorer*.⁴⁶

The veteran Côte de Sud sea captain rated a half-page obituary in the *Montreal Star* which began:

Capt. J.E. Bernier, outstanding Canadian Arctic explorer who during his lifetime had sailed in practically every section of the world, died at his home here yesterday after an illness of 10 days brought on by a paralytic stroke. The 82-year-old explorer put up a valiant fight against death, clinging tenaciously to life for days when physicians expected him to die any minute.⁴⁷

Even his death took on legendary proportions in the obituaries. Rightly so. The scope of what he did for Canada in visiting the Arctic in his ship and claiming the islands is worthy of legend. He was one of the last from an era of wooden ships and iron men.

"The truth remains that of all those who commanded Canadian expeditions to the

⁴⁵ Thomas E. Appleton, *Usque Ad Mare*, Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968: 248.

⁴⁶ E.T.(Esdras Terrien, founder of Le Droit Press) Epilogue of Bernier's *Master Mariner*. 406.

⁴⁷ "Capt. J.E. Bernier Dies: Noted Arctic Explorer," *Montreal Star*. Thursday, Dec. 27, 1934.

Arctic during that period, Captain Bernier, despite his meager formal education, was probably the most aware of the importance his action had on Canadian sovereignty in the North,”⁴⁸ concludes Dorion-Robitaille in her book.

Cloutier also feels that Bernier’s work in the North is important in its impact on people living there and on the shape of Canada as a whole. A second Ilititaa exhibit was mounted in Iqaluit in 2001. The value of what Bernier and his crew did in the Arctic attracted interest abroad, too, as a travelling Ilititaa exhibit went to France in the Spring of 2003.

The exhibit was featured at Nunavut House, a territorial government tourist information centre in Paris, and moved to the Centre polaire Paul-Emile Victor in Prémaman, France, for the summer of 2003, with a tour of six Italian towns later in the year. Cloutier says there are also plans in the works to bring Bernier’s story to Venice, Milan and Rome in 2004.

Ilititaa has had other positive repercussions. It has been the means of introducing the Inuit descendants of Wilfrid Caron and Bernier’s crew to their French relations on the Côte de Sud.⁴⁹

Martin Caron, whose father was a cousin of Wilfrid Caron, says discovering Wilfrid Caron’s descendants is like a gold mine. He was even more thrilled to meet his northern cousins at a reunion of the descendants in L’Islet in July 2000. The groups held a joint concert with Inuit and Québécois songs and entertainment reminiscent of the original parties that Bernier hosted aboard the *Arctic* 90 years ago.

It was a party that Bernier would have enjoyed.

⁴⁸ Dorion-Robitaille, 54.

⁴⁹ Jane George, “Kapitaikallak’s abiding legacy,” *Nunatsiaq News*, Oct. 26, 2001: 16-17.

Chapter Eight

Keeping the Door Closed on the Arctic

Canada has no real problems with sovereignty over our land. All the land, including the islands, that Canada claims is recognized internationally as Canadian. There are some questions of where borders run but that is a problem common to most nations, a problem of frontiers, not sovereignty.

– Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs
Carleton University, Oct. 18, 1988¹

An icebreaker the size of a city block crashes through four-metre-thick ice as it approaches Alert on the northern tip of Ellesmere Island.

“We are going back and forth across the channel to do seabeam scanning, which will map the ocean floor. We are now so far north that it is rare for a ship to get through, so it is important to collect as much new scientific information as possible,” writes Lee Narraway, photographer on the icebreaker *Healy*.²

She corresponds by e-mail, a hi-tech leap from the letters that Bernier and centuries of explorers before him left in stone cairns to be found months or even years later.

Narraway is spending the summer of 2003 photographing the scientists on the *Healy* who are in the Arctic to study climate change. They are drilling 200 metres into the ocean floor of the Nares Strait to take core samples. An examination of the sedimentation buildup in these core samples will help them understand what the Arctic’s climate was like thousands of years ago, and possibly determine if there was a global warming before.

¹ Joe Clark, Secretary of State for the Department of External Affairs. “Sovereignty in an Interdependent World,” Carleton University, Ottawa, Oct. 18, 1988.

² Lee Narraway. E-mail correspondence, Aug. 8, 2003.

The *Healy* is a United States Coast Guard icebreaker. It is operating in these High Arctic waters with permission from the Canadian and Greenland governments. The 30 scientists aboard are both American and Canadian.

When the *Healy* first plowed through Canada's icy waters on its way through the Northwest Passage in April 2000, Canadian officials dispelled concerns of "jurisdictional tussles" over the American icebreaker's presence in the High Arctic. The *Healy* had the sanction of the Canadian government, unlike previous transits by the American ships *Manhattan* and *Polar Sea*. Press coverage of the *Manhattan* in 1969, and *Polar Sea* in 1985, traversing the Arctic without Canada's permission alarmed the Canadian public and raised sovereignty questions.³

The tanker *Manhattan* went through the Northwest Passage as part of an American plan to use icebreaking tankers to carry crude oil from Alaska to the eastern seaboard of the United States. The tanker was taking the shortest route, saving 30,000 kilometres by going across the top of the world rather than down through the Panama Canal.

The American government had no reservations about sending the *Manhattan* through in '69, and again in '70, as it considered the Northwest Passage to be international waters. It did not request permission or notify Canadian authorities. The *Manhattan's* transit was a blatant challenge of Canada's title to the Arctic.

Only 45 years after the Etah incident, Arctic sovereignty was again being openly questioned by the United States.

When the Canadian government discovered the *Manhattan* in territorial Arctic

³ Mike Trickey, "No jurisdictional tussles expected as U.S. icebreaker cruises Arctic waters," The Ottawa Citizen, Thursday, April 27, 2000.

waters, it sent up a Canadian Coast Guard ship to escort it through.

Capt. Patrick Toomey was then working for the Coast Guard in the Arctic.

“I was not involved in the actual escort of the ship, but I was up there on an icebreaker at the time, on both voyages, and we were on call and following it very, very closely,” he says.⁴

At the same time, the United States Coast Guard projected that 140,000 barrels of crude oil would be accidentally spilled from supertankers off the coasts of Canada and the United States each year, and an average of one supertanker would be grounded annually along the Pacific coast. With the added menace of arctic ice, these statistics highlighted the fact that using the Northwest Passage as a shipping route was a serious threat to the Arctic’s sensitive environment.⁵

The Trudeau government took immediate steps to defend Canada’s Arctic. It did not send in warships. It implemented new legislation.

Canada claimed a 320-kilometre fishing limit and 20-kilometre territorial sea around the islands. This put Barrow and Prince of Wales straits, the most often used route through the Northwest Passage, indisputably within the 20-kilometre Canadian territorial waters. As well, the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act of 1972 set out rigorous guidelines that ships had to conform to in order to enter the Arctic ice.

This legislation gave Canada the right to deny non-compliant passage in all waters above the 60th parallel and within 160 kilometres of the Arctic coastlines and the Northwest Passage. This effectively halted shipping traffic and, in a sense, the legislation gave Canada ecological sovereignty over the Arctic.

⁴ Patrick Toomey. Personal interview, Dec. 18, 2002.

⁵ “Pollution and development: why Canada is worried and touchy, north and south,” *Financial Post*, April 15, 1972: 17.

“The American position regarding the waters and ice of the NWP and the Arctic Archipelago is far from ambiguous. The United States claims that the NWP is an international strait joining two areas of the high seas and, therefore, Canada has no right to legislate to prevent pollution or the passage of vessels through that strait,” wrote Ann MacInnis in 1985 for the Strategic Studies Program at the University of Calgary.⁶

Reinforcing Canadian Arctic Sovereignty

Though the official American position denied Canadian authority over the Arctic waters, Brig.-Gen. Keith Greenaway experienced the Americans’ reluctance to even admit Canada’s title to the islands, too. In May 1971, when he was science adviser with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, he was invited to be part of a team that participated in a Ditchley Foundation conference outside of Oxford, England.

The Ditchley Foundation is an Anglo-American think-tank based in Ditchley, England since 1958. Its original mandate was “to advance Anglo-American links” but this has since broadened to include “international challenges arising from issues of concern to democratic societies” around the world.⁷

“In 1971 they looked at the topic of the management of the polar basin,” says Greenaway. “It was intended to just be a discussion between British and American delegates. Of course, the embassies of other countries got wind of this. The Canadian High Commission said, ‘Well, this is pretty presumptuous of the Brits and Americans managing the Arctic basin when the Brits have no boundary at all on the Arctic, only academic and historical interests.’”

⁶ Ann MacInnis, “How Canadian are arctic waters?” *Maritime Industries*. Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan./Feb. 1985

⁷ Ditchley Foundation Web Site, July 5, 2003 <<http://www.ditchley.co.uk/>>, <<http://www.anu.edu.au/cabs/scholarships/ditchley.html>>

“So they opened it up and invited the Scandinavian countries. Norway particularly had been ignored and, of course, they invited us as well. Jean Chrétien led our delegation. He was Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Alan Beasley from Foreign Affairs....I was there on the aviation side of it,” says Greenaway.

“Thompson⁸ [the rapporteur] made a statement in the summary of the discussions of the day that there was no issue of the ownership of the land masses. Now, we realized the Americans were very firm on the water but not on the land. And when he read this out, Stevenson [legal adviser to the U.S. State Department⁹] asked him to hold it. He said, ‘I can’t quite allow that. We do not consider these are actually all Canadian territory. They’re not occupied, you see.’

“This was why we had all those RCMP patrols and the rest of it.

“Beasley looked at me. We were two active members on this, and Stevenson made this statement, so Beasley leaned over to me and said, ‘I guess this is where we leave.’ I said, ‘I think so.’ We packed up our notes and got up.”

Greenaway says Brian Roberts, head of the Scott Polar Research Institute who was chairing the conference, smoothed things over by saying that the comments were off the record, and the meeting continued. Afterwards, he says, they were on the phone to Ottawa.

“This alerted the Canadians about the American position. We were misreading it,” says Greenaway.

“We had a session with Stevenson afterward. He said, ‘You don’t occupy those

⁸ Andrew R. Thompson was a law professor at the universities of British Columbia and Victoria in the '70s and '80s.

⁹ John Stevenson was legal adviser to the Department of State and past president of the American Society of International Law.

islands. They're just sitting there and sovereignty really means a bit of activity and so forth and you're not.' And we countered that we had Polar Continental Shelf Project on research. We were in the state of what we call investigative inventory of the resources of the islands. We departed agreeing not to agree. And that was as late as the early '70s."¹⁰

Stevenson's belief that Canada did not have authority over High Arctic islands, such as Ellesmere, is reminiscent of Macmillan's 1926 conversation with Deputy Secretary of State Grew. Although this was not the official United States government position, the idea that Canada's title to the Arctic islands was still being denied by senior American bureaucrats was unnerving.

The Polar Continental Shelf Project, which Greenaway refers to, was set up after the first Russian satellite, Sputnik, was launched in 1957. The American competition needed to know the gravitational pull of Hudson Bay in order to calculate its own satellite's orbit. The United States government asked if it could make a gravity survey of Hudson Bay. John Diefenbaker's Conservative government responded that the Canadians would carry out the gravity survey themselves.

At the same time, the 1957 United Nations' conference on the Law of the Sea gave countries the rights to resources on their continental shelves to a depth of 200 metres. Canada, therefore, had jurisdiction of an Arctic continental shelf that it knew virtually nothing about.

The government created the Polar Continental Shelf Project in 1958 to meet the need for scientific data about the Arctic. This was another way to establish an internationally recognized presence in the North.

"Polar Shelf is the only agency in the Canadian government, outside of the

¹⁰ Keith Greenaway. Personal interview, Jan. 20, 2003.

military, that has sovereignty written into its mandate. How better to exercise your sovereignty than to have a thousand scientists, every year, wandering around [the Arctic] doing their thing peacefully,” says George Hobson, Polar Shelf director from 1972 to 1989. “Polar Shelf has been a big part of the sovereignty of Northern Canada.”¹¹

The Polar Continental Shelf Project coordinates support and offers expertise to Canadian government and university scientists and independent researchers working in isolated areas throughout the Canadian Arctic. The scientific projects it assists range from archeology to space science, and it provides these with ground and air transportation support, communications, accommodation, and field equipment.¹²

“Canada did not want happening to the northern islands what happened to Greenland. They didn’t want Norway or the Americans saying, ‘We’ll take the Queen Elizabeth Islands because you guys aren’t paying any attention to it,’ ” Hobson says.

The Polar Continental Shelf Project was one means of demonstrating that the Canadians were paying attention.

Polar Shelf has been recognized internationally as vital to Northern research. It continues to offer scientists access to remote corners of Canada’s High Arctic. It puts people on the ground and upholds sovereignty by occupation.

Michael Bell, the former vice-president of the Great Lakes shipping company Fednav, points to another of the government’s efforts to be present in the Arctic.

“Shortly after the *Manhattan* made its trip, Trudeau got panicky – well, everybody got panicky. The Americans were about to declare this as a public transit route and everybody could go backwards and forwards and they were going to claim the Arctic

¹¹ George Hobson interview, Jan. 17, 2003

¹² Polar Continental Shelf Project. Jan. 16, 2003 <http://polar.nrcan.gc.ca/home_e.html>

islands,” Bell says.¹³

He says after the introduction of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, Jeanne Sauvé, Liberal minister of the environment under the Trudeau government, “got on the bandwagon” and announced Canada’s plan to, within five years, achieve excellence in, under and through ice.¹⁴

“I thought that’s a hell of an opportunity. If they say they really want to do that, then we could do it. I was in Fednav at the time and we started to plan to come up with a ship that could demonstrate to Madame Sauvé that we’d got this excellence,” Bell says.

He explains that at the time the mining company, Cominco, was setting up the Polaris mine¹⁵ on Little Cornwallis, off Cornwallis Island, to mine lead and zinc. The problem was that icy waters limited cargo ship access to the High Arctic mine. Fednav suggested it could build an icebreaker-cargo ship that would be able to access Polaris to transport the mined base-metal to the southern markets. The ship would also answer the specifications of Sauvé’s mandate.

“So that’s how the *MV Arctic* came about,” says Bell.

“The *MV Arctic* was partly owned by the Canadian government for a few years, run by Fednav and a company called CanArctic,” he says. “Then during that period, from

¹³ Michael Bell. Personal interview, June 16, 2003.

¹⁴ Jeanne the first woman speaker of the House and was appointed the first woman Governor General of Canada from 1984-90.

¹⁵ It was suggested that perhaps industry in the Arctic also plays a role in reinforcing sovereignty. Bell disagreed, saying industry in the North is based on purely economic reasons.

The Polaris mine, which closed in August 2002, had an enormous Canadian flag on one side of the large, A-frame (27.4m X 259m X 36.5m) concentrate storage building. Former president of Cominco Alaska, Hank Giegerich, said the project engineer was Joe Sibeli, a Hungarian who had lost two fingers of his right hand throwing a grenade at the Russians during the Hungarian revolution of 1956. When it came to deciding on the building’s colour scheme, Joe insisted on red and white. He wanted the entire side to be painted like a Canadian flag to show the Russians Canada’s presence in the High Arctic. When it was suggested that the flag should be smaller, “Joe stood up and he banged his fist on the table and he said, ‘If that flag goes, I go.’ That’s how we got the flag,” says Giegerich. Hank Giegerich. Speaker phone interview through M. Bell, June 16, 2003.

1978 for about 15 years, it was the only ship in the world that was an icebreaker and cargo ship – a real icebreaker, not an ice-strengthened ship.”

Bell says it was the only ship “absolutely built to Trudeau’s regulations.”

The *MV Arctic*, launched in 1978 at Port Weller, Ont., was named after the CGS *Arctic*, “a Canadian government ship of the same name which played a historic role in Arctic exploration earlier in the century,” as the 1975 Transport Canada news release put it.¹⁶

The *MV Arctic* – like its hardy little namesake – never did transit the Northwest Passage, though the small Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *J.E. Bernier*, built in ’67, did in 1976 and 1980. Bernier finally made the Passage in the form of an icebreaker.

After the *Manhattan* incidents, even though Canada and the United States agreed to disagree on sovereignty of the Arctic waters, the Canadian government did not expect an American ship to transit the Passage without being informed about it. In August 1985, however, another international incident arose when the United States Coast Guard tested their icebreaker *Polar Sea* in Canada’s Arctic. Again, they did not ask permission of the Canadian government or tell them they were going through. Once the Canadian authorities were alerted, a Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker was sent up to escort the *Polar Sea* in its east-to-west transit of the Passage.

The Conservative government under Brian Mulroney, like Trudeau’s government before it, immediately implemented new legislation. On Sept. 10, 1985, the government discarded the sector theory¹⁷ and drew baselines around the Arctic islands, confirming that

¹⁶ Transport Canada news release, Nov. 2, 1975, RG 12, Vol. 529-593, N.A.C.
The *MV Arctic* is 213 metres long, compared to its 50.2 metre namesake.

¹⁷ The sector principle of defining Canadian territory was replaced by baselines in 1988, and Canada no longer claims everything up to the North Pole. Greenaway says the sectors are still used for international

the waters around them, and between them and the mainland, are Canadian.¹⁸

Joe Clark was Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time, and had the closest dealings with the United States over the incident. In October 1988, he gave a speech at Carleton University, in Ottawa, on the topic of Arctic sovereignty. He said:

On January 11, 1988, I announced an agreement on Arctic cooperation that met Canada's goals. Neither side moved from its stated position on the principle of sovereignty, but the agreement is entirely consistent with our position on sovereignty. What that agreement accomplished is that, from then on, the U.S.A. would ask our permission for American icebreakers to use Arctic waters.

That means they cannot enter waters we claim without our prior consent. We have achieved control over the U.S. icebreakers in our waters and there can be no repetition of the *Polar Sea* incident.¹⁹

The 1988 Canadian-American agreement on Arctic cooperation still stands. The sanctioned presence of the United States icebreaker *Healy* in Nares Strait in 2003 is an example of this. Now when an American icebreaker traverses the Northwest Passage, a Canadian icebreaker escorts it.

In his speech, Clark also mentioned the 1988 establishment of a national park on northern Ellesmere Island as part of the government's attempt to reinforce Arctic sovereignty. Quttinirpaaq is Canada's second largest national park, covering over 37,000 square kilometres. Administration of a national park is viewed internationally as custodianship over territorial land.

civil aviation traffic control purposes, "But we don't recognize it because we have drawn boundaries around our islands and we have accepted the economic zone principle as we live by the Law of the Sea convention." Greenaway interview.

However, even contemporary government-issued maps of Canada, such as the map put out by Natural Resources of Canada in 1999 (National Atlas of Canada Reference Map Series), still include border lines that run from the 141st meridian and the eastern territorial boundary of the country up to the North Pole. The sector still exists on paper.

¹⁸ Joe Clark, Secretary of State for the Department of External Affairs. "Sovereignty in an Interdependent World," Carleton University, Ottawa, Oct. 18, 1988.

¹⁹ Clark speech.

“There’s a national park up at Alert. Why? Who is going up there? Few people go up there. But if you put it into a national park, everybody will make it a destination and people will start going there. So, just by having a green spot on the map, you’re showing sovereignty over the area. It’s Canadian territory,” says zoology Prof. Rick Riewe from University of Manitoba.

“There’s one spot at the foot of Lancaster Sound, a marine park. Wonderful, why? It didn’t need protection at all. It’s just that if you have a park across the mouth of the Northwest Passage you could keep people out. You could say, ‘no, you can’t come here, see it’s a national park, it’s protected.’ So that was why it was there. You know there’s a park around Banks Island [Aulavik] that may be considered one, too. One on North Baffin Island [Sirmilik] around Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, right there around Lancaster Sound – put it in for sovereignty,” says Riewe.

At the end of the 20th century, Canadian sovereignty was well established over the Arctic islands. Control over the Arctic waters, though, is still a contentious issue between the United States and Canada, though it is more generally recognized internationally as Canadian territorial waters. Canada is confident that if the matter is brought before the World Court, it will win. However, the United States is unwilling to pursue the issue that far.²⁰

Conclusion

A hundred years ago, Canada was struggling to establish sovereignty over the archipelago that had been bequeathed to it by England in 1880. Because Canada was still such a new country with a small population in a huge territory, its efforts to explore and

²⁰ Greenaway interview, Clark speech.

occupy the northerly region was left to fur traders and missionaries. Canada's eventual meager efforts to uphold its jurisdiction in the Arctic coincided with foreign interest there. Historians, such as William Morrison and Morris Zaslow, deemed Canada's administration of the North as reactionary to foreign presence in the Arctic.

The flag-raising expeditions of Bernier were in response to foreign whalers and exploration parties in the Arctic, as well as the unfair resolution of the Alaskan Boundary Dispute. The Canadian Arctic Expedition was sponsored by the government only to usurp American sponsors so that any new lands discovered would not be claimed by the United States. The establishment of the Eastern Arctic Patrol in the 1920s was also in reaction to a perceived threat by Denmark and the United States.

The Canadian government's defence of its Arctic has not been with weapons or gunboat diplomacy. It has used peaceable, administrative measures: the implementation of fishery laws, post offices, and mounted police patrols. For the most part, Canada's jurisdiction over the Arctic has been a low-key, quiet assertion of its authority. This has come to be viewed as the Canadian way.

"It was mere window dressing, as far as I could see," says Capt. Toomey about the government's early efforts to establish sovereignty.²¹

"But they gathered scientific knowledge and in those days, to a certain extent, window dressing is all that's needed. You don't have to have a ring of missiles to enforce your ideas or your claims. Just being there was it," he says.

The establishment of Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic, as demonstrated in this thesis, has mainly been accomplished by acts of government administration, and the people involved were employed by the government. For the most part, they were civil

²¹ Toomey interview.

servants or mounted police. There is little personal information about who these people were. They weren't famous, or flamboyantly heroic, only ordinary individuals.

The Dominion government's unobtrusive way of assuming possession of the Arctic was achieved by stolid, almost invisible, men.

The one exception to this, the only giant figure in the history of Canadian sovereignty, was Capt. J.E. Bernier.

Bernier did not fit a government mould. He refused to be a quiet nationalist and downplay his annexation of the archipelago. He raised the flag and built crosses on the islands with great ceremony, and actively promoted the importance of these acts in the press. He was proud of what he and his men had done in the Arctic to establish sovereignty, and felt that Canadians should know about it.

Bernier did not fit the mould of hero either. He was a common, working man who was always mindful of his employer, the Dominion government, and the job he was hired to do. He was not one to buck orders. When he had the chance to go for the glory and traverse the Northwest Passage in 1908, he didn't because he did not have government orders to do so.

When his glorious dream of reaching the North Pole was shattered, he didn't chuck it all. He carried on admirably in a minor role, and used his experience to tackle the nobler cause of claiming the islands. He might have been tempted, when he was in the Arctic, to abandon his commission and make a detour to pursue the elusive Pole, but he did not. And when he heard that the gold medal of the Pole had gone to another, he was gracious and sent the explorer his congratulations. These are the qualities of a real hero.

Bernier was not a reckless adventurer like Stefansson, or a handsome star like

Shackelton. Compared to the extravagant explorers such as Peary and Byrd, who symbolize the eagles swooping in to conquer the North, Bernier was more like a beaver – gnawing away at his noble mission, year after year. He lacked the polish of Hollywood-type heroes, but he shines in a modest, Canadian hero way.

He was the one with a truly “National Dream” and the guts to pursue it.

He went into virtually unknown territory in a small wooden ship at a time when there were no satellite phones – for most of his service not even faint Morse beeps on a wireless radio could be received – and with no idea how long he and his men would be stuck in the ice.

“Other people have tried the same thing, in terms of navigation, and not only perished but umpteen other people perish along with him,” says Claude Minotto, archivist at l’Université de Montréal. “This captain, I don’t think had any single serious mishap throughout the expeditions. That’s already, I think, something.

“Maybe he didn’t take as many chances as others did, but then that wasn’t his job necessarily, and it might have been his job precisely to avoid that and he’s been able to. He has gone along without bringing danger to his crew, to the people around him. And in that sense, if only that, he becomes a heroic figure in Canadian history and that’s only one dimension,” says Minotto.²²

Minotto was working on his master’s in history in the early ’70s, shortly after the tanker *Manhattan* pushed through the waters of the archipelago and sparked a renewed angst over Canadian sovereignty. Minotto decided to look at the origins of Arctic sovereignty and Bernier’s work became an ideal topic for his thesis. He says Bernier had a profound impact on him.

²² Claude Minotto. Telephone interview, July 26, 2003.

“He’s a very determined and active promoter of Canadian sovereignty and development in the Arctic, both as a Canadian and as a French-Canadian. I guess I was impressed with the enthusiasm and determination with which he pressed on, both locally and nationally,” he says.

Stéphane Cloutier echoes Minotto’s admiration: “Even though Capt. Bernier didn’t have much education, he saw Canada as something very precious and important to him and he saw that he could contribute in good ways to his country.”²³

Bernier did not discover new land or add anything to the maps that had been created by explorers before him. He was, nonetheless, an explorer in the true sense. He went into virtually unknown territory and returned time and again safely with knowledge of a marvellous icy frontier.

He was employed by the government to claim the islands, and there is no question that his flag-raising patrols did establish Canadian jurisdiction over them. His efforts went a long way to help the government succeed in securing the Arctic.

With his expeditions, the government began to effectively close the front door of the Arctic against foreigners.

Shelagh Grant, adjunct professor of history at Trent University in Peterborough, says, “You have to ask yourself the question: Did Bernier do something over and above his job? I don’t think so, but I think he had a lot of fun. I think he did his job with more spirit because he just happened to like it up there and he did it incredibly well.

“As far as I’m concerned, he was the first Canadian captain that really took any initiative...I think probably the fact that Bernier was the first to really bring the Canadian

²³ Stéphane Cloutier. Personal interview, Jan. 12, 2003.

presence to the Arctic would be just cause for him to get the Order of Canada.”²⁴

Bernier, of course, did not get the Order of Canada. He was a man ahead of his time, but not truly appreciated by the government in his own time. He saw the importance of claiming the Arctic even before the government realized it. Still, his contribution to Canadian Arctic sovereignty is worthy of recognition and his larger-than-life personality should make him the stuff of legend. Though Bernier was opposed to an American presence in the Arctic and was a staunch Canadian, had he been born south of the border, he undoubtedly would be recognized as an American hero.

He wasn't completely forgotten by the Canadian government, though. In 1977, a 12-cent stamp was issued in his honour. The profile of Bernier on the blue-and-white stamp is a poor likeness, but his ship in the background is recognizably the *Arctic*, locked in the ice of some northern bay.

Twenty-eight years after completing his thesis, Minotto admits he still thinks about Bernier.

“Every day, in fact,” he says. “I have copy prints of historical photos in our home, so they're there. Every time I watch TV, there he is, not far from the television. He remains to me an impressive figure in Canadian history and Quebec history and in life, simple as that.”²⁵

²⁴ Shelagh Grant. Personal interview, May 4, 2003.

²⁵ Minotto interview.

Appendix One
Photographs and Illustrations

Fig. 1. Formal portrait of Capt. Bernier at 50, 1902.
© National Archives of Canada, PA-207173.

Fig. 2. *C.G.S. Arctic* at Port Burwell, Arctic Que., 1906. © Cruise of the *Arctic*, 1906-07.

J.E. BERNIER.
attacking the Pole

Fig. 3. Capt. Bernier's calling card circa 1898.
© Personal collection.

TORONTO, FRIDAY, JULY 10, 1903—TWELVE PAGES

A HOT WEATHER SUGGESTION FOR CAPTAIN BERNIER.

Fig. 4. Cartoon, © Toronto Daily Star, Friday July 10, 1903.

Fig. 5. *Arctic* and crew at Fullerton Harbour, 1904. Moodie sits front centre and Bernier is to his left. Photo taken by Grace Moodie. © National Archives of Canada, C-34479.

Fig. 6. *Arctic* in ice, 1924. © National Archives of Canada, PA-207174.

Winter Harbour 12 July 1909

This is to certify that all?
O. G. Moorin was at Deal Island
on the 15 July 1909 and put a
canvas cover the roof of this house
which was built by Capt. M. Kelleher
during July 1854. And that now
we repaired it with the material we
have on hand and we also replaced
to old guns and ammunition by
two new Lee Enfield guns and one
thousand round of 303. ammunition
well oiled and ready for use.

One old boat was seen on
the beach but too old for repairs.
There is a good deal of Barel
of stores and clothing but no
inventory was taken. 3 Barel was
open containing Boots and gunnery
Boat where partly destroyed but the
gunnery where good some where
taken by the boat crews while I
away to take sounding at Bridport
and where only seen when embarking
at the launch. The bread tank where
not open. Some rum cask where empty.
P.S. The steamer Arctic J. L. Bernier
is now at Winter Harbour. Commander
ready to go as soon as the
ice will permit all well.
we intend to reach Pond Inlet
about 1st September.
Our regards are at Winter Harbour
on Parry rock. J. L. Bernier

Fig. 7. Bernier's 1909 proclamation found in a cairn at Winter Harbour.
© National Archives of Canada.

Fig. 8. Annexation ceremony at Parry's Rock, Winter Harbour, Melville Island, July 1, 1909.
© National Archives of Canada, C-29604.

Fig. 9. Bernier in his chart room on board the *Arctic*.
© National Archives of Canada, C-25960.

Fig.10. *Arctic* in Quebec dry dock, 1904. © N.A.C., C-34475

Fig. 11. Taking Possession of "Baffin Land," King's Birthday, Nov. 9, 1906.
© Cruise of the *Arctic*, 1906-07.

Fig. 12. Scientific staff of the Canadian Arctic Expedition at Nome Alaska, July 13, 1913
 Front row left to right: F. MacKay, surgeon (died on the ice of the Chukchi Sea); Capt. Bob Bartlett, skipper of the Karluk; V. Stefansson, Commander of Expedition; Rudolph M. Anderson zoologist/biologist and second in command; James Murray, marine biologist-oceanographer (died on the Chukchi Sea); Frits Johansen, marine biologist,
 Back row left to right B. Mamen, meteorologist (died on Wrangel); B.M. McConnell, secretary, K.G. Chipman, topographer; behind Chipman – G.H. Wilkins, photographer (later Sir Hubert Wilkins); George Mallock, geologist (died on Wrangel); Henri Beauchat, anthropologist (died on Chukchi Sea); J.J. O'Neill, geologist; Diamond Jenness, anthropologist; J.R. Cox, topographer; W.L. McKinlay, magnetician and meteorologist. © National Archives of Canada, PA-74063.

Fig. 13. Bernier with sextant, 1924. © NA.C., PA-207168.

Fig. 14. Bernier, 73, being hoisted to the crow's nest in the bosuns' chair 1925. © N.A.C. PA-207172

Fig. 15. Conference on board the *Arctic* August 1925. Left to right: radio operator Robert Foster, Cmdr. George P. Mackenzie, MacMillan expedition Cmdr. Eugene McDonald, RCMP Insp. C.E. Wilcox, Capt. J.E. Bernier. © R.S. Finnie, *The Beaver*, Summer 1974: 52.

U. S. NAVAL MESSAGE

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

SC 111-99:3

From <u>OPNAV</u>	ACTION	To <u>S.S. PERRY</u>	Write ACK. after addressee requiring acknowledgment
Released by			
Date <u>20 August, 1925</u>	INFORMATION	To	
Code or TYPE Switch one <u>COMMUNICATIONS</u>			
Copies to			

(DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE)

4-8359

TEXT

ROUTINE

1920 MSG FOR BYRD. PLEASE CONVEY THE FOLLOWING TO MAC-
MILLAN QUOTE TO AVOID EMBARRASSING DIPLOMATIC SITUATION IT IS
ESSENTIAL YOU OBTAIN LICENSE FROM MACKENSIE OR BERNIER OF CANA-
DIAN STEAMSHIP ARTIC TO LAND AND EXPLORE BAFFIN LAND OR OTHER X
TERRITORY SOUTH OF ELLESMERE ISLAND STOP SUGGEST MAKING REQUEST
INFORMAL AND PERSONAL STOP IF SUCH LICENSE IS NOT OBTAINED BY
YOU WE CANNOT ASK FOR IT FROM WASHINGTON STOP SITUATION MOST
DELICATE STOP PLEASE ADVISE RESULT OF YOUR EFFORTS SIGNED LAGORCE
UNQUOTE 1600

Coded, and sent as requested.

325 AUG 20 PM 4 15

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D) or (E)
NND 730036
By hba NARS, Date 2/12/76

(COPY for Release and File—Deliver to Communication Office)

SC 111-99:3

Fig. 16. Coded U.S. Naval message to Cmdr. Byrd, Aug. 20, 1925.
© National Archives, Washington, RG80 111:99:3.

Appendix Two Maps

Maps of Bernier's flag-raising expeditions, 1906-07, 1908-09, 1910-11

Capt. J. E. Bernier, 1906-07.

Fig. 17. Route of the Cruise of the *Arctic* 1906-07

© Andrew Taylor, *Geographical Discovery and Exploration in the Queen Elizabeth Islands*,
Geographical Branch of Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys, Ottawa, 1955.

Fig. 20. © William Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1985.

Appendix Three **List of Characters**

Rudolph Martin Anderson: American biologist in charge of the Geological Survey of Canada's southern team of researchers for the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-17.

Michael Bell: Former vice president of shipping company, Fednav. Involved in construction of *MV Arctic*, the first icebreaker-cargo ship to access mines in the High Arctic.

Joseph-Elzéar Bernier: French-Canadian sea captain commissioned by Dominion government to claim the Arctic islands for Canada. He travelled extensively in the Arctic from 1904-1925.

Robert Borden: Prime minister of Canada as leader of Conservative party from October 1911 to October 1917 and, as leader of Unionist Party, from October 1917 to July 1920.

Magdeleine Bourget: Granddaughter of Almina Caron, Bernier's adopted daughter.

John Bryant: Professor at university of Oklahoma wrote a book about Donald B. MacMillan's 1925 Arctic expedition that was of concern to the Canadian government.

Richard Evelyn Byrd: Navy Pilot who was first to fly over both Poles. He accompanied MacMillan on the 1925 Arctic Expedition to make flight tests in high North.

Martin Caron: Former sailor on Arctic Coast Guard ships from Bernier's hometown of L'Islet.

Wilfrid Caron: Referred to as Bernier's nephew, actually his second cousin, was sailor on his trip and in charge of trading post at Igarjuak near Pond Inlet on North Baffin Island. He was also the brother of Almina Caron.

Stéphane Cloutier: Bernier enthusiast who grew up near L'Islet and lived in Iqaluit and Igloolik for seven years. Has been instrumental in getting Bernier exhibits in museum in L'Islet, Iqaluit and Europe.

William Wallace Cory: Deputy Minister of the Interior in the 1920s, involved in sovereignty issues.

John Davidson Craig: Senior bureaucrat in the Department of the Interior. Commander of the First Eastern Arctic Patrols in 1922 and '23.

Richard Diubaldo: Professor emeritus at Concordia University in Montreal, and has written extensively about Stefansson.

Oswald Sterling Finnie: Director of the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior and in charge of Arctic jurisdiction.

Richard Sterling Finnie: Son of Oswald and teenage assistant radio operator on 1924 and '25 Eastern Arctic Patrols. Arctic aficionado who wrote extensively about Bernier and the Arctic.

Nancy Fogelson: American historian who wrote about American-Canadian relations over the Arctic.

Shelagh D. Grant: Adjunct Professor at Trent university in Peterborough who has written extensively on Arctic sovereignty and in particular on the Robert Janes murder trial.

William Harold Grant: Secretary to J.D. Craig on first Eastern Arctic Patrol in 1922. Kept a daily journal.

David Gray: Arctic biologist and Arctic historian. Created a virtual exhibit on the Canadian Arctic Expedition.

Keith R. Greenaway: Distinguished air pilot who pioneered aviation in the Arctic. Also former science adviser at the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, involved in northern aviation policy.

Dick Harington, Paleobiologist and curator emeritus at the Museum of Nature in Ottawa, presently studying extinct mammals in the Arctic.

James B. Harkin: Commissioner of Dominion Parks Branch of Department of the Interior from 1911 to 1936. Was instrumental in steering resolution of Arctic sovereignty issues.

Robert Headland: Head archivist the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge England. Is an Arctic historian and lectures on Arctic history on the Arctic cruises.

Robert Janes: Second Officer on Bernier's 1910-11 Arctic expedition. Later began trading company near Pond Inlet on north Baffin , went mad and was eventually murdered for threatening the Inuit men he was trading with.

William Lyon Mackenzie King: Leader of Liberal party. First term as prime minister of Canada from December 1921 to June 1926.

Wilfrid Laurier: Leader of Liberal party. Prime minister of Canada from July 1896 to October 1911.

Nazaire LeVasseur: President of the Quebec Geographical society in the late 1890s and supporter of Bernier's North Pole expedition campaign.

Robert Archibald Logan: Air Force Pilot who was the Air Board Representative on the first Eastern Arctic Patrol in 1922 to assess flight and airstrip possibilities in the High Arctic.

Edward Macdonald: Third Officer on Bernier's 1910-11 Arctic expedition, kept a daily journal.

Donald Baxter MacMillan: American Arctic explorer who led 37 expeditions in the Canadian North in his lifetime, often without permission from the Canadian government.

Eugene Francis McDonald: Second command on MacMillan's 1925 Arctic expedition. Multi-millionaire president of Zenith Radio.

Arthur Meighen: National Liberal and Conservative party leader. Prime Minister of Canada from July 1920 to December 1921.

William Morrison: History professor at Northern University of British Columbia, has written about the role the RCMP played in the Arctic.

Fridtjof Nansen: Norwegian explorer that was first to sail through the southern route of the Northwest Passage and beat Robert F. Scott to the South Pole.

Lee Narraway: Photographer/writer has travelled extensively on North Baffin Island and has been photographer aboard icebreakers carrying researchers to Ellesmere Island.

William Edward Parry: British explorer that was first to reach farthest northwest first European to winter over in the Arctic islands at Winter Harbour, Melville island in High Western Arctic, in 1819-20.

Robert Peary: American explorer, first to reach the North Pole. His expedition base camps were at Etah, North Greenland as well as on Northern Ellesmere Island.

Bob Pilot: Mayor of Pembroke. Was an RCMP officer at High Arctic Posts in the 1950s and '60s.

Senator Pascal Poirier: Contemporary of Bernier's who put forth the Sector Principle, defining Canada's Arctic region to the Pole.

Joseph Raymond Préfontaine: Minister of Marine and Fisheries 1902-1905.

Isabel Purdy: Daughter of R.M. Anderson.

Benoit Robitaille: Geographer, worked as adviser to Rene Levesque when he was Quebec minister of Northern Affairs. Robitaille was invited to help himself to stuff in Bernier's house after Bernier's widow died. He procured boxes of valuable documents.

Yolande Dorion-Robitaille: Benoit's wife who compiled the documents into a book about Bernier.

Rick Riewe: Professor of zoology at University of Manitoba, who has studied large arctic carnivores and has worked closely with Inuit on Northern issues.

Marjolaine Saint-Pierre: A historical writer, is presently writing a biography of Bernier and has been researching Bernier's life for four years.

Ernest Shackleton: British Explorer who petitioned the Canadian government to finance a trip to the Beaufort Sea for scientific research.

Clifford Sifton: Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson: Canadian-born explorer who commanded Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-18, and was adviser on northern matters with the Canadian government until the mid-1920s.

Otto Sverdrup: Norwegian explorer who carried out research in the Eastern Arctic from 1898-1902 and explored and mapped Ellesmere, Axel Heiberg, Ellef and Amund Ringnes Islands.

Patrick Toomey: Master Mariner and Ice master, he captained ice breakers in the Arctic for the Coast Guard for 30 years and presently is ice pilot for ships cruising in Antarctic and Arctic.

Chris Trott: Professor of native studies at University of Manitoba, Carries out research in Arctic. Lived in Arctic Bay for several years in the 1970s.

Fabien Vanasse: Historiographer on the *Arctic's* voyages from 1904-11.

W.B. Wiegand: Went to Hudson Bay in 1912 aboard Arctic on meteorological expedition. Kept detailed daily journal.

Morris Zaslow: Canadian historian who has written about Arctic sovereignty issues as well as a comprehensive history of the Geological Society of Canada.

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MG 31, C6 – Richard S. Finnie Fonds

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Baie d'Hud.

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