

fairly random and disconnected paragraphs relating to Sir John Ross, Joseph-Réné Bellot, and John Rae, and an account of the *Fox* expedition, together with comments about recent work on the topic. But Sherard Osborn was not a lieutenant in 1855, all the ships of the Royal Navy were not ‘diverted’ to the Black Sea in the Crimean War, and so on.

The notes within the text are, on the whole, accurate and informative, but there are some irritating omissions. We are not told, for example, what the *London Charivari* is (page 64), although the well-informed reader will know that it is usually referred to as *Punch*.

The nadir of the book is the maps. These are copies of the original charts prepared after the expedition and are on so reduced a scale that a reader would need a magnifying glass to be able to follow the tracks of the vessels. There should have been specially drawn maps, which would greatly have enhanced the value of the book and the ease of its use. The other illustrations are of Carter, of persons connected with him, and of scenes from the expedition.

The book is well presented, in a handsome blue binding. There is a full index and a useful glossary.

To sum up: an unfortunate book. Carter’s journal merits an edition much better than this. It is clear that the editors have devoted most of their attention to Carter’s own background and relatively little to the Franklin search itself. Yet Carter’s account is important precisely because it illustrates the search and not because of any intrinsic interest relating to his family. Therefore the whole critical apparatus is ill-balanced, and the sections relating to the search, and its background, are incomplete and inaccurate. This, coupled with the inadequacy of the maps, makes the book difficult to use for the purpose for which it was intended, namely to provide additional illustration of the events surrounding an interesting expedition. (Ian R. Stone, Laggan Juys, Larivane Close, Andreas, Isle of Man IM7 4HD.)

TWO YEARS IN THE KLONDIKE AND ALASKAN GOLD-FIELDS 1896–1898. William B. Haskell. 1997. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. 578 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-889963-01-1. \$US34.95.

‘Gold! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools. Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools’ (Service 1917: 107). Gold rushes have always cast a powerful spell over the popular imagination. Just as the Klondike gold rush bridged the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, so it is safe to assume that publications commemorating its centenary will take us from this century and into the next millennium.

At the end of the nineteenth century, America was suffering the effects of a depressed economy and mass unemployment. Not surprisingly the discovery of gold in the Klondike captivated the American populace, infecting it with a gold fever to rival the California strikes of 1849. Newspapers like *The Bulletin* of San Francisco (15 July 1897: 3), although initially diffident in lending credence to

‘exaggerated’ miners’ tales of ‘enormously wealthy mines,’ quickly threw caution to the wind. *The Bulletin* suddenly woke up to the newsworthiness of ‘stories...too incredible,’ of ‘riches...too fabulous for belief,’ as the newspaper’s scepticism rapidly gave way to a new-found enthusiasm in the veracity of miners’ tales (*The Bulletin* 17 July 1897: 1).

The very next day it brought to its readers ‘authentic news of some of the most wonderful gold strikes in the world’s history’ with its own confirmation that ‘The richest gold strike the world has ever known was made in the Klondyke [sic] region’ (*The Bulletin* 16 July 1897: 12). The ‘News Was So Startling,’ reported a *Bulletin* headline, ‘That Even the Miners’ — portrayed only the day before as suspect, unreliable witnesses to Klondike events — were made to feature in headlines where they ‘Could Not Believe in its Truth at First’ (*The Bulletin* 16 July 1897: 12). Soon stories of heaps of ‘gold dust...look[ing] almost as cheap as sawdust’ (*The Bulletin* 21 July 1897: 4) were to become the hyperbolic norm.

This was not to say that the Klondike did not receive its fair share of descriptions emphasising its hardships or its horrifying potential for tragedy even in the newspapers. It was just that such descriptions somehow became lost in a vast unnavigable ocean of Klondike myths and half-truths concerning the abundance and availability of gold. It was as though those who dashed northwards had read the wild exaggerations of the newspapers, but also ignored the more sober cautions of the press.

The gold rush and its aftermath witnessed a great outpouring of related literature. There were innumerable novels, short stories, poems, and autobiographies. Jack London contributed his novels *The call of the wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), as well as numerous Klondike short stories. Robert Service wrote Klondike poetry collections the contents of which had such titles as ‘The trail of ninety-eight’ and ‘The man from Eldorado.’ Into the vanguard of this great flurry of literary activity, William Haskell’s book (a combination of autobiography, reminiscence, social history, guidebook, Klondike survival guide, and much, much more) came and was then just as quickly and undeservedly forgotten.

William Haskell and his partner Joseph (Joe) Meeker travelled to Forty Mile and Circle City in the spring of 1896. They staked and worked claims on Bonanza Creek and in the Indian River District and found ‘rich [pay] dirt — enough to provide [them] with a comfortable amount of gold dust’ (pages 505–506). However, the gold fever of 1897 brought a great influx of new prospectors, and the consequent scarcity of supplies finally prompted Haskell and Meeker to head for home. On their homeward journey a freak accident swept Joe under the ice, forcing Haskell to return alone in 1898.

The timescale of Haskell’s Klondike reminiscence (1896–1898) is quite unusual and makes the book valuable because it encompasses an account of the Klondike both before and after the discovery of gold introduced thousands of new prospectors to the north, irrevocably chang-

ing life in that region. Neither London, Service, nor Joaquin Miller, some of the literary names now most readily associated with the last great American gold rush, could claim any experience of the Klondike before 1897.

Haskell's narrative of his Klondike experiences is as unromanticised as it is encyclopedic, and it has numerous dimensions. Woven around a detailed, frequently humorous narrative of the successes and failures of the author and his partner, the book offers insights into Klondike life ranging from practical advice on the techniques of cabin and boat building to observations on the virulence of mosquitoes, tent care, the quality of Klondike 'restaurants,' and the wisdom of justice dispensed by Alaskan miners' meetings in the absence of any other form of law.

Haskell's varied account even includes late nineteenth-century celebrities like Miller, the bearded poet of the Sierras whose verse has long since vanished from many library shelves. Miller journeyed to the Klondike as a newspaper correspondent, and Haskell's gruesome description of him 'very badly frozen, having lost a part of the

great toe of his left foot, his left ear sloughing off, and both cheeks frozen' (page 490) conveys an insight into the book's matter-of-fact realism and gives an impression of its gritty tone.

The 1997 edition of Haskell's work has gained a poorly focused map and an informative foreword by Terrence Cole that surveys the contemporary literary productions of the Klondike and provides a context in which to place Haskell's work. In every other respect, though, the 1997 edition is a faithful reproduction of the original work. It comprises 40 chapters, each with a brief synopsis; 25 original photographs; and a comprehensive index, and it is well worth the attention of those interested in the cultural history of the Klondike. (Ian N. Higginson, Centre for History and Cultural Studies of Science, Rutherford College, University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NX.)

Reference

Service, R. 1917. *Ballads of a Cheechako*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.