

**A HISTORICAL AND LEGAL STUDY OF SOVEREIGNTY  
IN THE CANADIAN NORTH: TERRESTRIAL  
SOVEREIGNTY, 1870-1939**

By Gordon W. Smith, Edited by P. Whitney Lackenbauer

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## *Foreign Explorers in the Canadian North, 1877-1917*

The history of exploration in the Canadian Arctic in the half-century after Confederation is not simply a Canadian story. Various foreign explorers were active in the region, searching for clues to the fate of the Franklin expedition, conducting scientific research, discovering unknown coasts and claiming islands for their home country, and even transiting the Northwest Passage for the first time. Some of these explorers are well known, others less so. Cumulatively, their activities raised significant awareness about the Canadian North and gave Canadian authorities some reason to fret over the situation in the territories for which they had recently assumed responsibility.

### The Howgate-Tyson Expedition (1877-78)

An expedition which has remained rather obscure was that organized by Captain Henry W. Howgate of the US Army and led by the whaler George Tyson in 1877-78.<sup>1</sup> Howgate had conceived the idea of establishing a temporary Inuit colony in Lady Franklin Bay to aid a project for science and exploration; the expedition of 1877 was privately planned as a preliminary step he hoped would subsequently receive the official blessing and support of the American government.<sup>2</sup> The choice of Tyson, well known for his role in the recovery of *HMS Resolute* and his drift through Baffin Bay on the return trip from Hall's third expedition, was probably an unfortunate one, for, as his narrative reveals, he had little liking for his Inuit "colonists" and little desire to associate with them.<sup>3</sup> He took the fifty-six-ton schooner *Florence* and a small crew of twelve to Cumberland Sound in the summer of 1877 and wintered there, maintaining contact with the wintering whalers and less enthusiastically with the local Inuit. Unfortunately for the project, Congress did not grant the desired assistance,<sup>4</sup> even though various government departments had helped to outfit the preliminary expedition,<sup>5</sup> and thus the plan could not be carried through. Having transported some Inuit, dogs, and equipment to a Greenland port for the anticipated rendezvous with the main expedition in the summer of 1878, Tyson waited for its arrival in vain. When it became clear that it was not going to show up, he took his "colonists" back to Cumberland Sound, dumped them ashore, and gladly abandoned the project. Interestingly enough, all this happened while British officials were fretting



FIGURE 6-1: H.W. KLUTSCHAK, "THE AMERICAN FRANKLIN SEARCH EXPEDITION: CROSSING SIMPSON'S STRAIT IN KAYAKS," WOOD ENGRAVING IN *THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS*, 8 JANUARY 1881. OSHER MAP LIBRARY AND SMITH CENTER FOR CARTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE, OML-1881-22. IMAGE: 15.013.

over how they could best arrange a transfer of their rights in the Arctic islands to Canada. If the American "colony" had materialized, the problem would doubtless have become more complicated.

### Frederick Schwatka (1878–80)

Of the numerous expeditions which searched for relics of the Franklin disaster, the last that

went out deliberately for this purpose was the one commanded by Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka of the 3rd US Cavalry in 1878–80.<sup>6</sup> The motivation for the expedition was an Inuit report brought back by the whaler Captain T. F. Barry after a trip to Repulse Bay in 1871–73, which said that they had been visited years before by a white man in uniform who had left many papers in a cairn. Schwatka obtained leave of absence to conduct the expedition, which was sponsored mainly by the New York shipping merchants Morrison and Brown, and was taken to Depot Island north

of Chesterfield Inlet in the schooner *Eothen* by Captain Barry in the summer of 1878. From this base, he set out on 1 April 1879, with three white men and thirteen Inuit, the party including the expedition's chronicler William Henry Gilder, "Eskimo Joe" (who had been the faithful companion of Charles Francis Hall), and Joe's wife "Neepshark." The entire summer was spent searching King William Island and the nearby mainland coast, and it was not until 4 March 1880 that they arrived again at Depot Island, having sustained themselves almost entirely by "living off the country" during their record-breaking sledge journey of 3,251 statute miles in over eleven months, and having made the return trip in temperatures as low as  $-71^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-57^{\circ}\text{C}$ ).<sup>7</sup> Their search was more detailed and thorough than any of the preceding ones. Unfortunately, although they found more relics, they discovered no written records that might have thrown further light upon the fate of the lost expedition. They built some cairns and indulged in a display of the American flag on 4 July when it "waved from the highest point of King William Land,"<sup>8</sup> but it would appear to be an exaggeration to suggest that these gestures were intended to claim territory.<sup>9</sup> In Gilder's view, the most important result of the expedition was that they had ascertained (to their own satisfaction at least) that the Franklin records had been lost in Starvation Cove west of Richardson Point.<sup>10</sup>

### Adolphus W. Greely (1881–84)

In 1875, a far-reaching proposal for a change of emphasis in polar exploration was put forward by Austrian Navy Lieutenant Karl Weyprecht, who, with his fellow country man Lieutenant

Julius Payer, had been to Novaya Zemlya in 1871 and had recently returned from their joint discovery of Franz Josef Land in 1872–74.<sup>11</sup> Addressing a German scientific conference at Graz, Weyprecht suggested that henceforth the primary objective of polar exploration should be scientific investigation and that geographical discovery, which often amounted only to sighting new coastlines and reaching high latitudes, should be a matter of secondary concern, important mainly in enlarging the scope of scientific inquiry. If maximum results were to be obtained, he argued, the scientific program should be comprehensive, co-operative, and international in scope.<sup>12</sup> The International Meteorological Congress approved this broad concept at its meeting in Rome in 1879, and later conferences at Hamburg in 1879 and Berne in 1880 gave it substance and form. The outcome was the First International Polar Year of 1882–83, in which eleven nations established fifteen observatory stations in the polar regions: two in the Antarctic and the rest in the Arctic. This pioneering project gathered a great deal of valuable information and served as a model for the Second International Polar Year in 1932–33 and the International Geophysical Year in 1957–58.

Five of the stations were in North America, including one in Alaska, one in Greenland, and three in the Canadian Arctic. The United States maintained a small party under Lieutenant Patrick Henry Ray of the Eighth Infantry at Point Barrow from September 1881 to August 1883,<sup>13</sup> and Professor Adam F. W. Paulsen took charge of a Danish Station at Godthaab from August 1882 to August 1883. A small British-Canadian Station at Fort Rae on Great Slave Lake functioned under Captain Henry Philip Dawson from August 1882 to September 1883, while Germany maintained a station under Dr. Wilhelm Giese at Kingua Fiord in

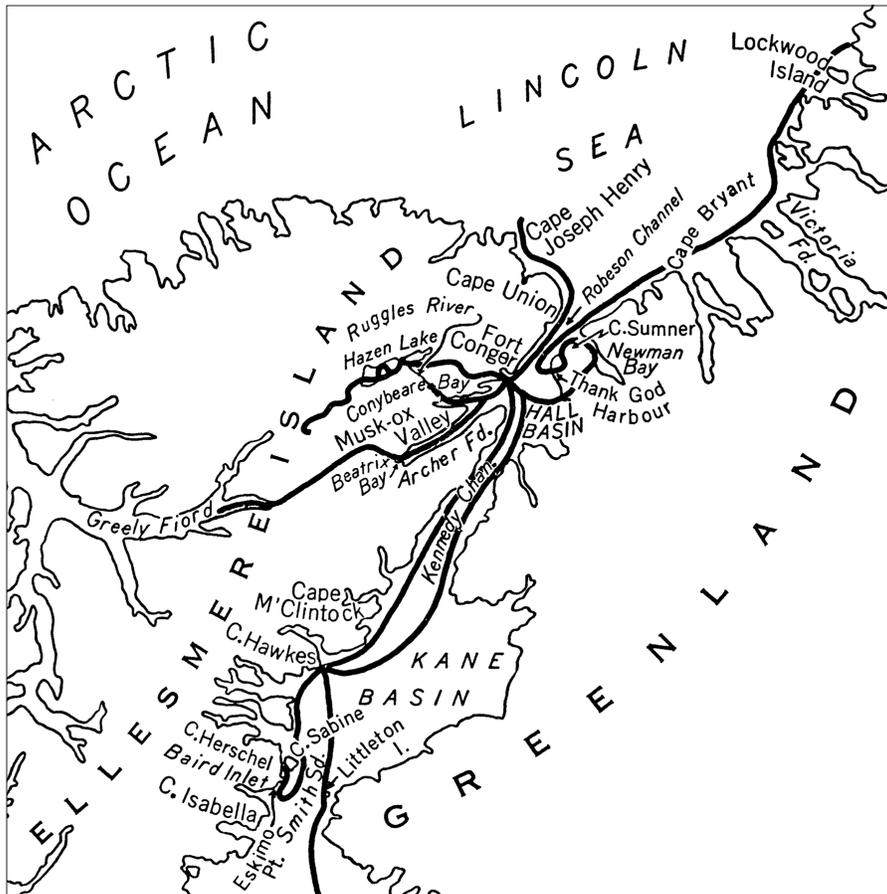


FIGURE 6-2:  
THE GREELY  
EXPEDITIONS,  
1881-84.  
ANDREW TAYLOR,  
*GEOGRAPHICAL  
DISCOVERY AND  
EXPLORATION  
IN THE QUEEN  
ELIZABETH  
ISLANDS* (OTTAWA:  
DEPARTMENT OF  
MINES AND  
TECHNICAL  
SURVEYS, 1964),  
84. BY PERMISSION  
OF NATURAL  
RESOURCES  
CANADA.

Cumberland Sound, Baffin Island, during approximately the same period. In addition to carrying out observations, Giese with Leopold Ambronn explored the interior of Cumberland Sound, and helped by the Moravian missionaries, Dr. Robert Koch made supplementary observations in Labrador.<sup>14</sup> The fifth North American station, which because of its achievements and its ultimate tragedy probably made a deeper and more lasting impression than the other fourteen stations put together, was also an American undertaking. This was the one in Lady Franklin Bay, under the command of US Cavalry Lieutenant Adolphus W. Greely.<sup>15</sup>

The expedition actually originated as the brainchild of the Arctic enthusiast Captain Howgate,<sup>16</sup> who strongly supported some of

Weyprecht's views but had failed to secure government support for his colonization and exploration scheme in 1877 and 1878.<sup>17</sup> Howgate persisted but was again unable to persuade Congress to pass the necessary bill in 1879.<sup>18</sup> In May 1880, however, he saw the US government authorize the establishment of a temporary observation station in Lady Franklin Bay as an American contribution to the International Polar Year.<sup>19</sup> To his embarrassment, the navy condemned his chartered ship *Gulnare* as unseaworthy. Although he sent her out under his own authority, she returned after getting no farther than Greenland. In March 1881, Congress voted \$25,000 for an expedition which would be official in every respect. Greely, who had already been chosen in 1880 but had declined

to go when the *Gulnare* was condemned, now eagerly accepted the command.<sup>20</sup>

The personnel of the expedition were taken to Lady Franklin Bay during the summer of 1881 in the steamer *Proteus*, which departed as soon as their habitation, Fort Conger, was under construction. The party of twenty-five included Greely, two second lieutenants, the surgeon Dr. Octave Pavy (who had been left by the *Gulnare* in Greenland), two Greenland Inuit, and nineteen army non-commissioned officers and privates. The plan anticipated that they should be visited by a relief ship in 1882 and taken out in 1883, but incredible bad luck and bungling on the part of others left them in complete isolation for almost three years. During the first two seasons they accomplished a great deal, not only in carrying out to the letter the comprehensive plan of scientific observations but also in exploration. In the spring of 1882, Dr. Pavy was stopped four miles offshore from Ellesmere Island, at 82° 56' N, and thus failed in his attempt to beat Markham's record north of Cape Joseph Henry. On the other hand, Second Lieutenant James B. Lockwood, Sergeant David L. Brainard, and "Eskimo Fred" (Frederick Thorlip Christiansen) succeeded magnificently in their trip along the north Greenland coast, reaching Lockwood Island at 83° 24' N 40° 46' W, which was approximately 150 miles beyond Beaumont's farthest east and four miles beyond Markham's farthest north. In the spring of 1883, the same trio attempted to beat their own record along the same coast, but they were stopped by open water off the Black Horn Cliffs. In 1882, Greely himself made two trips to Lake Hazen; a year later, Lockwood, again with Brainard and "Eskimo Fred," penetrated still further in the same direction to Greely Fiord, leading to the opposite side of the island.<sup>21</sup> Although the sledging parties raised ceremonial flags to mark their

discoveries and assigned generally American names to them,<sup>22</sup> they do not appear to have made any formal claims to land; Greely's orders show clearly that the authorities in Washington were concerned with scientific research and discovery rather than the acquisition of polar territory.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the expedition's great success in both these fields, it was troubled throughout by dissension and ended in appalling tragedy. A private named Clay was sent back on the *Proteus* in 1881 on grounds of incompatibility, and second-in-command Lieutenant Frederick F. Kislingbury, who "resigned," would have gone too but for the fact that he missed the ship. Dr. Pavy, who was in continual disagreement with Greely, also wanted to quit but was held in the service pending court martial; Sergeant David Linn was reduced to private; and there were other frictions, culminating in the shooting, at Greely's order, of Private Charles B. Henry, who persistently refused to stop stealing food during the last terrible days of starvation. This state of extremity was brought about by their retreat from Fort Conger to Smith Sound in August 1883, in conformity with the expedition's official instructions, and by the failure of relief expeditions to keep the appointed rendezvous. The *Neptune* had turned back in 1882, and the *Proteus* had been caught in the ice and sank in 1883, leaving them without shelter upon their arrival in Smith Sound and with food sufficient for only about forty-five days. During the ensuing dreadful winter of cold and starvation, there was miraculously only one death before April, but afterwards they succumbed one by one. When Commander Winfield S. Schley succeeded in reaching them with two relief ships on 22 June 1884, only Greely and six others remained alive in their last camp west of Cape Sabine.<sup>24</sup>

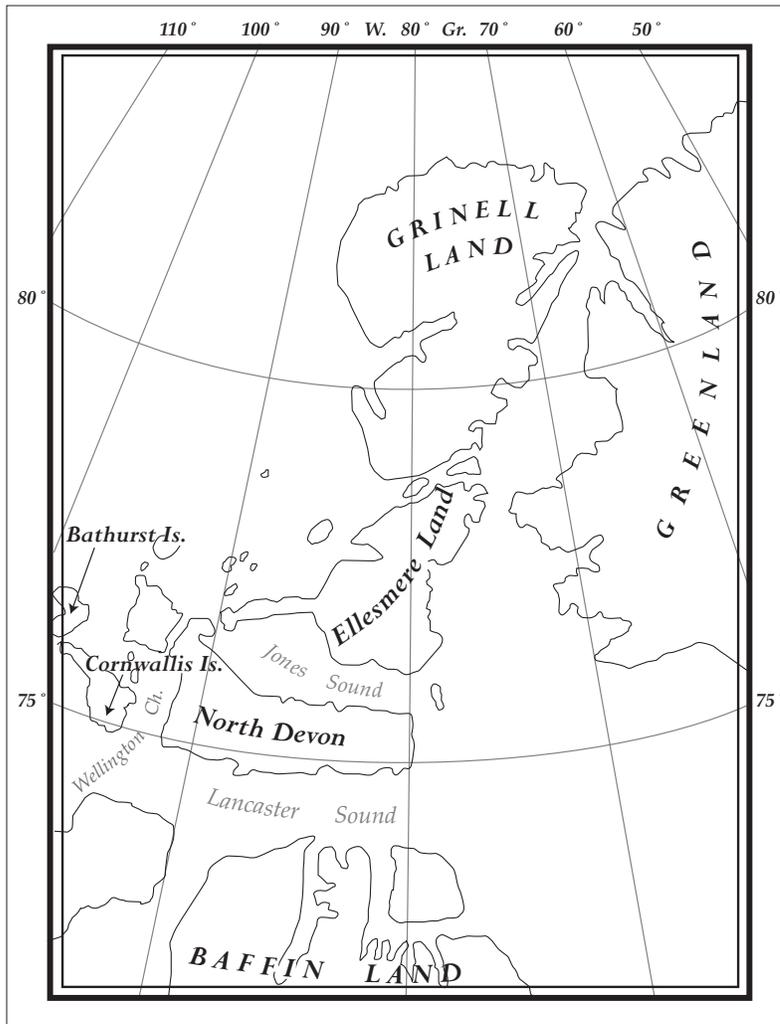


FIGURE 6-3: FRANZ BOAS, SPECULATIVE MAP OF ELLESMERE ISLAND (ENVISIONED AS TWO ISLANDS, ELLESMERE LAND AND GRINNELL LAND). *SCIENCE* 5, NO. 108 (27 FEBRUARY 1885), 171. JENNIFER ARTHUR-LACKENBAUER.

### Franz Boas (1883–84)

When the *Germania* went to remove the Giese party from Kingua Fiord in 1883, it had aboard the young German Dr. Franz Boas, who, supported by the German Polar Commission, spent the following year in private anthropological and ethnographical research among the Inuit of Cumberland Sound and vicinity.<sup>25</sup>

### Otto Sverdrup (1898–1902)

Norwegian Otto Sverdrup was evidently offered the command of an expedition at the suggestion of Fridtjof Nansen, under whom he had served during the first crossing of Greenland in 1888 and later as captain of the *Fram* during her remarkable drift across the Arctic Ocean in 1893–96.<sup>26</sup> As in the drift, the chief sponsors of the 1898 expedition were the consul Axel Heiberg and the Ringnes Brothers

brewing firm, while the Norwegian government loaned the *Fram* and donated 20,000 kroner. It was planned that the expedition should proceed to Smith Sound, winter as far north as possible, and then, with no thought of reaching the North Pole, explore along the northern coast of Greenland and if possible down the eastern side. The sponsors wisely left Sverdrup free to change the plan to meet unforeseen circumstances, however, and unable to get through Kane Basin in either 1898 or 1899, he diverted the expedition to Jones Sound, which provided the base for his activities during the final three years.<sup>27</sup> The winter of 1898–99 was spent in Rice Strait, not far from the scene of Greely’s disaster on Pim Island. In the spring, two sledging trips were made across King Oscar Land (as he called that part of Ellesmere Island) to Bay Fiord: one under Sverdrup himself and the other under the cartographer Gunnar Isachsen. During the winter, contact was made with Peary’s expedition, which was wintering off Cape Hawks some distance north and preparing for an assault upon the North Pole. Peary’s evident disapproval of having any possible rival in the area has been given as an additional reason for Sverdrup’s move to Jones Sound.<sup>28</sup>

The winter headquarters for 1899–1900 was in Harbour Fiord and for 1900–1901 was in Goose Fiord, both on the south coast of Ellesmere Island. From these bases, spectacularly successful sledging journeys were made during three successive seasons. In 1900, Sverdrup and Ivar Fosheim went up the west coast of Axel Heiberg Island to 80° 55' N, Gunerius (Gunnar) Isachsen and Knut Hassel made a rather hasty trip to the Ringnes Islands, and the geologist Per Schei with Peder Hendriksen undertook a more leisurely scientific examination of North Kent, Buckingham, and Graham Islands. In 1901, Sverdrup and Schei went up

Eureka Sound to Butter Porridge Point, locating Greely Fiord and thus linking up with the discoveries of the Greely expedition, while Isachsen and Hassel returned to the Ringnes Islands and went right around them. In 1902, Sverdrup and Schei again sledged up Eureka Sound, this time continuing up the west coast of Ellesmere to Land’s End at 81° 40' N, where they were only sixty miles from Pelham Aldrich’s farthest in 1876; Isachsen and the zoologist Edvard Bay surveyed part of the north coast of Devon Island; and second-in-command Victor Baumann took Fosheim and the mate Oluf Raanes on a trip to Franklin’s old wintering place at Beechey Island. Collectively, Sverdrup’s sledging parties had traced almost the entire unknown western coast of Ellesmere Island, discovered and explored Axel Heiberg and the two Ringnes Islands, as well as the hitherto untravelled north coasts of Cornwall, Graham, and Devon Islands, and sighted King Christian Island. The scientific work of the expedition, published between 1904 and 1919, fills four large volumes<sup>29</sup> and seems incredibly comprehensive considering the small size of the crew: sixteen altogether, two of whom died.

Although Sverdrup indulged in the customary building of cairns, depositing of records, displaying of flags, and naming of new lands, it does not appear that he accompanied these actions by any formal ceremonies of taking possession on the ground.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, his casual and good-humoured narrative indicates that he felt he was operating in a region unclaimed as well as unknown,<sup>31</sup> and his final statement that “an approximate area of one hundred thousand square miles had been explored, and, in the name of the Norwegian king, taken possession of”<sup>32</sup> shows clearly his intention that the lands he had discovered should be added to the Norwegian kingdom. His claim constituted a principal source of



FIGURE 6-4: THE SVERDRUP EXPEDITIONS, 1898-1902. ANDREW TAYLOR, GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 89. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

worry to Canada in her attempts to gain full sovereignty over the archipelago and remained unresolved until disavowed by the Norwegian government in 1930 (see chapter 12).

## Roald Amundsen (1903–6)

Sverdrup's countryman Roald Amundsen is chiefly remembered for his successful dash to the South Pole in 1911, but he had won an earlier distinction in 1903–6 by being the first to take a ship completely through the Northwest Passage. In so doing he accomplished one of the two major aims of the expedition. The other, to pinpoint the North Magnetic Pole, was achieved less authoritatively.<sup>33</sup>

The expedition was financed privately, for the most part, and evidently with considerable difficulty, as is shown by Amundsen's admission that it left Christiania secretly on the night of 16 June 1903 to avoid an impatient creditor who wanted his money without delay.<sup>34</sup> The ship was the tiny 47-ton fishing smack *Gjoa*, with a 13-horsepower motor, and the crew numbered only seven including Amundsen himself. Stopping en route at Godhavn and Beechey Island, Amundsen then followed the route that Franklin had attempted, except that he took the passage east rather than west of King William Island. The winters of 1903–4 and 1904–5 were spent comfortably in the secure little harbour of Gjoa Haven, on the south coast of King William Island, where they found much more game than Franklin's unfortunate crew evidently had done. In the autumn of 1904, Inuit brought them word of "Kabloona" in two ships to the southeast, with whom they attempted to communicate; the following spring an Inuk brought letters from Major J. D. Moodie of the



FIGURE 6-5: ROALD AMUNDSEN. LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / C-000738.

Royal Northwest Mounted Police (as it was renamed in 1904) and Captain J.-E. Bernier, who were wintering in their ship *Arctic* at Cape Fullerton, and also from Captain George Comer of the American whaler *Era*.<sup>35</sup> Since the Canadian expedition was a government patrol, it may be surmised that Moodie and Bernier informed the Norwegians that they were in Canadian waters, but Amundsen's narrative speaks only of his gratitude for the Canadians' offer of assistance and gift of sledge dogs.

In the spring of 1904, Amundsen and Per Ristvedt sledged almost to the Tasmania Islands off the Boothia coast in their attempt to locate the North Magnetic Pole. A year later, second-in-command Godfred Hansen and

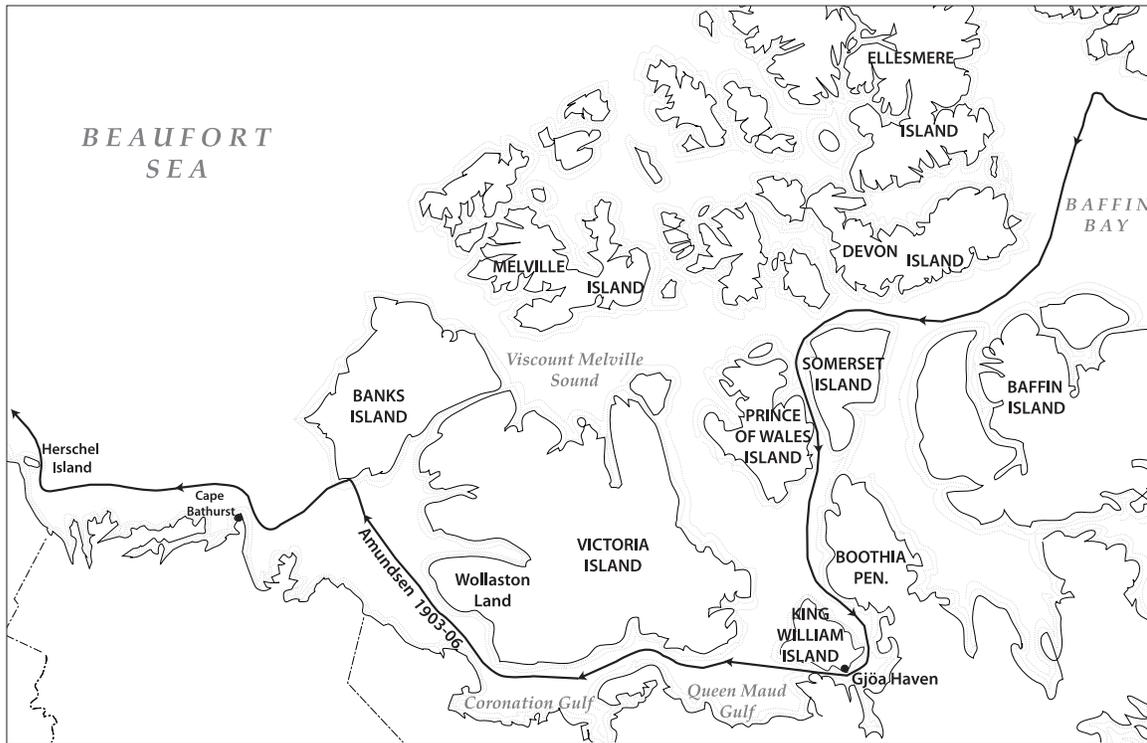


FIGURE 6-6: AMUNDSEN EXPEDITION, 1903–6. JENNIFER ARTHUR-LACKENBAUER.

Ristvedt explored part of the hitherto unknown eastern coast of Victoria Island, from Richard Collingson's farthest near Gateshead Island to Cape Nansen at  $72^{\circ} 2' N 104^{\circ} 45' W$ .<sup>36</sup> During their third winter, this time near Herschel Island, Amundsen travelled to Fort Yukon and Eagle City to communicate by telegraph with the outside world. Although the expedition lost their magnetic observer Gustav Juel Wiik that March, they completed the passage with their arrival at Nome, Alaska, on 31 August 1903.

### Robert E. Peary (1886–1909)

As the name of Amundsen is always associated with the conquest of the Northwest Passage and the South Pole, Robert E. Peary's is inextricably linked to the attainment of the North Pole. He also did noteworthy work in Greenland, to which the first five of his eight Arctic expeditions were directed, and in the Canadian archipelago. His first expedition, in 1886, involved an attempt to penetrate the interior of Greenland as far as possible from Disko Bay, but he was forced to turn back after about 120 miles. In each of his next two expeditions, in



FIGURE 6-7:  
PHOTOGRAVURE OF  
ROBERT E. PEARY IN FURS,  
1909. PEARY-MACMILLAN  
ARCTIC MUSEUM,  
BOWDOIN COLLEGE.

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1891–92 and 1893–95, he made crossings of north Greenland from Inglefield Bay to Independence Fiord. Two summer cruises, an unsuccessful one in 1896 and a successful one a year later, were devoted to bringing back the largest of the three Cape York meteorites, the two others having been recovered in 1895.<sup>37</sup>

Peary broached a new plan of Arctic exploration that would concentrate upon reaching the North Pole, which he presented at the annual meeting of the American Geographical Society in January 1897. He received vital

help from the English newspaperman Alfred Harmsworth, who gave him the stern yacht *Windward*, and from the Peary Arctic Club, organized in the spring of 1898 specifically to promote his project.<sup>38</sup> Setting out in July 1898, Peary spent four years in the north, with winter quarters successively at Cape D’Urville on the east coast of Ellesmere Island, at Etah in Greenland, at Greely’s Fort Conger, and in Payer Harbour near Cape Sabine. His attempts to reach his goal fell far short in both 1901 and 1902; nevertheless his achievements were significant.

Most notable were several exploratory trips into the interior of Ellesmere Island: a lengthy journey in 1900 along the north Greenland coast that took him to approximately 83° N 23° W, well beyond Lockwood's farthest in 1882, and (from his own viewpoint most important) an attempt upon the Pole in 1902 that reached almost 84° 18' N above Ellesmere Island, well beyond Markham's farthest in 1876. Peary returned minus his toes, which froze during a winter trip to Fort Conger in 1899, but determined to conquer the remaining 400 miles.

His next attempt was in 1905–6 in the specially constructed *Roosevelt*, which was built largely with funds provided by members of the Peary Arctic Club and was skippered by Newfoundlander Bob Bartlett of the famous Bartlett seafaring family.<sup>39</sup> They succeeded in ramming the *Roosevelt* through the ice as far as Cape Sheridan, where she wintered about two miles beyond the *Alert*'s position, and the great attempt began on 19 February 1906. After leaving the last of his supporting parties behind, Peary with seven Inuit pushed on to a new record of 87° 6' N (32' beyond the Italian Umberto Cagni's farthest in 1900, reached from Franz Josef Land) before shortage of food compelled him to turn back.<sup>40</sup> Drifting east on the return trip, Peary struck Cape Neumeyer at approximately 48° W on the Greenland coast, and then he made his way back to the ship with great difficulty. After only two weeks' rest, he made a trip along the Ellesmere coast which filled in the remaining gap between the farthest points of Aldrich in 1876 and Sverdrup in 1902, but the land he thought he sighted to the northwest – “Crocker Land” – was later found to be non-existent.<sup>41</sup> In one season, however, he had beaten Markham's farthest north, Beaumont's farthest east, and Aldrich's farthest west, thus eclipsing the collective achievements of the three principal sledging parties of the Nares

expedition – a striking demonstration of both superior capacity and superior technique, at least in covering distance. Peary's growing obsession with his designs is evident in his hastily written and excited narrative, and his exultant exclamations of “Mine! Mine!” upon reaching new parts of Ellesmere Island seem to indicate a passion for personal glory more than a desire to add new territories to the United States.<sup>42</sup> It is true that he speaks occasionally of planting the Stars and Stripes in new regions,<sup>43</sup> but he apparently made no formal claims in the territories he was first to tread upon.

Peary's final assault upon the Pole was made in 1908–9. Again the expedition was financed largely by members of the Peary Arctic Club, and again he had the *Roosevelt*, the serious damages suffered in 1906 having been repaired.<sup>44</sup> The party included veterans, such as African-American jack-of-all-trades Matt Henson, who accompanied Peary on all his Arctic expeditions except the first, and skipper Bob Bartlett. There were also the two young tenderfeet George Borup and Donald MacMillan, the latter of whom was just beginning his long career of Arctic exploration. Wintering again at Cape Sheridan, Peary made preparations for the earliest possible start from Cape Columbia at the northernmost tip of Ellesmere Island. By now his so-called “Peary system” of rapid and extended Arctic travel had been worked out to a high degree of efficiency. It depended essentially upon the attainment by ship of the farthest possible land base; the maximum use of Inuit, dogs, and sledges; and the help of supporting parties to break trail, build igloos, and deposit supplies.<sup>45</sup> Preceded by six supporting parties, he left Cape Columbia on 1 March 1909 and sent back the six one by one until the last, under Bartlett, left him on 1 April at 87° 46' 49" N. Accompanied only by his chosen group of Henson<sup>46</sup> and four Inuit, Peary pressed on



FIGURE 6-8: PEARY EXPEDITIONS, 1898-1909. ANDREW TAYLOR, GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 68, 73, 78. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

and, according to his calculations, had reached the approximate location of the North Pole by 6 April. The return trip was accomplished without incident and with almost unbelievable speed – Cape Columbia being reached on 23 April and the *Roosevelt* about four days later. The triumph was marred by the death of Professor Ross Marvin while leading his support party back to the ship. (Marvin's two Inuit companions initially stated that he drowned, although in 1926 one of them confessed that he had shot Marvin to prevent him from abandoning the other.)<sup>47</sup>

Peary claimed the entire region, including the North Pole itself, for the United States: a claim that aroused a good deal of legal discussion afterwards. He raised several flags at the Pole, including the American national ensign, and left the following message in a glass bottle:

90 N. Lat., North Pole,  
April 6, 1909.

I have to-day hoisted the national ensign of the United States of America at this place, which my observations indicate to be the North Polar Axis of the earth, and have formally taken possession of the entire region, and adjacent, for and in the name of the President of the United States of America.

I leave this record and United States flag in possession.

Robert E. Peary,  
United States Navy.<sup>48</sup>

## Dr. Frederick A. Cook (1907–9)

The mysterious and highly controversial figure of Dr. Frederick A. Cook cannot be ignored, even though most authorities have refused to accept his own record of his achievements. Cook had served as surgeon on Peary's Greenland expedition of 1891–92 and on Adrien de Gerlache's Belgian Antarctic expedition of 1897–99, and he had apparently acquitted himself well. In the summer of 1907, he arrived in Greenland on an expedition of his own, and after spending part of the winter near Etah, he disappeared into the interior of Ellesmere Island in February 1908, accompanied by one white man and nine Inuit. All returned or were sent back except two Inuit, and he reappeared with this remnant in the spring of 1909, claiming to have reached the North Pole from the northern extremity of Axel Heiberg on 12 April 1908.<sup>49</sup> There is no doubt that he spent two seasons in the field with limited supplies, a creditable feat in itself, and he may even have gone some distance north of Axel Heiberg, but the contrary testimony of his Inuit and other unsatisfactory evidence overcame the early enthusiastic acceptance of his North Pole claim and most reputable authorities soon discounted it. The principal result was to cast additional doubt upon Peary's achievement, which could not be conclusively verified either, and a bitter dispute between the two explorers and their rival groups of supporters went on for years.

In his narrative, Cook reveals his impression that he was travelling in a No Man's Land, saying that "no nation assumes the responsibility of claiming or protecting" Ellesmere Island,<sup>50</sup> although later he acknowledges his awareness that "Captain Bernier was bound for the American [Ellesmere Island] coast, to

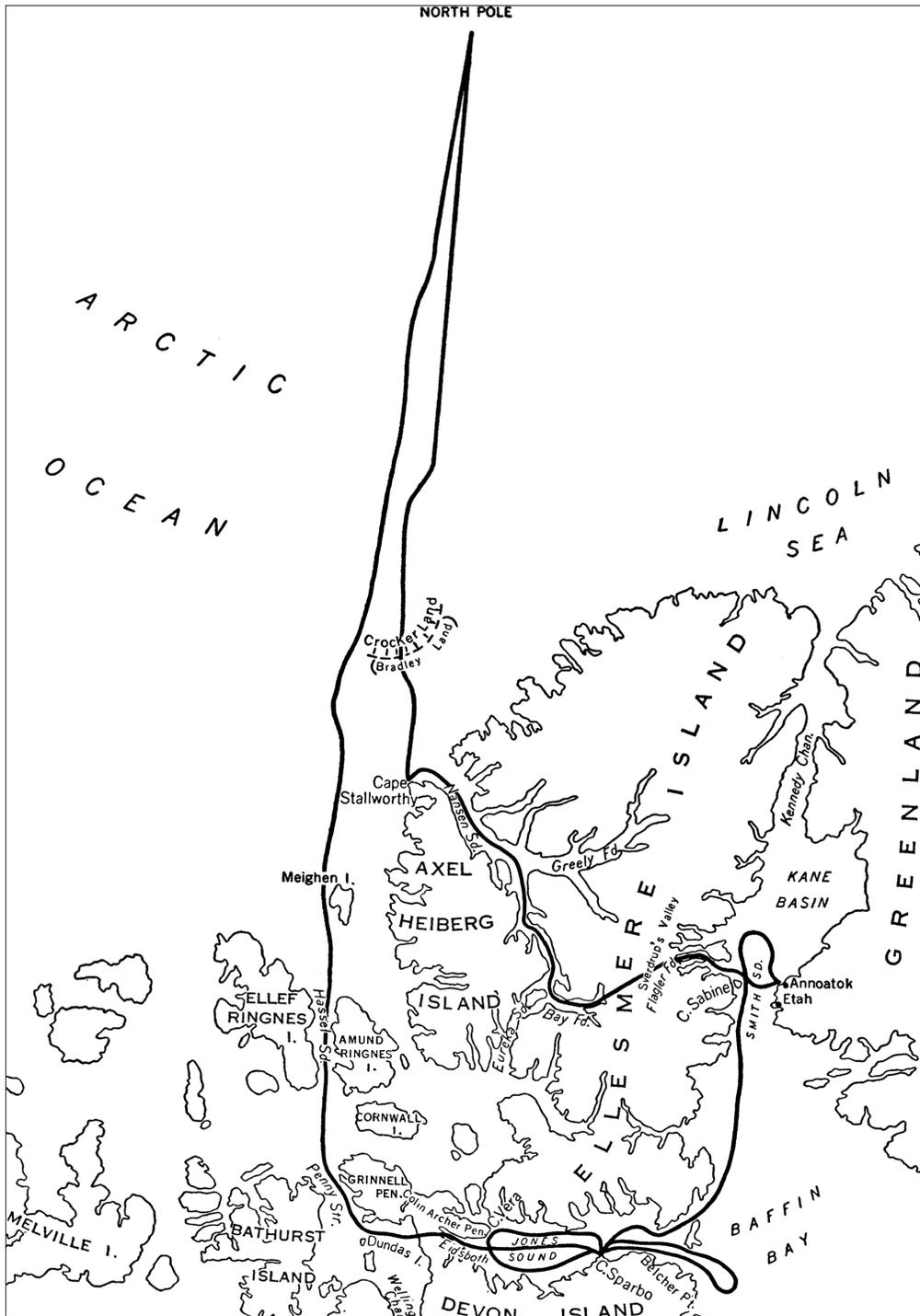


FIGURE 6-9: COOK EXPEDITION, 1907-9. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 76. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

explore and claim for Canada the land to the west.”<sup>51</sup> Cook also disputed Peary’s alleged complaint that he should have made an application to seek the Pole, and that he was trespassing upon Peary’s prior right, insisting that “the Pole is a place no nation owned, by right of discovery, occupation, or otherwise.”<sup>52</sup>

### Bernhard A. Hantzsch (1909–11)

A small private expedition that ended disastrously was that of Bernhard A. Hantzsch in 1909–11.<sup>53</sup> A German ornithologist, Hantzsch had been liberally supplied by scientific circles in Germany but unfortunately lost much of his outfit when the ship taking him to Cumberland Sound was wrecked on the outward voyage in the summer of 1909. He spent a difficult winter at Blacklead Island, in continual disharmony with the rest of the white population, and then, accompanied by several Inuit, he explored the Nettilling Lake region and the adjacent shore of Foxe Basin. His crossing of mid-Baffin Island was the first authenticated traverse by a white man. He wintered some distance north of the Koukdjuak River in great hardship and then, having examined the coast to approximately 86° 45' N, died on the return journey in June 1911, apparently of illness and malnutrition.

### Donald B. MacMillan (1913–17)

The last major foreign expedition of this period was that led by Donald B. MacMillan in 1913–17. MacMillan had been with Peary in 1908–9 and now undertook an expedition of his own, sponsored privately by the American

Museum of Natural History, the American Geographical Society, and the University of Illinois.<sup>54</sup> He planned to remain in the field for two years, or at most three, but through various misfortunes, relief expeditions miscarried in both 1915 and 1916, and his small party was not evacuated until Bob Bartlett arrived with the *Neptune* in the summer of 1917. From their comfortable headquarters, “Borup Lodge” at Etah on the Greenland coast, expedition members completed a considerable number of sledging trips and scientific sorties – the one of most immediate concern to the expedition being MacMillan’s long journey in 1914 beyond Axel Heiberg Island. Ethnographer Walter E. Ekblaw examined the Bay Fiord, Greely Fiord, and Lake Hazen region of central Ellesmere Island in 1915. The following year, MacMillan skirted the Sverdrup Islands and made the first landings upon King Christian Island and the north shore of Cornwall Island. In 1917, MacMillan traced the oft-seen but little known eastern coast of Ellesmere Island south of Cape Sabine. The expedition also recorded the discovery of nine new islands.<sup>55</sup> In common with other explorers to this time, MacMillan seems to have proceeded on his expedition under the impression that the part of Greenland in which he would be operating was subject to the laws of no state, but on 11 January 1917, he received the news by sledge that “the United States had acquired, by purchase, the Danish West Indies, conceding to Denmark at this time the right to control all of Greenland.”<sup>56</sup> He also mentions his awareness that the Canadian government expedition under A. P. Low “landed and took formal possession of Ellesmere Land in August, 1904.”<sup>57</sup> When he searched the site at Cape Herschel, however, he found that the cairn had been demolished and the record had disappeared.

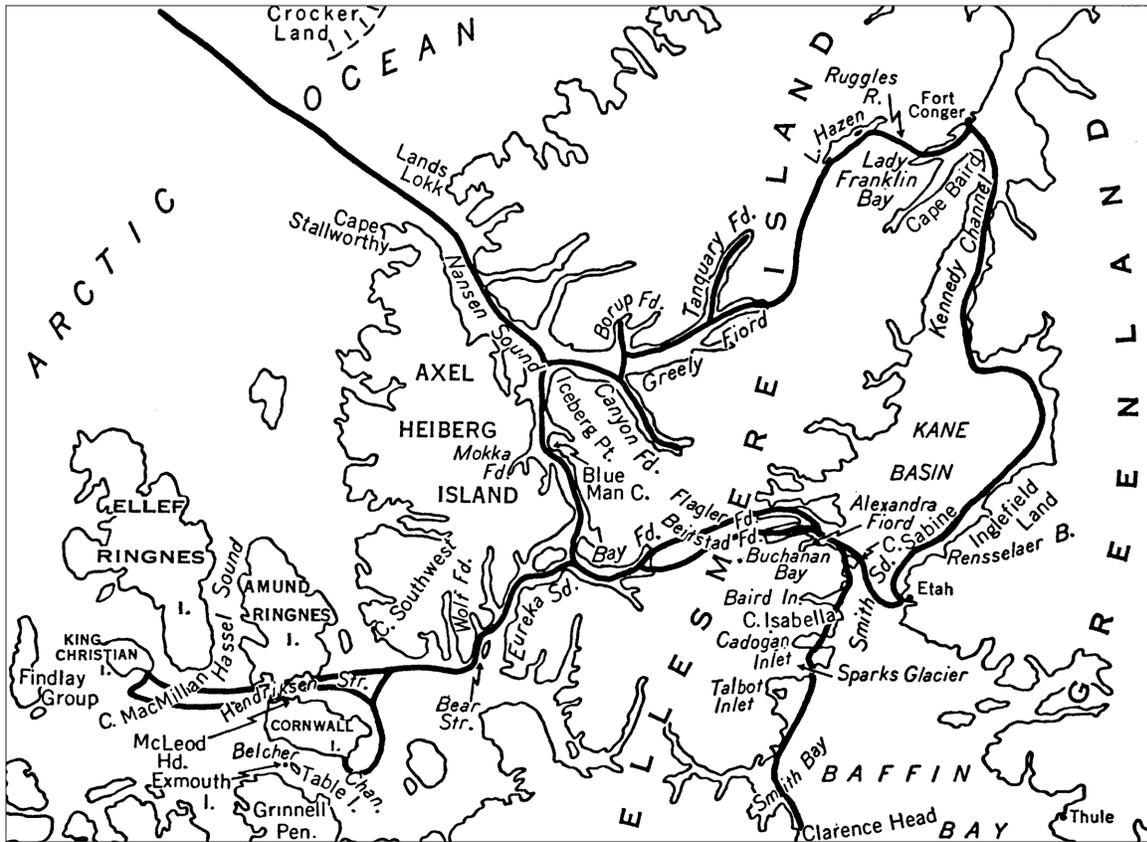


FIGURE 6-10: MACMILLAN EXPEDITION, 1913-17. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 99. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

