

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

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Canadian Government Expeditions to Northern Waters, 1897-1918

The preceding chapters have attempted to describe events, situations, and disputes that provoked increasing concern on the part of Canadian authorities regarding the security of the more northerly parts of the territories which had been turned over to Canada in 1870 and 1880. The Canadian government's response was the gradual initiation of a program of action, rather limited but nonetheless designed to solidify and consolidate Canadian sovereignty over the territories in question. Some aspects of this program, such as the attempts to organize these territories into districts, define their boundaries, and provide (at least for the Yukon) the basic elements of an administration, have already been described. Other aspects included the dispatch of Mounted Police units to various parts of the North to maintain law and order and the dispatch of government expeditions to northern waters to keep an eye on foreign whalers, traders, and others; to initiate the application of Canadian laws and regulations; and to bring these regions and their inhabitants under Canadian administration more generally. This chapter focuses on these early government expeditions, which eventually developed into the principal device used to assert supervision and control in the Arctic archipelago.

William Wakeham (1897)

The first Canadian government expedition was sent out in 1897 under the authority of the reconstituted Department of Marine and Fisheries¹ and commanded by Dr. William Wakeham (who had been serving as Canada's representative on the International Fisheries Commission). When the project was first discussed in the House of Commons, the stated purpose of the \$35,000 requested for it was "to provide for another expedition by water to Hudson Bay, to settle, if possible, the practicability of the route for commercial purposes."² Certain questions regarding the navigability of Hudson Bay and Strait had not been conclusively settled by the voyage of Lieutenant A. R. Gordon in the 1880s, particularly because of strong disagreements which had emerged afterwards. Therefore, government officials hoped that the new expedition would provide some definite answers. Speaking in the Commons discussion after the new Liberal Minister of Marine and Fisheries

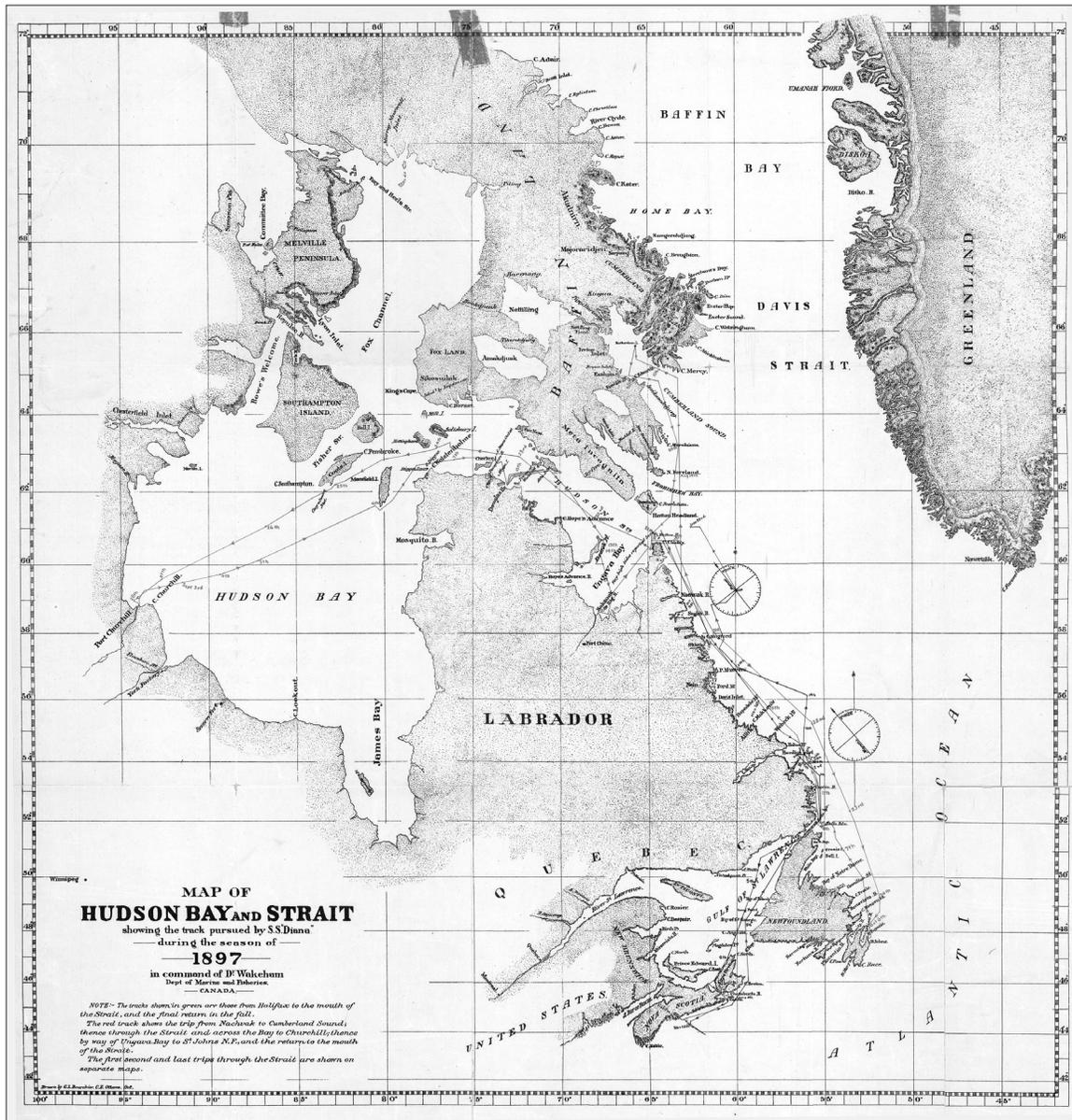


FIGURE 7-1: G.L. BOURCHIER, MAP OF HUDSON BAY AND STRAIT SHOWING THE TRACK PURSUED BY S.S. "DIANA" DURING THE SEASON OF 1897 IN COMMAND OF DR WAKEHAM, DEPT OF MARINE AND FISHERIES, CANADA, IN REPORT OF THE EXPEDITION TO HUDSON BAY AND CUMBERLAND GULF IN THE STEAMSHIP "DIANA" UNDER THE COMMAND OF WILLIAM WAKEHAM, MARINE AND FISHERIES CANADA, IN THE YEAR 1897, PUBLISHED IN CANADA SESSIONAL PAPERS (NO. 11B), VOL. XXXII, NO. 9, 1898. COURTESY OF CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES, MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES. MAP 146.

Louis Henry Davies, Sir Charles Tupper, who had filled the same post for the Conservative government a few years earlier, remarked: “The hon. Minister will recollect that there was a dispute carried on for years between Admiral Markham and Commander Gordon as regards the result of that investigation, and as to the navigability of these waters for a certain period.” George Elliott Casey of West Elgin observed, “There is no doubt that it was the desire on the last occasion to find that the Hudson Straits were not navigable.”³

Commander William Wakeham was instructed to try to find out if the navigation season recommended by Gordon from approximately 1–10 July to the first week in October could safely be extended.⁴ In his post-expedition report Wakeham wrote:

Now, as I understand the position, there is no question of the navigability of the strait with suitable vessels during a certain season.... I was not sent up to decide whether Hudson Strait could be navigated with suitable vessels within the dates mentioned – that question was settled, but what was required to meet the claims of those not satisfied with the dates above given, was a further test over a longer season, both spring and fall.⁵

Sailing in the chartered steam whaler *Diana*, Wakeham had entered Hudson Strait on 22 June and finally left it on 30 October. Between these dates, he made four round trips through the strait and also visited Cumberland Sound and Churchill. In the meantime, geological parties from the ship under Dr. Robert Bell and A. P. Low conducted investigations in southern Baffin Island and Ungava. Wakeham’s firm

conclusion, in reference to the navigation season, was that the advice of Lieutenant Gordon had been essentially sound:

I now conclude this part of the report by saying that I absolutely agree with Captain Gordon in fixing the date for the opening of navigation in Hudson Strait, for commercial purposes, by suitable vessels, at from 1st to the 10th July.... For all the reasons I have enumerated, I consider the 20th of October as the extreme limit of safe navigation in the fall. To such brave and experienced mariners as those who accused Capt. Gordon of timidity because he refused to force the “Alert” through the ice of Hudson Strait in June, after she had lost her stem plate, or who have dubbed the hardy men from Newfoundland who manned and sailed the “Diana,” as “feather bed sailors,” because we left the strait with the end of October, these conditions are frivolous and will have no influence; but to the ordinary sailor and ship owner, I flatter myself, sir, they will be plain and sufficient.⁶

Although the primary purpose of the expedition was to investigate navigation problems, a further purpose is also evident: to assert and uphold Canadian sovereignty in the region visited. Speaking for the Conservative government in the Senate before the defeat of 1896, well over a year before the expedition set sail, Sir Mackenzie Bowell said:

It is not the intention of the government at present to dispatch a vessel exclusively for the purpose

indicated, but the Departments of Customs and Marine and Fisheries have under consideration the propriety of keeping a vessel in Hudson Bay, for some time, for the purpose of protecting the revenue and also for the protection of the fisheries. As most hon. gentlemen who have paid any attention to the matter know, fisherman from the United States have been poaching on our fishing reserves for many years, and taking from those northern waters a good deal of wealth which properly belongs to us.⁷

Obviously the new Liberal administration decided to go ahead with the project, and on 6 May 1897, fisheries minister Davies reported to the House of Commons in the following terms:

It has been reported to me that some American whalers have for a series of years visited Cumberland Sound, north of Hudson's Bay Straits, and have acted as if they owned the country; and my instructions to Commander Wakeham were to proceed up the Sound, to take as formal possession of the country as possible, to plant the flag there as notice that the country is ours, and take all necessary precautions to inform natives and foreigners that the laws must be observed, and particularly the customs laws of Canada.⁸

In his report, which was addressed to Davies, Wakeham mentions "the instructions contained in your letter of the 23rd of April last," and probably refers to this aspect of them a little further on, where he writes, "when all doubt as

to the navigability was passed, I was to leave the strait and proceed on other work; resuming the navigation of the strait in the autumn of the year." But he does not reproduce the instructions, nor do they appear to have been printed in departmental reports or elsewhere.⁹ His narrative, however, indicates his activities related to this part of his assignment. He found out as much as he could about whaling, fishing, and trading activities in the parts he visited, called at Hudson's Bay Company and whaling posts, and tried to contact any ships in the region. He learned¹⁰ that only three American whaling ships had been visiting Hudson Bay in recent years and that there were only two whaling posts in Cumberland Sound, both of them Scottish. Consequently, he did not see much reason for alarm over such enterprises, nor did he feel that much revenue was being lost, even though Canadian duties were not being paid on goods brought in. His task of taking formal possession of the territory was performed at Kekerten in Cumberland Sound on 17 August, where, in the presence of the Scottish whaling agent, some Inuit, and his own crew, he raised the Union Jack and declared that "the flag was hoisted as an evidence that Baffin's Land with all the territories, islands and dependencies adjacent to it were now, as they always had been since their first discovery and occupation, under the exclusive sovereignty of Great Britain."¹¹ It would appear that Wakeham was the first leader of a Canadian expedition to make such a proclamation, under government orders, after the transfers of 1870 and 1880.

Although there had been some anticipation that Wakeham's expedition would initiate a continuing government presence in the Hudson Bay region, this did not turn out to be the case. When Conservative William James Roche asked in the House of Commons on 18 May 1899, "What action does the Government

propose to take on the strength of information obtained by the expedition?” Davies replied that “no action is at present contemplated.”¹² In fact, no further expedition of this type took place for half a dozen years, the next being that of Albert Peter Low in 1903–4.

Albert Peter Low (1903–4)

In the case of Low’s expedition, the priorities were reversed: its primary concern was with the question of sovereignty, and other matters such as navigation were secondary considerations. This was an official Canadian government expedition that had as its deliberate purpose the establishment of Canadian sovereignty over Hudson Bay and at least part of the Arctic archipelago, and as such it constitutes one of the important landmarks in Canada’s effort to bring this region under effective control. The government intended it to initiate genuine regulation of the fishing and whaling industry in Hudson Bay and the waters near Baffin Island, establish posts for the collection of customs, and generally impress upon both Inuit and whites in the region that they were subject to Canadian law. In addition, a small staff of scientists would accompany the expedition to bring back as much technical and scientific information as possible in a variety of fields, notably meteorology, navigation, geology, botany, and zoology.¹³

Low was appointed to the command of the expedition early in June 1903, according to his report,¹⁴ but the official order in council confirming the appointment was not issued until 13 August, and he was formally commissioned on the same day. The order in council reads as follows:

On a Memorandum dated 8th August 1903, from the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, recommending that Mr. Albert P. Lowe [*sic*], of the Geological Survey of Canada, be appointed officer in charge of the Expedition to Hudson Bay and Northward thereof, in the Steamship “Neptune” –

The Minister further recommends that under the provisions of Section 2 of Chapter 95 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, Mr. Lowe be appointed a Fishery Officer for Canada, with authority to exercise therein during his term of office as such Fishery Officer, the powers of a Justice of the Peace for all the purposes of the Fishery Laws and Regulations.

The Minister also recommends that a Commission be issued to Mr. Low conveying the powers above described and such others as may be requisite for him to exercise in his capacity as Officer in Charge of the Expedition in question.¹⁵

The commission itself was phrased in only the most general terms, however, the operative passage being worded thus:

We have constituted and appointed, and We do hereby constitute and appoint you the said Albert Peter Low to be officer in charge of the expedition to Hudson Bay and northward thereof in the Steamship *Neptune*,

To have, hold, exercise and enjoy the said office of officer in charge of the expedition to Hudson Bay and

northward thereof in the Steamship *Neptune* unto you the said Albert Peter Low, with all and every of the powers, rights, authority, privileges, profits, emoluments and advantages unto the said office of right and by law appertaining during pleasure.¹⁶

Besides Low, who was geologist as well as commander of the expedition, the senior personnel were Major J. D. Moodie of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP), who was appointed a commissioner, customs officer, and stipendiary magistrate, and Samuel W. Bartlett of the famous Newfoundland seafaring family, who was the ship's captain. Officially, the expedition was under the Department of Marine and Fisheries, but several other departments or branches were involved, notably the Department of the Interior and the NWMP. Some of the correspondence, notably that concerning the appointment of Major Moodie, throws a good deal of light upon the background, scope, and purpose of the expedition.

On 30 July 1903, Deputy Minister of the Interior James A. Smart sent the following letter and memorandum to Colonel Fred White, comptroller of the NWMP:

I beg to enclose you herewith a copy of a memorandum respecting the expedition to Hudson Bay. As you will observe, this memorandum sets out fully the nature of the proposed expedition, as well as the manner in which it is to be conducted. I have written to both Doctor [Robert?] Bell and Colonel [F.] Gourdeau [the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries] asking them to have the necessary instructions to their officers issued at once, and I would be glad

if you would adopt the same course with regard to the officers who are to be appointed by your Department.

It is the Minister's wish that the instructions to the Captain who is to be in charge of the vessel should be prepared by yourself, the Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries, and myself, and that the same should provide that the Captain in charge of the vessel, the Police Officer, and Mr. Low should constitute a sort of executive committee for consultation in regard to matters of general importance effecting the expedition.

I will be glad to meet you and Colonel Gourdeau at any time which may be found convenient for us to do so, but in the mean time the Minister would be glad if you would take the necessary steps to have your instructions to whoever may be appointed as Police Officer, prepared and issued at once.

As you will observe from the memorandum, the officer of the North West Mounted Police will be commissioned to act as Collector of Customs for the whole Territory, and will also be commissioned as stipendiary Magistrate.

It is the Minister's wish also that copies of all the instructions and commissions should be on file in both the Departments of Marine and Fisheries, and Interior, and I would be glad therefore, if you would kindly furnish me with a duplicate of the same for that purpose.¹⁷

Memorandum.

During the last year information has been received to the effect that American traders and whalers are in the habit of landing upon Hershell Island, at the mouth of the McKenzie [sic] River, and at or near the mouth of the McKenzie River carrying on a whaling, fishing and trading industry, and that the same thing has been going on to some extent on the North West coast of the Hudson Bay and upon the islands North of the Hudson Bay in the Arctic Circle.

There is not believed to be any question as to the absolute title of Canada to these territories and islands but it is feared that if American citizens are permitted to land and pursue the industries of whaling, fishing and trading with the Indians without complying with the revenue laws of Canada and without any assertion of sovereignty on the part of Canada unfounded and troublesome claims may hereafter be set up. The following has therefore been mapped out:

Superintendent Constantine of the North West Mounted Police has been sent overland to the mouth of the McKenzie River and will shortly reach that point. There he will establish authority of the Government and at the earliest possible date will make a report containing the necessary information upon which to base further action. It is believed that next year it will be wise to send an expedition around by way of Behring Straits to establish a permanent post wherever recommended by Superintendent Constantine.

As to the coast and islands Northward from Hudson Bay it is proposed immediately to send an expedition under the Marine and Fisheries Department which shall be for the purpose of patrolling and exploring and establishing the authority of the Government on the points in question.

Scientific observers from the Geological Survey and the Department of Marine and Fisheries will accompany the expedition, also a photographer from the Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior. The object in sending these officers is to collect all possible information in regard to the territory visited and to have the information collected in exact and scientific form so as to be available for future use. It is also proposed to send a commissioned officer of the North West Mounted Police with four or five men who will establish the post at the place found to be most convenient. Materials for permanent buildings will be taken up. The post will be provisional for two years but it is the intention that the patrol will return and visit the post every year. The officer of the North West Mounted Police will be commissioned to act as Collector of Customs for the whole territory and will also be commissioned as stipendiary magistrate. The details as to the working out of the scheme must necessarily be left largely to the experience and judgment of the officers in charge. Mr. Low, of the Geological Survey, who has already explored extensively in the Hudson

Bay district, will be the geologist accompanying the expedition.

The ship commissioned for the expedition is the "Neptune." The officers and crew will consist of- Captain, two mates, chief engineer, two assistant engineers, six stokers, chief steward, two assistant stewards, one cook, assistant cook, boatswain, carpenter, gunner, surgeon and twelve able seamen.

The cost of the expedition, approximately, will be:

Charter of steamer....	\$1,800 per month
Wages of crew....	1,200 per month
Surgeon....	100 " "
Photographer....	75 " "
Maintenance of crew and staff....	700 " "
Coal (200 tons per month)....	1,700 " "
Engine and deck supplies....	200 " "

Total.... \$5,775

It is to be noted that the provisioning and equipment must contemplate absence for two years although in all probability the ship will return next year in the spring and go back in the fall, but there is always a possibility in those waters of a ship being icelocked and ample provision must be made against such a contingency.

It will be understood that our knowledge of the Northern portions of the territories in question being so unexact no very definite instructions can be given as to the location of the post. The Captain in charge of the expedition, the police officer and Mr. Low, the geologist, will be a

committee to jointly decide on what shall be done and where the permanent post shall be located. They will further be asked to make a full report as to what should be the policy of the Government in dealing with the administration of these territories, apart from the technical report which each of them will be required to furnish to his own branch of the service.¹⁸

Colonel White responded with the following instructions to Major Moodie, which were explicit about the role of the NWMP as he understood it:

The Government of Canada having decided that the time has arrived when some system of supervision and control should be established over the coast and island in the northern part of the Dominion, a vessel has been selected and is now being equipped for the purpose of patrolling, exploring, and establishing the authority of the Government of Canada in the waters and islands of Hudson Bay, and the north thereof.

In addition to the crew, the vessel will carry representatives of the Geological Survey, the Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior, the Department of Marine and Fisheries, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and other departments of the public service.

Any work which has to be done in the way of boarding vessels which may be met, establishing ports on the mainland of these islands and the introduction of the system of

Government control such as prevails in the organized portions of Canada has been assigned to the Mounted Police, and you have been selected as the officer to take charge of that branch of the expedition.

You will have placed at your disposal a sergeant and four constables; you will be given the additional powers of a Commissioner under the Police Act of Canada, and you will also be authorized to act for the Department of Customs.

Mr. Low, the geologist; the captain in command of the vessel; and yourself will be constituted a Board to consult and decide upon any matters which may arise requiring consideration and joint action.

The knowledge of this far northern portion of Canada is not sufficient to enable definite instructions to be given you as to where a landing should be made, or a police post established; decision in that respect to be left to the Board of Three above mentioned, and wherever it is decided to land you will erect huts and communicate as widely as possible the fact that you are there as a representative of the Canadian Government to administer and enforce Canadian laws, and that a patrol vessel will visit the district annually, or more frequently.

It may happen that no suitable location for a post will be found, in which case you will return with the vessel but you will understand that it is the desire of the Government that, if at all possible, some spot shall be chosen where a small force

representing the authority of the Canadian Government can be stationed and exercise jurisdiction over the surrounding waters and territory.

It is not the wish of the Government that any harsh or hurried enforcement of the laws of Canada shall be made. Your first duty will be to impress upon the captains of whaling and trading vessels, and the natives, the fact that after considerable notice and warning the laws will be enforced as in other parts of Canada.

You will keep a diary and forward, whenever opportunity offers, full and explicit reports on all matters coming under your observation in any way affecting the establishment of a system of government and the administration of the laws of Canada.¹⁹

The above documents seem to reveal a certain amount of confusion in the planning and organization of the expedition, particularly with regard to the responsibilities of the departments and individuals involved. For example, although it was clearly specified that the expedition was to be under the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Deputy Minister Smart of the Department of the Interior wrote the letters to the other senior officials asking them to have instructions issued to the officers, and in speaking of the wishes of “the” minister he must surely have been referring to his own minister (Clifford Sifton). Although the order in council noted Minister of Marine and Fisheries Raymond Préfontaine’s recommendation that Low be appointed officer in charge of the expedition as well as a fishery officer with the powers of a justice of the peace for all the

purposes of the fishery laws and regulations, the memorandum and White's letter to Moodie said that Low be commissioned to act as collector of customs for the whole territory and as stipendiary magistrate. Again, although both the order in council and Low's commission make it clear that he was to be officer in charge of the expedition, both the memorandum and White's letter speak of Low only as geologist, while the memorandum refers to the captain as being in charge of the expedition. Low himself does not seem to have been in any doubt about his position as commander, which was confirmed by the order in council and the commission, and there does not appear to be any evidence that the confusion caused any trouble during the expedition.²⁰

Preparations for the voyage were made with as little publicity as possible – and one might almost say in a cloak-and-dagger atmosphere. What was not said publicly at the time, however, was said with emphasis three years later. Replying to repeated charges by the new Minister of Marine and Fisheries Louis-Philippe Brodeur that the Opposition was willing to let the Americans take possession of the northern territories, Conservative Leader Robert Borden spoke as follows:

Either the hon. minister does not know the history of his own and other departments of the government or else he has taken a course which I would not like to characterize in this House as it deserves. If he knew what he was speaking of, he would know that one of his colleagues came to me some two or three sessions ago and explained that he wanted a certain vote passed for the purpose of patrolling those waters, but that for certain reasons

of state he desired that there should be no discussion in the House on the subject. I spoke to my hon. Friends and the vote went through without a word of discussion. That vote was for the very purpose of protecting those northern lands and having the British flag fly over them.... The Minister of the Interior of that day, now the member for Brandon (Mr. Sifton), came to me across the floor, presented to me certain documents of a confidential nature, asked me to consider them and the vote which was to be founded upon them for the purpose of preventing this poaching in northern waters and thus avoid such claims as were made in connection with the Alaskan Boundary. After twenty-four hours consideration, I arranged with gentlemen on this side that, for reasons of state, there would be no discussion when that estimate went through the House.²¹

A little later in the same debate, Borden referred to a confidential memorandum he had been given by a member of the government, and read excerpts from it.²² These excerpts show that it was the memorandum which Deputy Minister Smart had sent with his letter to Colonel White on 30 July 1903 and which is reproduced above. Borden's statement was supported by other opposition members, among them David Henderson, who remarked:

I well remember, some two years ago, the circumstances referred to by the leader of the opposition, when we on this side of the House were requested by a minister of the Crown not to discuss the item that was to



FIGURE 7-2: LOW EXPEDITION, 1904. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 111. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

be voted for the purpose of sending out an expedition; we were asked to do so because the government did not wish to show to the people of the United States the weakness of our position; therefore we were asked to remain silent and assent to the item going through.²³

It seems apparent that whatever the need for secrecy may have been about midsummer 1903, it had disappeared three years later in 1906. Nonetheless, the silence had been broken long before this time. As early as 30 September 1903, during a Commons discussion of Captain J.-E.

Bernier's projected expedition to the North Pole, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Raymond Préfontaine had remarked (in reference to Low's assignment) that "at the present time an expedition has left for the northern part of Hudson Bay. And why? Simply to organize that territory, to protect our interests in it and keep it for Canada."²⁴ Officials felt that once Low was on his way he would be in a position to take the necessary action, and therefore, it was no longer important to keep the project a secret.

The expedition left Halifax on 23 August 1903 and returned on 12 October 1904. Besides Commander Low, Major Moodie, and Captain Bartlett, the ship's company included a crew of

twenty-nine, five other members of the NWMP, a scientific staff of five, and an Inuit interpreter picked up at Port Burwell.²⁵ The *Neptune* proceeded in turn to Port Burwell, Cumberland Sound, Hudson Strait, and Fullerton Harbour at the northwest of Hudson Bay, where the expedition wintered. In the summer of 1904, the ship passed out again through Hudson Strait and northwards to Ellesmere, Devon, Somerset, Bylot, and Baffin Islands, through the Strait again to Fullerton, and then home to Halifax, making frequent stops en route to visit settlements and collect scientific data.

The activities of Low and Moodie during the voyage show how they undertook to carry out their assignment. Low gathered a great deal of information about the regions visited – their geography, geology, and Inuit inhabitants, the work of previous explorers, the Scottish and American whaling industries, the prospects for navigation – and incorporated it in his account of the voyage. On 4 September 1903, the *Neptune* landed near Blacklead Island in Cumberland Sound, and the next day Major Moodie explained the intentions of the Canadian government to the Anglican missionaries and the agent of the Scottish whaling establishment located there.²⁶ Over the next few days, visits were made to another Scottish whaling station at Kekerten Island, also in Cumberland Sound, and to a station at Cape Haven in Cyrus Field Bay operated by Potter and Wrightington of Boston.²⁷ In accordance with instructions, Low searched for Captain George Comer of the American whaler *Era* and wintered with him at Fullerton, maintaining good relations throughout their stay together.²⁸ Major Moodie decided that Fullerton would be a suitable location for a police post and erected a building there, leaving several members of the Mounted Police in charge when the *Neptune* departed in the summer of 1904.²⁹

On the east coast of Ellesmere Island, not far from Adolphus Greely's last camp at Cape Sabine, Low took formal possession of the island for Canada. He describes the proceedings in the following words:

It took little time to attend to the duties of the landing at Cape Herschel, where a document taking formal possession in the name of King Edward VII., for the Dominion, was read, and the Canadian flag was raised and saluted. A copy of the document was placed in a large cairn built of rock on the end of the cape.³⁰

Low does not himself give the text of his proclamation, but elsewhere it has been reproduced as follows:

In the name of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII, and on behalf of the government of the Dominion of Canada, I have this day taken possession of the Island of Ellesmereland, and of all the smaller islands adjoining it, and in token of such formal possession I have caused the flag of the Dominion of Canada to be hoisted upon the Island of Ellesmereland, and have deposited a copy of this document in a sealed metal box placed in a cairn erected on the conspicuous headland of Cape Isabella.

(Sgd) A. P. Low
Officer Commanding

The Dominion government's expedition to Hudson Bay and Northern waters.³¹



FIGURE 7-3: HOISTING THE FLAG, ELLESMERE ISLAND, 1904. LAC PA-038265.

On 15 August, Low followed a similar procedure at Beechey Island³² and two days later at Port Leopold, Somerset Island.³³ Low did not land on or claim any of the more westerly islands because his instructions limited the cruise westward in Lancaster Sound to Beechey Island.³⁴

The 1903–4 expedition of Low and Moodie may be regarded as a deliberate attempt on the part of the Canadian government to take effective possession of the more easterly islands of the archipelago and to bring their inhabitants and commercial enterprise under Canadian law. The pattern of activity initiated

by Low was followed closely by his successor Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, who was in the archipelago as a government agent each year from 1904 to 1911.

Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier (1904–11)

Captain Bernier had already had a long and adventurous career at sea before sailing on his first Arctic voyage in 1904.³⁵ Born in 1852 at L'Islet, on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence about

fifty miles below Quebec City, he came from a well-known French-Canadian seafaring family which for several generations had contributed members to the ships that sailed in the St. Lawrence River and Gulf. Bernier himself had become master of a ship at the incredibly early age of seventeen, and he had been all over the globe on scores of voyages. Apparently his interest in Arctic exploration had first been stimulated through witnessing the fitting out of Charles Francis Hall's *Polaris* in the Washington Navy Yard in 1871. Although he had not as yet undertaken any polar expeditions himself, he had steeped himself in Arctic lore and had become a recognized authority on the subject.³⁶ He became obsessed with the desire to make the first conquest of the North Pole and to plant the British flag there, but he also became convinced, through long study of the problem, that the traditional direct assault upon the Pole by ship and then sledge was not the best method of attack. Taking note of the transpolar drifts of the wreckage of Lieutenant-Commander George W. De Long's *Jeannette* in 1881–83 and of Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram* in 1893–96, Bernier reasoned that if a ship were deliberately put into the right place in the ice north of Alaska it would drift gradually to the northwest and across the Arctic Ocean, passing so close to the North Pole on the way to Greenland or the Greenland Sea that it could be used as a base from which the North Pole could be attained on foot.³⁷

Once Bernier had set his mind on this project, he pursued it with the enthusiasm, tenacity, and determination that typified his efforts regardless of the task in hand. In his autobiography, he tells how, after 1872, his cabin aboard ship became an Arctic library. His collection continued during periods ashore, as dockmaster at Lauzon from 1887 to 1890 and as governor of the Quebec gaol from 1895–98.

In 1899–1900, he succeeded in salvaging the steamer *Scottish King*, which had been wrecked about forty miles south of St. John's on the Newfoundland coast; his earnings of over \$35,000 for this exploit gave him a measure of the financial independence he needed for the promotion of his enterprise. While occupied with these and other activities, he carried on a persistent campaign of tours, lectures, interviews, solicitations, and appeals, not only throughout Canada but in Great Britain and the United States as well, with the object of stirring up public enthusiasm and financial support for his project.³⁸

There is much information scattered throughout a variety of sources, but especially in the Laurier Papers, Bernier's own papers, and Hansard, which, when pieced together, tells a great deal about his efforts to bring his expedition to reality and his conviction that it would be important in connection with Canada's sovereignty in these northern regions and the security of her northern frontier. On 5 March 1898, Bernier took his appeal directly to Prime Minister Laurier, apparently for the first time, in a letter accompanied by a detailed plan.³⁹ The plan itself had changed from the original, since it now involved taking a ship to a point as far to the north as possible beyond the mouth of the Lena, or alternatively to the vicinity of Franz Josef Land, and then leaving the ship and trying to reach the Pole by using houseboat, sledges, kayaks, dogs, and reindeer. Laurier was evidently dubious about the plan, although the reason is not entirely clear, but Bernier kept up the pressure. Among his many public appearances to promote his project were speeches or lectures to la Société de géographie de Québec,⁴⁰ la Société littéraire et historique de Québec, the Quebec legislature, the Canadian Institute in Toronto,⁴¹ the Royal Society of Canada,⁴² the Royal Colonial Institute in



FIGURE 7-4: CAPTAIN J. E. BERNIER. LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / C-085035.

London,⁴³ and, on several occasions, the members of Parliament in Ottawa.⁴⁴ Almost without exception, his plans were well received, and the fund of voluntary contributions grew slowly. Bernier lost no opportunity of letting Laurier know about any additional support, either moral or financial, that he received, and there were other testimonials which were apparently unsolicited and unknown to him.

A “Rapport de la Société de Géographic de Québec,” dated 23 May 1899, was sent to Laurier as an endorsement of the polar expedition, and it suggests the extent to which Bernier was preoccupied with the political aspects of what he was trying to do. It is also an early formulation of the sector concept which was given such publicity a few years afterwards by Senator Poirier:

Il est au moins rationnel ... que nous prenions possession du pays, îles et mers, etc., du bassin polaire et que nous l'occupions où y ayions au moins droit de cité; avant que nos entreprenants voisins des Etats-Unis, qui s'y préparent, viennent ainsi nous déposséder de notre avoir territorial; car le Canada doit nécessairement, tout en se terminant à l'Ouest au méridien d'Alaska, voir prolonger ce méridien le 140ème [sic] jusqu'au Pôle. Vers l'Est ce serait le 60ème méridien séparant le Canada du Groënland.⁴⁵

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In an interview published in the *Montreal Witness* on 9 February 1901, Bernier put forward his case in similar terms:

If the boundary between Canada and Alaska were continued northward it would strike the North Pole. A similar line through Baffin Bay prolonged to the pole should be Canada's northeasterly frontier, and if our expedition reached the pole and we planted the flag there we could claim the whole country to the north of us by right of discovery.⁴⁶

A letter from Bernier to Laurier on 18 February 1903, requesting \$100,000 from the government, shows his concern about the recently completed Sverdrup expedition and its implications:

Je vous envoie une carte géographique faisant voir les bornes du Canada septentrional, telles que je les comprends, et désignant plusieurs

îles très riches en charbon sur une étendue de douze cent milles, qui ont été découvertes de 1898 à 1902 par M. le capitaine Otto Sverdrup et plusieurs autres explorateurs, et dont je voudrais prendre possession au nom du Canada, auquel elles doivent appartenir.⁴⁷

Among the enticements Bernier extended to Laurier was an offer on 15 April 1901 of the presidency of “The General Committee in Charge of the Canadian North Pole Expedition”;⁴⁸ an invitation on 28 October 1901 to a lecture he was giving to Governor General and Lady Minto; or, failing that, an invitation to a private lecture for his own benefit later on.⁴⁹ Laurier remained elusive and hard to convince. When he received a letter of solicitation from “Executive Commissioner” Joseph Xavier Perreault of “The Canadian North Pole Expedition,” the stationery letterhead revealing that the organization was under “the High Patronage of His Excellency the Governor General” and the honorary presidency of Lord Strathcona, Laurier replied on 9 July 1901 in the following vein: “N’oubliez pas cependant qu’il y a une expédition, celle de Peary, partie depuis trois ans. S’il réussit, notre projet n’aura plus de valeur; s’il ne réussit pas, il y aura peu d’espoir pour le succès du capitaine Bernier.”⁵⁰ Answering a letter from François-Xavier Berlinguet of la Société de géographie de Québec on 12 October 1901, Laurier said bluntly: “je désire immédiatement corriger une erreur.... Le Gouvernement n’a fait aucune promesse au Capitaine Bernier.”⁵¹

From time to time, Bernier’s projected voyage was brought up in Parliament, the remarks of the members indicating widespread sympathy with its objectives and its prospects. On 21 March 1901, opposition member Frederick Debartzch Monk asked the government to come to

a decision about its course of action respecting the expedition, drawing from Laurier only the non-committal reply that this would be done as soon as possible.⁵² Occasional comments thereafter showed that the possible political implications of the project were not being overlooked:

May 14, 1901

F. D. Monk (Jacques Cartier): Captain Bernier is, I think, pre-eminently qualified to go in search of the North Pole; and if he does not get the necessary encouragement from us, I believe he will get it from the American people. I believe he has already been approached by enterprising American newspapers, with the object of securing his services for that purpose....

T. S. Sproule (East Grey): In the impression of many, the discovery of the north pole would enable us much more easily to determine what is our own in making a dividing line between our territory and that of Russia and the United States....⁵³

May 1, 1902

John Charlton (North Norfolk): 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 [*sic*] of

longitude on the west, and Baffin's Bay and Grant land on the east....

T. B. Flint (Yarmouth): There can be no doubt, from a fair understanding of our position as the controller of the northern half of this North American continent, that the jurisdiction of Canada extends to the pole.⁵⁴

On the same occasion, David Henderson, the member for Halton, speculated darkly on the outcome if Bernier should resort to Washington for funds: "If he goes to Washington, there is not the slightest doubt that, within twenty four hours he will have all the money he wants. And the next thing we know we shall have another Alaska boundary question away near the north pole, with commissions sitting at Washington to settle question of our northern boundary."⁵⁵ Henderson thought it unlikely, however, that Bernier would seek American help, and his remarks (as well as those of the majority of the members who spoke) were decidedly in favour of the project.

Bernier's expedition was again discussed in the House of Commons towards the end of the session on 30 September 1903, with remarks of similar import being made:

John Charlton (North Norfolk): A successful expedition to the Pole would give Canada a very prominent place among the maritime states, and the discovery of the Pole would give us a standing with regard to territorial acquisition in the north between the northern coast of the continent, which we would not otherwise have....

A. C. Bell (Pictou): If any people in the world should look upon it as

their peculiar business, and finally succeed in making that discovery, it is the people of Canada, because of the North Pole when discovered will unquestionably form part of this country.... It may be of great material advantage to Canada to establish finally and indisputably her claim and title to all the lands lying on the north part of this continent....

D. Henderson (Halton): Not long ago I saw in the newspapers that the Americans are talking very loudly of some possessions to which they propose to lay claim, away to the north of this Dominion which properly belong to the Dominion of Canada. Now, if Captain Bernier succeeds in locating the Pole and planting thereon the British flag, taking possession of whatever there is in land or sea, we will certainly have a right to claim possession in the name of the King of England of everything that lies between the North Pole and the now known Dominion of Canada. We will then not be troubled in the future with any Alaska boundary disputes in that direction.⁵⁶

Sir Wilfrid Laurier evidently said as little as possible on the subject, either inside or outside the House, and continued to handle it circumspectly and with great caution. He unburdened himself more openly in a private letter to Senator William Edwards on 29 October 1903, in response to a worried one written by the senator the day before. Probably both men were influenced by the Alaska Boundary Award, which had been handed down about one week earlier.

Rockland, October 28th, 1903

Dear Sir Wilfrid:

At the risk of being regarded as troubling you with what may be thought a very trivial matter, I write a few lines with regard to Capt. Bernier. In view of recent events, would it not be well for an exploring expedition to go to the North with the object of a far more important mission than that of the discovery of the North Pole, and if incidentally the North Pole is discovered, no harm will be done.

In looking up the matter a short time ago, I was surprised to find the extent to which the Americans have been whaling in Hudson Bay and the many years they have been at it. Their aggressive and grasping nature is such that we need not be surprised if shortly they take the position that Hudson Bay is an open sea, and further, that they may lay claim to islands and territory in that North land, said to be rich in coal and a variety of minerals. It seems to me that we should lose no time in asserting our rights, and decidedly so. I would neither wait for nor depend on Great Britain looking after our rights or protecting them. I would do it on our own account.

Bernier has not spoken to me of this matter. I am acting entirely on my own account. I have had a life long experience in handling and managing men and I must say that I have never met the man in whom I would have the same confidence as I

would have in Bernier in undertaking an expedition where great hardship is to be encountered and great endurance is requisite. His stability and powers of endurance as well as his ability as a navigator I cannot think can be questioned. There may be features of such an expedition that would require other knowledge than that possessed by Bernier, but in any such lines the necessary assistance could be supplied him. If the Americans are permitted to skirt our Western possessions, for Heaven's sake do not allow them to skirt us all around. They are south of us for the entire width of our country; they block our natural and best possible outlet to the Atlantic; they skirt us for hundreds of miles on the Pacific and control the entrance to a vast portion of our territory, and the next move if we do not look sharply after our interests, will be to surround us on the North. You will have noticed no doubt that they have a Northern expedition fitting out now. Britain's interests are first, ours are secondary. Let us look after our own as best we can.

Most sincerely yours,
Wm. C. Edwards

Ottawa, 29th. October, 1903.

My dear Edwards,

The subject as to which you write me has been engaging our attention. Dr. Ami [Bernier] has talked the matter over with me and proposed a

plan which does not command [*sic*] itself to my judgment at this moment. The plan which he proposes and which he may also have outlined to you is to get the British Government to issue a proclamation claiming jurisdiction over all the northern Territory. This would simply arouse a storm at this juncture. It is by far preferable to continue the work which we have already commence [*sic*] in that direction. This year we have sent from Newfoundland an expedition to establish a post of the Mounted Police on the Interior shore of the Hudson Bay, and quietly assume jurisdiction in all directions. We have likewise sent over land by the McKenzie [*sic*] river an expedition down to the mouth of the river where we are establishing a post of the Mounted Police. Next year, I propose that we should send a cruiser to patrol the waters and plant our flag at every point. When we have covered the whole ground and have men stationed everywhere, then I think we can have such a proclamation as is suggested by Dr. Ami.

Believe me, as ever,
My dear Edwards,
Yours very sincerely,
Wilfrid Laurier⁵⁷

Laurier's letter evidently provides the key to what actually happened and why, but it provokes other questions. One of these relates to the financing of the expedition, where there are noticeable discrepancies in facts, figures, and dates which do not lend themselves to easy explanation. It is clear that the government

eventually decided to provide a large amount of money for an expedition, part of it for the purchase of a ship and part for other expenses. The expedition that materialized was, of course, that of 1904–5 in the German ship *Gauss*, which was purchased and renamed the *Arctic*. Bernier says in his autobiography that Laurier, Borden, and Meighen (who, as a matter of fact, was not yet in the House of Commons) “co-operated in securing a vote of \$200,000 to outfit a Canadian Polar Expedition under my command.”⁵⁸ In the House of Commons on 30 September 1903, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Raymond Préfontaine spoke favourably in a personal way of Bernier's plan and suggested \$80,000 as the amount which might be provided.⁵⁹ On 12 October 1903, the sum of \$100,000 was voted to “cover cost of the extension of the coast service and surveys on the northern coast of Canada,” on which occasion Préfontaine replied affirmatively to Conservative member Thomas Simpson Sproule's question as to whether “the government are still carrying on their expedition to ascertain the navigability of Hudson bay and straits.”⁶⁰ There were no other comments, however, and this would appear to have been the vote for Low's expedition.⁶¹

On 29 July 1904, the House of Commons voted the sum of \$200,000 for “the purchase, equipment, and maintenance of vessels to be employed in patrolling the waters in the northern portion of Canada; also for establishing and maintaining police and customs posts at such points on the mainland or islands as may be deemed necessary from time to time.” The only comment was by the Prime Minister himself, who gave a brief explanation of the item, referring to the dispatch of the *Neptune* in 1903 to assert “the undoubted authority of the Dominion of Canada in the waters of Hudson's Bay and beyond” and saying that the *Arctic*, “under the command of Captain Bernier,” was now being

sent to relieve and replace the *Neptune*. He added that the new expedition was “to patrol the waters, to find suitable locations for posts, to establish those posts and to assert the jurisdiction of Canada,” and thus he made it clear that the money was not to be used for a drift across the Arctic Ocean or an attempt upon the North Pole.⁶² Strangely enough, about one month earlier, Préfontaine had spoken of a special vote which had been granted in 1903 to purchase a ship (the *Arctic*) and send it to Hudson Bay as a special expedition. He also informed the House that this was “a special expenditure for the general account of three departments” – the Department of the Interior, the Mounted Police, and the Marine Department.⁶³

Bernier, assuming that he had at last won government sponsorship and would be able to make his polar drift, went to Bremerhaven in the spring of 1904 and for \$70,000 or \$75,000 purchased the German ship *Gauss*.⁶⁴ This was a recently built steamship with auxiliary sail, which had just returned from a German voyage to the Antarctic and which Bernier thought would be ideally suited to his purpose. Back at Quebec, he supervised preparations for his own expedition, and the ship, renamed the *Arctic*, had been made all ready when special instructions from Ottawa in July abruptly changed all his plans. Bernier was directed, he says in his autobiography, to “proceed to Hudson Bay, practically under the orders of the Mounted Police to ascertain whether a certain well-known and highly respected ship captain was engaged in selling liquor to the natives.”⁶⁵ Bernier’s autobiography tells of his bitter disappointment at this turn of events, which effectively cancelled the polar drift and which came to him, according to his own account, as a complete surprise and a great shock.⁶⁶

Bernier seems to have proceeded until the very last moment under the impression that

a polar expedition was really going to be dispatched and that he would be in command of it. On the other hand, judging by Laurier’s letter to Senator Edwards quoted above, the Prime Minister, as late as 29 October 1903, was still inclined to reject Bernier’s plan and was thinking rather of sending a ship to patrol more southerly waters and plant the flag on the lands encountered. This is, of course, what eventually happened. In his remarks on the subject in the Commons on 30 September 1903, however, Minister of Marine and Fisheries Préfontaine clearly identified the project under discussion with Bernier’s polar drift, as did others, and Préfontaine voiced his support of it in this context.⁶⁷ Yet on 21 June 1904, he said with equal clarity that the purchase of the *Gauss* was for “a special expedition to Hudson Bay” and that the special vote granted the year before had been for “this expedition.”⁶⁸ The question arises as to whether the government at one stage had made up its mind to support Bernier’s polar expedition and later decided to divert the ship to Hudson Bay (as Bernier obviously believed) or whether in fact there had never been any serious intention of letting Bernier go ahead with his project, and the authorities kept him in the dark about their real intentions until they considered that the appropriate moment had arrived to tell him. Also, if the government did change its mind, when did the change come and in what circumstances? Not very much light was shed upon these matters by L. P. Brodeur, the new Minister of Marine and Fisheries, in his attempt to answer questions put by Leader of the Opposition Robert Borden, during a lengthy wrangle over the expedition on 11 May 1906:

R. L. Borden: On what date was this expedition decided upon?

Brodeur: It was decided upon in the month of June.

Borden: What time in June?

Brodeur: In the beginning of June....

Borden: Was she purchased for this expedition?

Brodeur: Yes.

Borden: When was she purchased?

Brodeur: In April, 1904.⁶⁹

Borden was not slow to point out the obvious discrepancy in Brodeur's answers, and it seems apparent that if the expedition was decided upon in June and the ship was purchased in April, then she could hardly have been purchased with this particular expedition in mind.

Bernier's biographers T. C. Fairly and Charles E. Israel report Bernier as having told a newspaperman years afterwards that he thought his polar expedition was cancelled because of Peary's forthcoming new attempt upon the North Pole and Laurier's fear that a Canadian expedition might run afoul of the Americans.⁷⁰ There is certainly truth in this, but it is not the whole story. Other considerations were worrying Laurier and his advisers: the outcome of the Alaska Boundary Case and the anxiety it provoked; concern over American activities in Hudson Bay and Strait and the desire to establish these waters as Canadian; the idea that priority should be given to solidifying Canada's claim to the archipelago and making secure the northern frontier; the lingering feeling that a North Pole expedition was a luxury Canada could do without, at least until matters further south were looked after; and certain reservations about Bernier himself. The last-mentioned consideration suggests the unlikelihood, or impossibility, that Bernier

would be taken into the full confidence of the government.

In the circumstances, there was little for Bernier to do but swallow his discomfiture and disappointment. He soon found himself able to adjust to the new circumstances, however, and sought consolation in the decision to devote his efforts in the Arctic "to what after may be regarded as a more important object, that is to say to securing all the islands in the Arctic archipelago for Canada."⁷¹ He was eager to take both the responsibility and the credit for this work, which, he later averred, he "had consistently urged upon the Canadian government for many years before it was finally undertaken."⁷²

The expedition sailed from Quebec on 17 September 1904, with Bernier as captain of the *Arctic* and Major Moodie of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (the prefix "Royal" having been added earlier that year), to Bernier's intense displeasure, in command of the expedition as a whole as well as of the ten members of the Mounted Police who accompanied it.⁷³ The responsibilities of the expedition were limited to Hudson Bay and Strait, and no attempt was made to sail farther north. The *Arctic* proceeded to Port Burwell and then to Fullerton, where she wintered with the *Era* as the *Neptune* had done the previous year. Leaving Fullerton on 5 July 1905, the *Arctic* failed in an attempt to reach Churchill and then, calling at points on the way, returned through Hudson Strait to Chateau Bay on the Labrador coast where it rendezvoused with the *Neptune* and Captain Bartlett. Major Moodie, who had left the *Neptune* at Port Burwell in August 1904 to return south and join the *Arctic*, now received instructions to rejoin the *Neptune* and go back to Fullerton. Bernier, also under orders from Ottawa, took the *Arctic* back to Quebec for repairs, arriving early in the fall.

During the expedition, relations between Major Moodie and Captain Bernier were perhaps formally correct but at the same time rather strained. This occasioned comment afterwards in the House of Commons. For example, Conservative member Joseph Gédéon Horace Bergeron noted on 28 June 1906: "There was some bad blood on the steamer, there is no doubt about that, though we were not allowed to prove it, between Major Moodie and Captain Bernier. Each of them thought he should command the expedition."⁷⁴ In their accounts, neither indulges in open criticism of the other, but the underlying tension is evident. For example, Moodie notes that "on September 17, 1904, I sailed from Quebec in command of the D.G.S. *Arctic*."⁷⁵ For his part, Bernier suggests that "Major Moodie, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, was sent in command of the government force with myself in command of the *Arctic*.... In connection with the voyage, it is worthy of note that Major Moodie was commissioned by the government to establish Mounted Police stations, and for the *Arctic* under my command to attend to annexing to Canada Arctic territory granted by the Imperial Government."⁷⁶ Reading between the lines, one can detect other, though less obvious, disagreements.

In his report, Moodie mentioned the construction of a post at Fullerton the preceding winter and spoke of plans to build "the headquarters of 'M' Division, newly created for service in the Hudson's Bay district" at or near Cape Wolstenholme, as well as another post in Cumberland Sound. He also expressed his view that if the government should intend on having the coasts of Keewatin and Ungava patrolled, it would be necessary to establish small detachments no more than 150 miles apart. The notice forbidding the export of muskox hides "had had good results," but if the animals were to

be preserved, it would be necessary to prohibit killing at any time, except by the natives for food. Moodie also noted that the regulations of 1904 regarding the methods of killing whales should be extended to walrus and that he had collected customs duties wherever possible (though very small). He also reported sending some dogs to Roald Amundsen, who was wintering at King William Island, in response to a letter received from him on 16 March 1905.⁷⁷

The atmosphere of secrecy which had surrounded the expedition led to rumours and accusations of extravagance, incompetence, and corruption; afterwards those broke out into the open in a barrage of charges and counter charges which resulted in a parliamentary investigation. Conservative member William Humphrey Bennett fired the opening gun in the House of Commons on 11 May 1906, when he charged that the person responsible for fitting out the expedition had "decided, when he had the public crib to go for, to plunge his hands into it, and to fit out an expedition that the gods themselves might envy."⁷⁸ In the discussions that followed over the next two months,⁷⁹ opposition members repeatedly hurled accusations that the expedition had been provided for on a ridiculously lavish scale and had cost far too much (one estimate was that it had cost a total of about \$285,000); that the purchase of supplies had not been by public tender and thus had gone completely out of control; that the *Arctic* had originally been purchased for an expedition to the North Pole and had then been diverted to Hudson Bay without adequate explanation; that although the *Arctic* had been completely equipped for three years she had returned after only one year; and that there had been dissension aboard the ship and also gross misconduct with Inuit women. With regard to the supplies, opposition critics suggested that both quantities and prices paid had been

scandalously high, that not all of them had been put on board, and that there had been profiteering, waste, and theft before, during, and after the voyage so that, according to one estimate, only \$36,000 worth were left over at the end.

The evident vulnerability of the government to some of these charges, along with rather suggestive information in the Auditor General's report, gave opposition members plenty of scope to vent their wit and sarcasm on those deemed responsible, and they seized their opportunity with gusto. For example:

Samuel Barker (East Hamilton): I find there were 40 trousseaus bought at \$4 each. Were these for ladies or for the crew?

L. P. Brodeur: The wife of Major Moody [*sic*] was on board.

R. L. Borden: I don't see why one lady would want 40 trousseaus.⁸⁰

George William Fowler (King's and Albert): Was this steamer ballasted with sugar? I see that they carried seven and a half tons of sugar.⁸¹

George Oscar Alcorn (Prince Edward): What brought this expedition to so untimely an end? Why did this vessel not complete her three years cruise?

Borden: The provisions gave out.⁸²

Brodeur: Of rum, the English expedition had 800 gallons, while the Canadian expedition had only 100 gallons.

Borden: Is that the reason the expedition came back?⁸³

The opposition members were particularly incensed over the excess of certain commodities which had been provided, even if the

expedition had been equipped for three years rather than one. Conservative member George Taylor quoted figures from the Auditor General's report which gave totals of approximately 8,500 cigars, 400 pipes, 5,000 cigarettes, over 4,000 pounds of tobacco of various kinds, 30 cases and 15 gallons of wines, liqueurs, and champagnes, and 285 gallons and 1 barrel of rums and spirits.⁸⁴ In some instances, a rough calculation was sufficient to show that the amounts were not really as excessive as they appeared to be, at least on the basis of a plan for a three-year expedition. In other instances, however, the actual rate of usage made the extravagance appear worse than the figures themselves suggested. Conservative member William Barton Northrup, who had obviously put pencil and paper to work, drove this point home by putting before the House a formidable array of statistics, in the following vein: "Then they took 5,908 pounds of bovril at \$1.65 a pound and only used 447 pounds. So at the same rate of usage they had enough bovril to last them for thirteen years." In the same way, he calculated that they had taken enough honey to last for 21 years, enough buckwheat to last for 31, enough chocolate sweets to last for 264 years, and enough beeswax and celery cream to last forever, presumably, since they had used none at all.⁸⁵

It was easy for government spokesmen to show errors or exaggeration in some of the charges. For example, the expedition had forty-eight personnel rather than fifteen as the opposition had originally asserted, the cost of supplies and equipment was not nearly so great as had been claimed, the quantities of many articles were modest in comparison with what other expeditions had taken, and it was absolutely necessary to take a considerable surplus in case of emergency or accident. Other explanations were less convincing: that

tenders had not been called because the time was insufficient; that a broken windlass had forced the *Arctic* to return; that all the supplies had been put on board and there had not been profiteering, waste, or theft; and that there had never been a vote or appreciation for an expedition to the North Pole.

In view of the seriousness of the charges, Laurier himself moved for a special committee “to inquire fully into all the circumstances connected with the purchase of said supplies, the disposal of the same, and the different matters above mentioned.”⁸⁶ The Opposition immediately complained that the scope of the proposed inquiry was too limited, but in the end, after losing an amendment taking for a broader investigation, they accepted Laurier’s motion without dissent.⁸⁷ As might have been expected, the members of the committee divided along essentially party lines, with Conservatives finding plenty of substantiation for the charges and Liberals finding that they were without foundation. The Conservatives presented a minority report which strongly condemned the organization and conduct of the expedition,⁸⁸ but it was easily defeated by an overwhelming preponderance of Liberals, and the favourable majority report was then approved.⁸⁹

One of the most notable features of the investigation was that Bernier emerged from it with his reputation unscathed and even, perhaps, a little enhanced. With one or two exceptions, members on both sides of the House spoke of him in consistently laudatory terms and paid tribute to his competence, reliability, experience, and integrity. This was all the more remarkable because Bernier had more to do with choosing, purchasing, and supplying the *Arctic* than anyone else, and thus he was in an extremely vulnerable position. The general consensus of opinion, however, obviously held

that whatever had gone wrong with the expedition was not his fault.⁹⁰

The public criticism and the parliamentary investigation were temporary setbacks for Bernier, and they gave him new hurdles to overcome, but they did not stop him. He had returned from the 1904–5 voyage more determined than ever to load his own expedition to the North, and at last he won his point. The *Arctic* was repaired and fitted out at Sorel, the sum of \$30,000 was allotted to cover expenses,⁹¹ and the expedition set off from Quebec on 28 July 1906, with Bernier in command. Under the authority of an order in council on 23 July,⁹² he had been given separate commissions as officer in charge of the *Arctic* and as a fishery officer for Canada.⁹³ None of these documents said anything about taking possession of territory, yet Bernier looked upon this as his major responsibility. “The main purpose of the expedition,” he remarked, “was to assert Canadian sovereignty in the insular part of the Arctic north of Canada, by formally taking over the territory ceded to Canada by the Imperial government in 1880.”⁹⁴ It was, he also declared, “the first arctic voyage of real importance to me”⁹⁵ – a fairly clear indication of his feelings about the voyage of 1904–5.

The *Arctic* visited in turn Chateau Bay, the Greenland coast, and Lancaster Sound, and then visited Baffin, Bylot, Somerset, Cornwallis, Bathurst, and Melville Islands, as well as some smaller ones. Winter quarters were established at Albert Harbour in Pond Inlet, near the northern extremity of Baffin Island, in early September, and here the expedition remained until 27 July 1907. After the *Arctic* escaped from the winter ice, it made calls successively at Coburg, Somerset, and Ellesmere Islands; then the expedition turned south, calling at Cumberland Sound and Port Burwell before arriving at Quebec on 19 October. In

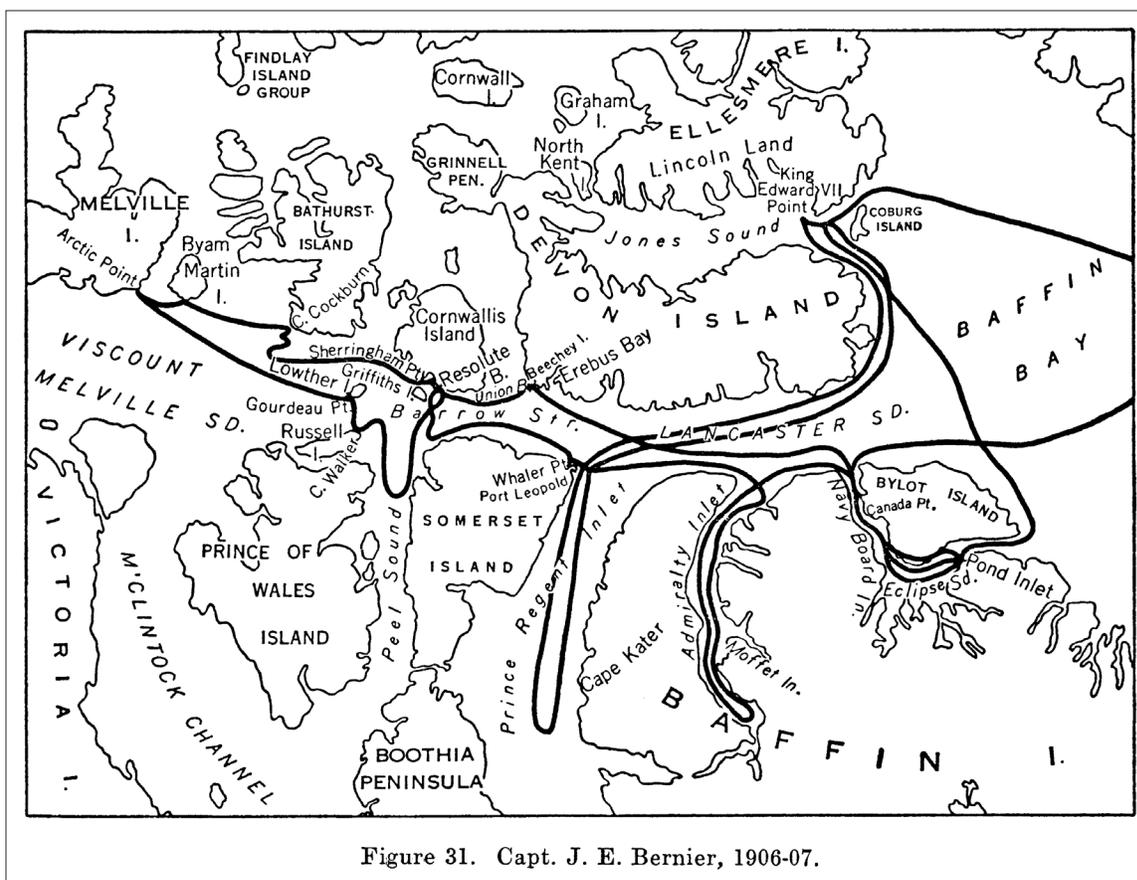


Figure 31. Capt. J. E. Bernier, 1906-07.

FIGURE 7-5: BERNIER EXPEDITION, 1906-7. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 113. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

the course of the voyage, Bernier landed upon and claimed the following islands: Bylot, Griffith, Cornwallis, Bathurst, Byam Martin, Melville, Lowther, Russell, Baffin, Beloeil, Coburg, Cone, and Ellesmere.⁹⁶ In some cases, such as at Griffith, Byam Martin, Lowther, Beloeil, and Cone Islands, he took possession only of the particular island landed upon. In others, such as at Bylot, Cornwallis, Bathurst, Melville, Russell, Baffin, Coburg, and Ellesmere Islands, he went further and purported to take possession not only of the island landed upon but also “the adjacent islands” or “all adjacent islands.”

In some cases, some of those adjacent islands were named. For example, at Melville Island he took possession of “Melville Island, Prince Patrick Island, Eglinton Island and all adjacent islands,” while at Ellesmere Island he named the principal parts of this large island and also nearby islands, including those discovered and claimed by Sverdrup in 1898–1902.⁹⁷ Typically Bernier went through a formal ceremony of taking possession, having a cairn erected in a conspicuous place, raising the Canadian flag, making a proclamation, and having the ceremony photographed. In each case, a document

of formal possession was drawn up in two or more copies, one of which was deposited inside the cairn. The first such document to be deposited – the one left at Canada Point on the west coast of Bylot Island – is a representative example.

August 21st, 1906.

This island Bylot Island, was graciously given to the Dominion of Canada, by the Imperial Government in the year 1880, and being ordered to take possession of it in the name of Canada, know all men that on this day the Canadian Government Steamer *Arctic*, anchored here, and I planted the Canadian flag and took possession of Bylot Island in the name of Canada. We built a cairn to commemorate and locate this point, which we named Canada Point, after, and in honour of the first steamer belonging to the Canadian Navy.

Being foggy no latitude was obtained. On the chart this point is located in Long. 80.50 west and 73.22 north Latitude.

From here the *Arctic* will proceed onward through the Navy Board inlet, to the westward into Admiralty inlet, and from these westward to Port Leopold, where we will leave a record of our future work.

Witnessed thereof under my hand this 21st day of August, 1906 A. D., in the fifth year of the reign of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII.

J. E. Bernier

Commanding Officer, by Royal Commission.

Fabien Vanasdse, Historiographer.

Joseph Raoul Pepin, M. D.

Jas. Duncan, Customs Officer.

Wingate H. Weeks, Purser.

Geo. R. Lancefield, Photographer.⁹⁸

The sweeping claim to Ellesmere and nearby islands, which was left at King Edward VII Point on the southern extremity of Ellesmere Island, was worded as follows:

Proclamation,
C.G.S. 'Arctic'
James [*sic*] Sound
August 12th, 1907.

On this day we landed on this point, on North Lincoln, and annexed the following lands and islands: North Lincoln, Grinnell Land, Ellesmere Land, Arthur Laud, Grant Land, King Oscar's Land, North Kent and several islands, namely, Axel Heiberg Land, Ammund [*sic*] Ringnes Land, Ellee [*sic*] Ringnes Land, King Christian Land, formerly named Finlay Land; North Cornwall, Graham Land, Buckingham Island, Table Island, and all adjacent islands as forming part of the Dominion of Canada. And I hereby annex the above named lands as part of the Dominion of Canada.

J. E. Bernier, Commanding Officer.

George Hayes, Chief Officer.

O. J. Morin, Second Officer,

Wingate H. Weeks, Purser.⁹⁹



FIGURE 7-6: LARGE GROUP OF INUIT WITH CREWMEN OF CGS *ARCTIC* AT THE CEREMONIAL TAKING OF POSSESSION BY CAPT JOSEPH-ELZÉAR BERNIER ON BAFFIN ISLAND, 9 NOVEMBER 1906. *LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / PA-165672.*

Bernier's account does not mention any attempts to take possession of Devon and Somerset Islands, and presumably the reason why he did not trouble to lay claim to them was that Low had already done so. On the other hand, he did take possession of Baffin and Ellesmere Islands even though they had previously been claimed by Wakeham and Low, respectively. In all probability, the explanation for the repetition is that both Baffin and Ellesmere are enormous islands, and the places where Wakeham

and Low performed their ceremonies of taking possession are separated by several hundred miles from those where Bernier performed his. Apart from this aspect of repetition or duplication, Bernier seems to have been impressed throughout with the idea that the claims he and Low were making were valid for any purposes and final.

Several whalers met with on the voyage were notified that licences of \$50 must henceforth be paid, in compliance with the 1906

amendment to the Fisheries Act,¹⁰⁰ and two licences were sold to each of five Scottish whalers for the years 1906 and 1907.¹⁰¹ No American whalers were found.¹⁰² Customs duties were collected from the Scottish whalers for goods brought into the area,¹⁰³ and an inventory of the goods belonging to the Moravian missionaries at Port Burwell was taken.¹⁰⁴ The Inuit of Baffin Island were told that they must obey the laws of Canada.¹⁰⁵ From the winter base at Albert Harbour, several fairly long exploratory sledge trips were made. Documents left by Low and Moodie on Somerset Island and by Low on Beechey Island were found and reproduced in Bernier's narrative,¹⁰⁶ as were various other records (principally of British expeditions).¹⁰⁷ Altogether, in spite of the dubious value of his proclamations, Bernier made a comprehensive effort to examine and take note of everything he could find in the parts of the archipelago he visited during his voyage of 1906–7 and to establish Canadian law there – insofar as anything could be found to regulate or administer.

The return of the *Arctic* in 1907 was followed by another bitter wrangle in the House of Commons over the submission of an item for \$50,000 in the estimates anticipating the next voyage of the *Arctic*. It was intended to “provide for the maintenance of vessels employed in patrolling the waters in the northern portion of Canada, also for establishing and maintaining police and customs ports on the mainland or islands as may be deemed necessary from time to time.”¹⁰⁸ The matter at issue, however, was not so much the *Arctic* as the larger question of Brodeur's entire performance in directing the work of his department, and the key point of dispute was whether the estimates should be voted first and departmental information and reports be furnished in full detail afterwards or the information and reports should come first and the voting of the estimates thereafter.

In the particular circumstances, Brodeur and his supporters argued for the first alternative, and the Opposition, led by George Eulas Foster, for the second. Opposition members took advantage of the opportunity to deliver extremely caustic remarks about the *Arctic*. George Taylor read with obvious relish a satirical article in the *Toronto Star*:

The voyage was a great success. There were four meals a day, and the main brace was spliced every hour. It was felt that the captain had established his right to take his ship anywhere that a man may go on pemmican, p \hat{a} te-de-foie-gras, truffles, and certain other bare necessities of life....

.... Captain Bernier is the greatest island namer and claimer in the business. With its terrific speed – four knots an hour under forced draught – the ‘Arctic’ can overhaul any island that was ever made. When the ‘Arctic’ is seen in the offing, bearing down on an island, the island feels at once that it cannot get away from such a relentless pursuer as Captain Bernier.¹⁰⁹

Foster made his own contribution, in similar vein:

Captain Bernier took possession of the islands. What he did with them, goodness only knows; but he took possession of them, and the hon. member for Halifax says that they will not be there next year, and next year he will have to go back in search of them and take possession again. If, as he says, they change their

place of abode every year, there is an absolute reason for a further expedition to capture and take possession of these elusive, floating and shifting islands. Then we will have Captain Bernier with us for ever, or as long as he lives.¹¹⁰

After a fruitless discussion that went on continuously from the evening of Thursday, 27 February, until midnight the following Saturday, the House adjourned without deciding the matter.¹¹¹ The \$50,000 was voted when discussion on the subject resumed a few days later, however, and Brodeur gave a brief summary of plans for the coming expedition of the *Arctic* in the summer of 1908. She was to go to northern waters early in July, patrol the islands in the vicinity of Lancaster Sound which were frequented by whalers, collect licences and customs duties, and if possible go further west and north and claim more islands.¹¹²

On 20 May, when the estimates for the RN-WMP were being discussed, Laurier commented on the situation in the North, his remarks showing clearly that he was firmly convinced that Bernier's expeditions were necessary:

Since the police have taken possession and asserted our authority, the American whalers have taken licenses from us and have paid customs duties, and our authority is no longer disputed. At first these American whalers were inclined to demur, and I think they made some complaints at Washington; but of late years we have had no trouble.... There was a disputed territory between the United States and Canada, and if we had taken earlier the precaution which to have now taken,

of sending men into the country to take possession of it, we would have had Skagway to-day. In the last map issued at Washington, I think by the War Department, there are various islands in the north with American names attached to them, conveying the impression that these lands belong to the United States. Captain Bernier goes north in order to put the British flag and assert our authority on this territory, which we claim as ours.... If we want to assert our jurisdiction in our country, we must be all the time vigilant. Vigilance is the price, not only of liberty but of security as well. I am making no complaint of our American friends, but they are very enterprising, and if they find anything in any place where there is nobody, they are apt to take possession. For that reason the expenditure connected with the expedition of Captain Bernier is well warranted.¹¹³

Precisely what authority was given to Bernier for the voyage of 1908 is unclear. In a letter of 5 April 1910, to Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries Georges-Joseph Desbarats, which accompanied Bernier's report of the expedition, the captain said that the voyage was "for the purpose of patrolling the waters contiguous to that part of the Dominion of Canada already annexed, and for the further purpose of annexing territory of British possessions as far west as longitude 141 degrees."¹¹⁴ His opening statement in the report read as follows:

Under a Royal Commission, issued to me to annex lands and territories granted by the British Crown to Canada, and as fishery officer of

the northern waters of Canada, I commanded the steamer *Arctic*, fitted out and made ready for sea for a two years' voyage under instructions of the Marine and Fisheries Department. Specific instructions were given as to the waters to be patrolled, explored, and lands to be annexed in continuation of the two voyages, already made to the northern waters by the same ship, commanded by myself.¹¹⁵

He gave no further identification of the royal commission, and the two commissions included in the report (appointing him officer in charge of the *Arctic* and fishery officer) were actually those for the voyage of 1906–7. These appointments were to be held “during our pleasure,” however, and it may not have been considered necessary to reissue or renew them. As already noted, neither of these documents nor the order in council for the voyage of 1906–7 said anything specifically about annexing territory, and Bernier's statement that his authority to carry out this responsibility came from his commission is evidently inaccurate. The “specific instructions” that he mentions must either have been put in another document or given orally. It is also possible, of course, that he put his own interpretation on the instructions he received and saw in them directions which were really not there.

Just before leaving Quebec, he was called into the presence of the Prince of Wales (later King George V), who was visiting the city. Bernier said that he “took advantage of the occasion to indicate to His Royal Highness my plan to take possession for Canada of all the islands discovered and annexed by British explorers, and was warmly commended for

my persistence in urging this matter upon the Canadian government.”¹¹⁶

The expedition departed from Quebec on 28 July 1908, and after cruising along the coast of Greenland and calling at Etah, it entered Lancaster Sound and proceeded westward to a point in McClure Strait south or southwest of Cape Hay. The route through McClure Strait looked inviting and ice-free, but Bernier's orders did not allow for an attempt upon the Northwest Passage, so he turned the *Arctic* about and established winter headquarters at Parry's old base at Winter Harbour on the southern coast of Melville Island. The voyage home began on 12 August 1909, and, after stops including Albert Harbour, Kekerten, Blacklead, and Port Burwell, the *Arctic* arrived at Quebec on 5 October.

During the long stay at Winter Harbour, Bernier sent out sledge parties to take possession of Banks and Victoria Islands. Between 6 April and 9 May 1909, Second Officer O. J. Morin led a small party which under incredibly difficult conditions succeeded in landing upon both and leaving a record of taking possession near Point Russell on Banks Island.¹¹⁷ Between 1 May and 10 June, Third Officer C. W. Green led another party to McClure's old refuge in Mercy Bay on Banks Island, in the hope of finding relics or remains, but they saw no trace of his ship *Investigator* or of any cache or cairn. A record was left in a cairn at Cape Hamilton.¹¹⁸ Morin made a second trip to Banks Island between 17 May and 24 June and carried out another search in Mercy Bay. Although he saw debris from the *Investigator*, he found no trace of the ship itself or of any records. A cairn which had been erected by the crew of the *Investigator* was rebuilt, and Morin “officially took possession of Banks island” a second time, leaving a record of the expedition in the cairn.¹¹⁹ This expedition seems to have been an extraordinary affair,

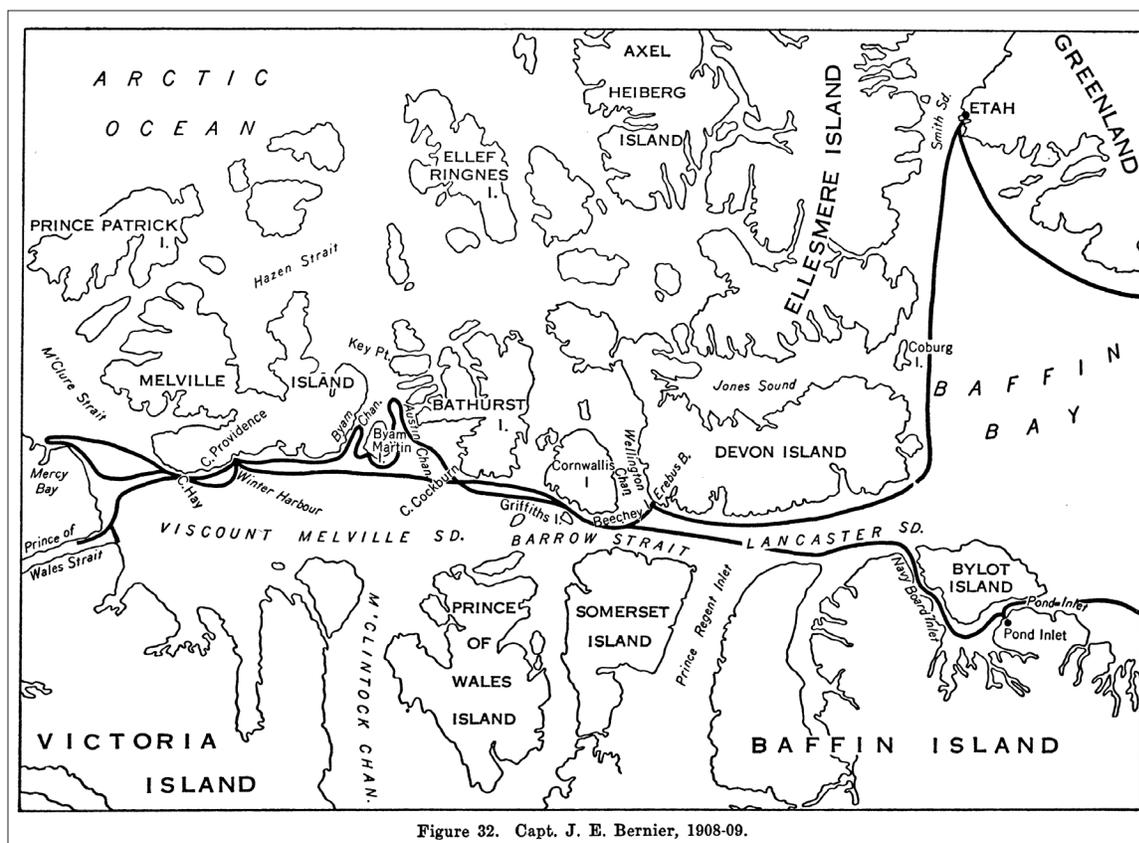


Figure 32. Capt. J. E. Bernier, 1908-09.

FIGURE 7-7: BERNIER EXPEDITION, 1908-9. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 115. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

having evidently been occasioned by Bernier's dissatisfaction with Morin's first performance, in that his party had left no record of possession on Victoria Island and had simply put the one for Banks Island in a bottle, placed it near a high rock rather than in a cairn, and covered it with stones. On his second expedition, Morin left the document in a cairn, but apparently it claimed only Banks Island, and he did not get to Victoria Island. Nevertheless, Bernier felt able to say that this expedition "was more satisfactory than the first."¹²⁰ The attention to detail in the case of Banks and Victoria Islands, and the disregard of such matters in the first sledge

party's claim to distant King William Island, is evident. This feature was observable in other claims that Bernier made during his northern voyages.

On 4 March 1909, Bernier's team erected a cross on Northeast Hill at Winter Harbour "to commemorate the annexing of the Arctic archipelago to Canada."¹²¹ Then, on Dominion Day, 1 July, a memorial tablet on Parry's Rock at Winter Harbour was unveiled, revealing an inscription which claimed the entire archipelago for Canada. Bernier wrote:

At dinner we drank a toast to the Dominion and the Premier of Canada; then all assembled around Parry's rock to witness the unveiling of a tablet placed on the rock, commemorating the annexing of the whole of the Arctic archipelago. I briefly referred to the important event in connection with the granting to Canada, by the Imperial Government, on September 1, 1880, all the British territory in the northern waters of the continent of America and Arctic ocean, from 60 degrees west longitude to 141 degrees west longitude, and as far north as 90 degrees north latitude.¹²² That we had annexed a number of islands one by one and a large area of territory by landing, that we now claimed all islands and territory within the degrees 141 and 60 west longitude as Canadian territory, and now under Canadian jurisdiction.¹²³

The inscription on the tablet took this form:

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.
C.G.S. Arctic, July. 1st, 1909.
J. E. Bernier Commander.
J. V. Koenig Sculptor.¹²⁴

Clearly Captain Bernier was convinced that this final step, following his earlier claims during the years 1906–9, had secured for Canada all the islands within the stated limits, small as well as large.¹²⁵ The question arises as to why he bothered with the preliminary bites at all if he intended throughout to make the final complete swallow. It might reasonably be assumed that Bernier, as a strong exponent of the sector principle which had been pronounced publicly and in categorical terms by Senator Pascal Poirier in February 1907 (see chapter 8), would have found such piecemeal annexations inappropriate and needless. Yet his own accounts certainly leave the impression that he was firmly convinced of the need for and the utility of all that he was doing. In any case, Bernier was in reality an agent for the Canadian government, and to some extent, at least, his actions were directed by government policy. It seems likely that the guiding hand behind the scenes was ultimately that of Laurier himself, and the explanation for what was being done may lie in Laurier's above-quoted letter of 29 October 1903 to Senator William Edwards: "I propose that we should send a cruiser to patrol the waters and plant our flag at every point. When we have covered the whole ground and have men stationed everywhere, then I think we can have such a proclamation as is suggested by Dr. Ami."¹²⁶

Other features of the voyage are worthy of mention. W. E. Jackson, the meteorologist, had a commission as customs officer and took charge of this responsibility.¹²⁷ Again licences were sold to whalers, including some Scotsmen and a Harry Whitney of New York. Bernier described the encounter with the latter, who was at Clyde River, Baffin Island, on 5 September 1909, as follows:



FIGURE 7-8:
CAPTAIN JOSEPH-
ELZÉAR BERNIER
AND HIS CREW AT
WINTER HARBOUR,
MELVILLE ISLAND, 1
JULY 1909. *LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES
CANADA / C-001198.*

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I informed Mr. Whitney that I was patrolling Canadian waters, and, as he had on board his vessel a motor whaleboat, it would be necessary for him to take out a fishery license, and that I would issue it. He stated that if it was a regulation, he would pay the legal fee of \$50, and take the license. I accordingly issued the license and received the fee.¹²⁸

During his visit at Etah and elsewhere, Bernier informed himself about hunting and whaling in the region, and in his narrative he commented particularly upon the killing of Ellesmere Island muskoxen and other game by the Greenland Inuit and the Peary, Sverdrup, and Cook expeditions. He expressed a strong view that moderate hunting by explorers would be unobjectionable, but it should be kept under Canadian government control:

I am of the opinion that Canada will not object to hunting, for food purposes, by explorers who prosecute their explorations in the interest of science, but regulations enforcing a judicious course should be adopted, to prevent numbers of Eskimo natives of foreign countries exploiting Canadian territory, and destroying valuable hunting and fishing grounds.¹²⁹

Later he suggested that such regulations would be even more advisable for game-rich Melville Island.¹³⁰

Captain Bernier made his last expedition to the Arctic for the Canadian government in 1910–11. Since the task of formally claiming all the islands of the archipelago was now considered complete, this voyage was mainly a patrol to see that Canadian laws were being observed. It was not the government's intention to adopt a "get tough" policy, however, as shown

by the following passage from Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries Alexander Johnston's instructions to Bernier:

You will acquaint any persons whom you may find engaged in the whale fishery in these northern waters that you are patrolling these waters as the duly accredited officer of the Canadian Government, and you will, where necessary, demand payment of license fees for such fishing. If payment be refused you will make a request that such refusal be put in writing. It is not desirable that you should take any action in this regard which would be likely to embarrass the Government.¹³¹

Bernier was also instructed to attempt the Northwest Passage if possible,¹³² but this turned out to be inadvisable because of the extremely large masses of ice blocking McClure Strait. Otherwise the voyage was rather routine. The *Arctic* left Quebec on 7 July 1910, and after reaching a point about thirty miles southwest of Cape James Ross in the unsuccessful attempt to get through McClure Strait, it turned back and wintered at Arctic Bay in Admiralty Inlet, Baffin Island. Again sledge parties were sent out, particularly noteworthy being two expeditions to Fury and Hecla Strait under the leadership of surveyor J.T.E. Lavoie, which discovered that Admiralty Inlet and Prince Regent Inlet were apparently unconnected.¹³³ When the sailing season opened in 1911, an attempt was made to reach Fury and Hecla Strait through Prince Regent Inlet, but this also was defeated by ice. In the course of the voyage, calls were made at many of the places visited on previous trips, and the *Arctic* was safely back at Quebec on 25 September 1911.

At Albert Harbour in August 1910, Bernier as fishery officer and Lavoie as customs officer boarded the Newfoundland ship *Diana* to look after these responsibilities, and similar duties were performed during the voyage home in 1911 at Kekerten, Blacklead, and Port Burwell.¹³⁴ Another Newfoundland ship encountered near Cape Kater off the eastern coast of Baffin Island fled and managed to escape, provoking Bernier to send photographs and a description of her to the department in the hope that she could be identified and action taken.¹³⁵ Second Officer Robert S. Janes also met with refusals or excuses when he tried to issue whaling licences to ships at Button Point on Bylot Island, and in one case, he apparently desisted in his attempt because the ship in question was "outside of the three mile limit."¹³⁶

Bernier was not sent back to the Arctic after returning from this voyage, and patrols of the type that Wakeham, Low, and he had initiated were abandoned – at least for the time being. The change of government in 1911 was largely responsible, with the new Conservative administration unimpressed with the need for maintaining such activity. The Conservatives when in opposition had been critical of certain aspects of Bernier's work, which had actually been made possible largely through the personal interest of influential Liberals, such as Préfontaine, Brodeur, and (at least in the later stages) Laurier himself. Not surprisingly, the period of inactivity lasted through the First World War. "The war temporarily put an end to Arctic voyages," Bernier noted, and undoubtedly the shortage of shipping and the pressing need to throw all available men, money, and materials into the war effort would have made such voyages difficult to maintain even had this been desired.

Bernier made several more trips to the Arctic in an unofficial and private capacity before

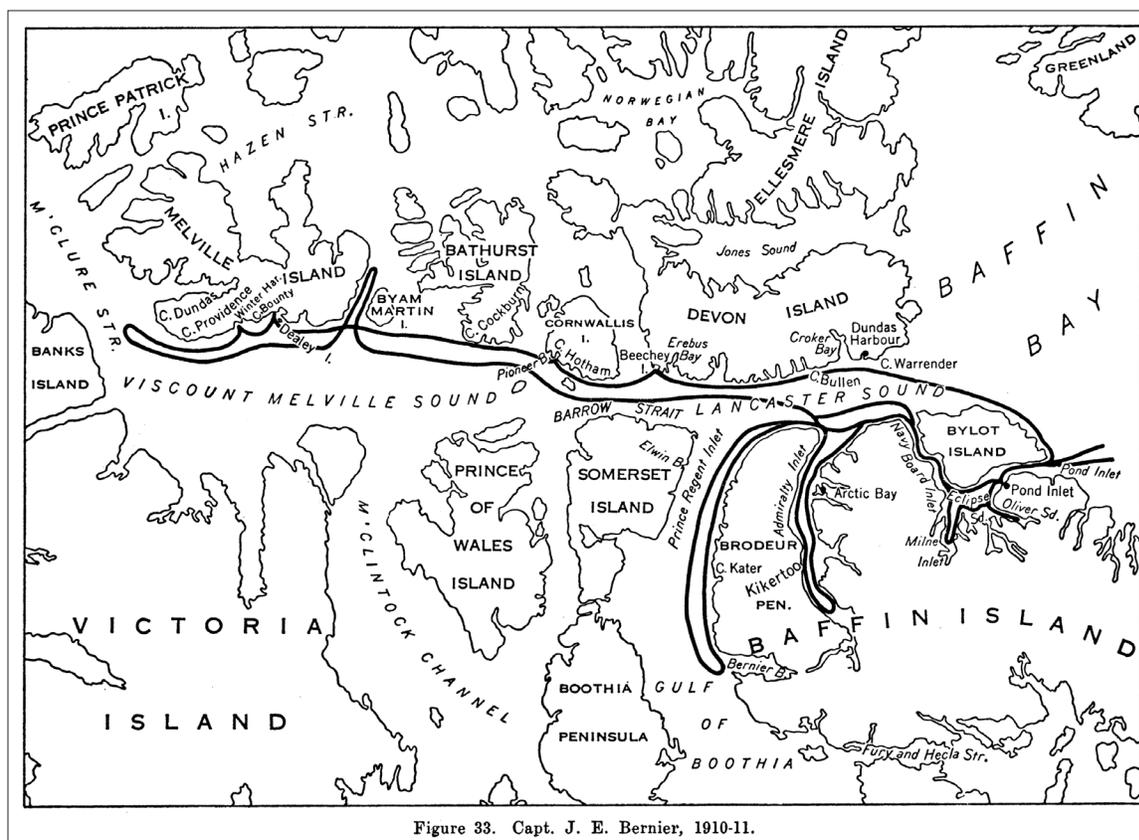


Figure 33. Capt. J. E. Bernier, 1910-11.

FIGURE 7-9: BERNIER EXPEDITION, 1910-11. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 118. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

and during the war. The most notable was as commander of the *Minnie Maud* in 1912-13, on an expedition he himself organized to trade and search for gold on northern Baffin Island.¹³⁷ Reports by Robert Janes, his second officer on the 1910-11 expedition, that there was gold in the Salmon River valley proved to be inaccurate, but the small party was able to carry on a fairly profitable trade from their winter base at Albert Harbour. The most noteworthy feature of the expedition, however, was a series of remarkable journeys by crew member Alfred Tremblay, who, in almost unbelievably difficult circumstances, covered over 4,000 miles

on foot while exploring in northern Baffin Island and Melville Peninsula.¹³⁸ He also mapped 3,000 miles of coastline and, after examining Fury and Hecla Strait, reported that although it has a water passage about thirty fathoms deep and is open during some seasons, it could never be relied upon as a shipping route because of permanent ice inside it and also at both eastern and western entrances.¹³⁹

Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913–18)

Although government patrol voyages in eastern Arctic waters were temporarily discontinued in 1911, the official “Canadian Arctic Expedition” under Vilhjalmur Stefansson, which had been planned, organized, and dispatched to the western Arctic before hostilities broke out, continued its activities throughout the war years. Stefansson, born in Manitoba of Icelandic parents and raised in the Dakota Territory, already had a great deal of experience in the North, having made two summer trips to Iceland in 1904 and 1905,¹⁴⁰ an expedition down the Mackenzie River to the Canadian and Alaskan Arctic coast in connection with the luckless Mikkelsen-Leffingwell expedition in 1906–7,¹⁴¹ and a longer expedition to the same region with Dr. Rudolph Martin Anderson in 1908–12.¹⁴² These expeditions were all privately sponsored and financed: the two to Iceland with Harvard University funds, the one in 1906–7 by Harvard University and the University of Toronto, and that of 1908–12 by the American Museum of Natural History and the Geological Survey of Canada.¹⁴³

For the expedition that he planned to begin in 1913, Stefansson had practically completed arrangements for financial support with the National Geographic Society, the American Museum of Natural History, the Harvard Travelers’ Club, and the Geographical Society of Philadelphia. Thus, the expedition was originally conceived as one which would be supported by American institutions. Before these arrangements were finalized, however, Stefansson also approached Prime Minister Robert Borden for additional financial support. Borden responded that he would prefer the Canadian government take over all financial and

other responsibility for the expedition because it was going to be conducted mainly in Canadian territory.¹⁴⁴ In Borden’s own words, “I told Mr. Stefansson that while the public spirit, sympathy and co-operation of those important institutions were highly appreciated, the Government preferred that Canada should assume entire responsibility for the Expedition, as any lands yet undiscovered in these northern regions should be added to Canadian territory.”¹⁴⁵ The upshot was that Stefansson, although remaining completely in charge, found himself commanding an official Canadian government expedition and, at least for certain purposes, acting as a representative of the Canadian government. Among other things, the expedition was authorized to take possession of any newly discovered lands for Canada and to investigate the activities of American whalers in the northern waters of Canada. The order in council of 22 February 1913, confirming the arrangements, made these points sufficiently clear:

The expedition will conduct its explorations in waters and on lands under Canadian jurisdiction or included in the northern zone contiguous to the Canadian territory. It is, therefore, considered advisable that the expedition should be under the general direction of the Canadian Government and should sail under the Canadian flag...

The expedition would also have occasion to examine into the operations of the American whalers which frequent the northern waters of Canada, and of putting into force the Customs and Fisheries Regulations which these whalers should observe....

Mr. Stefansson proposes that his personal services should be free to the Canadian Government, but that the Government should provide the necessary funds to pay the expenses of the expedition; Mr. Stefansson to have full responsibility, and to have the choice of the men going on the expedition; and of the ships, provisions, and outfit needed for the trip....

Any new or partly unknown lands which the expedition would touch would be observed, positions fixed, and the British flag would be planted on these lands.

An Officer of the expedition would receive authority as Customs and Fishery Officer, and would be empowered to collect customs dues and fishery dues from the whaling vessels frequenting Canadian northern waters

The Committee concur in the foregoing and submit the same for approval.¹⁴⁶

Mild complications respecting this order in council arose when Canada's Governor General, the Duke of Connaught, sent copies of it to Colonial Secretary Lewis Vernon Harcourt in London on 1 March 1913.¹⁴⁷ Harcourt feared that the Canadian Cabinet might not have adequate formal authority to make the proposed annexations of territory, and on 10 May he replied as follows:

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught's despatch No. 129 of the 1st of March on the subject of the expedition which the Canadian Government

propose to send during the summer to explore the northern seas and the lands which lie to the north of the Continent.

1. I have read His Royal Highness's despatch with much interest and have communicated copies of it to the Foreign Office and to the Admiralty.
2. I take this opportunity of stating that His Majesty's Government have had under their consideration from time to time the question of the position of the territories to the north of Canada. As your Ministers are aware the Order in Council of the 31st July 1880 annexed to the Dominion of Canada all British territories and possessions in North America not already included with the Dominion and all islands adjacent to any such territories or possessions.
3. The full extent of the lands thus annexed has nowhere been formally defined and I observe in the fourth paragraph of the approved minute of the Privy Council which accompanied His Royal Highness's despatch, that reference is made to the expedition conducting explorations in waters and on lands under Canadian jurisdiction or included in the northern zone contiguous to the Canadian territory, while it is stated in the eleventh paragraph of the same minute that the

British Flag will be planted on any new or partly unknown lands.

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4. So far as the lands on which the Flag is so planted are already, in virtue of the Order in Council, part of Canadian territory no question can arise as to the authority of your Government to deal with the matter, but as it is an established part of the law of the Empire that no Governor has a general delegation of authority to effect annexation of territory, His Majesty's Government are advised that in order to remove any doubt as to the validity of the proceedings of the Canadian Government – with the aim of which they are in full sympathy – it is desirable that formal authority should be given for the annexation of any lands to the north of Canada not already belonging to any foreign power which may not yet be British territory.
 5. I have accordingly received His Majesty's commands to convey to the Governor-General authority, with the advice of the Privy Council of the Dominion, to take possession of and annex to, His Majesty's Dominions any lands lying to the north of Canadian territory as defined in the Order in Council of 1880 which are not within the jurisdiction of any civilized power.
 6. As it is not desirable that any stress should be laid on the fact that a portion of the territory may

not already be British, I do not consider it advisable that this despatch should be published, but it should be permanently recorded as giving authority for annexation to the Governor-General in Council.

7. I have to add that if your Ministers consider it desirable His Majesty's Government will be prepared, when the result of the expedition and the extent of the lands in question are known, to issue a fresh Order in Council supplementing that of July 31st, 1880.¹⁴⁸

Copies of Harcourt's letter were sent to the several departments most immediately interested, and on 2 June an order in council was promulgated which authorized Stefansson to take possession of new lands for Canada. The key passages of the order, which was based upon a memorandum dated 27 May from Minister of the Naval Service John Douglas Hazen, were as follows:

The Minister observes that in the course of these explorations it is possible that unknown lands may be discovered and it is advisable that Mr. Stefansson should be given proper authority to take possession of these lands for the Government of Canada, and to annex these lands to His Majesty's Dominions.

The Minister, therefore, recommends that Mr. Vilhjalmur Stefansson be given authority to take possession of and annex to His Majesty's Dominions any lands lying to the

north of Canadian territory which are not within the jurisdiction of any civilized Power.¹⁴⁹

Although several departments were involved, the expedition was placed specifically under the direction of the Department of the Naval Service. On 29 May, Deputy Minister G. J. Desbarats wrote a long letter to Stefansson setting down in considerable detail the government's instructions concerning the expedition. These instructions recorded the understanding that there was to be a northern party which would devote itself primarily to exploration of the waters and lands of the Beaufort Sea region and a southern party which would carry on a variety of scientific work along the northern mainland coast. The following brief passage summarizes the basic organization of the expedition:

The expedition will be under your personal direction and control, and you will give general directions to the various leaders of parties, as may be required.

The Northern party will be under your own immediate charge and control.

The Southern party will be under the direction of Dr. Anderson; the next senior officer of that party being Mr. Chipman, unless some other member is designated by Dr. Anderson.

It was thus made quite clear that Stefansson, besides being directly in charge of the northern party, was in overall command of the entire expedition.¹⁵⁰ Desbarats' letter also noted that the expedition's chief topographer, Kenneth Chipman, had been appointed customs officer based

on a recommendation in the February order in council.¹⁵¹

The whaling ship *Karluk* was purchased and outfitted at Esquimalt in the spring of 1913. Sailing on 17 June, she joined the *Alaska* and *Mary Sachs*, two smaller vessels which the expedition acquired, at Nome. When the squadron departed from Nome in mid-July, Stefansson had the *Karluk* for the use of the northern party, Anderson had the *Alaska* for the use of the southern party, and the *Mary Sachs*, under Captain Peter Bernard, was to function first as a supply ship and then as a floating base for oceanographic research. It was thus planned that the three ships would operate singly and to some extent independently; however, they and the personnel aboard them became separated in a way that had not been anticipated, with disastrous results.

The *Alaska* stopped at Teller in Bering Strait for needed repairs, but afterwards it succeeded in getting as far as Collinson Point on the northern Alaska coast, about 100 miles west of the Yukon boundary. This became the southern party's winter headquarters in 1913–14. For the remaining two years of this party's work, Anderson made his headquarters at Bernard Harbour in Dolphin and Union Strait, and the *Alaska* took the entire party out through Bering Strait in the summer of 1916. The impressive scientific work of this group was published in a series of voluminous reports by several government departments and agencies over the next three decades.¹⁵²

The *Karluk* was caught in the ice near Camden Bay, about 200 miles beyond Point Barrow, on 13 August. Stefansson and several others became separated from the ship when they went ashore on a hunting trip, and they never saw her again. With Captain Bob Bartlett in command, she drifted to a point about sixty miles northeast of Wrangel Island, where she



FIGURE 7-10: CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION PARTY, NOME, ALASKA, CA. 1913. *RUDOLPH MARTIN ANDERSON / LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / E002712837.*

sank on 11 January 1914. Bartlett took the party to Wrangel Island and then, with only one Inuk as companion, made a difficult winter trip to the Siberian coast and thence to St. Michael in Alaska. From there, news of the disaster was sent by telegraph to Ottawa, and arrangements were made to send several ships to Wrangel Island from Alaska and Siberia. The *King and Winge* succeeded in pushing through the ice and rescuing the survivors early in September, but of the twenty-five who had been on the *Karluk* drift, eleven lost their lives, either trying to reach Wrangel Island or after getting there.¹⁵³

After being separated from his ship, Stefansson spent the following winter on the coast, endeavouring to find men, supplies, and equipment to replace those that had been lost. His task was complicated by the fact that a considerable number of the southern party,

led by Dr. Anderson, were now inclined to deny his position as commander and to refuse any materials or co-operation that would help him to carry out the work of the northern party. Nevertheless, by improvisation and by taking advantage of the greater scope for decision and action that fell to him as commander, he was able to accomplish a good deal of what he wanted to do. With the two volunteers Storker Storkerson and Ole Andreasen accompanying him, he made a three-month sledge journey in the spring of 1914 across the ice from the Alaska coast to Banks Island, intending primarily to demonstrate that sea creatures could be secured in sufficient quantities on such a trip to sustain an exploring party. During the next three years, keeping only minimum contact with the mainland, he and small supporting parties maintained themselves in the islands,

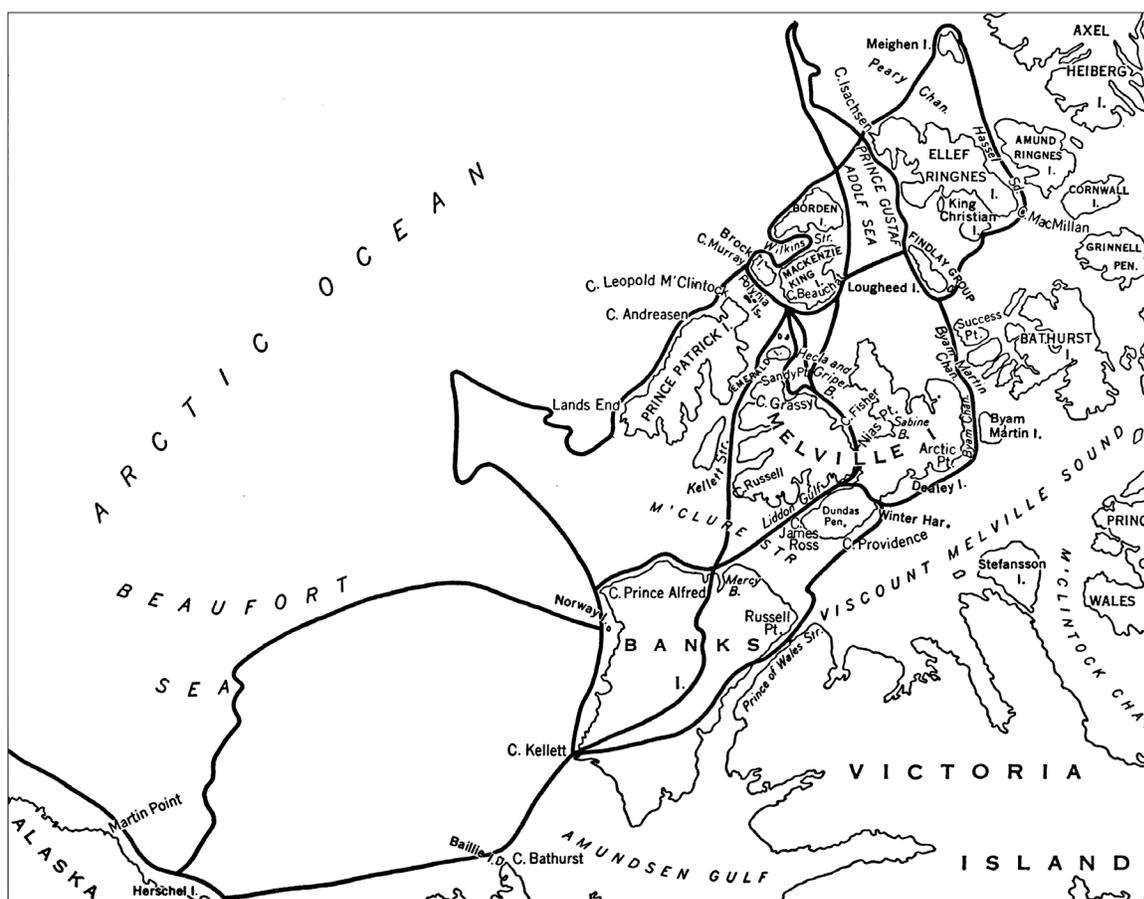


FIGURE 7-11: STEFANSSON'S EXPEDITION, 1913–18. ANDREW TAYLOR, *GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION IN THE QUEEN ELIZABETH ISLANDS* (OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND TECHNICAL SURVEYS, 1964), 121. BY PERMISSION OF NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA.

establishing winter bases successively at Cape Kellett on the west coast of Banks Island (1914–15), again at Cape Kellett and also at two other places on or near Banks Island (1915–16), and at Liddon Gulf on the south coast of Melville Island (1916–17). From these bases, Stefansson, with various companions, carried out a succession of exploratory expeditions over the ice of Beaufort Sea and then north of Prince Patrick Island in 1915, across Melville Island and north of the Ringnes Islands in 1916, and again north of the Ringnes Islands to a high of nearly 81° in 1917. The northern party left the islands in

the summer of 1917, but an accident to their ship compelled them to spend another winter in the north. Storkerson, who in 1917 had explored most of the unknown part of the northeast coastline of Victoria Island that Godfred Hansen of Amundsen's expedition had been unable to reach in 1905, now used the additional time and opportunity in 1918 to carry out a six-months drift on an ice floe. Stefansson was taken seriously ill and spent long periods of recovery at Herschel Island and Fort Yukon, in consequence not getting back to southern regions until September 1918.¹⁵⁴

In the present context, two matters connected with this expedition are of particular importance: the sojourn of the party from the *Karluk* on Wrangel Island in 1914 and Stefansson's own discovery of new islands during his sledging trips to the north. The first is important because, perhaps more than any other single factor, it gave Stefansson the impulse and resolve several years later to establish a claim to Wrangel Island, thus setting off a complicated tangle that narrowly missed becoming a major international dispute. The *Karluk* survivors were in actual occupation of the island, which they found completely uninhabited, for a period of almost six months, and during this time they flew the British flag and generally carried on as if they were monarchs of the inhospitable country they surveyed. The second is important because one of Stefansson's main responsibilities, from the Canadian government's point of view, was to discover new islands and claim them for Canada.

On 18 June 1915, while on his spring sledging trip, Stefansson and his three companions sighted new land from the northernmost tip of Prince Patrick Island. The island, which was later christened Brock Island after the director of the Canadian Geological Survey,¹⁵⁵ was claimed by building a gravel mound and depositing in it this record:

June 20, 2 A. M.

This land was first seen, so far as I know, by Storker Storkerson of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, June 18, 1915, at 2 A. M. from a point on the ice distant from the cairn where this record is left about fourteen miles due west (true). From an ice cake about 40 ft. high, land was

seen extending from ExN to NExE. The first man to land here was Ole Andreasen of the same Expedition at 1:50 A. M. June 19th.

"By authority especially vested in me for that purpose, I have to-day hoisted the flag of the Empire and have taken possession of the land in the name of His Majesty King George V on behalf of the Dominion of Canada."

"Vilhjalmur Stefansson,"
Commander,
Canadian Arctic Expedition,
Witnesses: "Storker Storkerson,
Ole Andreasen, Karl Thomsen."

Party, dogs (13) and equipment, all well. Shall proceed eastward along this coast some distance, should it prove extensive, and then south across or around Melville Island to the Expedition head-quarters near Cape Kellett, Banks Island.¹⁵⁶

The next year, Stefansson discovered that there was another, larger island beyond Brock,¹⁵⁷ which was named Borden Island in honour of the Prime Minister.¹⁵⁸ On the 1916 sledging trip, Stefansson discovered more new islands: Meighen and Perley to the north of Ellef Ringnes Island and Lougheed (as distinct from Sverdrup's King Christian Land) to the south of it. He claimed these islands for Canada and left records in cairns, as in the case of the first discovery.¹⁵⁹

The day after claiming Brock Island, Stefansson expressed his thoughts in a lengthy letter to Prime Minister Borden, which eventually reached its destination. It is worth reproducing in full:

N. Lat. 77° 30', W. Long. 113° Approx.
June 21st., 1915.

Dear Mr. Borden:

I do not know if for the past two years you have taken especial interest in our Arctic Expedition, but I have always felt that the matter of having new land north of Canada discovered and explored by Canadians in the service of the Government, appeared to you an important one. I write this on a land that it has been our fortune to discover and take possession of for Canada. More than anyone else in the Government I have you to thank for the support which has enabled us to accomplish at least part of the purpose of this Expedition, the writing of this letter may therefore seem superfluous, for it is written to urge the fitness and importance of the continuance by Canadians in the service of the Government of the work of exploring the region between the mainland and the pole until the last mystery is unveiled. We shall do what we can next year, but when the three years assigned us are

up there will yet remain much to do. We have had misfortunes, but have accomplished a part of our work nevertheless. What you think of how we have met adverse conditions I do not know, and I do not write to plead any personal cause. But I feel strongly not only that Canada should explore the regions to which she lays claim as far as the pole; it is true also that by doing so she makes good her claims. I shall remain ready to volunteer my services for this work, but if it shall seem that my record does not earn further support, then let another carry on the work, so he is a Canadian in Canadian service.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson¹⁶⁰

Stefansson returned to Ottawa in the autumn of 1918 eager for more Arctic service, but the government was completely occupied with the war and the armistice. In fact, apart from the necessary attention to his own expedition, there had been little visible evidence of official interest or activity in the far north for several years. When activity resumed, it was in circumstances that neither Stefansson nor the government could have foreseen.

