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The Reindeer Botanist: Alf Erling Porsild, 1901–1977

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Part Three

THE NATIONAL HERBARIUM IN PEACE AND WAR, 1936–1977
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX
THE NATIONAL HERBARIUM

In 1936, the National Herbarium of Canada was seriously in need of a botanically trained curator. That treasure-trove of dried plants, dating back to the Geological Survey days when an enthusiastic young Irishman named John Macoun had leapt from a prairie wagon-train to stuff his collecting vasculum with flowers, mosses, and grasses, had been housed in the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa since January 1911. Due to lack of space, however, the entire Division of Biology, including the Herbarium, was moved to the Motor Building in 1935, and when Erling Porsild started his temporary appointment in 1936, he was faced with the daunting task of sorting out the mess that had been left after years of neglect. There were bundles of newspapers with loose dried plants, or cabinets filled with large sheets of heavy paper to which were glued flattened specimens and faded labels that gave the date and place of collection but with names that no longer applied. No one had touched the collections since Oscar Malte had died in 1933, and before that the Chief Botanist had been a sick man and unable to keep up with the work piling up in front of him.

Malte had divided the collections into four separate divisions – CANADA, UNITED STATES, EUROPE, and OTTAWA DISTRICT – and, as Erling described them, they were “sorely in need of revision.” In order to do any serious work on them, he needed reference books and indices close at hand, but the problem was that the library had remained behind in the Museum. Erling’s request to the Director for essential reading matter to be re-located to his office was turned down on the grounds that housing the necessary books and material where they could be used by other scientists instead of just one man had been a satisfactory arrangement with his predecessor and, in any case, it was expected that the Herbarium would be moved back to the Museum “within a few years.”
Obtaining furniture like a proper working desk and needed storage cabinets in these tough depression times was out of the question. In other words, he was expected to put up with the way things were and not complain about it.¹

Erling was not alone in needing the reference material to be located in the Herbarium when he started work. On April 14, Anderson wrote to Professor Fernald at the Gray Herbarium:

Nicholas Polunin has been here for some time and has been delving deeply into our arctic plants. He is a prodigious worker and apparently tireless in energy, and says that he is finding many interesting things. He has met most of our officials who are interested in his work, and I think he has made a very good impression on everyone. As you suggest, he would be an admirable man to get into the Herbarium here, but from what he has told me, he feels at the present time that University work is more attractive. He can go back to Oxford and teach
at intervals, alternating the teaching work with botanical expeditions to different places where there are botanical problems to be solved. I do not think he is the ‘adventurer explorer’ type, but he is young yet and wants to do something in the difficult field work while he is still able to make the trips. The lack of adequate assistance here and the difficulty of contact with other capable botanists are other drawbacks here. However, I am doing all that I can to forward his arctic botanical work.²

Nicholas Polunin had originally approached Oscar Malte for his chances of going on the Eastern Arctic Patrol in 1933. Malte wrote to John Ramsbottom, Keeper of Botany at the British Museum, to ask about the young man’s qualifications and was told that he was a young Oxford student of Russian descent. “I believe his father had something to do with the Russian ballet,” Ramsbottom wrote on March 7.

He is keen on exploring and has been on several of the Oxford University expeditions. His main interest so far has been in ecology on a somewhat broad basis and he has paid little attention to pure taxonomy; his collections have been very scrappy as he has been more concerned in getting names for his lists than good herbarium specimens. He is very interested in arctic vegetation and I think will take pains now to make a good collection of plants. If he is given permission to go by the Government steamer to the Eastern Canadian Arctic it is his intention to present a set of plants to your Department, and a second set to us. He has recently been awarded a Henry Fellowship at Yale where he is to study ecology under Professor Nicholls. In the vacation he plans to study taxonomy under Professor Fernald at the Gray Herbarium making his collections the basis of his study.³

Malte, who was still hoping that his own trip would not be cancelled because of stringent cuts in expenditures, wrote back to Ramsbottom on March 28 to state firmly that the patrol ship only stopped for forty-eight hours at each place touched, which was long enough for a man devoting all his time to collecting if he knew all the arctic plants by sight and knew beforehand exactly what should be collected but was much too short a time to make an ecological survey
worthwhile. He thought that Mr. Polunin had very little chance of being taken on by the Canadian Government as a scientist on the Eastern Arctic Patrol that year.\(^4\)

In the end, Polunin had headed for Spitsbergen that summer while Malte was finally given approval to go on the patrol himself in 1933. This was the trip that would cost Malte his life, perhaps due to all his hard work collecting at the short stops en route, for when writing to Eric Hultén at the University of Lund in August 1933, Anderson had said:

While Dr. Malte had been in rather poor health for about three years, he had been feeling much better during the past winter and spring. He wished to make another visit to certain points in the North, and also collect specimens at other critical points which he had not visited, and the 1933 voyage of the S.S. \textit{Nascopie} seemed to offer that opportunity. It was also thought that the sea voyage would improve his health. In fact, the last letter which he wrote me … on east side of Hudson Bay … stated that everything was all right and that the botanical results had been beyond his expectations. He had collected about 1,500 liberal herbarium sheets up to that time. In my opinion, the probability is that on account of the ship being in the different posts not more than two or three days, that Dr. Malte was unable to resist the temptation to overwork during the long days, and the strain brought on his collapse.\(^5\)

Polunin got his wish to go to the Canadian north on the Hudson Bay Company’s supply ship the following year. By 1936, he had put in his year of looking at the arctic material in the Gray Herbarium under Fernald and was now in the National Herbarium in Ottawa looking at Malte’s 10,000 or more sheets of Arctic plants. Since it was felt in official circles that there was no one who was in a better position to pick up the work on the Flora of the Eastern Arctic at that time, the Museum offered to publish his findings when he had completed his work.

Polunin’s arrival in the field of Eastern Arctic Botany left open by Malte’s untimely demise was opportune for him but most unfortunate for Erling Porsild. With Erling’s so-newly-appointed tenuous position, it must have been hard enough for him to look at this supremely confident young man as a potential rival in the Herbarium, but to avoid being accused of professional jealousy he would never be able to state how much he resented Polunin’s territorial
takeover just as he himself was at last in a position not only to work up his collections from the western Arctic but to pick up the work in the Eastern Arctic done by himself and his father in Greenland and his old friends and advisors in the field, Oscar Malte in Ottawa and Professor Ostenfeld in Copenhagen.

Years later, when Wynne-Edwards asked Erling for his frank opinion of “Nic Polunin” as a candidate for the Chair of Botany at McGill University in 1945, he wrote:

Personally I do not think there is any doubt that Polunin is a good taxonomist; in fact, Fernald, ten years ago expected him to do great things. I know that Raup thinks he is alright too as an ecologist. He is a good collector with a very ‘keen nose,’ but makes lousy specimens. As a museum man I find myself somewhat shocked by the careless way in which he handles his own and other people’s stuff. He has a very charming and winning personality and seems to be well enough thought of at his own college, at the British Museum and at Kew. He is very ambitious and I have sometimes suspected that he is the kind of chap who will permit very little to stand in his way.... Personally I used to be somewhat annoyed by Polunin’s perhaps youthful cocksureness and somewhat patronizing manners, and I have also thought that he was a good deal of a snob. I remember back in 1936 I asked his age to which he replied ‘twenty-six – and a half,’ and then blushed violently. Another time he cautioned me not to let myself become too overly impressed by the array of letters that ‘some people place behind their names.’ ... He is a man who always has a dozen or more irons in the fire, and who perhaps because of his excess of energy sometimes over estimates his own capacity.6

Whatever the relationship between these two men at this time, Polunin had left Ottawa by the end of April and Erling could settle down to proving his worth to his new superiors. On May 12, he sent a memo to Director Dr. Collins with an outline of botanical work that might be carried out in the coming season. He had, of course, his own 30,000 or so sheets from his ten-year collection period in Alaska, arctic Canada, and arctic Europe, from which he hoped to bring out four publications. He had not yet had time to examine five of the tall herbarium cases filled with specimens from New Brunswick and western Alberta collected by Malte and others, but it seemed to him that it would be best to tie in the next
season’s fieldwork with earlier work. He suggested that he should begin look-
ing at the plants in the Ottawa valley since he had limited experience with the southern flora and it was important to familiarize himself as soon as possible with the collections in the general herbarium. “Since the survey of the Ottawa district was originally started many years ago by the Macouns, the influence of cultivation of course has spread a great deal and for this reason and because of the present day transportation facilities, it might be desirable to increase the scope of the survey beyond the original thirty mile radius,” he said.7

By August, he could tell Anderson that he had spent most of his weekends and holidays that spring and summer collecting in the Ottawa valley and was proposing a trip to Algonquin Park later that month at the invitation of Dr. Carl Heimburger of the Forestry Branch. He had been combining his work in the field with diligent work in the Herbarium.

When in May this year I was transferred from the Interior Department to the National Herbarium it was realized at once that, in order to have the use of the four herbaria kept here, it would be necessary to make a more or less complete revision and rearrangement of the collection since it was found that in a great many groups all revisions and changes made during the last 10 or 15 years by monographers and specialists throughout the world had not yet been incorporated in our collection. Thus, in some instances a single species was found in the collections distributed under as many as a dozen different names. The greater part of my time since I came here has been employed in this work and to date has resulted in the changing of over one thousand labels.8

He was hoping that he would be permitted, “while carrying out the routine curatorial management of the National Herbarium,” to complete the research work on his arctic collections, with publication in view, by visiting the Gray Herbarium in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the U.S. National Herbarium in Washington, D.C. He had hoped to go in the fall, but as he had earlier warned Heimburger re: the Algonquin Park canoe trip, he had a hernia that was bothering him a bit and would be “afraid of long and strenuous portages,” although apart from “being pretty soft” he was otherwise in fair shape to go. His health had worsened after the trip, and in a letter to Raup Dec. 6, he said:
I have been laid up for nearly six weeks following an operation for a hernia I managed to develop on my very last sledge journey in the north. I am on my feet again now and hope to be back to the office before Xmas. To pass the time I have been trying to do a little writing, and, amongst other things have tried to plan a tentative list of 1) plants new to N. Am. and 2) plants new to the N.W.T. So far I have only got through the Monocots, but find that I have here about a dozen of the former and about 75 of the latter. These figures will probably have to be modified when I get access to more lit. [literature]. As you perhaps remember we only have vol. I of Hooker’s *Flora Boreali-Americana* in Ottawa. Scandalous isn’t it? You don’t happen to know of a copy that is for sale?

He still had Polunin in mind when he added: “Since I don’t know when I shall be able to get my flora out I have been thinking of getting out a preliminary list of some of the more important finds in order to forestall somebody else from doing it. Lately such has happened, e.g. *Carex holostoma, Epilobium arcticum* that Bob and I found years before Malte and Polunin got them. Do you think this desirable or does it detract too much from the value of the main publication?”

He reported that changes were going on in his Administration. Camsell had been appointed Deputy Minister of the new Mines and Resources with five directors under him, McLeish as Director of the Geological Survey, Lynch as head of the Museum with Malcolm as Assistant Curator, Collins as Consulting Geologist, and Bolton as Assistant Director of the Survey. “The legislation which amalgamates four of our Departments, including Mines and Interior has finally been enacted but a number of less important details have not yet been announced and I do not know yet to what extent the herbarium or my position there has been affected. For that matter I don’t even know if I have one.”

By February 2, 1937, still on temporary appointment under the new Mines and Resources Department, Erling was discussing with Anderson the need for Polunin to return the 1,079 sheets of mounted and unmounted plants borrowed from the National Herbarium in August in connection with his studies of the flora of Baffin Island. “It is not customary for botanical museums, except under exceptional circumstances, such as the case of Mr. Polunin, to permit a large part of its collections, and particularly not such that are not classified or mounted, to be taken from the premises. It would appear advisable therefore
that for the protection of the museum and Mr. Polunin as well that the plants should be returned to the museum by Mr. Polunin to be carefully checked.”

He had been working hard on his publications. He had finished the first draft of his manuscript on the Flora of Little Diomede Island and passed it to Diamond Jenness who commented: “To myself it is very interesting, but I don’t know if it will be as interesting to the layman who knows nothing of the country. Much will depend on what precedes or follows.” By mid-February, he had completed another manuscript on “Edible Plants and Berries in Northern Canada,” some twenty or so plants known from his personal experience to be edible.

Erling left Ottawa soon after his approval came for his six-week study period in Boston, New York, and Washington. He was sorry, he said, to miss Polunin who “actually left Cambridge the day before” he arrived, but from the Gray Herbarium on March 7, he wrote enthusiastically to Anderson: “I have been having a grand time since I came here and everyone in the herbarium has been very good to me. Prof. Fernald at once extended to me the ‘Freedom of the City’ and I have been able to come and go as I wanted.” He was only feeling a bit discouraged because, although he had been working late every night, and Saturdays and Sundays as well, he did not seem to have got very far. “The trouble is, of course, that one problem always leads to a dozen more, and when you have the good fortune to be in a place like the Gray Herbarium with its unique botanical library, it seems a pity not to make the most of it.”

On March 20, he wrote to Anderson from New York City, where he was working at the New York Botanical Gardens (which he did not like nearly as much as the Gray Herbarium), and said he had been delighted to run into his “old friend Peter Freuchen who lectured at the Explorers’ Club” the night before. His later stay in Washington also did not measure up to the rewarding time spent at the Gray Herbarium, but William Maxon, Curator of the U.S. National Herbarium, promised to fill in some of the gaps in the literature on file in the Ottawa museum library.

Back in Ottawa in April, Erling wrote to thank Maxon for his kindness to him during his “much too short visit” but worried that he had given him the wrong impression about his relationship with another of his rivals in the field of Arctic Botany. “Since I returned I have sometimes wondered whether I left the impression in your mind that my professed interest in your Alaska collection was a poorly camouflaged reconnaître in connection with a possible collaboration on a Flora of Alaska between Hultén and myself. It really wasn’t. When I
came I had hoped to find some of the critical groups in better shape. When I found that the collection in that respect was of little or no help I limited myself to the checking of distribution of new or interesting material against my own findings.” Curious about what was happening with Hultén’s proposed Flora of Alaska, he added: “Has any new development occurred in this matter?”

Three days later, Maxon sent him a rare copy of *Contributions from the U.S. National Herbarium* (“Vol. 1, no. 1, which by good luck we happen to have on hand”) and three Canadian specimens of *Nymphaea tetragona* on loan, and assured him that he was under no misapprehension as to Erling’s personal interest with regard to work on the Alaskan flora. On April 24, Maxon wrote again to tell him that a general letter of inquiry had gone out to Hultén as to his plans for preparing a descriptive flora, offering to place their extensive Alaskan material at his disposal for study in Washington:

> Having spent a week in going over our Alaskan collection, you are of course in a position to give Dr. Hultén helpful information as to the richness of our collection, and I should think it a good idea for you to write him at this time. You doubtless know the main sources of the material that has been available to him thus far, and can explain advantageously the value of the numerous collections represented in our so-called Alaskan Herbarium. You will recollect our estimate that it contains pretty close to 25,000 specimens. I think it would be best to write Dr. Hultén without delay, so that he may have the benefit of your information in replying to Dr. Stejneger’s letter.

It was one month after this exchange of letters that Eric Hultén was to publicly defend his doctoral thesis at the University of Lund in Sweden, on the *Outline of the History of Arctic and Boreal Biota during the Quaternary Period*. This massive tome purported to look at the evolution of these species during and after the glacial period as indicated by their present forms and distribution. Hultén also had in the works the “Flora of the Aleutians and Westernmost Alaska Peninsula with notes on the flora of Commander Islands” after a summer spent in the Aleutians in 1932, but by now he was ready to look at the idea of doing a larger Flora of the Alaskan side of the Bering Sea in order to complete the overall picture he was forming in his plant-geographical studies begun on the Kamchatka side.
This was the Flora that Erling said he had discussed with Hultén in Lund when he had gone to Scandinavia to hire the reindeer herders for the Mackenzie River Delta reindeer station in the summer of 1931. There had been a suggestion of handing over the collections he and Bob had made in Alaska to Hultén at that time, with some thought of co-authorship on a smaller scale, which Erling had rejected as he wanted to work up their collection himself. As it now appeared that Hultén would be working on an encompassing Flora of Alaska and Yukon in the near future, the pressure was mounting on Erling to get their work in print as soon as possible. It was not to be expected that he would be delighted to offer Hultén every help he could give him with his rival publication until he was ready with his own, but he did write and offer to send him sheets from the Aleutians and Macoun’s collection from the Pribilof Islands.¹⁶

He was, in fact, very busy with publications when he got back from his trip south. He wrote to tell Raup in May that his chapter on the Flora of Northwest
Territories for the Department of the Interior Bluebook had probably gone to print. “I wish I could have had time to send it to you first for comment, but they were clamouring for it when I came back. I am not any too pleased with it and found it a lot harder to write than I had anticipated. Since I got that off my hands I have enlarged and completely rewritten the paper on the ‘Earth Mounds.’ I am sending it to the American Geographical Review one of these days.”

Putting the reindeer work behind him was not going to be easy either. On June 23, he received a memo from Malcolm that he had been added to the committee of departmental officials familiar with the development of the reindeer herd at the mouth of the Mackenzie River. He had been attending their meetings since coming to Ottawa and was continuing to get reports from the Reindeer Depot where the herd was still doing well but there had been a change of administration. Of the three Lapp herders he had hired in Norway, no difficulty had been experienced in retaining Mikkel Pulk and Aslak Tornensis on a new two-year contract. “With regard to [Mathis] Hatta, however, matters were somewhat different,” reported the Medical Health Officer, J. A. Urquhart, September 15, 1936:

This man has two small children and disliked intensely being separated from his family for fairly long periods. He also had decided during the winter that he would return to his own country and wavered considerably before coming to a final decision. At the last minute I believe it would have been possible to retain his services had I continued to urge him to stay. In the meantime, however, I discovered that there was a certain amount of friction between himself and the other two Lapps and taking that into consideration in addition to the fact that he was undoubtedly the poorest man of the three and was the ring leader in their threat to leave two years ago at the expiration of their original contracts, I concluded that there was little to be gained by retaining his service.

Erling was hoping to go on a collecting trip to Jasper Park that summer, but just as that fell through he received an invitation from Captain Bob Bartlett to join his expedition to Greenland, offering to land him at Disko Island on his way north and to pick him up when he returned a month later. He immediately applied for permission to go on the expedition in order to visit his parents whom
he had not seen for twelve years, leaving Ottawa on July 1 and returning on September 4. The ship sailed from Brigus, Newfoundland, on July 8. On July 14, under the heading of “at sea,” Erling wrote jubilantly to Anderson:

The good ship *Morrissey* is rolling its way up the Labrador coast and tonight we are expected to make a landfall at Turnovik. We have had head winds since we left Brigus and for 2½ days had to run in for shelter. Now finally it looks like we might enjoy calm weather for a spell. I managed to get ashore a few hours when we were tied up (most of the time it was too rough even to launch a boat) and I got quite an interesting collection of plants from a small outlying island. To my great surprise the flora was entirely without arctic elements, in fact less arctic than that of the north shore of the Gulf.

I am enjoying the trip immensely. There are lots of bergs (the first honest to God bergs I have seen since I left Greenland 12 years ago). For awhile we saw lots of *Balaenoptera sibbaldii* [Blue Whales] & as far north as lat 53° had water keeping around 50°; from then it dropped very suddenly & for the last day or two has been about 36–37°. We are quite a crowd on board – 25 in all. Twelve are merely high school kids and are having a wonderful time. At times I think they have the Captain worried with all their pranks. It is a rare crowd! They are all armed to the teeth and I am sure that not even Captain Kidd’s crew could have mustered such a display of six-shooters of all kinds & makes from venerable old blunderbusses from the Mexican war to up-to-date automatics. Pity the polar bear that ever goes near the *Morrissey*!\(^9\)

It is obvious from the tone of his letter that he was enjoying a real vacation. He was going home. It might be the Greenland that he was so anxious to leave all those years ago but this was the renewal that he needed after all he had gone through since then. When the ship reached Godhavn, he would have his father to talk to frankly, however “critic” he might be, about his professional trials and disappointments and fears, as well as his successes and hopes for the future. He would have his mother’s sympathy regarding his failed marriage, for Asta Por-sild remained in Denmark and would do so for the rest of her life, and receive support for how he was handling his life domestically looking after himself and his growing daughter in Ottawa. In a later letter to his old Greenland adventurer from Cambridge, England, now Professor Sir Albert Seward, he said that
he had found his parents “grown quite old in looks, if less so in spirit” while he told Raup on September 12 that “I got badly spoiled during my month at home. I had not seen mother or my sister for twelve years and you know what mothers and sisters will do under such circumstances.”

He was very interested in the changes he found in the vegetation due to climatic warming. He told Raup:

From Disko I got material for a small paper on “Botanical evidence of recent changes in climate.” Having been away for twelve years a number of changes in distribution of the southern element of the flora were most striking, although Dad at first would not hear of it (on principle, I believe). I could, of course, not get away on any extended trips, so concentrated on the local flora which from boyhood I know very well. It is, of course, well known that some climatic changes have taken place recently and that this, no doubt caused by the increased temperatures of the waters of Davis Strait. The change is most strikingly illustrated in the distribution of the cod and a number of other fishes. Although Disko bay, when we crossed in July, was full of bergs, we recorded at
surface temperature of 50° F. No one, however, so far has noted changes in the flora.

To Seward, who was also familiar with the areas that they had seen together in the past, he said “Skarvefjaeld was green almost to the summit and many of the rare plants of Engelskmandan’s Havn and Lyngmarken, that I knew so well as a boy, had spread at a surprising rate. In many places where willows and ground birch used to hug the ground I found small thickets. I hope sometime to publish a short notice of my findings.”

During the voyage along the Labrador coast, he had twelve hours ashore in four locations while the ship was getting fresh water. He told Raup, “I just saw enough to realize how much there is to be done there. I am working on my list now and believe that I have a few additions to the flora. Since so little has been done on that coast I suppose I am justified in getting out a list. My collections were made on three small islands and one at least, I think I can say is 95% complete with 120-odd species. Incidentally I have about 50 sheets of willows.”

When “Dr. A. E. Porsild” returned to Ottawa at the beginning of September, it was reported in the *Ottawa Journal* that his bulky “Arctic holiday luggage” contained more than 3,000 sheets of rare Labrador and Greenland plants, … including one supposed to be new to North America and another from Greenland that will probably prove to be altogether new to science…. Dr. Porsild did not find any evidence of the depression in Greenland and noted many changes since his last visit 12 years ago. He found that the pretty and picturesque native dresses of the Eskimo belles were replaced by stylish imported dresses and silk stockings. A soccer game was arranged at Godhavn between a native team and the younger members of the Bartlett expedition. Midnight sun shone on the icebergs in Disco Bay while the game was played. A surprise was in store for the American team as soon as the game started. The entire population of Godhavn viewed the game, cheering both sides with great impartiality when a goal was scored. The upshot was a 12–2 victory for the Greenlanders.

The article went on to state that Dr. Porsild had addressed the Greenland Parliament in Eskimo on the results of the reindeer experiment, and his father had presented him with a telescope used by Admiral Sir Leopold McClintock
during his famous voyage in the Fox in 1857–59 when the fate of the Franklin Expedition was solved in all its tragic details. The telescope had been given to McClintock’s Danish interpreter and dog-driver, Carl Petersen, and through his descendants had finally reached Dr. Morten Porsild. It was expected that it would be presented to the Dominion Archives.\textsuperscript{21}

While Erling was at Disko, Nicholas Polunin had also been collecting in Greenland but had received Erling’s letter too late to head north to meet him. In fact, he had not gone north at all as there was “far too much to do in the Julianehaab District” and he hoped to return there sometime. Like Erling, he reported that he had

… found several species new to Greenland and there must be many more. Also did some fairly intensive ecological work – but time was all too short. I am going to turn over my records to your father so that he can use them for his flora…. Yes I did a lot of work at the Gray – but what I did at New York was hardly work, but rather a rush through what I could do in a few days. Isn’t it a terrible place! In nomenclature and determinations I generally follow Fernald wherever possible; I do wish you would let me know where you disagree seriously, it would be invaluable for my work to have your opinion. I have of course considered it in such cases as Ledum decumbens, where, however, we shall never agree I fear.\textsuperscript{22}

With Erling’s trip behind him, except for a talk that he would give to the Ottawa Naturalist’s Club at their annual meeting on December 7 on “Botanizing in Labrador and Greenland,” he settled back to work in earnest in the Herbarium, trying to bring some form of order in the large material of unnamed plants in seven double herbarium cases, dating back to Malte’s collections from Alberta and New Brunswick and other important ones from various parts of Canada. The older collections, including a large one by Professor John Macoun, had been laid out and wrapped in newsprint that was coming to pieces due to age.

By December 14, he could also tell Raup that “I have been plugging along with the Northwest Territories Flora since I returned from Greenland. Various byproducts have seen the light in the process. One is to appear in Geographical Review January and another whenever space permits. A revision of the Canadian Cranberry may appear soon in the Ottawa Field Naturalist. Today I have started on my antennarias but I have not yet arrived at the point so commonly
found in German texts where the author with glee declares, – ‘Nun sieht man leicht.’” Raup had been pressing him to go down to the Gray Herbarium that winter, where he could stay with them and have an opportunity for “some old-fashioned rag-chewing;” but Erling did not think Mr. Malcolm would see the necessity for him to make the trip. Perhaps the Raups would like to come up to Ottawa to stay with him instead? He might find some interesting willows in the National Herbarium?23

Meanwhile, they had both been reading Vero Wynne-Edwards’ recent paper entitled *Isolated Arctic-Alpine Floras in Eastern North America*, which rejected Fernald’s theory of “nunataks” (taken from an Eskimo word for a mountain projecting above an ice-cap) that attempted to explain the disjointed distribution of plants across northern North America. This uneven plant distribution was a current problem under discussion in botanical circles. Most scientists generally accepted the fact that there were large areas across the north that had served as plant refugia and escaped glaciation in the form of an arc from west to east over Alaska, Yukon, the northern islands in the Arctic archipelago, and perhaps even the northern mountains in Labrador, but it still did not explain some rare western species growing in the East with no continental connection with the same species growing widely in the West. The nunatak theory proposed the idea that the plants were relicts of a time when they had spread across the continent but had escaped being wiped out in central areas only by being in isolated high areas above the continental ice sheet. Wynne-Edwards’ new paper postulated that the uneven distribution had more to do with the rare plants being lime-loving species that remained in suitable isolated habitats but died out in the more acidic soils of the Canadian Shield, thus breaking the connection.

Erling said: “I think on the whole that he is right, and Fernald probably realizes that some of his relict theories have to be somewhat modified. I myself never did believe in his ‘Nunatak refuges’ and had he ever himself visited Greenland or Labrador, he would have realized the impossibility.” To which Raup replied:

I have read Wynne-Edwards paper; in fact, I saw it in manuscript some time ago. I think it is very good so far as it goes, and no one is more willing that I am to examine critically Professor Fernald’s Nunatak hypothesis. However, as I told Wynne-Edwards, I have a very good idea of the quality of the steel in Professor Fernald’s armament. There
is one serious weakness in the paper, and that is that he has left out of
the picture entirely those phases of the Nunatak theory that have to do
with the coastal plain flora. I am inclined to think he would not have
such an easy time in dealing with these.24

Erling was still wondering what to do about his Alaska collection in September.
He told Raup that he expected soon to have his summer’s work written up and
could then “revise my paper on the Diomede Flora and try to get out some-
thing on the most interesting novelties in my Alaska collection before Hultén
describes it all.” The burning question of what to do about Alaska became even
more heated on December 17 when Raup wrote to say that a chap named Dr.
George Neville Jones had turned up at the Gray Herbarium and he was inter-
ested in doing the flora of Alaska. “Do you know,” he asked Erling, “whether
Hultén is actually planning a flora of Alaska? — Personally I am inclined to
think that Hultén should not attempt a flora of Alaska unless he is willing and
able to come to America for a considerable time to study the American affin-
ities of that flora.”25

It would be January before Erling would reply:

My reasons for not answering your letter before is first that I was laid
up most of the Xmas week and partly because I did not then know
what Hultén’s plans were. But I did have a long letter the other day.
Hultén is coming over some time this winter, and if Washington wants
to go ahead with the Flora, Hultén is prepared to spend four to six
months going over the various collections. I do not know Jones but I
do think Hultén is exceptionally well qualified for that job (wouldn’t
expect one Scandinavian to knock another even if he happens to be
a d … d Swede!). I wrote Hultén that he had better plan on six rather
than four months.

To which Raup added: “I think it is fine that he is coming over here, and I
hope that he will stretch his six months to a considerably longer time. I doubt
whether he knows what problems he is going to run into when he comes to
study the American continental relationships of the Alaskan flora.”26
Erling Porsild started his 1938 year by sending out duplicates of his Labrador and Greenland trip. “Did I tell you that we had a general housecleaning before Xmas,” he told Raup in January, “and now have the unnamed material sorted out after a fashion? There is almost a case of unnamed Macoun plants. Most of them were lying on newspapers and it was often very difficult to make out the pencil annotations on the edge. There were a couple of small collections from the Mackenzie basin – one from the Lower Liard but I did not see anything from the Peace. But lots from Yukon including some by Malte and some by Macoun that looked interesting. In all there are seven double cases of unnamed and unpublished material besides my own. And that does not include Cryptogams.”

His news brought a welcome response from Raup:

I am very much interested in those seven double cases of undetermined plants, and wish that somehow we here at the Gray and Arboretum could have access to them…. Here is a suggestion. Do you suppose it could be arranged for us to acquire a set of duplicates out of this mass of undetermined material if we were to undertake a considerable part of the determination? If it could be so arranged, I think I could spend a couple of weeks at Ottawa this winter running through it. If we could work together on it, I think we could get sight duplicates which I could bring here and work on further. Do you think this would be feasible? I do not know what the situation is with relation to the management of the herbarium’s affairs since your reorganization, but presume that you either have the authority to make such a deal, or could get it.
Erling immediately sent a memo to Assistant Curator Wyatt Malcolm who passed the word on to John McLeish, the new Director of Mines and Geology Branch under which the Herbarium was now administered, that

Dr. H. M. Raup of the Arnold Arboretum, who has spent several summers making botanical surveys in Canada and who is regarded by Canadian and American botanists as a very competent taxonomist, has offered to come to Ottawa for two weeks this winter and assist in putting our British Columbia material in good order. This will be without cost to the Canadian Government and will be done on condition that he be permitted to take duplicate specimens to the Gray Herbarium. There has always been very free exchange with the Gray Herbarium and we had on more than one occasion been under obligation to Dr. Fernald of Harvard for much needed advice. This has in all cases been most generously given. We recommend that Dr. Raup’s offer be accepted.3

Erling figured it would take a month to get the material ready once the offer was accepted and told Raup that he was happy to extend the offer of his ‘igloo’ if the Raups cared to share it with him – it was “small and primitive” but no worse than camping in Wood Buffalo Park. Raup, who could not get away before mid-February, replied: “I should very much like to stay at your house provided it wouldn’t be too much of an inconvenience. Mrs. Raup would like very much to come along, but I don’t know whether we could manage it or not…. Incidentally, what is the state of your duplicate material in the lichen collection? Could she undertake a program in the interest of the Farlow Herbarium similar to the one I have suggested with regard to the flowering plants? She is much interested in doing this if it could be arranged, and if she could get up there to do it.”4

Lucy Raup had been working on Erling’s lichens from Little Diomede Island so Erling was certainly interested. The lichens in the herbarium were still in the same shape as when Professor Macoun died, with the addition of fifteen fat bundles of lichens all determined and placed in envelopes. “You probably have a very fair idea as to what shape things were in when I came here, so I trust you will understand why nothing has been done with these collections. We should, of course, have a cryptogamic botanist in the Museum, but I do not imagine that we shall have one soon. It has even been suggested that I should
be able to take care of cryptogamic botany, as well as paleobotany, peat and pollen analysis.”

In the end, Hugh Raup came alone on the working trip in February, but much was accomplished in the short time at their disposal in going over the undetermined material in the seven cases and parcelling up duplicate sheets to be taken back to the Gray Herbarium for further identification, while Erling’s technical assistant, Miss Hilda Harkness, did what she could to help speed things along. When he got back to Cambridge, Raup wrote a long and significant letter to the Director of Mines and Geology on March 17.

I have recently spent two weeks in botanical research at the National Museum of Canada, associating with the botanist there, Mr. A. E. Porsild. May I take occasion to express my gratitude for many kindnesses received from the National Museum, and refer particularly to
the excellent co-operation I had from the botanical staff. I have been interested for a number of years in the development of the National Herbarium, both on account of my own studies on the plants of northwestern Canada, and also because of the importance of this herbarium to the advancement of botanical knowledge in all of Canadian America. I hope it will not be out of order for me to make a few comments regarding the present situation based upon my observations over the past decade.

May I say that the herbarium has been vastly improved during the past few years. Its present quarters in the Motor Building are well chosen, and although its separation from the library of the museum is a disadvantage, I understand that this difficulty is fairly well taken care of by adequate messenger service, and arrangements for the loan of certain much used books and periodicals. The herbarium itself is undergoing a highly desirable and efficient reorganization to make it more usable locally and for visiting botanists. A particularly useful project of late has been the sorting out of the great quantities of unstudied material which have been in storage for many years. Some of the most valuable collections which the herbarium possesses are in this mass of undetermined, undistributed material.

Mr. Porsild has obviously been responsible for this development, and I sincerely hope that the very real progress which he has made will be recognized. He is adequately trained for the work which is to be done in the herbarium. His knowledge of plants in the field is extensive and accurate, and he is well trained in herbarium techniques. I understand that his present position is an entirely temporary one, due not only to certain rules regarding the number of permanent employees in such institutions as this, but also to his lack of formally acquired university degrees. Upon the workings of the former I cannot intelligently comment, but I cannot help decrying the latter. At present there are very few young men who are as well trained in systematic botany and herbarium methods as Mr. Porsild, whether they have university degrees or not; and above all, men who are as well equipped for the field study of botany are extremely rare.

Such special branches of science as Mr. Porsild represents are very commonly mastered by people whose formal training is not large, and I can cite many cases of men in high positions of responsibility in the
biological and other fields of science who do not have these degrees. The present dean of the graduate school of Johns Hopkins University does not have even a bachelor's degree. The late C. D. Wolcott, who was for many years at the head of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, was also without formal degrees. One of the more recent appointments to the staff of the Botanical Museum at Harvard is in the important and complex field of paleobotany. The appointee is a young man who has no degrees beyond a bachelor's. Nevertheless his mastery of his field and his obvious teaching ability have made him a very desirable and useful addition to our organization. The present director of the Arnold Arboretum, who is also the Administrator of all botanical collections at Harvard University, has no earned academic degrees beyond that of Bachelor of Science. Likewise the present director of the Gray Herbarium has only the academically earned degree of Bachelor of Science. It seems to me that in the light of these things, and in the light of Mr. Porsild's obvious ability and promise, the rules might well be interpreted broadly and a somewhat more permanent position be given him. This would not only enable him to manipulate the affairs of the herbarium more efficiently, but give him a greater feeling of security in planning long-time projects.

The National Herbarium is one of the most valuable possessions of the National Museum of Canada. The material in it will be the foundation upon which botanical knowledge of the vast regions of western and northwestern Canada must be built. The economic utilization of a great deal of this region must rest upon an adequate knowledge of the natural flora and plant associations which cover it now or have covered it in the past. The late John Macoun contributed valuable pioneer efforts in this direction, but anyone who has studied the northern and western floras with any degree of detail knows that a great amount of work is yet to be done before this knowledge is codified and made usable. Particularly useful would be floras, carefully worked out on a sound systematic basis, of the prairie provinces and of the national parks. These can be done either directly from the National Herbarium or in close collaboration with it. The Herbarium, with its rich collections, has lain fallow for many years. Dr. Malte, the late Chief Botanist, though a brilliant student, was unable to accomplish much due to failing health. Now that a man of ability and accomplishments is at
hand – one who is particularly well prepared for this work – it seems that he should be given adequate support, not only with a position of greater permanence, but also by means of sufficient funds to carry on.⁶

Raup’s letter to McLeish was extraordinary for several reasons. No qualified outsider had expressed more clearly the need for recognition of the important pioneer collection work of the National Herbarium of Canada and the useful attributes and organizational abilities of its temporary curator at that time, but in his careful letter he also disclosed incredible details of this transition period in the field of science in North America, where men with talent who lacked the necessary “pieces of paper” at a university level could still be successful and make considerable contributions in their chosen arenas.

For the time being, Raup’s plea to give Erling a permanent position would make no difference to the hiring rules at the Museum, but at least the letter had created a favourable impression and would be on file for later reference. Erling did not find out about it until two weeks later, although he began to get hints from Museum staff. On March 29, he wrote:

The other day I met Lynch at some official function, when, in passing, he commented on something you had told him about the herbarium and my work there. Later I saw Jenness at a committee meeting and he said some more. Finally this morning a copy of your letter to the Director was sent over ‘for my information,’ so now the ‘cat is out of the bag’ and did I blush! I wish I could believe it all. You certainly made out a very good case for me and for the herbarium – as Jenness put it: ‘It certainly can do no harm.’ It was certainly a fine thing to do and whether it is going to help or not I wish to assure you of my appreciation. I only hope that you do not think I had any thing like that in mind, when I asked you, before you went to see Malcolm, if the opportunity arose, to say a good word for the herbarium – and that you did not perjure yourself in thinking up so many laudatory adjectives. In the end the ‘joke’ may be on me in living up to it all.⁷

Raup seems to have been energized by his trip north. After seeing the extent of the boreal material in the National Herbarium, and with his large new collection from the Peace area that he had brought down from Ottawa to determine in addition to his own collections from Wood Buffalo Park, on April 22, he
wrote: “I have been having some more wild ideas, as you will see from the enclosed prospectus. I have had the seeds of the plan in mind for some time, but sort of let them rest until this spring when the warm weather appears to have made them germinate!” His proposal was to have a group of specialists work on a new Flora of Boreal America. “I hope you will read the proposal as critically as possible,” he asked Erling, “give me any suggestions you may have as to changes or additions, and then let me know if you are willing to collaborate. I talked it over with Hultén when he was here, but have only recently got it down on paper. He seemed ready to cooperate, and was rather enthusiastic about it. Dr. Jones has also signified his willingness to go into the project, and we have Dr. Merrill’s hearty support for the whole thing.”

“Your plan certainly is an ambitious one,” Erling replied, “but, there is no denying, also a fascinating one. I admire your courage in wishing to tackle a job of such magnitude – for it is no use thinking that it is not going to be a big job…. I am naturally keenly interested, and, although, as you know, a born sceptic and pessimist, more than willing to co-operate as fully as circumstances will permit me.” He assumed that the flora would be descriptive rather than a listing of species, and would require a revision of a great many groups by a number of specialists. “A strong point for your plan, I think, is that the proposed sponsors are all private institutions, and as much as I should have liked to see a work of this kind emanate from Canada, I realize fully that we shall not live to see that happen.” He wished there might be a way to get some kind of grant from Canada without strings attached, and he understood why the National Museum of Canada was not included in the list of sponsors, although its co-operation would be very much needed since the bulk of the material for the flora would be found there. He did not think Malte and Ostenfeld’s papers were going to be of any help due to their narrowly defined arctic flora and because most of their notes were merely citations from their own herbaria. “Between ourselves,” he added, “I wonder to what extent Hultén would actually be willing to co-operate. Would he be willing to shelf his Alaska flora?”

Earlier that winter there had been an exchange of letters between Erling and Hultén in which the latter had told him of his plans to visit the North American herbaria shortly and his progress with keys and maps for his Alaska Flora but he was hoping to have some of the Porsild material to be included. As he said on December 18, 1937: “I hope you soon will have your papers on the Alaska flora in print. I am longing for them.” And on February 14, 1938: “I am most curious on your flora of the Barren Grounds. It is for the present the most
unknown gap in the arctic flora. When do you think that it can be expected?” By May 10, Hultén had been in Washington for six weeks. As Raup had predicted, he was finding the North American material more of a challenge than he had expected. He was quite tired after working for four months continuously from early morning to late in the evening but he thought he would be finished with his Alaska studies by the end of the month. “I have had a hard job to go through all in Gray Herbarium and here but I think that I have got most everything from Alaska in these herbaria now,” he wrote. “There are now things that apparently are found in Ottawa that I should like to see and I therefore plan to go to Ottawa when I am through here. I intend for stay only for some few days, however as I hardly expect to find so much that I have not already seen. Naturally I should like to discuss things with you and I therefore ask if you will be in Ottawa end of this month and if it will be convenient for you.”

Hultén had not arrived by May 30, when Erling told Raup that he had read his paper on Little Diomede Island for the Royal Society meeting earlier that week “and the next day the Canadian Press credited me with the discovery of a former land connection between Asia and America,” but arrived in Ottawa June 2. He was still there when Erling wrote to Raup: “Hultén has been here for about ten days and is staying with us. He is now working on Pedicularis. I expect it will take him another week to finish. When he came he said he expected to finish the job in a ‘couple of days.’” Although Hultén was later to express his “deep gratitude for the pleasant days” in the Porsild home in Ottawa and for everything during his visit there, during the time he spent in the National Herbarium he was still pressing to be given the Alaska material that Erling wanted to write up himself, and in Hultén’s introduction to his eventual “Flora of Alaska and Yukon” he noted: “The sets of plants collected by Dr. M. O. Malte and that of the Porsild brothers preserved in the Nat. Herb. Ottawa, were at the time of my visit to Ottawa not inserted in the herbarium and I had no opportunity of examining them, which is much to be regretted.”

Erling was expecting the Raups in June on a family visit. They had been discussing the idea of going to the Green or White Mountains together on their return south, but he was now hoping to persuade them to join him on the Gaspé Peninsula. “I am quite sick for a whiff of kelp and salt water,” he said. “What do you think of it? A week would not give us much time for botanical collecting but we could make a trip inland to see what the plateau flora looks like.” Raup was not sure if they could manage the time or money but they were coming up at the end of the month for the meeting of the American Association for
the Advancement of Science being held in Ottawa June 27–July 2, in which he would be giving a symposium and Erling a field trip to Mer Bleue bog on the outskirts of the city, and it could all be “chewed over” when they got there. “Give our very best regards to Hultén,” Raup said, giving an arrival date of June 28. “We hope to see him again before he goes back to Sweden.”

Once the meetings in Ottawa were over and Hultén was on his way back home from New York on the Swedish ship *Gripsholm*, “Mr. Porsild” was not in the Herbarium for the next ten days or so. He and his teenaged daughter joined the Raups and their two young children on a happy camping and collecting holiday around the Gaspé Peninsula, where they were able to see for themselves some of the rare disjunct species discussed in Fernald’s and Wynne-Edwards’ papers. When it was over, Edith went back to Massachusetts to stay with the Raups for the rest of the summer while her father returned to Ottawa with a car “full of *Empetrum* and codfish,” which left the others to wonder what his
vehicle smelled like when he got back home. It is worth noting that this holiday marked the consolidation of a real friendship between the Porsild and Raup families. For the first time in Erling's official correspondence, he was comfortable enough to include personal references to his daughter, even though she had been with him all through the Reindeer Station and early Ottawa years. In a personal interview in 1985, Edith Porsild (by then Karin Lumsden) said she certainly was present during Hultén’s visit to their home in 1938. For her, it had been far from a pleasant visit because she dreaded the silent mealtimes and the evenings when the men retired to her father’s study for long and angry arguments. All through that ensuing summer, official letters between Erling and the Raups included news of Edith and how she was enjoying Boston until she returned home safely on August 22 “with just a trace of New England accent.”

While Erling was away, Nicholas Polunin’s first manuscript on the flora of the Eastern Arctic had arrived on Anderson’s desk with a request to have Mr. Porsild look it over and express his opinions as to whether the Museum should proceed with the publication. Erling immediately sat down to pay serious attention to “Botany of the Canadian Eastern Arctic in 4 parts,” Part I, dealing with the vascular plants. The manuscript consisted of nearly 600 typewritten pages, roughly 180,000 words, beginning with a general introduction outlining the scope of the paper and the history of previous botanical exploration, and continuing with a discussion of the 297 species now recognized from the area. He looked first at its strengths. “The work evidently is the result of much painstaking research,” Erling wrote to Malcolm on July 19, “involving critical examination of practically all existing material from the region, deposited in the leading herbaria of the New and Old World and also of a great deal of library research. It consolidates and brings up to date our knowledge of the vascular flora of the Eastern Arctic.” Having given credit where it was due, he then looked at the paper’s weaknesses, finding its failures to be much in line with the author’s youth and inexperience combined with over-confidence as were noted from personal observation in the Herbarium the year before:

In his taxonomical treatment and delimitation of species the author, on the whole, appears to be rather conservative. He has undertaken to deal with the entire flora himself, rather than enlist the assistance of specialists for the most critical groups. Notwithstanding the author’s claim to greater conformity resulting from this procedure, in view of his youth and necessarily somewhat limited experience this departure
may, perhaps, tend to weaken the treatment under discussion. In the
general discussion, given under each species, the author quite often in-
dulges in a good deal of youthful, and in some cases quite unnecessary
and undignified whimsicality and at times, unfair criticism of previ-
ous workers and authors; also, it seems that often a great deal of space
is given to elaboration of commonplace and seemingly unimportant
and irrelevant detail.

Despite technical deficiencies in the manuscript, such as not giving the col-
lector’s number for specific specimens, using personal abbreviations in citing
herbaria instead of those proposed by international agreement, and a care-
lessly prepared typescript with numerous corrections and additions in often
unintelligible handwriting making it unsuitable for editing, Erling concluded
that it still showed that the author had a “remarkably good understanding of
the taxonomical and phytogeographical problems involved” and the paper was
most decidedly worthy of publication, although its scientific value would not be
impaired if it was thoroughly edited and considerably reduced in size.\textsuperscript{14}

When he had finished his critique of Polunin’s work, it was time for Erling
to re-examine his own publishing priorities. Up to this point, as expected by
his Department officials, he had been putting most of his major emphasis on
his Flora of Northwest Canada, but he was beginning to realize that if he did
not get out his paper on Alaska soon, the early collecting work that he and Bob
had done would be by-passed by Hultén’s forthcoming and more encompassing
flora. He felt it was imperative that the new records they had made, particularly
in the interior, should be made by him first, and could then be included in the
larger work belonging to someone else. He must have discussed his need for
this publication with Raup, for on July 28 he wrote:

\begin{quote}
I guess your visit here and the trip to Gaspé did me a world of good
and I have been feeling quite energetic and am going after the Alaska
paper in earnest. I have made quite satisfactory arrangements with the
[Ottawa Field Naturalists]. They have even promised to print the first
instalment in the September number, but I can see now that I won’t
have it ready. Like all that kind of papers it is going to take a lot more
space than I thought first. I had hoped to be able to write the general
part – about 5,000 words for the first instalment, but I find it tough
\end{quote}
going without the catalogue, so I am doing that now and have got to the end of Cyperaceae.\textsuperscript{15}

A week later, he could report that with any luck the first instalment should appear in the October number of “The Naturalist.” [The journal to which Erling was referring was originally called “The Ottawa Naturalist” but later became “The Canadian Field-Naturalist,” although still based in Ottawa.]

They have agreed to run 5,000 words monthly if I can deliver the goods. That, I think, is most satisfactory and as good an arrangement as I could possibly hope to make anywhere. What I am trying to do is this: In the first and general part I endeavour to give a general ecological floristical description of the places visited by us and that have not been published before. I cannot, however, hope to include everything and do not attempt to do that, only such things that I happen to have looked up at Gray, N.Y. and U.S. Nat. Herb. I am giving only the most necessary bibliographical citations and synonyms because Hultén will do that. And I give the briefest possible notes on general distribution. Nevertheless the paper is going to be a long one, longer than I first realized. The number of species will aggregate 500 and the paper perhaps 30,000 words. I shall have to describe half a dozen ‘new’ species. I am not sure how I shall manage the Latin, but if I can do no better, I shall even attempt to do it myself…. I couldn’t inveigle you to read the ms critically – the whole ms, I mean?

He had sent the final manuscript of the “Diomede list” to his father, who had been in Denmark since the previous fall, and was agreeably surprised by the recently returned comments as he had been wondering whether it was worth publishing or not.\textsuperscript{16}

Erling had told his father’s old friend Elmer Ekblaw, Professor of Geography at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in February:

Dad had planned to retire next year and … went to Denmark on a year’s ‘furlough’ … to prepare the publication of his life-work on the Greenland flora…. In each new letter I can read between the lines that his resolution of retiring next year is gradually weakening and that at heart he is ‘homesick’ for his beloved ‘Station.’ The trouble is, of
course, that after having spent a life time in Greenland he finds so many things changed at home. Also, I think, perhaps that in these days of breathless scurry for the sensational he finds himself a ‘forgotten man.’ He no doubt realizes that he has stayed too long in Greenland and that life has passed by. He has to go back to Greenland for a year to wind up his work at Disko, but I sincerely hope that he will not stay on. Thirty-two years in Greenland are altogether too many and I think that after a year or two in Denmark he would be able to adjust himself to the change. At any rate mother has found the last few years in the North very hard, and I am sure, should not go back for an indefinite period.17

It would not be long before his parents returned to Greenland, and Erling would tell Seward November 29:

From his letters I gather that his year in Denmark had been a disappointment and that he was glad to go back…. In a way I am sorry to see him go back because he has already spent too many years in Greenland. For many years he has worked on his two large papers “Fruits of Arctic Plants” and “Flora of Greenland.” But he needs a larger library and herbarium and above all new contacts and new points of view that he cannot have at Disko. But I can well understand that he did not find working conditions congenial in the very cramped offices of the Copenhagen Museum, where a visiting botanist is fortunate if he can obtain for himself the use of a card table and a 10 Watt light in a dark secluded corner of the Arctic Herbarium.18

Although Erling was concerned about the welfare of his elderly parents, the most disturbing news of his summer came in the form of Museum developments in the middle of August. It looked as if Erling’s job in the Herbarium was in jeopardy. “Mr. Malcolm came to see me this afternoon and said that he was somewhat worried about me,” he told Raup on August 16:

You know M. well enough to know that he does not always tell you everything, but this was the message that he conveyed. Being a temporary, my certificate has to be renewed each six months and the last time the Civil Service Commission put their backs up urging that
something be done about the position I was filling. They thought that if I was not qualified to be permanently appointed the position ought to be advertised and thrown open to free competition. If advertised for the classification of “Botanist” – the title I now hold – a great many botanists including plant pathologists were eligible; for this reason the Bureau thought they might have it changed to that of Associate Botanist with Taxonomy as main line of training.

That was the preliminaries and now comes the rub. Mr. M. did not say whether the Bureau or the C.S.C. in looking over my qualifications had been apprehensive of the lack of impressive letters but they were worrying about it. In other words they did not know what to think of me. I had come to the Museum through irregular channels and not with the benediction of some Scientific Board appointed by the C.S.C. to pass on my qualifications. And since no one in the Museum were in a position to check up on me, no one, to use M.’s words were in a position to say whether I were actually doing bona fide scientific work or merely “putting over a big bluff.” I had now been at work at the Herbarium for two years and a half and while M. himself did not doubt that I was doing good work, there was really nothing to show for it.

That all, of course, merely boiled down to what you were telling me last winter, that I very badly need some worth while publication to consolidate my position, to wit, my long overdue Flora of Northwest Canada. Mr. M. thought it would be a fine thing if I could very soon have the finished ms. to show for my two and a half years of work at the herbarium. I realized that it would be useless to try and show Mr. M. what had been done in the herbarium since I came here, so instead I told him that I did have quite a few publications that I thought any unbiased body perhaps would accept as proof of my qualifications as a taxonomic botanist. I also told him about the ms. of the Flora of Alaska. I had spoken to him about that before, but he had not realized that it was so big a thing. I also told him what I had thought of doing with it.

Mr. M. thought that a 35,000 word paper on the flora of Alaska, while not as good as a completed Flora of Northwest Canada, might be a very useful thing for me, and he made one observation also which is the real reason for this letter. He said in substance; That neither he, nor the director, nor the C.S.C. would be in a position to pass on the merits
of such a paper. That he realized the expedience of having it published in the Ottawa Field Naturalist, but that to a body like the C.S.C. the fact that it was published there and not in a prominent botanical magazine would very much detract from it, or, even worse, he thought that it might to them even signify that the paper had not been deemed worthy of publication in a botanical magazine. This is an angle I had not thought of, but I do think that M. is quite right. I explained to him that few botanical magazines probably would consider a paper of 35,000 words, and that at any rate it would take a terribly long time to get it out that way, whereas in the Ottawa Field Naturalist I would be able to get it out in five or six instalments. Now, the more I think about this point of view the more I get M’s point and I now want to ask you what you think about it. M. has a very high opinion of Fernald’s views and thought that the place for me to have this published would be in *Rhodora*. Then I could stand back and say “Gentlemen, this paper was considered worthy of publication by Fernald, so it must be good and I must be a great taxonomist.” I realize, of course, that *Rhodora* would be a much better place to get the paper published and I also realize that Fernald’s O.K. would mean a lot, not only with regard to the C.S.C., and the O.K. of the O. F-N editor very little.

Before I do anything about it would you let me have your reactions? And also what you think F’s reactions would be. I think when we discussed this possibility before you said that it might be possible to speed up publications in *Rhodora* by making a contribution towards the cost of publication. If the cost of doing this would be within my means I suppose that would be money well spent. Needless to say I would not be afraid of competing for the position in a regular way, that is to say if I thought that the board of examiners were in a position to judge my work on its merits. On the other hand I should probably stand a small chance with a board of Canadian University Professors who had one or several of their own candidates running. To them, I feel, that whatever work I have done in botany would count little against my missing letters. Malcolm did not say so, but I had the feeling during the interview that the Bureau were all for me and wanted me to get the permanent appointment, but, that since things are the way they are, to protect themselves, they very much feel the need for some one of great authority to O.K. me scientifically. Do you think
Fernald would do that if approached by the C.S.C. or the Bureau, or would he think that a great imposition.19

Raup was sorry to hear that Erling was worried over his appointment but guessed he would have to meet that sort of difficulty. To answer his questions, he said:

Personally I don’t know that publication in *Rhodora* is so much better than in the C.F.N. After all, the circulation of *Rhodora* is not large, though it is rather wide, the only advantage would be, as you suggest, that if M.L.F. put his seal on the ms. to the extent of accepting it – that would be “something” in the eyes of your officials. If you want to try it, I see no reason for your not sounding out Prof. Fernald. You could write him saying that you have the ms. which for geographic reasons won’t be published by the Can. Government, and that you are willing to help in the financing in order to expedite publication. If he is willing to talk business at all he will tell you in jig time what the cost would be. In laying the matter before him I think it would be well to state rather clearly why you want to publish it now – that you are not competing with Hultén in his work on a larger Alaskan flora, but rather that this is the result of your own work over a period of years, and that by getting it out you not only do justice to yourself, but you make the material readily available to Hultén. Please take this only as a suggestion!

With regard to the C.S.C. approaching Prof. Fernald, I can see no reason why he should react unfavourably. It seems to me the scheme to make a new title – Associate Botanist etc. – is a good one. Something should be done to protect the position. I personally hope something is done about the whole thing pretty soon, before some outsider who isn’t up to it is hastily groomed for the job. Suggestions are easy and cheap, but I hope you’ll forgive me if I make another. I think it wouldn’t hurt any if you made a valiant attempt to demonstrate to the Museum people, the C.S.C., and to whoever else will listen – what you’ve done in the herbarium. That herbarium when in running order has a real function, and you are getting it in running order – so why not say so!! You may have to lineup a little preaching about its significance and general workings of the place before you begin tooting your own horn, but that won’t do any damage.20
Given Raup’s wise counsel, Erling immediately wrote to Professor Fernald at the Gray Herbarium, telling him of the work he had been doing for some years, with publication in view, on the vascular plants that he and his brother had collected in Alaska in 1926, stating that it was probably the largest single collection made there outside S.E. Alaska and the Aleutian chain. “In view of Hultén’s forthcoming Flora of Alaska, I realized when he came here last spring that I must make this collection available forthwith. The simplest way, and perhaps the most satisfactory, would be to turn the entire collection over to Hultén but, because of the large amount of work already done on it before Hultén even became interested in the Alaska flora, and because this work was practically in shape for publication, I was naturally reluctant to do that.”

He was careful to dismiss any danger of competing with Hultén in his own work: “I give a brief ecological description of the places visited but, because of the nature of the work and because of Hultén’s forthcoming flora, I have abstained from any phytogeographical discussion of the material. In the annotated list I cite all our own collection and only such additional ones that are of particular interest and which are from the same localities visited by us and that have not been published elsewhere. But, because Hultén can do that better than I, no attempt has been made to make it a complete list of the plants known from the entire region visited.”

He had looked at different ways to publish his Alaska material. It could not be published as a National Museum Bulletin as the region covered was outside Canada. A second possibility was in the Ottawa Field-Naturalist, but before committing to that he wanted to sound out the possibility of having it published in Rhodora. “I fully realize that the size of the paper strongly militates against it and also that Rhodora probably is tied up for a long time in advance, so that it would not be possible to publish it there in time to make it useful to Hultén.” If it should prove acceptable, however, he would be glad to contribute towards the cost to expedite publication.

Getting the work out in time for Hultén was not the only reason that he was anxious to get his paper out now, Erling said. There was another reason that was inherent with the set-up and management of the National Museum with which he believed that Fernald was quite familiar:

When I came to the National Herbarium two and a half years ago I at once realized that to do any serious work there it would be necessary first to put in a lot of time placing the herbarium in working order. In
making this statement I do not in the least wish to minimize or criticize the work done by Dr. Malte but, as you know, Dr. Malte during the last years of his life was very seriously handicapped, not alone by poor health but also by the total lack of trained botanical assistance and even by the lack of a capable technical assistant. Moreover, the herbarium had, since Malte’s death, been transferred to another building and for more than two years to all practical purposes closed up.

I at once explained these matters to the Museum direction, but at the time well realized that the amount of work actually needed to do this was not at all clear to them.

He had started by incorporating into the herbarium the numerous monographic treatments and revisions of genera and families that had been made during the last ten to fifteen years, involving corrections and revisions of several thousand sheets. While the task was not yet completed, he had made much needed rearrangements, particularly in the Canadian collections, to place the largest families in systematical order and indexed. In addition to the above there had been the usual routine of re-establishing and handling exchanges totalling 13,000 sheets, herbarium loans totalling 5,482 and the mounting and insertion of about 16,500 sheets, etc. etc.

In the latter I have been fortunate in having a very efficient and capable technical assistant but these routine matters, nevertheless, because no botanical assistance is available, have taken up much of my time. While very important to the herbarium, much of the above mentioned work has been of a nature that is not very easily demonstrated to a non-botanical direction, or for that matter to anyone not familiar with herbarium practise and it has, of course, very much delayed the research and writing of what is officially considered my primary task – the writing of my “Flora of N.W. Mackenzie.”

That work was progressing well and he hoped to complete it by the end of the coming winter, but meanwhile his position in the herbarium was still a temporary one and it was expected that, in view of legislation passed in Spring, a permanent appointment to the Herbarium would soon have to be made. “Personally,” he said,
... I feel that my past and present experience and work in systematic botany makes me fully qualified for this position but I fully realize that, to the Museum management and to the Civil Service Commission who jointly will make the appointment, my limited academic attainments seriously militate against me. I do have a dozen or so of botanical papers to my credit and I feel also that my northern grazing survey and my administration of the reindeer experiment, on which I spent ten years, is being recognized but I feel also that when the appointment is to be considered this winter some tangible evidence of my work in the herbarium would have been highly desirable.21

When Erling had finished his long letter to Fernald, he sent a copy to Raup saying he thought it was three pages too long and thus ran the danger of Fernald not bothering to read it, but thanking him for his prompt help with the matter and apologizing for giving the impression that he was much worried about the appointment. “Really I am not. I am a fatalist and have a strong belief that things in the end always work out the best possible way.”22

He did not have long to wait for a reply from Fernald, who, after all, had been concerned about how to help the son of his old friend Morten Porsild all the way back to 1925, and who knew how much his old friend Oscar Malte had valued the Porsild brothers’ contributions from Alaska in 1926. He also knew how much Hultén wanted to see their results and what Raup had told him of the improvements in the National Herbarium since Erling Porsild had worked there. Like Raup, he was not happy with the idea of someone being appointed to the Canadian Herbarium who was not suitable, just because of having the university qualifications.

On August 29, he sent Erling the following:

Mr. Weatherby and I have carefully considered the possibility of publishing your Alaska paper in Rhodora. As you say, the journal is pretty thoroughly booked up for many months ahead, but it would be possible, by putting in extra paging, to get your paper into print during the spring months. There are several long papers already pledged to be published in the early months. The region is far outside that usually covered by Rhodora, which holds itself responsible for the northeastern section of the continent, but we realize the importance of your having proper publication, and are ready to do our part to help you.
Looking at ways to reduce the paper in the publication, he said:

If you could raise $100.00 towards the cost of extra paging we could push the paper along as soon as possible. If this meets your wishes we can give you a letter upon receipt of the manuscript accepting the paper for publication, which would serve your purposes in showing the Museum management that this long paper is about to be published. We fully agree with you that your own long experience and your very detailed work should be published under your own name rather than to be turned over to some one else to be merged in his work.23

Erling was overjoyed by Fernald’s favourable reaction to his *Rhodora* proposal. He told Raup September 2: “I showed the letter to Mr. Malcolm today and I think he was quite impressed by the fact that Prof. Fernald would even discuss publication before he had seen the M.S.” In turn, Malcolm sent a copy of Fernald’s letter to McLeish the next day, adding: “The paper referred to is a taxonomic work on the plants collected in Alaska by Mr. Porsild during his investigations for the Department of the Interior. It is a much longer paper than is usually printed in a botanical journal and it is very interesting to know that Dr. Fernald whose opinion commands great respect in our Department is ready to go out of his way to provide for its early publication. This is a strong piece of evidence of Mr. Porsild’s qualifications as a taxonomist.”24

Erling spent the next two months in a fever of work to complete the manuscript in the short time available. Raup pronounced the first part “first-rate, and should not only make a notable contribution to the Alaska flora, but also it will grace the pages of *Rhodora* to good purpose.” He thought it would be a good thing if Erling told Hultén what he intended to do, so on October 13, Erling wrote to Sweden to tell Hultén that since the visit to Ottawa he had realized that he should make his Alaska collections available to him without further delay and had put aside all other matters and worked very hard day and night. “Realizing the importance of getting this publication out as quickly as possible I put the matter before Professor Fernald who accepted the paper for publication in *Rhodora*.... In the catalogue, between 550 and 600 species are enumerated, including a large number which are new to the flora of Alaska. In view of your forthcoming monograph, I have only tried to cover the region visited by myself but I make no claim of having included all species known from that region.”25
Erling drove down to Boston on October 31 and reported to Malcolm that the following three weeks were spent in herbaria and library research at the Gray Herbarium, Cambridge, and the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain. “On November 7th, at the invitation of Dr. E. D. Merrill, Director of Harvard Botanical Institutions and President of the New England Botanical Club, I addressed a meeting of taxonomists, held under the auspices of the New England Botanical Club at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. My subject was the Flora of Alaska. On November 8th I submitted my manuscript entitled ‘Contribution to the Flora of Alaska’ to Professor M. L. Fernald, Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the New England Botanical Club, who, having read the paper, accepted it for publication in Rhodora.”

26
CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT
RUMBLES ON THE HORIZON

When the snow fell on Ottawa’s Peace Tower at the beginning of 1939, no one could imagine that before the next New Year Canada would be at war and the long Depression of the Dirty Thirties would be over. So many difficult years had passed and still seemed as if they would never end that January, with ongoing tough times for a nation struggling with financial problems and widespread unemployment and hardship, times when men like Erling Porsild had been extremely fortunate to have a job at all, however temporary it seemed. As Pierre Berton put it: “One million Canadians were still on relief. Jobs remained hard to get, even though many who had them were overworked. Social workers had too many desperate cases, doctors too many indigent patients, teachers too many ragged students crammed into rundown classrooms. Since 1930, the country had been living from hand to mouth. The government had shovelled nine hundred million dollars into direct-aid works and projects for unemployment relief and agricultural distress and had precious little to show for it. The number of people dependent on public funds was still rising, yet the nation’s leaders seemed incapable of effective planning.”

In retrospect, despite the widespread and desperate need across the country, the decade had not been a bad one for people who were lucky enough to be working and living comfortably in a world of low expectations. In the National Museum, relatively safe under the umbrella of the Government of Canada, there had been cutbacks in research and personnel, and there was a need to hold everything as close to the bare essentials as possible, but the Depression amounted to not much more than stringent checks on expenses and a tight rein on anything that was deemed to be more than absolutely necessary. Curtailment of field costs was definitely part of the order of the day, so in discussing
the Raups’ summer field work in their January exchange of letters, Erling felt he would not be able to join them however much he would like to do so.

The Raups’ proposal was certainly enticing. They were aiming for the South Nahanni River country in the Mackenzie Mountains north of the Liard River, a region that they claimed was not only a part of the vast botanical “terra incognita” of northern Canada, but lay in a position intermediate between the somewhat better-known districts of the Mackenzie basin and Alaska. Their purpose would be to make a study of the mountain flora of the northern Rockies in the light of its relation to the floras of the central Rocky Mountains, the Arctic Coast, and the Bering Sea region, and to accumulate geographic data for the study of plant ranges on a broad scale in the northwestern part of the continent. They thought it was especially desirable for them to learn the phytogeographical relations of the unglaciated portions of the far-northern cordillera.²

Erling would have liked nothing better than to join them. He had told Hultén in December that he would be starting to write up his Flora of the Northwest Mackenzie in the new year, and Fernald and Raup had been urging him, if at all possible, to take in all the Northwest Territories west of Hudson Bay, rather than limiting himself to the somewhat artificial boundaries of the region which his own work had covered. “I have not spoken to anyone yet about field work this summer,” he told Raup January 12,

… I think I would like to get out to where I can see some real mountains. I have now cleaned up all the Yukon collection – in all about 500–600 numbers. There was more in Malte’s collection than I had thought first…. If I cannot go with you, I think I should like to go to the Yukon. I should not want to try and do too much. I should like to get in to Dawson and cover as much of the vicinity as possible and then make a trip up into the Ogilvie mountains. An alternative would be to go to Mayo. From here I can go to Mayo Lake by car and get into mountains 6,000–7,000 feet high. There will be much activity this summer in the Mayo section and I could perhaps get co-operation from one or several of our field parties. Either project, for a three month’s season, with one extra man picked up in Vancouver, would cost about $2,000.00.³

There were, however, other concerns to ponder that January. For the first time in his correspondence with Raup, on January 23, Erling mentioned emerging problems between the National Herbarium and the Botany Division of the
Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, beginning with a very critical personal appraisal of newcomer Howard Senn. He had been watching Senn with keen interest since he arrived, he said, had sized him up as a smooth-talking climber with a great capacity for work, and suspected that he was “something of a bluffer” who had been “strutting his stuff” at the Farm. It seemed that Senn had been casting covetous eyes in the direction of the National Herbarium, although Erling was hoping that he would be prevented from launching any major schemes by the fact that his Experimental Farm Chief, H. T. Gussow, was presently under a cloud for preaching fascism rather too openly in the feelings of the day.

“I think I told you of the first scheme,” Erling said, “in which G[ussow], no doubt at S[enn’s] suggestion, proposed to the Museum that, since the Museum had shown itself unable to do anything with the large collections from the Ottawa district, to have these transferred to the Farm. This plan was rather coldly received at the Museum. My recommendation was that this material could not be worked up to better advantage anywhere else than at the National Herbarium. We did not have the staff to do it at present, but if Gussow could furnish somebody capable of doing the job, we should be glad to publish a flora of the Ottawa District.”

He was having some amusement at Senn’s expense. There had been a round-table meeting the previous fall in which it was realized that there were a number of people in Ottawa who were more or less interested in botany but were frightened by keys and manuals and technical terms. It was agreed that those people should be given some guidance with an informal Botany Class meeting once a week. Senn had been made chairman to allot lectures and demonstrations to various specialists, so Erling was surprised to find when he got back from Boston in November that Senn had decided to give a full-blown course in Plant Taxonomy in a series of thirty-six lectures.

Erling attended two of the lectures and thought it all a waste of time for everybody. They consisted of a more or less verbatim rendering of one of the modern texts, and the students were expected to make very full notes spelling out all the names he put on the blackboard for them. “It was very funny to watch the proceedings,” Erling reported not too kindly to Raup. “About half the class was girls of Miss Harkness caliber, mostly from the Seed Branch and from the Farm. They came armed with hand lenses, expecting to be shown how to find the petals and stamens in a flower. They all sat greatly awed filling page after page with long Latin names of fossil cryptogams or with names of Cuban
ferns. When the modern ferns were discussed, only one or two Canadian species were mentioned. Each of them were afraid to admit to the other that all these names were not ‘household words’ to such as her.”

He was even more amused to receive a circular letter addressed to all who had attended the lectures asking them to show their appreciation to Senn “for giving up so freely of his time” by giving him a Fellowship in the Linnean Society.

I am afraid that I have made myself very unpopular by … suggesting that for our “group” to “present” fellowships in the L.S., might possibly invite uncomplimentary comment and by suggesting as an alternative to present Senn with a Life-membership in the Ottawa Field-Naturalist’s Club. I don’t want you to get the impression from the above that “I don’t like Senn” or that I am lacking in co-operative spirit. On the contrary. And I very much realize that we need somebody here in Ottawa with a little pep. On the other hand I think, as Malcolm said of Polunin: “You know, Porsild, Polunin is a young man,” and I think his ascent on the firmament should not be too rapid.

A propos Polunin – the second part of “his” Flora of the Eastern Arctic has appeared in a 2,000 page typescript. It deals with the cryptogams. I have not actually counted the pages and there is no pagination – but the stack measures six inches. Future collectors of cryptogams do not need to bother about the Eastern Arctic. “10:45 P.M. – There, the pond-weeds are done fairly.”

On March 2, he wrote: “Fernald for some time has been sending me a daily greeting by postcard or letter with suggestions and comments on my Alaska ms. which finally has gone to print with his unequivocal blessings. I think he realized he had been too lenient at first, although I must say I think he has treated me leniently.” He was going to get his wish to see mountains even if he could not join the Raups that summer. “I am leaving for Banff tonight on an eighteen day ski excursion in order to use up my statutory leave and at the same time shake some of the Ottawa dust off my brains. I shall have ten days at a ski chalet at 7,800 feet with hills back of it reaching 9,000 feet. How does that strike you?”

By the end of April he could report that the ski trip had been a great success. He and Carl Heimburger had decided that they had to do it on a shoestring so
they had gone by ‘colonist car’ on the train, taking sleeping bags. The first night was quite an experience as the passengers were of very diverse nationalities and tongues. They included two men who had just returned from the Spanish Civil War, and three Ukrainians who were met at each station by a deputation that gave them a speech and then embraced and kissed all around. “Heimy got a big kick out of it because he could understand the Ukrainian speeches but I for my part very much disliked Ukrainian speeches at all hours of the night. I finally rolled up my bag and withdrew to the daycoach and found it to be almost empty and slept like a top. I slept there during the rest of the trip and said ‘grrrrrrr’ when anyone came near my section. It worked beautifully.”

From Banff they covered fifteen miles by snowmobile before doing the last 2,000 feet on skis “over a most awe inspiring trail, through primeval forest” of spruce, pine, and a very few poplars. He and Heimburger spent some time trying to figure out what *Picea albertiana* [Alberta Spruce] was. “What impressed me as being very strange was that nowhere did we see any underbrush. I don’t remember seeing a single willow! … Above the timberline we saw that curious tree, *Larix Lyallii* [Alpine larch], that looks like it comes out of a book on prehistoric trees. It must be hardier than the most hardy arctic willows. Why don’t we get that in Alaska or in the Arctic?”

Sunshine Chalet, a rough log building with accommodation for about sixty guests, lay at timberline at an elevation of 7,200 feet. “The place was extremely well run and the atmosphere very friendly – a sort of skiers’ free-masonry,” Erling said.

Everybody was on first name already the first day. This was a new experience to me because Canadians are generally a trifle stiff and when they do let themselves go, incline to overdo it. The skiing was the very best. As a matter of fact I have seen no ski country anywhere that can touch the country out there. Five to six feet of snow on the level and always at least six inches of honest-to-goodness powder snow of the kind you see in ski advertisements. And there were ski slopes for every taste and inclination from the most impossible to the gentle rolling kind. Brewster Mt. (9,400) started right at the door and from its top we could schuss to the door in two and a half minutes over as many miles. What fun! I have never before experienced the sensation of having my skis actually hum due to vibration…. The ‘Chalet’ is open year round and I should love to go there in summer. The rates are very reasonable.
We paid $4.50 per day, including transportation from Banff, guides etc. We stayed there ten days and were loath to leave. Ottawa seemed very far away and a very undesirable place to go back to.

When he returned to the Herbarium, Miss Harkness was just completing the labelling of the Malte-Watson collection from Banff that Raup had returned to them. Erling was looking forward to going over it but doubted if he would have any constructive comments to make. “You certainly fixed things up very nicely for us,” he said, “and the material, when mounted and inserted will be no end of help to us. Thanks a lot.”

By May 10, the Raups were expecting to be passing through on their way north any day and Erling said that Ottawa was “upside down” over the Royal visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. “I shall be glad when it is all over,” he said. On May 15, he wrote to tell them that due to the delay of the Royal party, the Ottawa schedule had been changed. “Sunday is going to be the big day,” he said. “I had planned to meet your train but that will be quite impossible now because I wouldn’t get within six blocks of the Station. All private cars are banned from the city streets and no one will be permitted to enter the station except on business. The train service, however, as far as I know will not be affected. The best thing for you to do is to leave the station by the front and to take a Lindenlea car that passes right in front and get off at Acacia.”

Raup was still looking for help with their field work and mentioned “a chap named Soper at McMaster University” who was going down to the Gray Herbarium to do graduate work in the fall. “I suppose he would have to be paid a salary if he is planning to go to school next year. He has a scholarship here which will cover part of the expenses.” “Soper spent a few days here,” Erling said May 15, “working on some Lake Erie problem. He impressed me as a nice very quiet chap, so quiet as a matter of fact that his speech was literally limited to ‘Yes – Yes and No – No.’ He seemed rather young – around twenty one I should say.” He suggested that Raup might like to try a man called August Breitung for field help as he had received some excellent material from him recently. “He is 27 and entirely self-taught. He has had five years experience in N. Saskatchewan and seems to know his local flora very well and to tackle his problems in a very proficient way.” Professor Fraser of the University of Saskatchewan had told him: “Mr. Breitung as an observer and collector approaches, if he does not reach, genius. He is thoroughly trustworthy in his observations and in other respects.”
When Raup got through all the barriers erected during the visit of their Majesties, there would be much to talk over about the summer’s field work, including his choice of taking James Soper in the field with him, but there was also the latest startling salvo from the Farm front. On May 12, on the day when Erling could report to the Department that the first instalment of his “Contributions to the Flora of Alaska” had finally appeared in print on May 1 in *Rhodora* and ask for help with supplying reprints, he and Malcolm had a lengthy discussion concerning a report that the Experimental Farm was pressing for the National Herbarium to be taken out of the Museum and run by the Farm under the Department of Agriculture.

Erling immediately martialed his arguments against the alarming idea. On a sheet of paper that was half typed, half scribbled over, he wrote them all down to have ready in his files. “Transfer would mean a calamity for the Herbarium,” he wrote.

Bot. Div. of Central Experimental Farm is chiefly interested and equipped for work on plant pathology and weed survey – they are not interested in taxonomic botany, nor in botanical surveys and have had no experience in such work. During all the years they have had two systematic botanists who have so far managed to build up a pitifully small collection of weed and forage plants. Those that have succeeded in seeing this herbarium agreed that it was more or less a “joke.” Why now this sudden interest in systematic botany? Of late, within the last six or eight months they have added two more systematic botanists to their staff. Ostensibly now they have the men, they must create work for them. The National Herbarium is by far the largest and most important scientific collection of Canadian plants and can only be maintained as such under a Museum set-up. If made an adjunct to a division of economic botany, under a plant pathologist it would soon lose its scientific value and standing. With all respect to Dr. G. [Gussow] as a plant pathologist – he never was a taxonomic botanist and knows nothing of the problems of plant geography. [Transfer would mean] dismemberment of the National Museum of which the National Herbarium is one of the most important parts. The National Herbarium is being used increasingly by other Departments, and by Canadian and foreign institutions and botanists. The Forestry Branch uses it far more than botanists from the Farm. Experience elsewhere [i.e., in
Washington] has shown that large herbaria when placed under economic botanists soon become merely collections of weed and forage plants. A herbarium of the size of the National Herbarium is not needed by the Farm or for any branch of the Department of Agriculture.

There was no adequate housing at the Farm, he added, concluding his notes with a barely decipherable scribble: “It looks to me & I think to any unbiased observer as if the question to transfer Herbarium & to set up a Botanical Garden is merely a grand gesture of Gussow, who has long wished to erect a memorial to his own glorification.”

Erling wisely put these angry personal notes away and prepared a five-page report on the “The National Herbarium of Canada” for use by his superiors, completed June 30. In summary, he started with a definition that stated that the functions of a National Herbarium were “to gather and record botanical knowledge in the form of specimens of wild plants; to study and map their distribution; to conduct and promote purely scientific researches in taxonomic botany and to describe new species of wild plants; to prepare publications on the wild flora of Canada; to prepare suitable exhibits; and to make all such botanical information available to all workers in Natural History.” He continued with the point that “the maintaining of a National Herbarium is a museum activity and is recognized as such in all civilized countries.” It had been clearly stated in the Revised Statutes of Canada in 1927 that the functions of the Geological Survey were “to collect and classify, and arrange for exhibit in the Victoria Memorial Museum such specimens as are necessary to afford a complete and exact knowledge of the geology, mineralogy, palaeontology, ethnology, and fauna and flora of Canada, etc.”

The primary function of the National Herbarium, founded in 1882, was to provide “a permanent and safe repository for representative collections of wild plants from all parts of the Dominion,” where they were classified, catalogued, and arranged in scientific order for reference. Its “rich and irreplaceable collections” now numbered over 150,000 specimens, and its valuable “type specimens,” i.e., those first collected and described for a new species, could be considered a national treasure, and the whole collection should be safeguarded as such.

With a continued emphasis on wild as against cultivated plants or weed species, Erling said that the National Herbarium of Canada “has in its possession the largest and most comprehensive collections of wild Canadian plants
to be found anywhere.” He discussed in general the botanical surveys that had been done and the usefulness of these in advance of cultivation, and outlined the wide and numerous branches of the Government who made use of the Herbarium to study plants as they affected their own interests. These included the Geological Survey, Forest Service, National Parks Bureau, Indian Affairs, Bureau of Northwest Territories and Yukon, Fisheries Department, and the National Research Council in addition to the Department of Agriculture, and it was in the best interest of the many branches of Government that the Herbarium should be maintained where there was a tradition for such museum activity, with adequate botanical library facilities, where advantage could be taken of general reference collections such as birds and mammals, and where contacts were available with men in other biological sections.

With regard to the Department of Agriculture taking over the Herbarium, there was no logical reason for the lesser special interest of one department to take precedence over the greater general one in which many departments were concerned. If there was duplication of herbarium activities at the Museum and the Farm, it was certainly not on the part of the Museum which was carrying out an activity provided for by Parliament and recognized by all countries of the world, not as an agricultural problem but as a museum activity. “The maintaining of a Dominion-wide collection of wild plants and the promotion of botanical surveys is not an Agricultural activity,” Erling said. “It is further respectfully submitted that what is needed by the Department of Agriculture is a small, well-named reference collection of plants of strictly economic importance, such as fodders and range plants, weeds, poisonous plants, and soil indicator plants, to serve for immediate and rapid consultation, thus aiding the botanist engaged in agricultural or economic botany. The present case has an illuminating parallel in the United States where the National Herbarium founded and maintained by the Smithsonian Institution was in 1868 transferred to the Department of Agriculture. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory and in 1896 was returned to the Smithsonian Institution where it has remained since.”

It was certainly to be expected that this careful and comprehensive defence of the Museum position would be useful ammunition for the Department of Mines and Resources. Nothing more on this subject appeared in Erling’s Herbarium file until the Fall, when it became obvious that much rival activity was still going on in the background at the Farm. Meanwhile, there had been suggestions that he should go up to the Mackenzie River Delta area to assess the
lichen grazing situation at Reindeer Station, but in the end Seymour Hadwen, Director of the Department of Pathology and Bacteriology at the Ontario Research Station in Toronto, whom the Porsild brothers had met during the 1926–28 investigation, went north in early July to give his assessment of what had happened to Canada’s reindeer herd since Erling had left the station in 1935.

When he arrived on the Mackenzie River Delta, Hadwen found the herd on Richards Island remarkably fine and healthy-looking. “As previously reported,” he said, “the original herd doubled in size in the first three years despite the fact that about 300 were killed each year to furnish food and clothing for the herdsmen, and meat for the two mission hospitals and residential schools in Aklavik. As well as the herd on Richards Island, a new herd had been located at Anderson River on the mainland about 160 miles east of the Mackenzie River. These two herds together now number over 5,000.” The Anderson herd was native-owned under the supervision of one white man.

Hadwen preferred not to commit himself about the carrying capacity of Richards Island because some of the coastal ranges in Alaska had shown changes and the disappearance of certain plants, especially lichens. Grazing areas in Lapland, once thought to have much larger possibilities for reindeer, had also shown signs of deterioration.

In other words, the grazing capacity of the ranges has been over-estimated. In Lapland it is now believed that 50 to 60 acres per animal are required for permanent grazing, the former estimates being half that amount. In Canada we are fortunate in being forewarned about this matter and it is to be hoped that we shall never overstock our ranges. The danger of over-stocking the summer pastures near the sea may not be so great, according to Mr. A. E. Porsild who surveyed the area, because many of the forage plants are annuals. Nevertheless, we are concerned with what the ranges will be like many years hence and must do our utmost to protect them.

The second of the Lapp herders hired in Norway had gone home the previous fall at the expiration of his contract, leaving behind only one of the three Laplanders who had come to “teach our natives how to herd the reindeer, and to instruct them in throwing the lasso, breaking and driving the deer, training and using herd dogs, and many other methods which Lapps had learned from their forebears.” Erling had translated a letter for Gibson in December from Aslak
Tornensis, who had arrived safely in Norway with his family the previous November. They had been fortunate in being able to travel to their home by motor car “over a new road which has been made since you were there. There was so little snow that the motor car could cross the mountain without any difficulty.” He was anxious to hear how the Canadian herd was doing, especially the drive they were going to make to Anderson River “for the Eskimo.” In conclusion, he said, “I want to thank you again for all you have done for me and I ask you to be good enough to extend my respectful thanks to the officials at the Ottawa office for all you and they did for myself and my family.”

So now Mikkel Pulk was the only Lapp herder left in Canada with his family, and the native herders were mainly doing the work independently under the supervision of three white supervisors acting under instruction from Ottawa. “The Eskimos make excellent herders,” Hadwen said, “as was to be expected because they had done so well in Alaska. In this connection it should be pointed out that reindeer raising is a specialty of the polar races, the last remaining gap to be filled being in Canada. It is rather surprising that the North American Eskimos did not domesticate caribou, seeing that the Chukchi reindeer people are very close to them in Alaska, and the Lapps and Novaya Zemlyans were on the other side, although the gap here was much wider.”

Since the idea of expanding reindeer ownership for Canada’s northern people was always under question, Hadwen noted that, although there was no doubt that the reindeer was a descendant of the caribou, it could not be said that where caribou were found reindeer herding would succeed.

To make a success of reindeer raising, the pastures must be of the best and the situation chosen should have certain advantages, such as accessibility. The wild caribou have the migratory habit and cover large tracts of land quite unsuited to reindeer. Besides, they seldom approach the reindeer as regards fatness. Reindeer steers, on the other hand, like other domesticated animals, become very fat in the autumn and cannot be driven for long distances without losing weight.

There was also a concern that if wild caribou joined the herd, the caribou might cross with the reindeer, but he felt that there was no cause to worry as the reindeer had an earlier rutting season and crossing had been rare in Alaska. To prevent the reindeer from joining the caribou in migration, it was only necessary
to keep them under control at all seasons of the year, and wild caribou that strayed into the herd were always shot because of their unpredictable behaviour.

Hadwen felt that the management of the Canadian herd was satisfactory and the native herders were anxious to qualify for herd ownership, especially since the Anderson River herd had been started. He strongly advocated that Canada should follow Lapland’s lead in banning non-native or company ownership as this had caused trouble in reindeer countries. “Government supervision of our native herds will always be necessary,” he concluded, in the continuing vein of the philosophy of the Canadian Reindeer Project from its inception, “especially to assist in applying scientific methods to the industry and to act in loco parentis as far as the Eskimo are concerned. A benevolent, paternal administration of native requirements should be our aim.” Doubtless, this remark would reflect the sentiments of the Department of the Interior and meet with full approval in Ottawa.12

The update on the situation at Reindeer Station closed the end of the last peaceful summer before World War II began. As early as March 29, Erling had received a letter from his father’s old friend Professor Elmer Ekblaw of Clark University who said: “The situation in Europe seems to improve very little, if at all. Denmark, and for that matter all the Scandinavian countries, are in a rather precarious situation right now, and I fear that they will find it difficult to oppose the imperialistic expansion of Germany, both economically and territorially. I am inclined to the belief that it will be difficult to escape war this coming summer. I wonder what Canadians are thinking about it at the present time.”13

Canada had enjoyed the golden optimism of the Royal Tour, that smiling cross-country break in the tired Depression hopelessness that ended with the triumphal departure of the Empress of Britain on June 15, but another and far more terrible visit had gone practically unnoticed. With bitter irony, Pierre Berton noted that the shy King and his charming Queen arrived back in England one day before another boat returned to Europe, one that had sailed from Hamburg on the same day as the royal couple reached Canada. The luxury liner St. Louis was filled with 907 German Jewish refugees who had desperately cruised the Atlantic Ocean all during the month-long regal tour and had heartbreakingly been refused entry into every country in the New World, including Canada, where they had begged for assistance.14

It seemed that practically no one in Canada believed that a major war was possible in that summer of 1939, and practically everyone believed that peace negotiations would win out, but Czechoslovakia had fallen to the Nazis in the
spring and Poland fell as summer ended. Britain and France declared war on September 3. On September 10, Canada was at war with Hitler’s Germany.

It is amazing to think of the speed at which Canada was put into action, down to the smallest details. Two days before war was declared in Ottawa, Malcolm sent a memo to Erling: “We are informed by Mr. C. W. Jackson, Chief Executive Assistant, that it is proposed to commence immediately a postal censorship of mails and it is requested that your services be reserved for this work. For the present at least your salary will continue to be paid by this Department. I understand that you have already started this work as a result of a telephone message two or three days ago.” Erling’s work for the post office would effectively consume all of his daytime hours from September 6 to October 17. On October 6, he wrote to J. A. Munro, Chief Federal Migratory Bird Officer in British Columbia, with whom he had a friendly correspondence: “Since war broke out I have been assigned special work & I only get to my own office after regular hours, in order to take care of the most urgent matters.” However, Erling reported to Raup on October 31: “On the whole Ottawa has settled down more or less to normal business and the war does not seem to have affected things as much as one might have expected. There is even talk of a general election in the spring.”

Meanwhile, the minor skirmishes between the Museum and the Farm were continuing on and off the screen.

With regard to the Herbarium there really has been no new development and although pessimist that I am I somehow do not believe myself that ‘they’ will succeed in making the ‘steal.’ Nevertheless they are working hard at it. I am hoping that the war will tend to make things harder for the ‘enemy.’ Gussow, since the war broke out has been more or less under a cloud, because of his outspokenness in certain matters, but Swaine, who is director of the new ‘Science Service’ of the Agr. Dept. is firmly sold on the idea that the Herbarium ought to be at the Farm. And he is a great pusher. Senn told me the other day, quite unintentionally I believe, that for some time the plans for the new wing to the botany building at the farm had been held up by Gussow because he hoped to have the matter in the bag, so that he could make room for the herbarium. Now it looked as if the war sort of has pigeonholed the plans and Senn admitted, that even the small plan, providing for a herbarium 16 × 32 feet in two stories had not been finally o.k.’ed. This
information was more or less pried loose and Senn did not actually make the statement as I have rendered it.

He was sending Raup a copy of a twenty-five-page ‘white paper’ that he had written that he thought would surely convince the most sceptical that the Herbarium should remain within the jurisdiction of the Museum. He felt that that combined with the yearly record of field work “ought to show Gussow that his suggestion that we should ‘start’ a botanical survey of Canada is somewhat passé.” He had talked to Taverner and Jenness earlier that day “and we all agree that the view of some outside botanist, who has no axe to grind and with authority can speak for the world botanists, probably would be of great help to us and would be appreciated by the head of our Department in future dealings with the Civil Service Comm.” He was hesitant to ask him to do more since he had done a great deal for them already; however, if Raup did wish to write, Erling suggested he write to Dr. Camsell, as he knew him personally, with copies to other interests involved.16

Erling’s ‘white paper,’ completed October 30, had been written in response to a memo dated October 12. McLeish wanted to know to what extent the collections in the National Herbarium were consulted by officers of the departments of Agriculture, Forestry, and others and by private individuals and representatives of other organizations, to which Erling gave him a complete list of visitors to date in 1939. McLeish’s second question concerned the percentage of the National Herbarium collection that would be of definite interest to Agriculture, to which he replied that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to give a definite answer but since the majority of the collections were from wild areas that preceded cultivation, possibly only the weed species and a portion of the grasses and sedges used for fodder would be of interest to agriculturalists. “I believe that I am justified in stating that only a very small part of the collections in the National Herbarium are of any importance whatever to agricultural botanists engaged in economic applied botany,” he said. “The negligible use made in the past of the collections in the National Herbarium by our agricultural botanists would seem amply to bear out this contention.” Question number three asked him to compile a review of all the field studies in connection with botanical surveys that had been made by the Geological Survey and the National Herbarium, which was answered by an appendix of six detailed pages of botanical field work. A final request for a list of publications dealing with botanical surveys and studies published by the same took another twelve pages.17
While Erling was compiling his answers to the memo from McLeish, he received an unexpected letter from the Farm. “Dear Mr. Porsild,” Gussow wrote October 19. “I enclose for your confidential information a copy of a letter I am sending today to Dr. J. M. Swaine, Director, Science Service, Department of Agriculture.” His letter to Swaine read:

We view with regret the formation of an impression that owing to a proposal to consider the final disposition of the National Herbarium Mr. Porsild’s promotion may have possibly been affected. May I point out that I am emphatically in favour of the long overdue promotion of so able a botanist as Mr. Porsild. I wish to make clear that under no circumstances should Mr. Porsild’s promotion be held up for whatever final decision may be arrived at as a result of our proposal. As we have pointed out Mr. Porsild should be transferred to the Department of Agriculture with the identical future prospects he may have had in the herbarium under the Department of Mines and Resources.

We have been aware of Porsild’s work for many years, as well as the reputation which he has established for himself among his own peers and I certainly desire to place myself on record in stating that the delay in recognizing the services of a man of so unique experience and training is considered definitely unfortunate and its continuation not in the best interests of the public. I am enclosing two copies of this letter and would request you to kindly forward them to the Civil Service Commission and to the authorities of the Department of Mines and Resources.18

Erling took some time to reply to Gussow’s letter. The personal recommendations were flattering but he was astute enough to wonder if this was not merely a ploy to gain his support for the Herbarium transfer. On November 18, he answered carefully but briefly, regarding the confidential letters “concerning my position and other matters related to the National Herbarium. Your stand in the matter has been noted with appreciation and I thank you sincerely for your thoughtfulness in keeping me informed. The Government’s policy in relation to the National Herbarium is, of course, decided by others, but my interest is, naturally, in seeing that the best decision for the good of plant geography and taxonomy in Canada be reached.”19
Gussow was not to be deterred from trying to get him on side. “I have your letter of Nov. 18th,” he said on November 21, “and wish to assure you that as with you, my earnest desire is that the best interests of Canada, of Canadian botany and of the services which botany can and should render to the national welfare, be served as efficiently and adequately as possible. It is to this end that we have made the proposals for the amalgamation of the herbaria under the control of the Dominion Government, not with the idea of interfering in any way with well-merited promotions of those associated with the herbaria. Indeed the centralization and setting up of adequate facilities for this work should materially improve the opportunity for advancement of those associated with it.”

No mention of Gussow’s letters appeared in Erling’s letter to Raup on November 26, thanking him for his supportive letters to Camsell and Harry Snyder, a private individual whom the Raups had met at Brintnell Lake in the summer. It seemed from the latter letter that more than the National Herbarium was at stake that fall, for Raup told Snyder that it was the interest and support of such men as himself that were most necessary for the development of the National Museum.

I believe that if you could get together a small group of people, private citizens who would take a personal and dynamic interest in the affairs of the Museum, that it would very quickly acquire a new lease on life. Once under way, with the public’s attention drawn to it, I am confident it would have ample public support. Museums everywhere have had to go through much difficult periods as this, and the good ones have come through with flying colours. There is at the Museum now a nucleus of fine men who are well able to handle this development. I speak particularly of Dr. Jenness, Mr. Taverner, Mr. Porsild, and Dr. Anderson. As I think I suggested, I think Dr. Jenness is the logical man to direct the whole Museum.

Erling thought it would be interesting to see what Snyder’s reaction would be and said Raup’s letter to Camsell was a masterpiece. From the odd remarks he had heard,

… it seems to be bringing home a few of the points that we have been trying to make…. Meanwhile I have managed to get our only M.P.
who is interested in botany worked up over the Museum situation. It is Mrs. Black from the Yukon. She may not be a botanist although she is genuinely interested in wild flowers and writes about them. I got her so interested that she listened to me for four hours straight the other day. I talked to her for two hours about the life and work of John Macoun whom she knew. She thought it was “the most thrilling” story she had ever heard. Mrs. B. is a very shrewd woman and she may do some good too. At the moment she is sold on the idea that the Gov’t must implement the report of recommendation of the Royal Society the essence of which is that the Museum should be placed under an independent board of directors. This will not cost anything and would be the first step towards placing the Museum on a sound basis. 

The cannons had definitely been loaded on the Ottawa scene and seem to have had the desired effect. The absence of further comment in the correspondence and the continuance of regular unrelated memos from the Department of Mines and Resources clearly demonstrate that the internal domestic war between the Herbarium and the Farm was over, with the Museum status quo intact, but in the meantime the real war over the Atlantic had only just begun.
CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE PROBLEM OF GREENLAND

The year 1940 began peacefully enough in Ottawa, although there had been an ice storm over the holidays that had done a great deal of damage to street and garden trees and shrubs, not to mention downed power lines and over 5,000 telephones being out of order for a few days. The usually open ski trails in the Gatineau hills looked more like rabbit runs through tunnels, Erling told Raup on New Years Day, and this had made for some rather exciting skiing. He was looking forward to seeing him in March. “Someone at head office told me last Saturday, unofficially, that my trip to Boston has been approved,” he said. “My informant was as surprised as I am myself. It means that I can get three weeks before the end of March and my expenses paid.” He also had some holiday time to use up so he might even try to get to New York if he could swing the expense. He had been trying to get grant money for publication from the American Academy of Science without success and wondered if it was worth another try.¹

He had been in touch with Wynne-Edwards and was about to travel to Montreal where he had been invited by Professor Scarth to speak at McGill University on January 8 on “Flora of the Northwest Territories.” He gave the same lecture the next day at l’Université de Montréal, which gave him a chance to talk to some of the Quebec botanists. Frère Marie-Victorin had been anxious to spend as much time as possible with him and Jacques Rousseau wanted to show him around the Botanical Gardens. In between the university lectures, on the evening of June 8, he talked to the Province of Quebec Bird Society about his “18 years in the Arctic.” As he told his hosts, the Wynne-Edwards, on February 4, he had a good time in Montreal.²

He left Ottawa mid-February for Boston in order to spend four weeks doing library and herbarium research at the Gray Herbarium and Arnold Arboretum
and wrote to Diamond Jenness March 6: “I have been having a very busy and, I hope, fruitful sojourn in this most remarkable institution. I do not believe that there are any places in the world just like it. The only trouble with it is that it is so very hard to resist the temptation to digress. One starts with the very best of intentions to look up just the one thing, but almost at once other things turn up that one had not thought of but that one has wanted to look into for years.”

Boston was as enjoyable as ever and little had changed because America was not at war, but shortly after his return to Canada, everything went from normalcy to urgency in the back rooms of Ottawa. On the morning of April 9, the radio crackled with the news that Hitler’s army had occupied Denmark in the space of a few hours, setting in motion a level of External Affairs activity that would affect Erling personally in a very short time. At 7:56 that morning, Prime Minister Mackenzie King received a telegram from a Lieut. Col. C. H. Reason in London, Ontario: “Strongly urge occupation of Greenland by Canada,” while the news of the capitulation of Denmark was greeted with particular panic in one company in Montreal where at 7 a.m. that morning the President of Alcan, R. E. Powell, was immediately on the phone to “Scottie” Bruce in Ottawa to ask who was going to stop the Nazis from disrupting their supply of cryolite from Greenland. Cryolite, composed mainly of sodium-aluminum-fluoride and called ‘ice rock’ for its lustrous qualities, was a natural ore that was vitally needed in the electrolysis process in the manufacture of aluminum, which in turn was vitally needed in the war effort, and its only commercial source of supply was from a mine in Ivigtut, situated close to the coast of a fjord in southwest Greenland. The company had purchased 3,000 tons of the ore from the Ivigtut mine for delivery in the summer, had expected to purchase the same amount again, and more would be needed in the expansion for the war, Bruce informed Norman Robertson at External Affairs, so the company was deeply disturbed to learn of the German occupation of Greenland’s parent country that morning.

Naval intelligence reports were quickly added to Alcan’s concern, because a telegram went out from the Secretary of State for External Affairs in Ottawa to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in London the same day: “Reports of enemy ships heading in direction of Iceland and Southern Greenland force consideration of risks of enemy interference with cryolite production at Ivigtut, Greenland, upon which maintenance of essential aluminum depends. Understand that winter’s production is awaiting shipment from Ivigtut and that destruction of stocks accumulated there would seriously threaten planned
rate of aluminum production in Canada, other allied countries and the United States.”

Germany’s takeover of Denmark affected not only Greenland but also Iceland and the Faroe Islands under Danish sovereignty, all of which added dangers to trans-Atlantic shipping for the Allies. Because the Faroes were so close to Scotland, Great Britain was immediately co-operating with the Governor to ensure that German occupation was not possible. Similar measures were being suggested to the Iceland government. The idea of a Nazi-controlled Greenland, in addition to the concern about Alcan’s cryolite supply, was particularly worrisome for Canada because of its proximity to North America and its many fjords and harbours as potential shelter for German submarines and its land area for possible air bases.

The war was suddenly coming closer to Canada. Headlines in the *Toronto Star* on April 10 blazoned the concern: “Suggest Canada may set watch over Greenland. Possibility of Germans Establishing Air Bases Cannot Be Overlooked. Ottawa silent.” The article continued:

Immediate fate of Greenland, a Danish possession, now that Germany has overrun Denmark, is a problem under discussion here. The external affairs department declined today to comment on whether Canada would take over supervision of this territory. Impression here is that Greenland cannot be neglected because of the danger of its being used as a submarine or air base for Nazi activities. The decision will be whether it can be best patrolled from Great Britain or Canada. This Dominion already has advantages in its Hudson Strait radio stations and facilities at the eastern end of the strait, from which the Canadian fliers operated when making a weather survey of the strait…. Possibility that conditions in northern Europe might encourage enemy expeditions from Greenland aimed at northern Canada has been contemplated and prepared for in plans of the RCAF. Possibility of enemy air forays against central Canada from ships entering Hudson Bay or far northern bases has been raised.°

In the office of the High Commission for Canada at Canada House in London, England, First Secretary Lester Pearson received notice from Hume Wrong on April 10 that Dr. Nicholas Polunin, a young scientist from the Department of Botany at Oxford who had extensive knowledge of Norway, Greenland, and
the Canadian Arctic, had come in with regard to the position of Greenland and Iceland. “He wanted assurance that due consideration was being given to the position of Greenland and Iceland in view of the German occupation of Denmark,” Wrong said. “I told him that he could rest assured that this was not being overlooked either in Ottawa or in London. He says that at present only the extreme southern tip of Greenland is accessible and on the east coast harbours will be icebound until July. He was anxious that some record should be kept of his name and address in case there was any need for the services of a person with his special knowledge of these regions. I promised him that this would be done.”

Lengthy discussions continued in Ottawa about the problem of Greenland and its scattered population of 400 Danes and 16,000 Eskimo. When ownership of the territory had been settled between Denmark and Norway in 1920, the British Foreign Office had sent a communication to the Danish Minister in London stating that His Majesty’s Government recognized His Danish Majesty’s sovereignty over Greenland, but in view of its geographical proximity to the Dominion of Canada, His Majesty’s Government reserved the right to be consulted should the Danish Government at any time contemplate alienation of this territory. Since an unexpected kind of alienation had now occurred without consultation, the question arose as to whether Great Britain or Canada should do something about its defence. If any action was contemplated, and if Canada was in a position to occupy strategic coastal points, it might be more acceptable to United States opinion in view of the Monroe Doctrine and the general political attitude against European intervention on the American continent. No such action could be considered unless control of the North Atlantic remained with British and French navies, and in any case it was desirable to discuss the matter not only with London but also with Washington. 8

Washington was certainly aware of the problem. The New York Times, April 11, cried: “GREENLAND RAISES HEMISPHERE ISSUE. Monroe Doctrine To Be Applied If It Is Necessary – Danish Envoy Sees Roosevelt.” On leaving the White House, Henrik Kauffman would only say: “We agreed, of course, that Greenland belongs to the American continent.” The Monroe Doctrine, 1823, was originally intended as a protection measure for the Spanish American republics, and set in law by Congress the principle whereby “the American continents were not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European power,” although this did not apply to existing colonies. The Doctrine could be interpreted in different ways depending on circumstances, and
one fear in Washington was that if the United States or Canada took control in Greenland, the Japanese might see that as international approval for taking over the Dutch East Indies if the low country also fell to Germany.9

Another missive from Alcan applied further urgent pressure on External Affairs on April 11. The company had received a message from His Majesty’s Ministry of Supply that Britain needed shipments of refined Greenland cryolite that was no longer available from Denmark or Norway. There were only two places in North America that took the raw cryolite from Greenland and converted it for use in aluminum smelters, one being Penn-Salt, the Pennsylvania Salt Manufacturing Company in Philadelphia, and the other being Alcan’s plant at Arvida in Canada. Alcan was very worried about the safety of the Ivigtut mine in Greenland because the shaft was two hundred feet deep and only fifty feet from the sea, protected merely by a bank of waste rock that could easily be sabotaged, and there was the question of the operation of the mine, which Alcan had said earlier they would be prepared to run if needed, because the Danish company usually sent a ship in the spring with “some 75 labourers and technicians, who mine the bulk of the tonnage produced. Only some 15 men stay through the winter and, presumably, carry out a certain amount of mining. It will be appreciated, therefore, that aside from sabotage, steps must be taken quickly to ensure that mining operations are preceded with this Summer.”10

On April 12, the Department of National Defence (Naval and Air) was contacted for a report on the possibilities of any action by Canadian forces in Greenland, and Dr. Hugh Keenleyside at External Affairs was asked to get in touch with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Northwest Territories Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources for information from these sources. Keenleyside, at Gibson’s suggestion, immediately called in the botanist from the National Herbarium who had spent a considerable part of his life in Greenland.

In their discussion, Erling Porsild confirmed many of the Departmental fears, and a long memorandum was later circulated through External Affairs with the information they had obtained from him, expanding on possible solutions. There were many communities along the west Greenland coast but few on the east, he had told them, and there were many safe harbours or havens that could be utilized by German submarines or surface raiders. There were no roads connecting the communities, and no airfields anywhere in Greenland. The cryolite mine at Ivigtut on the southwest coast was almost on the shoreline and navigation to the entrance of the mine was open at all times of the year, so
it would be easy for a submarine or raider to come in at any time. It would not be practical to station a patrol boat offshore throughout the year, and the use of sea planes was out of the question due to fog in summer and rough weather in winter, so it seemed that the only way to defend the mine was to mount guns on land.

There were two radio stations, one at Julianehaab and one at Godhavn that were sufficiently powerful to engage in trans-Atlantic communication. There were many small schooners along the coast and the Danish Government sent two patrol vessels each summer, although it was improbable that they had left Denmark that year. Erling’s personal concern, especially for his family in Disko, was that the people of Greenland were entirely dependent, except for meat, fish, and domestic coal, on supplies sent out by ship from Denmark.

Fairly large supplies of most commodities are generally kept on hand, and it might be possible for the population to go through one year without additional aid except in the matter of fuel oil. This, however, is by no means certain. Practically all of the trade is carried out by barter as there are no banks and little use for money. All trade is handled through the Home Office of the Danish Government and is operated as a state monopoly.... There are two centres of administration – Godhavn for the north province, and Godthaab for the south. There are no police and no military defences, except for the two Danish Coastguards. Practically the whole population live in European style, and almost all of them have European blood. There is little or no illiteracy. The natives can be expected to be sympathetic to the Allies and would be most useful for the supplying of information about raiders or suspicious vessels.11

Telegrams went back and forth across the Atlantic on April 12, trying to decide what steps should be taken if Canadian intervention in Greenland became necessary, how to protect the mine at Ivigtut, and whether to take on civil administration by providing food and fishing supplies and the marketing of furs that was normally done under Danish Government monopoly, while stressing that this was merely a temporary situation. O. D. Skelton reported in an internal memo April 12 that “The Prime Minister stated today that we should not jump into the position of announcing that we were ready to take over Greenland. It was impossible to foresee the implications both during the war and after the
war of such an undertaking. It might involve similar action regarding New-
foundland. It would be sufficient to let the British Govt. know of the danger
that existed and let them take necessary action. There was the danger also of
disturbing American opinion. The recent developments in Europe were likely
to lead to demands for sending more contingents to Europe and we should
keep this in mind.” It was still proposed that action should be taken to protect
the cryolite mine, but the suggestion of providing the “native inhabitants” of
Greenland with usual supplies met with Mackenzie King’s disapproval. “The
unemployed in Canada would criticize looking after Esquimaux in Green-
land’s icy mountains, or India’s coral strand, rather than Canadians at home,”
he said.12

The New York Times reported that America was also not anxious to do
anything about the icy land to the north at that time. Roosevelt told the press
that, after studying the atlas, he was satisfied that Greenland belonged to North
America, and he had checked with the Red Cross about humanitarian aid and
been told that there was no need at present, and it was hypothetical and pre-
mature to contemplate a Greenland dominated by Germany.13

Meanwhile, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Mas-
sey, sent a telegram to Ottawa to the effect that the United Kingdom Govern-
ment had expressed their appreciation of Canada’s proposals and hoped Can-
adia would proceed with “any plans that were feasible.” The United Kingdom
Government would like to be informed before any action was taken and would
notify their United States Ambassador to keep in touch with the Canadian
Minister in Washington prior to any United States notification and stressed the
temporary nature of any occupation as well as the intent to purchase cryolite at
current price and reimburse the rightful owners as soon as Denmark regained
independence. It was considered highly improbable that Germany would at-
tempt to seize the mine, although they might have tried to destroy export fa-
cilities with a scale of attack ranging from bombardment by armoured ship
to destruction by landing party. An air attack was an extremely remote pos-
sibility, and the coast might be used for fuelling raiders or subs, but there was
no greater likelihood of this than before the occupation of Denmark. “It is not
considered there is sufficient likelihood of a German attack on Ivigtut to war-
rant provisions of defences which would be necessary to meet the scale of attack
which is actually possible. In view, however, of importance attached to mines,
it is thought that despatch of a small detachment to act as a deterrent would be
justified. There would also be some advantage in watching the Greenland coast
either by naval or air patrols, more especially when German submarines are known to be operating in North Atlantic waters.”

It was time to test the waters of American opinion. A telegram went out from External Affairs on April 15 to Loring Christie in the Canadian Legation in Washington, informing the Minister of their official concerns and, “as a result of this situation, whether it would be necessary to send to Greenland a small defence force to guard against the above mentioned dangers and to cooperate with the local administrations in North and South Greenland in providing for the needs of the native inhabitants. These measures would not be intended as affording the basis for any future claim to acquire a title of sovereignty but would be purely of an emergency character. For the duration of the war the Canadian Government would be acting as trustee for a restored and independent Danish Government and full accounting would be maintained for that Government.” Christie duly passed the message on to the State Department the next day and was impressed by how cautiously the Canadian representations were received, leaving with the feeling that the United States was already seriously contemplating the possibility of taking some action in Greenland themselves. He sent a secret and personal message on April 17 that he had been told off the record: “The United States does not want Canada to take the proposed action in Greenland…. The western hemisphere is the only part of the world where the U.S. has a positive policy and they want to keep it consistent.”

Two of the reasons for the State Department’s wary reaction to Canada’s proposals regarding any interference in Greenland involved their constant contact with Penn-Salt, Alcan’s rival company in the North American refined cryolite market, and their close association with Kauffman, the Danish Minister, who was actively negotiating with the local authorities in Greenland whom he regarded as the supreme authority during Denmark’s occupation. Telegrams to Greenland from Penn-Salt and the Minister were routinely intercepted, translated, and examined before being sent on by Canada’s cable censors, so Ottawa was able to confirm that Kauffman’s messages were helpful on the whole. However, an internal memo on April 27 noted that Canadian radio stations had been picking up a number of Kauffman’s messages in the last two days insistently demanding an answer but none had come. It was questioned whether German sympathizers in Greenland, with or without assistance, had taken some action there, though this was regarded as improbable, or whether the local authorities had been receiving messages and instructions from Copenhagen
as well as from the Danish Minister in Washington and were undecided what
to do so were sitting tight.16

By April 27, Washington was buzzing with activity on behalf of Green-
land. An American-Danish Committee had been formed, it was announced
in the Washington Post, with two of its members being Captain Bob Bartlett,
“explorer,” and Leonard Beale, President of Penn-Salt, to take charge of some of
the commercial and humanitarian aspects of the Greenland situation. A dele-
gation from Greenland to see Kauffman was expected in Washington, and a
confidential memo was circulating about the appointment of a U.S. Consul to
Greenland subject to the consent of the Danish Minister. By April 30, a message
from Kauffman to the Southern Administrator in Godhavn was picked up that,
at the suggestion of the President, the American Red Cross proposed to send a
delegate with coastguard cutter on a short visit to Greenland to ascertain the
need for medical supplies, etc., and regarded the visit as a chance for him to
welcome them. The U.S. Consul would also arrive at that time and probably re-
main in Greenland for the summer and desired a house of his own if possible.17

The official announcement came in the New York Times on May 2 that a
U.S. Consulate was to be established provisionally at Godthaab, and James K.
Penfield, Consul, and George L. West Jr, Vice Consul, would be sailing on the
coastguard cutter Comanche on May 10. Mackenzie King met with President
Roosevelt on May 2 to discuss the Greenland situation. Roosevelt confirmed
the consular appointment and thought that the Canadian Government might
consider taking similar action as “such action would not interfere in any way
with the administration or control of the local authorities.” The Prime Min-
ister’s general impression was that the United States was “quite prepared for
parallel action by our two countries in the way of observation and economic
assistance” while the President said that they “might” send a revenue cutter to
Greenland – the need there was communications, and it “might” take up radio
sets and binoculars so that the coast could be watched and alarm given, fires
“might” be started on hill tops, etc. Canada’s annual patrol of the Canadian
Eastern Arctic was approved as possibly calling in Greenland, although it was
suggested that the captains of the Comanche and the Nascopie should confer in
Montreal or elsewhere before setting off.18

Keenleyside had already had meetings with Ralph Parsons, the Fur Trade
Commissioner of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and Captain Smellie, Master of
the Nascopie, two days earlier, and Parsons had laid out a proposal whereby the
Nascopie could pick up food and medical supplies in Churchill for delivery in
Greenland and bring back cryolite on his return home that summer. He had also proposed an additional trip later in the year. Keenleyside suggested that an immediate telegram should be sent to the authorities in Greenland to assure them of Canadian interest in their welfare and invite their views on any steps Canada might take to contribute to the independence and happiness of their people, and in addition that officials from the Canadian and U.S. Governments should meet with the Danish Minister, a delegate from Greenland, the American-Danish Committee, and representatives from Alcan and Penn-Salt, for a free exchange of views and a basis for solving problems. Once that meeting had occurred, the Nascopie could be sent on a brief survey trip, leaving “an accredited representative” in Greenland to co-operate with local authorities. “It is suggested that only through such a programme as that outlined above can the Canadian Government avoid a loss of prestige and at the same time ensure, through a mutually satisfactory co-operative agreement with the other interested parties, that the essential supplies of cryolite will be available for Canadian industry.”

On May 2, External Affairs received a secret cipher from Vincent Massey conveying a message from Anthony Eden in the Dominion Office on Downing Street, saying that the United Kingdom Government felt that it was within the legal rights of the Allies to protect the mine at Ivigtut. The Japanese could use British occupation of the Faroe Islands as a pretext in Netherlands East Indies but in United Kingdom opinion their principle deterrent would be their fear of United States action. The United Kingdom would be glad if the Canadian Government would consider the immediate despatch of an expedition to Greenland for the purpose of taking control of cryolite mines. To meet points raised by the U.S. Secretary of State, the expedition could be described as a Relief Expedition and could carry supplies for local population in the area. The object would be to ensure continued production of cryolite and consequently aluminium in Canada and other parts of the Empire and in United States, and to take the necessary measures to guard against danger of enemy action by sabotage or other means.

It was also stated that the United Kingdom did not think it was necessary to inform the U.S. Government before the expedition was despatched, but they thought it might be “useful” (someone in External Affairs added an exclamation mark) to tell them as soon as it had arrived and offer to concert with them in further humanitarian matters and for disposal of cryolite as far as U.S. requirements were concerned. As Mackenzie King’s deputy minister Dr. O. D.
Skelton noted confidentially to Christie at the Canadian Legation in Washington, with the need to keep the United States informed, “The mentality revealed by this telegram must be that of the genius who organized the campaign in Norway,” referring to the hastily assembled and disastrous plan to land Allied troops, including the Canadian force based at Aldershot, in Norwegian fishing ports after Germany’s attack on neutral Norway on April 9.20

By May 3, it was learned that the U.S. Consular appointments were causing concern in Nazi-occupied Denmark that the United States was getting too interested in Greenland and they were considering sending a commission to the United States to take care of Danish interests in Greenland. However, Christie was told by the State Department that it would be impossible for such a commission to enter without a visa, of which they had control. Meanwhile, Lester Pearson in the High Commission for Canada in London heard that the Chief Officer of the Julius Thomsen, the supply ship jointly owned by the Cryolite Mining Company and the Danish Government, had “approached our naval authorities with regard to the protection of the cryolite mines at Ivigtut.” The vessel, originally on a voyage to Ivigtut with workers and supplies, was now detained at Kirkwall. The Chief Officer “would be willing and able to pilot in any of our warships through the fjord, which is very deep…. There is, incidentally, a wireless telegraph station there.”21

Keenleyside worked on press release proposals for a “Canadian Policy Relating to Greenland” in Ottawa from May 4–6. Although the question of general defence of Greenland was now not considered to be a very great danger, the cryolite supply was of the utmost importance. The American Red Cross had already made plans for humanitarian aid, but it was probably desirable for Canada to assist in relief program. There was the question of national prestige, as the Canadian Government would be exposed to criticism at home and abroad if Ottawa let Washington handle the whole problem. Canada had been put in an uncomfortable position over the important cryolite supply because, while the United Kingdom was urging that Canada should send a defensive unit “and would hold her responsible if she does not and the mine is lost,” the United States was “insistently anxious” that Canada should not send a defensive expedition to Greenland. Keenleyside suggested that they should contact the Greenland officials, send the Nascopie ostensibly on her annual voyage with supplies and bring back cryolite, and send a Consul to Greenland on the Nascopie to keep Canada informed on developments. He felt that they should tell the UK that it would be a serious mistake to disregard American views,
that Canada was sending up the *Nascopie* and the Consul, and to hold the *Julius Thomsen* in Kirkwall until after the *Nascopie* had arrived in Greenland, and they should tell the United States that, although they understood the importance of their views, “we are still concerned about the vulnerability of the mines,” and tell them about *Nascopie* and Consul and also set up a meeting of all the representatives interested.22

It seems likely that Keenleyside had Erling Porsild in mind for the Consular appointment when he added: “Consideration might be given to the selection of a Canadian of Scandinavian background – preferably Icelandic or Danish – for appointment to this post.” Even if Erling was not to be given a consular post, it was possible that he might be or had already been asked to accompany the *Nascopie* on her trip north as an interpreter, because, on May 6, Ralph Parsons sent a message to Gibson: “Would you please ascertain from Mr. Porsild the form of address to the Governor of Greenland, in the event that we may wish to telegraph him, asking him if he wishes us to bring a quantity of supplies from Churchill to Godhavn in exchange for furs and other country produce that he may have on hand, presuming that the Canadian Government would have no objection to such a proposal.” Gibson passed the letter to Keenleyside to “indicate the nature of the reply that should be made.”23

On May 10, a long missive went out from Ottawa to inform the High Commission for Canada in London that in the opinion of the Canadian Government it was of the greatest importance that direct and friendly interest of the United States in the Western Pacific as well as in Greenland should be maintained. While informing Washington that Canada was holding in abeyance plans for sending to Greenland a defensive guard for the cryolite mines, … we are pointing out that no alternative measures for preventing a sudden raid on and destruction of the mine at Ivigtut has been suggested by the United States. We have drawn particular attention to the fact that the problem of securing the cryolite supply cannot be met by measures which would take effect only after a raid has occurred…. You will realize, in view of general friendly relations of the United Kingdom and Canada with the United States and their readiness to discuss freely this special situation, it would appear to be most inadvisable to carry out the suggestion that the United States Government should be advised only after action has been taken by Canada…. We propose to
inform the Greenland authorities that we intend to send a Consul to Greenland as soon as an appointment can be made.\textsuperscript{24}

On May 10, the day that Hitler’s army advanced on Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, the day that Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Britain, a press release was personally delivered by Kauffman to the Canadian Legation in Washington containing a resolution adopted by the United Greenland Council at their meeting at Godhavn on May 3.

We, the people of Greenland, have witnessed with profound grief the aggression to which our mother country Denmark has fallen prey. At the same time it has caused us grave concern to see Denmark cut off from the work which she has been doing for the people of Greenland for more than two hundred years. It is our sincere hope that the day is not far off when peace and justice will be restored and when a free Denmark will be able to resume this work. It has been necessary for the authorities charged with the responsibility for Greenland to seek new routes for our vital connection with the outside world. In these circumstances it has made us extremely happy to learn of the sympathy expressed officially and unofficially by the Government and the people of the United States, a sympathy which has found its latest expression in the establishment of an American Consulate in Greenland and the dispatch of U.S. Coast Guard cutters to visit Greenland. It is our hope that, for as long as we remain cut off from our mother country, the United States Government will continue to hold in mind the exposed position of the Danish flag in Greenland, of the native Greenland and Danish population, and of established public order. We hope that the United States Government, taking our isolated geographical position, will facilitate the import of necessities and the export of our products. While reiterating to our rightful King Christian X of Denmark our oath of allegiance, which will be kept unswervingly, we desire in this grave hour to convey to the President of the United States the deepfelt thanks of the people of Greenland for the sympathy with our cause and the respect for our freedom which the great American nation has proved so amply in these dark days.\textsuperscript{25}

Although there was much further interchange of telegrams on all fronts, it seemed that the stage was set for United States activity in Greenland, and, it was
hoped, for Canada also. There was a discussion about whether the Greenland administration would agree to mount guns at Ivigtut, supplied by either the United States or Canada, and what guns should be mounted on the *Nascopie* before her voyage and how it should be done. Skelton received notice from the Department of National Defence on May 13 that the naval authorities in Halifax had been instructed to put a 4” gun and 2 rifles on board the vessel, “which is that provided for all Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships and recognized in International Law,” and three naval ratings would be placed on board to “fight the gun.” He was warned that there was a possibility that, should additional armament or personnel be placed on board, this might be considered as altering her status as a merchant ship. However, the difficulty might quite properly be overcome by putting aboard the required number of RCMP personnel as opposed to members of the Fighting Forces of Canada.

Skelton informed the Prime Minister on May 14 that the *Nascopie* was being rapidly put into shape and should be ready to sail shortly from Halifax. It was suggested that she should make a thirty-day trip, chartered by the Government at $550 a day including crew, plus insurance, and carry about nine hundred tons of Hudson Bay Company supplies of salt, oil, flour, potatoes, sugar, and other foods, and plan to bring back a cargo of cryolite. She could be accompanied by four members of the RCMP. Re: the appointment of Consul: “If a competent Canadian of Danish or Icelandic descent is available, that might be appropriate. He could be accompanied say by Porsild, a very reliable Greenlander who is in the Canadian Government Service, and thoroughly familiar with the Danish and Esquimaux languages.”

It was Robert Bothwell, in his biography of Lester Pearson, who stated that “the calibre of the Canadian foreign service created by Dr. Skelton was extraordinarily high; stocked with talented lawyers, professors, and poets manqué,” but it was Pearson himself who noted that the service from time to time appointed an outsider with special skills and experience for a particular post, unlike the British who were overly concerned with keeping all appointments within the Foreign Office and the Americans who went to the opposite extreme. The results, on the whole, had been good, he said. An unsigned letter was put into External Affairs files on May 15 entitled “Looking at men for consideration as Consul.” Among those suggested for the Greenland post was Diamond Jenness, Anthropologist at the Museum, for his Arctic experience (but not in Greenland). However, the unknown author concluded,
... it is possible we have been attaching too much importance to the question of language and not enough [to] experience in international work. It had seemed to me that it was not possible to spare any man from our services or to get him to Greenland in time. It now seems the best solution might be to send [Kenneth] Kirkwood to Greenland. Since the occupation of Holland, he is without duties of importance, and is now in London. He has had long experience in Japan and Holland, and is a level-headed, careful fellow. He served in the last war and is a bachelor. If the Danish supply ship, *Julius Thomsen*, now at Kirkwall, is to be sent out to Greenland shortly, with a British guard on board, it would seem possible to have Kirkwood go to Greenland direct on her. Porsild, a native Greenlander, now in Mines and Resources, who is said to be a competent man and who knows Eskimo as well as Danish, could perhaps remain as assistant to Kirkwood and supply the local and language knowledge required.28

On the same day, Erling Porsild was asked to translate into Danish a telegram to the Danish authorities in Greenland: Eske Brun in Godhavn, North Greenland, and Aksel Svane, Godthaab, South Greenland – carefully informing them that:

In common with all other free and democratic States, Canada has been greatly disturbed by the invasion of Denmark and the subjugation of its Government to an alien dictatorship. The Canadian Government understands that pending the restoration of Danish freedom the local authorities in North and South Greenland have decided to administer their territories on the their own responsibility and to refuse to accept instructions forwarded under compulsion from Copenhagen. On the understanding that this is the case the Government of Canada is prepared, if so desired, to co-operate with and assist the Greenland authorities in promoting the welfare of their people.

Canada would be glad to consider their suggestions as to the best co-operation and assistance they needed, it continued, and could be contacted either by wireless to Ottawa or to their representatives on the ship *Nascopie*, “which carries supplies annually to the Canadian Northwest Territories outposts and which has called at Greenland posts in other years” and would be leaving
Halifax about May 20th with the usual supply of goods if all or part of these would be required. “Canada is greatly interested in the security of the cryolite mines at Ivigtut and is hopeful that the ore production this year may be considerably increased. It is hoped that early consultation with the Greenland and U.S. authorities in regard to production, transportation and marketing of this ore may be arranged. In this connection consideration might be given to the possibility of having the Nascopie bring back a cargo of cryolite on her present trip.... The Danish Consul General at Montreal and the Danish Minister at Washington are being informed of the contents of this telegram.”

The combined response from both Governors on May 17 was equally careful. They accepted with thanks Canada’s kind offer of supplies on the Nascopie. The cryolite mine was in full operation and they anticipated a normal production, they said, adding a cryptic “About this later” to which Erling added after translation “Meaning we shall inform you in detail about this at a later date.” They were thankful regarding export to Canada of other Greenland products but reserved decision until later in summer.

The Governors also sent immediate welcoming letters to Ken Kirkwood and Erling Porsild when their appointments as Consul and Vice-Consul were announced on May 20, but to External Affairs the welcome was tempered with a problem: “The Consul shall be very welcome but it will be necessary to call the attention to the fact that, after the establishment of the U.S. Consulate and of a
Central Office for Greenland no housing accommodation is available, so it will be necessary to build a special house. Fitted boards, timber etc. together with plans for a house must therefore be brought along whereupon the house shall be built immediately. Temporary but less satisfactory accommodation can be counted upon.” It had been noted in an earlier missive from Washington that the U.S. Consul and Vice-Consul would be taking all the supplies they needed for a year, in order not to be a burden on the Greenland people during these trying times, and before leaving London on May 23, Kirkwood was preparing for the isolation post by asking if he could have by the next Government opportunity “a general atlas, year books, Canadian almanac and a useful book on Greenland” and, at his own expense, he would appreciate a portable gramophone with symphony records, a medium-size Kodak camera with supply of film, and an oil painting kit and small oil boards.31

The High Commissioner in London informed Ottawa May 22 that the Julius Thomsen would be sailing from Kirkwall on May 23 or 24 with Kirkwood on board. She would carry thirty-three persons, all connected with the mines, and supplies of hardware and canned goods, under the surveillance of “the guard.”32

In Ottawa, Erling Porsild had little time to prepare to reach Sydney, Nova Scotia, by May 23, ready to leave on the Nascopie on May 24, and certainly not enough time to assemble material for building a Consular house in Godthaab, but it was noted in the Annual Report from the National Herbarium for 1940–41 that “From April 12, Mr. Porsild was detailed to special duty outside the department but until May 20th, when he left to take up the post of Vice-Consul to Greenland, continued to attend to routine matters in the herbarium.” It would be up to Hilda Harkness, as with so many women in wartime Canada and elsewhere, to hold the fort with routine matters in the National Herbarium until he returned from Greenland.
CHAPTER THIRTY
CONSULAR GREENLAND

The boarding party that assembled at Sydney, Nova Scotia, ready for the departure of the Hudson’s Bay Company vessel *Nascopie* on 24 May 1940, should have made it obvious to all but a casual observer that this was no ordinary supply trip to the Canadian Arctic. Captain Smellie, her regular skipper, was in charge of the ship as usual, but the actual expedition was under the command of Major D. L. McKeand, superintendent of the Eastern Arctic, with second-in-command Major C.L.M. Macdonald, Royal Canadian Artillery, assisted by non-uniformed Royal Canadian Mounted Police Constables J.S.C. Skeel and I. O. Smistad, and Special Constables C. B. Holmes, R. Young, S. Marks, and A. Hooper. There was even an accountant from the RCMP listed in the company, J. E. Dancey. Other Government officials ready to board included Erling Porsild, the new Vice Consul to Ivigtut, Greenland, and more usual party members such as F.R.E. Sparks, Postmaster of the Eastern Arctic, Dr. F. S. Parney, Government Surgeon, and O. M. Demment from the Hudson’s Bay Company. Two representatives from Alcan completed the party – H. J. Hendra, who had been manager of Alcan’s bauxite mining operations in British Guiana [Guyana] in the early thirties, and D. W. Miller, a young mining engineer. The company men were supposed to act only as observers and to obtain information about the cryolite production, but the President of Alcan had said to them, “Don’t come back unless you bring cryolite.”

One of the Alcan men was certainly more aware than Erling Porsild seems to have been of his company’s competition for cryolite with Penn-Salt in Pennsylvania. In a letter that Hendra wrote to Alcan’s Vice President O. M. Montgomery from the Isle Royale Hotel in Sydney, May 23, and a later report to the company July 6, he said that he and Erling and Major McKeand had been
Greenland in the early 1940s (Cartography: Faith Carlson)
talking the night before sailing when the subject turned to wireless communications and receiving mail.

Dr. Porsild asked the Major how he could receive mail from Philadelphia. Major McKeand asked why he wanted mail from there, and he said he was asked by the people in Philadelphia how they could get mail to him in Greenland. I asked him if he was referring to the Pennsylvania Salt Co. and he said yes, he had been communicating with them for some time. ‘Does Ottawa know this?’ the Major asked, and Dr. Porsild said ‘I don’t know.’ The Major seemed angry and told Dr. Porsild that if he was receiving information from these people he should have informed the External Affairs Department.

Hendra was disturbed enough to call the Alcan Vice President at 9 a.m. the next morning and repeat the conversation of the previous evening. Montgomery called him back two hours later and told him Powell was very concerned about Dr. Porsild’s communications with Penn. Salt Co. and suggested that “AEP” be recalled if possible. Hendra advised against any alteration but suggested that, since “Dr. P.” had been appointed censor for Ivigtut, any mail from the United States should be censored in Ottawa.²

It seems extraordinary, in view of all the worries at External Affairs about Alcan and cryolite supply in relation to the United States and Penn-Salt, that Erling Porsild had not been put completely into the picture so that this kind of suspicion could have been avoided. There seemed to be no need to suspect any untoward rival interests on his part, as witnessed by his open question about receiving mail, although it is obvious that the American company had approached him with what could be interpreted as questionable intent, thereby raising doubts about Erling’s loyalty to Canada in the minds of Alcan and McKeand right at the beginning of his consular term, but it was the kind of misunderstanding that was to dog the whole Greenland expedition for the next few weeks. Kirkwood was to complain to the Department later that it was unfortunate that all the material relevant to the mine at Ivigtut, “said to be available in Ottawa,” had not been provided to the newly arriving Consul and Vice-Consul, or to the leader of the Government party on the Nascopie (who showed [him] his notes on Ivigtut, supplied by Ottawa departments, which were both erroneous and obsolete), or to the two representatives of the Aluminum Company of Canada who were sent to examine and collect data on the mine. In addition,
no preliminary understanding or prearrangements had apparently been made with the Ivigtut authorities and the “absence of instructions to the Canadian party or consular officers created much uncertainty on their part and on the part of their perspective hosts. The whole chain of events … as well as the misgivings as to the Nascopie’s character, caused hesitation and delay and created at first sight a natural reluctance of the Danish authorities to impart at first sight full information to foreign visitors.”

Unaware of the tangle of uncertainty that lay ahead, the Hudson’s Bay Company ship duly set sail from Sydney with her cargo of necessary supplies from the Canadian Government and “a cabin full of liquor from Alcan.” The voyage to Greenland was uneventful, held up only slightly on May 30 by fog, and Hendra reported that the ship proceeded up Arsuk Fjord to Ivigtut harbour, a run of about three hours, in the early morning of June 1. The U.S. Coastguard Cutter Comanche was at anchor when the Nascopie arrived. At 8:30 a.m. the Danish Government Controller for Ivigtut, Albrecht Fischer, and the Assistant Mine Manager, Hasselback, came on board, and McKeand explained the reason for the visit was as a relief expedition to open trade negotiations between Greenland and Canada. Fischer invited Hendra ashore to view the plant but the Major thought the party should not go ashore before Kirkwood arrived on the Julius Thomsen.
Perhaps if Hendra had managed to go ashore at that time, he might have been able to allay anxiety on the part of the local officials, relayed to Governor Svane in Godthaab and from there to the Danish Minister in Washington, about the presence of the people on board the Nascopie whose arrival they had not expected. The Julius Thomsen, carrying the new Canadian Consul, did not arrive for another three days, by which time news had reached the U.S. State Department that it was beginning to look as if Canada intended to take over the mine and occupy Greenland.

An angry Adolf Berle Jr., U.S. Secretary of State, called on M. M. Mahoney, Chargé d’Affaires for Canada in Washington, who reported the interview to Ottawa on June 3: “Mr. Berle stated that up to the present the United States and the Canadian Governments had been working in harmony over Greenland. The problem of the production and distribution of cryolite was, he understood, being satisfactorily ironed out, though the Aluminum Company of Canada had apparently had the idea that they had fallen heir to the cryolite mines in Greenland. At the suggestion of the Canadian Government, the United States Government had drawn up a defence project for Greenland. The armaments for this project had been supplied by the United States at a nominal price and were now on their way to Greenland.” The State Department had, however, received information of two developments which might complicate the problem. They had been informed when the Julius Thomsen had passed Ireland that there were not only the Canadian Consul but three naval officers on board; and the Nascopie, which had arrived in Greenland,

... had on board not only the Canadian Vice Consul but an artillery officer, some officials of the RCMP, two mining engineers from AL-CAN and some soldiers. The Canadian Government had informed them only of one artillery officer in mufti and mining engineers to look over conditions at the mine and return to Arvida immediately. Berle admitted that perhaps the RCMP formed part of the normal complement of the Nascopie but could not see the need for the engineers or the rest.

He said the State Department was disturbed by this information. They felt that the presence of these people in Greenland, as well as the presence of three United Kingdom naval officers, might be interpreted as meaning that the Canadian Government intended to assume control in Greenland. He wanted to be informed if they were to stay or
would return to Canada shortly. He said, “I am being very blunt about this, and I could put our feelings in more diplomatic language, but I feel I should report to you that I have discussed the matter with the President and he said he would be ‘very angry’ if the Canadian Government attempted to occupy Greenland.”

Mr. Berle said that this was not the time for this type of 1890 imperialism and that the days of Cecil Rhodes had passed. He said that the mining engineers were from the Alcan, and he indicated his belief that Alcan was trying to take advantage of the present situation in order to get control of the cryolite mines. He said that after all there were very few white people in Greenland, and that a few armed men from another country could quite easily assume control. He did not see that the presence of these men was necessary in Greenland in order to protect the cryolite mines against attack. Minor attacks could be dealt with by the local Greenland authorities with the material with which they had now been provided. Major attacks could not be prevented unless a first-class base were established in Greenland and “we had not yet got around to that.” If and until the situation changed then the Canadian and United States Governments would have to get together to reconsider the matter but until such time the United States wanted to keep the status quo in Greenland as much as possible.5

In Ottawa, where they had been so careful not to have more than one member of the armed forces on board the *Nascopie* precisely because they did not want to upset Washington, Skelton sent the original telegram to Mackenzie King with the comment “I think his [Berle’s] tone is wholly unwarranted,” and sent a prompt response to Mahoney on June 4 asking him to send a copy of the reply to the British Embassy and the Danish Minister and to make an immediate appointment with Mr. Berle to give him the following information:

(1) *Julius Thomsen*. We have been informed that the United Kingdom placed a temporary guard on the vessel to prevent sabotage and to see that it did in fact go to Greenland as ordered. This seems to us to be a reasonable precaution. (2) We did not state that there would be artillery ‘officers’ on the *Nascopie*. We informed Mr. Berle that one such ‘officer’ in plain clothes would make the round trip. This is what is being done. (3) There is no RCMP Officer on the *Nascopie*. Two constables
were sent and four civilians deputized to assist in handling the two machine guns which with one spare and a few rifles constituted the total defensive equipment carried by the Nascopie. (This of course does not in any way compare with the armament carried by the U.S. Coast Guard cutters.) The Nascopie always carries members of the RCMP on its northern trips. (4) There are no soldiers on the Nascopie other than the one officer referred to above. (5) The whole complement of the Nascopie will return on that ship. (6) The only way in which the Aluminum Company of Canada enters the picture is in connection with the negotiations regarding the division of the cryolite which are now proceeding with Penn Salt, the outcome of which, as Mr. Berle knows, is subject to revision by both Governments. (7) Even if the erroneous reports received by the State Department were true it is difficult to see how they could be interpreted as a Canadian attempt ‘to occupy Greenland.’ We have already informed the United States that we have no intention of occupying Greenland. You may add that from the first the Canadian Government has kept the Government of the United States fully informed of all its plans relating to Greenland. In return, we feel justified in asking that our statements be accepted by the officials of the State Department.

Once Berle and the Danish Minister were relieved of their concerns about the possibility of Canada occupying Greenland, events began to move more smoothly at Ivigtut, albeit slowly. The Julius Thomsen came in on June 4 and the naval commander expressed his satisfaction as to the loyalty and reliability of the crew and passengers on board. Erling left the Nascopie on June 5 to join Ken Kirkwood in their consular duties, making courtesy calls on the local administration and mine officials at Ivigtut on June 6, although “in view of some uncertainty [in] recent administrative and diplomatic developments,” the people on shore asked to defer conversations with the Canadian party on the Nascopie until the arrival of the Governor of South Greenland from Godthaab. Another week passed before Governor Svane and U.S. Consul Penfield arrived, at which time some of the Canadian supplies were able to be off-loaded at Ivigtut while the rest would have to wait for another vessel to transport the goods further north.

The U.S. coastguard ship Campbell docked June 12 and off-loaded Greenland supplies and an anti-aircraft gun and machine guns for the defence of
the mine. As further security, fifteen members from the cutter were quietly seconded and temporarily “hired” as “mine guards.” Kirkwood told Hendra on June 14 that the mine manager, a Swedish engineer named Corp, seemed willing to talk to Alcan about supplying cryolite and had signed a one-year contract with Penn Salt in April.7

To date, no member of the Government party except the Vice Consul and the doctor had gone ashore in fourteen days, but Kirkwood said: “Governor Svane, after long delayed arrival here, is now displaying energy in all outstanding matters, in conjunction with mine officials who, since my arrival have been anxious to co-operate with Canadian representatives and interests, but lacked the necessary authority until now.” There was no real progress, however, until it was learned in Ottawa on June 17 that Alcan and Penn-Salt agreed to a fair division of the cryolite supply, with Penn-Salt to handle United States needs and Alcan to have the larger share in order to be able to look after the needs of the United Kingdom, France, and other Allies, and each company would buy direct from Greenland. As soon as news of the settlement reached Ivigtut, on June 19, McKeand and Hendra were able to pay an official call on Governor Svane and the mine manager and hold preliminary discussions concerning cryolite supplies to Alcan.8
Three long, trying weeks after the arrival of the Hudson’s Bay vessel at Ivigtut, on the evening of June 22, eleven members of the Canadian party, including Captain Smellie and the Chief Officers, went ashore for a social evening at which the liquor consignment from Alcan was a well-received contribution. Members of the party were invited to inspect the mine workings the next day, and from then until the Nascopie sailed on June 29 with her cargo of cryolite for Arvida, well overdue for her annual Arctic patrol, the Alcan representatives were able to take photographs, collect samples, and make at least a cursory investigation of the mining plant and operation.9

While the consular representatives waited for the Nascopie to complete her mission, Kirkwood cabled Ottawa on June 21 concerning the location of the new Canadian Consulate. The U.S. Consulate had been set up at the administrative centre of Godthaab further north, and Governor Svane had repeatedly expressed the opinion that the Canadian Consulate should also be situated at Godthaab instead of at Ivigtut, a view endorsed by the U.S. Consul, some of the mine officials, and Erling. Their own house would be needed in either place, as well as essential furniture and a year’s supply of food, and the house had to be erected before September freeze-up made the ground unworkable for a foundation. In response, Keenleyside assured Kirkwood on June 24 that they were arranging to “send a house and necessary food and equipment,” and he asked them to postpone a visit to Godthaab until the Nascopie had left, and to keep the Department informed of their whereabouts at all times.10

At Kirkwood’s suggestion, because he could stay behind and keep an eye on things at Ivigtut while his Vice Consul’s language skills and familiarity with North Greenland would be helpful to “wave the flag” for Canada, Erling left for Godthaab with Governor Svane on the day the vessel sailed and was proceeding north to visit his family in Godhavn on July 6 when Kirkwood told Keenleyside that he would go up to Godthaab himself on July 8 and return to Ivigtut in about a month. Seeing that the Consul was alone in Ivigtut, Keenleyside sent a secret code message July 7 to be decoded by Kirkwood personally: “Please let me have brief but candid appreciation of attitude of Brun, Corp, Fischer, and any other member of Greenland Delegation of importance. Indirect suggestion received from McKeand that Porsild may not be wholly loyal to Canadian interests and that you might prefer to get along without him. Does that represent your view?”11
Although Kirkwood’s reply is missing from the file, subsequent letters do not suggest that he believed that Erling was opposed to Canadian interests; quite the opposite. Ken Kirkwood was quickly proving that he had been a good choice for the Greenland post at a time when the needs for diplomacy and ability to smooth over difficult negotiations were at their highest. Max Dunbar, who met him at his home in 1941, described him as a “scholar, writer, and professional diplomat who was highly gifted, utterly charming and devoted to his calling.” Kirkwood would have recognized from the start that his Vice Consul was perhaps not the kind of man who excelled in pouring diplomatic oil on troubled waters, that at heart he was a loner, a pragmatist, and above all a botanist yearning to be doing his botanical work that had been interrupted once again by the war, but he was conscientious about doing his duty for the Department and the new Consul certainly needed his help for his knowledge of Greenland and his cordial ease with the people and the language and local conditions under normal circumstances.12

When Erling got back to Godthaab, there was a letter waiting from Anderson. Wartime pressure for office space was creating chaos in Ottawa. They had been able to keep the reference collection of the Herbarium clear and available for use, but the vacant space left by the staff of the Fuel Board was awaiting new temporary occupants, and they had had to move some of the herbarium furniture and other material out of immediate use in order to make room for employees of another branch. It was not necessary to move the systematic collection so Miss Harkness had been able to continue work in the reduced quarters. After a month, the other branch moved out so “today we had some of our stuff put back again.” Otherwise, all was well, including Edith whom his wife had seen just before she left to spend the summer with the Raups.13

Erling was glad to hear that the Herbarium and the rest of the Division had weathered the storm intact and trusted that the new wing was now occupied to everyone’s satisfaction and that “no more covetous looks are being directed our way.” He was grateful to Anderson for sending him Polunin’s opus. “I have travelled about a good deal this summer and visited many places and interviewed a great many people,” he said.

A great many changes have taken place, some of which I am dubious about but others no doubt are most desirable. A new generation of technicians have developed and the ability and skill of some of these young Greenlanders impressed me very much. At Holstenborg there
is a small shipyard capable of hauling boats up to 200 tons. It is entirely operated by natives (although owned by the Government). The machines (all electric) were all humming and the place looked very busy.... I have had a visit with my folks now. They are both well but, of course, are getting quite old, especially Mother. Dad is working hard on his two large volumes on the Greenland flora but, like myself, finds it hard not to digress into related matters.\textsuperscript{14}

It was the last time Erling saw his mother for she died before his return to Greenland the next year.

On July 17 Kirkwood wrote to Ottawa from Godthaab, where he was staying with U.S. Vice Consul West:

I understand that a suggestion was made to Porsild that he might be permitted to return to Canada later this year to attend to personal matters and redirect work of his assistant at the National Museum. Such a visit, in my opinion, would be most useful for reporting and consultation with Dept. of External Affairs, securing of supplementary supplies, etc. Visit should be made if possible in August or September. Are we to understand that we are both to remain here through the winter? Question of location and condition of Consulate, site of house and equipment and supplies are influenced by decision on this point. U.S. Consulate have not yet had instructions on this question on their part.

While they waited for answers, there was much consular travelling still to be done. Erling and Kirkwood rendezvous-ed in Godthaab on August 10 and made a trip together to Ivigtut and Julianehaab from August 27 to September 12. Erling left Ivigtut for Godthaab on September 24, leaving Kirkwood to continue to monitor shipments of cryolite for Arvida. By the time Kirkwood arrived in Godthaab on November 23, he could report that, either alone or together, Canada’s two consular officials had visited, made personal contacts, and studied local conditions in all the communities on the west coast of Greenland except for Umanak, Upernavik, and Thule, and they had maintained consular representation concurrently at Ivigtut, the chief economic and shipping centre, and Godthaab, the administrative centre.\textsuperscript{15}
In an interview for the *Toronto Star* shortly after his return to Ottawa for the winter, Erling was quoted as saying:

Mr. Kirkwood and I went all over the settled part of Greenland. There are no long roads and no railways. We travelled along the shore by boat, sometimes in government boats, sometimes on fishing craft. Our object was to meet people, find out what was going on, explain the objectives of our government in sending us there. We would first call on the government administrator in each section, the “kolonibestyrer” and the medical officer, and then gradually meet the inhabitants. My knowledge of the languages came in handy. All government officials came from Denmark and speak Danish. The Greenlanders, a “mixed race” part Danish and part Eskimo, talk in the Eskimo language and many of them have learned Danish as well. These people could easily be subversive but they have no desire to do anything of the kind.

The newspaper article in the *Toronto Star*, dramatically headed “‘Canadian Greenlander’ Thwarts German Plans,” included a photograph of Erling smoking his pipe and some of the photographs he had taken of people in Greenland unloading Canadian supplies. The heading referred to the various reasons that Nazi Germany would have liked to gain control of Greenland when Denmark was conquered, including “those weather forecasts so useful to Nazi raiders engaged in the Battle of Britain, [that] ceased to be broadcast from Greenland some time last summer. The Nazis made one effort to do something about it – sent up radio experts with short wave sets in a Norwegian boat, represented as a supply ship to provision some Norwegian scientists who were really in Greenland. But the Greenland government seized the ship, interned the Germans.”

The fear of Nazi activity in Greenland undoubtedly inspired two despatches from Kirkwood, dated September 18 and October 27, informing Ottawa of the history of suspected German spies in pre-war Greenland. Among the most notable was a German army officer known to the Danish officials as Dr. Max Gruenewald from Kiel, who passed himself off with inconsistent stories as being a member of the German Polar Party and was suspected of being a spy in 1932 when he came to supervise the building of a meteorological and magnetic station on Kajartalik island, an island with a natural harbour for small boats situated in a strategic position commanding the entrance to Arsuk Fjord on which the Ivigtut cryolite mine was located. His unpleasant successor, a
Dr. Paul Burkert (who was there with his wife, since believed to have divorced him), spent considerable time making studies of the fjord, its currents and marine topography, travelling around Greenland waters in a fast motor launch supplied by the German navy in 1933. He was refused hospitality by Corp, the Manager at Ivigtut, because he was regarded as a German spy, which appeared to be confirmed a few years later when a Danish official, on a visit to Germany in 1938, accidentally met Burkert wearing a German officer’s uniform and driving an official Gestapo car. Corp and Governor Svane had both expressed their opinion to Kirkwood that if any German action was taken in Greenland, Dr. Burkert would doubtless be among those directing it.

Since the Battle of Britain, that fierce aerial war that began over England in July, the subject of establishing an air base, aircraft wireless and meteorological stations in Greenland had already begun to be discussed in Ottawa. It was noted by Kirkwood that a German cinematograph party had come to Greenland a few years earlier and made a feature film, *S.O.S. Iceberg* with some remarkable scenes of dare-devil flying among the icebergs and in the fjords. The pilot and leader of the party was the German aviator Udet. “On July 13th this year, a German wireless despatch from Berlin mentioned that Lieutenant-General Ernst Udet, chief of the German Air Force’s technical department, was the most prominent of Germany’s war fliers, and was largely responsible for building up the present German Air Force. It is believed that he is principally responsible for parachute development.”

While all the talk and fear of Nazi undercover activity was going on, the Canadian Consulate move to Godthaab had been approved during the summer but there was no sign of the new “house” until the beginning of October. Erling told Anderson: “The material for our consulate building came two weeks ago on the *Nascopie* after having completed the round trip to the Eastern Arctic. Too bad. There have been a number of ships going to Greenland from Canadian ports, all in ballast and it would have been ever so much nicer to have had the material before winter set in. The Greenland Government, who had promised to have the house built for us, now decided that it was too late and in consequence I have had to be my own contractor.” According to what Erling later told the reporter for the *Toronto Star*, “The job was done by his instructing the local carpenters in person how to put together a Canadian frame house, something quite new to them. He gave the local inhabitants a demonstration, in which they were enthusiastically interested, of this type of construction, of central heating, and of laid in water, which he achieved by digging a well for his water supply.”
The Consulate was not completed before Erling left, however, because Kirkwood complained that the late delivery of the lumber had meant that they had had to make do with “inadequate temporary quarters in a native Greenlander’s leased house throughout the winter of 1940–41 until the late summer of 1941.”

Anderson’s letter of August 20, to which Erling was replying in October, brought him welcome news of what was happening in the world of Botany during his absence. The Chief of the Division of Biology was glad to hear that Erling was getting around Greenland,

… and without doubt you can find time to observe botanical phenomena now and then out of the corner of your eye without neglecting affairs of State, and perhaps ‘pick a few flowers’ occasionally. You might even be able to press a few in the pages of your ‘Hellige Skrif’ or weight them down under the massive files of consular reports.

The National Herbarium is getting along as well as can be expected. The Postal Censorship branch moved into the new wing in June, reserving only a small square at the south end of the ‘L’ which was partitioned off for storage of some of their stationery. Two or three weeks [ago] they had an increase in their force and had to take over the long corridor of the ‘Annex’ again. Miss Harkness had to move her desk into your office again, but work is not interfered with. Some of the metal storage cases in the ‘L’ had to be put in the middle of the corridor, but the tall row of fibreboard cases were left intact along the south wall as they were not in the way of progress.

Miss Harkness was on duty “somewhere in the city” for three days assisting in the National Registration work, so Anderson had put Miss Hurlbert to work on sorting and filing the Gray Herbarium Card Index, of which two new series had been received recently. The botanists at the Jardin Botanique had been inquiring about it and Frère Marie-Victorin wanted to come to Ottawa and talk over Herbarium matters, so Anderson had invited them to his country place at “Blue Sea Lake” for the weekend if they wanted to see that part of Quebec before returning to Ottawa. The party had consisted of Frère Marie-Victorin, Dr. and Mme Jacques Rousseau, M. Charbonneau who drove their car, and Marcel Raymond, a young botanist working on Carices who “did a little botanising” and later sent a list of over fifty species of plants that he collected on the island.
Frère Victorin had recently returned from Cuba where he had spent the winter. He had been in poor health but has improved in health and was looking well, although he could not walk very far. He is a very interesting man, and has travelled extensively in Africa and other parts of the world, including several trips to the West Indies. The main point of their visit at the time was to devise some plan of making use of the Card Index. The Jardin Botanique is short of funds as usual, but can get quite a bit of clerical help, and the suggestion was made that some people might be sent over and copy some of the cards which were most needed.

Anderson had not heard anything from Montreal for a month, but Miss Harkness told him after they left that she saw an item in one of the Ottawa papers that the Jardin Botanique had received a grant of several thousand dollars from the Carnegie Foundation to help out on some of their projects.\textsuperscript{19}

Anderson would not have been Anderson if he had not immediately plunged into the possibility of Erling collecting “a few mammal specimens” for the National Museum of Canada. Erling quickly cut down the list of what could be collected for the Museum in Greenland. The natural history teacher at the college in Godthaab, a Greenlander, said he could get him skulls of some of the mammals mentioned, but there were no lemmings, weasels, wolves, or musk-oxen on the West Coast. “Skulls of seals are, naturally, hard to get because they are invariably shot in the head when taken from the kayak. In North Greenland many are taken in nets, however. There are no dogs in south Greenland, because of the sheep industry and because there is no winter ice and, therefore, no travel by dog team.” He had, as Anderson had guessed, managed to “pick a few flowers by the roadside” that summer, “about one thousand, including a number of rare ones that we did not have in our collection of Greenland plants,” and he was glad to hear that “we still have a National Herbarium and that things at the Museum are not in too bad a way. As far as I know now I am not to spend the winter here and you may see me back on the job some time before Xmas. This place is quite a little town and almost too civilized. People here are amazed that I did not bring a dinner coat.”\textsuperscript{20}

The “dinner coat” comment was great ammunition for Anderson in his November 14 return letter where he could chaff the new Vice Consul about giving himself away as an “amateur diplomat” by not arriving in Greenland properly prepared. He was glad Erling had managed to arrange to get some
mammals for him and to hear that he had done well collecting, but his latest news of the Herbarium, which was “still functioning,” described what amounted to a curator’s nightmare.

His account began gently. The postal branch, with whom they were on friendly terms, was still occupying part of Erling’s old quarters. The main collection was in his old office where Miss Harkness was also working, and the tall metal-sheathed cases containing mosses and “unfinished business” were stored in the ‘L’ with locks on the doors but the material was readily accessible if wanted. The only trouble they had had was with the stack of 185 corrugated fibreboard cartons stacked along the south wall of the corridor in the ‘Annex.’ They were not in the way and had been allowed to remain in place.

However, there were many traces of holes in the walls made by various plumbers, steam-fitters, electricians, and telephone men, and about two or three weeks ago the Blackburn Estate, owners of the Motor Building, decided to decorate the ceilings and walls on second floor as far east as the ‘Annex’ extends. I talked with the decorators when they began work in your office, washing the ceiling and walls before putting on the ‘Alabastine’ and ‘Muresco,’ and they said that they did not have to move the storage cases, as they would paint the ceiling white, and tint the walls as far as they could reach down the tops of the cases. That was all right as far as we were concerned and Miss Harkness was able to continue work by moving around as the work progressed.

However, on last Monday, November 11th, Remembrance Day, a holiday in most branches, none of our staff were in the building. I came down in the morning to do a spot of work undisturbed, but the place was locked, and after attending the exercises at the Memorial, I went home. The next morning Miss Harkness was much disturbed to find that the decorators had been working on the holiday, and had pulled out the stack of 185 cartons, which were glued together to prevent them from sliding, ripped them apart and chucked them on top of the cases in the other room, disturbing the order, and even piling some of the cartons on edge. Where the cartons were filled and the parcels well tied up, I do not think that there was much slipping of specimens from between the drying sheets, but there certainly [was] a tremendous hazard for the smaller lots which were kept separately, as when ungummed specimens get the corners and edges slipped out.
of the papers they are apt to get broken off and pulverized. From brief examinations of some of the cartons, the damage was not as great as might have been expected, but of course the total effects will not be known until all the contents of the cartons have been examined.

Anderson said he

... took occasion to write a strong memorandum of protest against disturbance of the herbarium in the absence of some member of the biological staff, as well as the risk involved to valuable specimens stored in buildings which are not under more than nominal control of departmental officials. In this case, I suppose that the Blackburn people had authority to clean and decorate the rooms. They were considerate of our wishes when we were around, but we could not anticipate overhauling during nights, Sundays, or holidays. The last blitz-krieg before this one was on Victoria Day, the same week you left, and that was by our own departmental people, who came near moving out the whole biological division during my short absence of four days, but that was compromised and modified in time by the Director of the Branch. Of course we all recognize the necessity of sacrificing various kinds of work on account of the war, but at the same time it is rather short-sighted to scrap arbitrarily collections of specimens and scientific records which have taken sixty years to build up. The British Museum people put much of their most valuable material in as safe ‘caches’ as possible at the outbreak of the war. I understand that they lost some material by bombing in London, and a considerable amount of botanical material and many thousand volumes of books were lost in an unnamed British institution. Under the circumstances it behooves us to salvage all we can in this country for post-war use.

In addition to the unfortunate physical upheaval in the Herbarium, in the past week there had been another “little flurry” about the National Museum, started by a dispatch from Toronto stating that the late J. H. Fleming in his will had left his collection and library to the National Museum at Ottawa. This was contradicted in Ottawa paper the next day, stating that Ottawa could not meet his conditions, and explaining that the Victoria Memorial Museum was pretty good, but the specimens and library appraised at $60,000, had been turned over
to the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology in Toronto. In Anderson’s opinion, the collection alone was worth $50,000 and there was nothing like it in Canada, and the library had

... old books galore, bales of pamphlets and separates. Four or five years ago, the owner told me that he was rather hard up from the depression, with income cut, and was “thinking long” before he felt he could afford to buy one book which he had been trailing for years, but he bought it anyway, for $1,000. Some collection.

Mr. F. was not so much concerned about the building (the V.M.M.), which he knew was after all as sound and fireproof as most public building (much more so, in fact) when it is not cluttered up with business offices and beaverboard cubbyholes. His real consideration was permanence of organization, with scientific persons in control of the general management, and as another important essential, the development of a continuing policy by training junior assistants to take over and carry on the work as the older men died or were superannuated without leaving an interim when the work was interrupted and the collections in jeopardy. It was no news to me, as I have agitated these points for twenty years, and I presume F. gave it up years ago. The whole business will leave some black marks of omission in the history of the N.M.C. [National Museum of Canada], which will not be forgotten, but the bringing up of the subject to attention again may have some slight effect in causing authorities to hesitate about scrapping what little is left of the museum. On the other hand, it might give some ammunition to your agricultural botanist friend, if he were in a position to use it. He seems to have dropped out of sight and sound, as the conditions are hardly propitious for his expansionist activities. Otherwise he might make out a case for “protective” occupation.21

If Erling Porsild had been anxiously wanting to get back home to attend to regular matters in the herbarium and see his daughter again after her summer with the Raups, the news from Anderson would have been an even greater incentive to get back to Ottawa to check the damaged boxes and get up to date on what was happening with Museum politics. His return to Canada for the winter months had been proposed and approved in order for him to have
closer contact with External Affairs in Ottawa during the period when exchanges, visits, and mail between Greenland and Canada had to be suspended or discontinued.

Before Erling left Ivigtut on November 20, Kirkwood was taking what seemed to be his last chance to send mail from Greenland to Canada. To Prime Minister Mackenzie King, he sent the customary expression of kind regards and best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. “You will have followed the developments in Greenland this summer with closest attention,” he said, “and no doubt have shared in the reports and letters sent to the Department of External Affairs from this post…. This rather unique diplomatic post has been one full of interest; progress has been made in uniting in cordiality and goodwill the orphaned Danish community here and Canada; and, on a more material basis, the cryolite resources of Greenland, so important to our industrial war-effort, have been successfully placed at the disposal of Canada and our friendly neighbours to the south.” He was greatly conscious of the honour of having been appointed one of the first Canadian Consuls to this special post, “where I believe I shall be, on the departure of Mr. Porsild, the sole diplomatic representative of the Allied nations in almost the whole of the Arctic. I humbly recognize the unique and responsible assignment, and deeply appreciate the confidence which supported it. I am also grateful to the association and invaluable help of Mr. A. E. Porsild, whose selection as Vice-Consul was ideal and whose services here since last June have been indispensable and very highly appreciated.”

To Under-Secretary of State O. D. Skelton he repeated his warmest personal greetings and best wishes for the season, thanking him and his department for their continuous consideration and helpfulness in assisting in the establishment of this remote official outpost. “What had by necessity to be rather an improvised post last June under a war-time emergency has been greatly aided by the support – both official and personal – of the Department and the supplies which arrived later to add to our comfort and facilitate our work,” he said. “I am now looking forward without any apprehension or anxiety to a self-contained winter in Godthaab.” The past summer had gradually witnessed a general improvement in Canada’s relations with the Greenland authorities who had evinced doubt and distrust in the early stages but their confidence had slowly been built up and their confidence restored. The various comings and goings had served to maintain a close contact with Canada with favourable results. “I am convinced that the progress made during the difficult period of this past summer – difficult in our own functions, but especially difficult to the
Greenland authorities during a transitional improvisation of their independent
government – is in the right direction and is of utmost value. Building bridges
across currents of distrust and uncertainty necessarily takes time, but I think
these bridges have been built.”

Turning to the subject of his assistant, Kirkwood was too much the perfect
diplomat to say that in his long and distinguished career in polished consular
circles, he had never had a Vice-Consul quite like Erling Porsild, who would be
bringing back to Canada, in lieu of interesting “objets d’art” for display in an
elegant drawing room, some twenty-five hundred dried plants he had gathered
“by the roadside” and a number of nasty-looking skulls for the National Mu-
seum of Canada, all of which had been collected over their consular summer in
Greenland. What Kirkwood did say, with characteristic generosity, was: “May
I repeat how very much I have valued the collaboration and companionship
of Mr. Porsild in the duties with which we were rather suddenly confronted.
He has done much, on his part, to improve the cordiality of spirit between the
Danish and Greenland community here and Canada. I need not say how much
he has done to aid me personally in a new and unaccustomed sphere of official
work in our entirely unfamiliar part of the world.”

By November 23, the soon-to-be “Sole Diplomatic Representative of the
Allied Nations in almost the whole of the Arctic” was requesting Ottawa to ap-
proach Washington for permission for Erling to return via the coastguard boat
Northland to a U.S. port, possibly leaving Greenland sooner than early in De-
cember. Erling received a note from Anderson dated December 9, stating that
the Treasury Board had authorized extension of his temporary position as bot-
anist to March 31, 1941, “you may be interested in knowing that you still have
a job of sorts even if External Affairs does not need your services any more. I
assure you that we shall be glad to see you back again.” On December 28, a cable
was received in the office of External Affairs, Ottawa: “ARRD BOSTON TODAY
OTTAWA SUNDAY REPORT ON MONDAY. PORSILD.”
CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

HERBARIUM INTERLUDE

Erling Porsild was free to get back to his regular duties in the Herbarium at the beginning of 1941, after updating the External Affairs office on confidential matters he had discussed with Ken Kirkwood prior to leaving Godthaab. He could see for himself how Miss Harkness had got on in his absence, check the herbarium sheets in the damaged cardboard boxes, and get to his correspondence. However, it was still wartime, and his newspaper-established reputation as “The Canadian Greenlander who had thwarted German Plans” gave him something of the aura of the hero returned from the front, a hero whose knowledge of the Eskimo language had made him “a valuable asset in establishing Canada’s new consulate” and personally responsible for creating “a nice little trade with Greenland, replacing Denmark in shipping food and supplies it has always been necessary to import.” Erling was always amused by newspaper reports that made extravagant claims on his behalf, including an earlier one written in Danish that had given him credit for transporting Canada’s three and a half thousand reindeer single-handedly over the Rocky Mountains to the Mackenzie River Delta, but there was no doubt that his consular appointment had increased his reputation in Ottawa as a man who really knew the North, with important contacts beyond those he had already made in the Department of Mines and Resources.¹

Trying to get back to work as usual, there would have been no way that the “Vice Consul to Greenland cum Botanist (Temporary)” could settle down to his “Flora of the Northwest Territories,” not with his continuing consular appointment re-confirmed for later in the year, and not with the lack of department money to get down to the Gray Herbarium for further research. He had two manuscripts by Polunin and Raup on his desk to read and on which to make
comments. Polunin’s opus had just been published, and he sent him a brief note with greetings from mutual friends in Greenland, using an Eskimo expression to “add my small voice to the din of others” to congratulate him on his “fine” *Botany of the Canadian Eastern Arctic* that he thought would prove “a most useful and much quoted manual for time to come.” That done, he could spend more time on the unpublished manuscript that he had just received from Raup, which would need his total attention because it summarized some of the most important concepts in botanical circles for the last decade.²

Raup had been grappling since the previous summer with an article he had promised the *Botanical Review*. “I wish you were available to make comments about it and tell me what is wrong with it,” he had written to Erling in Greenland on July 18, when, as so often between them, he had combined serious intellectual discussion with news in a lighter vein. They had had a family camping trip with Edith to the Adirondacks when they had often wished he had been with them

… if only to laugh at us. It was by all odds the wettest camping trip we ever had. After picking up Charles Denny at Hanover, we drove to the foot of Mt. Marcy and stayed in a tourist camp for the night. The next day we walked to the highest point where camping was feasible below the summit. Most of the timber was scrubby, and balsam. When we got there towards the evening we were in a cloud, and remained either in the cloud or in hard rain practically all the rest of the time we were there. The camp site and the trails were seas of mud, and in one occasion we worked for three hours trying to start a fire. We learned later that the balsam that grows up there is known locally as “the fireproof balsam.” We stayed until all our footwear got soggy, most of our clothes, and one of the sleeping bags. Charles and I made one trip to the summit and saw enough to make us want to go back. He showed me things in the way of frost action phenomena that were quite new to me, and I think there is a nice set of botanical problems related to movement of surface soils by frost.³

Raup’s long manuscript on “Botanical problems in boreal America” had taken him six weeks longer to finish than he had expected, but it was a brave and timely attempt to cover all the phytogeographical problems that botanists working with the Arctic and Boreal flora had been encountering for years.
Earlier botanists had been concerned only with collecting unknown plants from widely unknown areas and bringing them to where they could be examined and catalogued, so it was not until the exploration period was well advanced in the first quarter of the twentieth century that the possibility of looking at plant origin and distribution could begin to be considered in detail. By the end of the 1930s, it seemed that the more that was known about the flora of North America, the more questions were being raised about how it got there, especially in parts of the continent where there were inexplicable species that belonged somewhere else.

To look briefly at Raup’s paper, it can be seen that his “Boreal America” could be somewhat arbitrarily defined as the band of forested land from below the tree-line to the north and fairly well-marked from west to east across central Canada and the Canadian Shield, but it was a little harder to define in the high elevations of the Rockies and Eastern Canada and was more conveniently bounded to the south by what he could only call “botanical convenience” from what was known of the flora. As he had constantly outlined in his proposals for field work, much work was still needed to be done with botanical surveys in that vast inland area, virtually unknown biologically, that a botanist was soon “lost in a maze of problems concerning the origin, age, and stage of development of the land area.”

The biggest problem to be considered was the history of the Pleistocene ice age, because the wholesale destruction of vegetation, and the rearranging of soils, topography, and climates, was inseparable from the history and distribution of plants. Arguments had been going on for years as to how far the ice sheet extended; what areas were not glaciated and might have served as refugia for plants; how marine shorelines were affected, including along lakes and the Champlain Sea as the ice melted, advanced, or retreated; how many interglacial periods with warmer weather had occurred; how plants had survived in some areas and not in others or had survived on mountain islands (nunataks) hundreds of miles apart; why some plants could migrate and others seemed to stay in one place or in several isolated places; whether plants could have migrated from west to east across a non-glaciated arch to the north of the continental ice sheet (as in the Arctic archipelago that was not glaciated), or to the south along the shores of the Champlain Sea; or whether they had arisen in a central area and spread outwards before being wiped out by the ice in the centre.

Despite the huge size of the area, the number of species in the boreal flora was relatively small, and a large percentage might be termed “fluid” because of
poorly defined structural differences between closely related plants. Genetic research was proving helpful, but for characteristics that could be seen out in the field as well as under the microscope, as Polunin had said of *Poa glauca* in the Eastern Arctic, “the transition forms were so abundant and the characters were so unstable that the task seemed futile, and I soon came to agree with Porsild … that *Poa glauca* ‘varies without limits according to the quality of the place.’” There were few endemic boreal species and those that were known were widely separated from each other.

Looking at the welter of ideas and theories that had arisen in order to attempt to explain the present distribution of plants in the boreal flora, Raup noted that it was Darwin who had emphasized the idea of “persistence” of plants in suitable localities after their former continuous ranges had been broken, and it was Fernald who had proposed that isolated communities of plants had survived as relics before the last advance of the Pleistocene in ice-free lands in the arctic and on “nunataks” in or near the margin of the ice sheet, and described these old, pre-glacial species as “conservative” or “non-aggressive” in that they were able to persist in areas that they might otherwise not have been able to pioneer. There had been arguments, both geologically and botanically, as to whether such mountain refuges from the ice had really existed in Eastern Canada, including the contention of Ernst Abbe, who worked in the Torngat area of northern Quebec-Labrador where it had been found that the mountain tops had been glaciated, that some of these plants must have survived in lower areas near the coast, suggesting that they had been protected at the head of fjords, or migrated north from refuges in the south during postglacial warmer climate changes, a hypothesis already proposed by Morten Porsild to account for the southern elements in the flora of Greenland.

Wynne-Edwards had criticized Fernald’s nunatak theory on several counts and proposed returning to the classic concept of Hooker: “that the arctic-alpine flora of eastern North America has formed a single unit since pre-Wisconsin times; that in those times it occupied suitable habitats in latitudes similar or higher than now; that with the advance of the Wisconsin glaciation it was driven southwards and outwards; and finally with the retreat of the ice a recolonization of suitable habitats took place.” He relied on soil preference, isolation, and time to account for disrupted relics or spread of ranges. Marie-Victorin, tactful as ever, had summed it up by saying that there was much truth in both Fernald’s and Wynne-Edwards’ theories, and perhaps the situation was “much too complex for one good simple, schematic and dogmatic explanation.”
still clung to the idea of the persistence of relics in the Mingan and Anticosti Islands as being shielded between tongues of the glacier during the Wisconsin glaciation and spared during the invasion of the Champlain Sea by a smaller submergence than had been thought. He felt that the arctic-alpine plants either had wide limits of climatic tolerance or were narrowly confined to the non-glaciated marginal “rainbow” above the ice sheet that had been lower on the east and west sides. Arid and calcareous soils might have been more important than low temperatures in explaining the continuing existence of some arctic plants in certain areas, and migration could have occurred in post-glacial time along the shores of the Champlain Sea or in the “dry unforest belt that must have existed along a receding ice-front, as a kind of side-walk extending from the Rockies to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.”

On the other side of the Atlantic, Eric Hultén had come up with an entirely new perspective on the problem of arctic-boreal plant distribution. Working from surface-true polar projection maps rather than the Mercator maps that enlarged and distorted the countries around the north pole, he was much more able to look at the problem as within the smaller space of a circumpolar one. In his 1937 Outline of the History of Arctic and Boreal Biota during the Quaternary Period after his studies in Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands, he had started with a proposal for centres of origin for boreal species as being found in central Russia, North-East Siberia, Manchuria, Japan, and the northern part of the Bering Sea area. Long before there was any proof for his hypothesis but based on his observations of the flora, he saw the Bering Sea area as being an unglaciated land bridge between Asia and North America that he called “Beringia.” There were no centres of boreal plant origin in North America or Europe because they were covered with ice during the maximum Pleistocene glaciation. Out of the described Asian and Beringian centres, arctic-alpine species that he called “radiants” had radiated northwards and outwards symmetrically, west across Arctic Asia and Europe and east towards Arctic America. From Beringia and then refugia in Alaska and Yukon, radiants from secondary centres could move across the unglaciated Arctic Archipelago and down the Rocky Mountains along the edges of the continental ice sheet much in the same way that he had observed on the sides of contemporary retreating glaciers. To explain the problems of uneven plant dispersal, like Fernald he recognized species that were “plastic” and able to freely adapt and move to new locations and ones that were “rigid” and had lost their ability to do this. He was the first to recognize the significance of small refugia, such as those found in Eastern Canada, versus
large refugia, such as those found in the Yukon and Arctic Archipelago, because of the loss of genetic variance that affected spreading capacity for plant communities in small areas as against greater possibilities in larger refugia.⁴

Raup had made a masterful presentation of all these ideas as he looked at them critically. “I am more convinced than ever that this man Fernald has made a pretty big splash in the phytogeographical waters,” he told Erling.

As nearly as I can figure out, his ideas of senescence or non-aggressiveness as applied to living species and modern distribution was a new departure – a new premise which became necessary when he began to have relic colonies of plants so close together that their failure to occupy intervening country couldn’t be explained in any other way.…. Have you seen Brother Victorin’s paper, published in the American Midland Naturalist, on phytogeographic problems in eastern Canada? He has an excellent discussion of the whole problem up to and including Wynne-Edwards, but even then it isn’t as clear and incisive as Abbe’s. None of these three has yet considered Hultén seriously enough.⁵

Erling finished reading Raup’s manuscript on January 16, after making notes “for what they were worth.” Looking at his clean personal copy, it is obvious that his notes must have been written on another sheet, but it can safely be assumed that they would not be like the critical ones in the margins of his copies of both Polunin’s and Hultén’s manuscripts that included a number of exclamation and question marks and interjections like “No! Nonsense! Not true! Weak argument!” to express his disbelief or disapproval. He thought Raup had done a splendid job of it.

Within the necessarily limited space available you have managed to give what will prove to be a most useful and badly needed review of the knotty problems of Boreal and Arctic Botany. Your excellent arrangement and marshalling of the problems and your very clear and concise elucidation of some of the little understood ideas, for example in Hultén’s paper, has helped me get a much better view of the whole situation…. I cannot help feeling that you are, perhaps, somewhat biased in your treatment of Wynne-Edwards in favour of Hultén, but that may be because I myself disagree with a good many of Hultén’s ideas. Still, I
think you are immanently right that Hultén’s contribution is the most important one in a century and ought not to remain so largely ignored as it has been so far.

Erling was sorry he had not included some European botanical theories.

I cannot see that you can entirely ignore Steffen or Wulff. Hultén does, but whether one believes Wegener’s theory as a working hypothesis or not, your Review of the Botanical Problems of North America is decidedly incomplete without it. With regards to Greenland I can readily see that it is a great temptation not to “invoke the Monroe Doctrine.” I realize that at this time you cannot very well do anything about it but I do think that it is a pity that you could not have seen your way to incorporate briefly some of the more important works and thoughts. Warming’s ecological paper on the Vegetation of Greenland is fundamental and, I should think, even if in some respects out-of-date, rates higher than Polunin’s on Akpatok Island which, after all, was the first field work done by a 20-year-old lad.

“You were quite right about Steffen and Wulff,” Raup concurred. “They should be in the paper somewhere.” He had contacted the editor but most of it had gone back to the printer and he was too late for anything except an insertion in his discussion of plant communities in Part II. He was able to add some additional references, including Warming, and Morten Porsild’s paper on Disko. It would have been fine if he could have included more discussion of Greenland problems and if Erling had been available he might have had the courage to tackle them, but the paper would have been considerably longer and taken a lot more time. As it was, it was four times the length of the average paper in Botanical Review.

In answer to one of Erling’s queries, he said:

There is a tremendous lot of evidence for a post-glacial warm period. Circumstantial? Yes, a good deal of it! But how much worse is it than a lot of the evidence we work with all the time? … It is true that Polunin was a young man when he did the field work at Akapatok Island, but after reading his papers on it, and considering the way in which they were prepared, I have come to have a pretty high regard for them. I
suspect that they were edited rather carefully by Tansley at Oxford and by Nichols at Yale, and of all the modern ecologists, I have more regard for these two than any. I do not agree with Polunin’s final interpretation of much of the dynamics of the vegetation at Akapatok, but it seems to me that the descriptive matter will stand…. One thing I am sorry about is that I can’t put you in the acknowledgements, which come at the beginning of this paper. You have contributed more than anyone else who has read it.7

“My query regarding the postglacial warm period of the Nearctic was not meant to imply that I did not believe in it,” Erling answered. “I merely wondered if any proof or evidence had ever been published…. The evidence that I found in the Mackenzie Delta, (Earth Mounds which you cite), was both post- and interglacial. My impression is that there is a recent amelioration in temperature in that region and that the tree-line is now advancing.” He had just been down to Montreal for a few days where he had “a nice chat” with Wynne-Edwards, Mousley, Gibbs and “with the crowd at the Montreal Botanical Garden.” “Victorin told me that he thought they would ‘weather the storm.’ ‘The secret is,’ he said, ‘that if you only make such a place big and expensive enough, nobody dares to interfere too much. A $110,000 place can be scrapped – but not one that cost six millions.’ No doubt there is a lot of truth in that.”8

The skiing had been grand since he got back to Ottawa but both he and Edith had had an accident on the slopes. Edith had got by with a sprained knee and ankle that would keep her grounded for the rest of the season, but on March 13 he was

… enjoying a forced holiday following a skiing mishap which occurred about a month ago, when for no good reason I fell and ‘busted’ my knee. I have taken worse spills before and I did not think this was anything but a bit of a sprain, but it turned out that I had torn or dislocated the cartilage in the knee joint, causing the knee to lock. This meant having the d——d thing cut open. My doctor tells me that everything is okay now and that I shall have no after effects if I will only have patience and give the cut ligaments time to heal. I have been back from hospital for almost a week and can hobble around on a pair of crutches…. I am very much afraid that my mishap is going to interfere with my chances
for getting a trip down your way, so I guess you were right that I should have taken the chance when I had it.º

“Can’t you come down here anyway, even for a short time, perhaps in the course of your recuperation?”, Raup asked. He had just seen an article that must have been picked up from the one in the Toronto Star. “I almost forgot to mention the wonderful picture of you that appeared this week in the Christian Science Monitor, along with a little story about your Greenland experiences. There is no question now but that we will have to arrange to shoot off those four guns (or whatever the number is) when you arrive at our house! Would it be acceptable if done with fire crackers?”¹⁰

There would, of course, be no chance of a trip to Boston that spring. The Raups were sorry to miss seeing him before he left for Greenland and offered to have his daughter again for the summer but she opted to take a job in Ottawa instead. Erling was back in the office by March 30 when the President of Alcan, R. E. Powell, gave a radio talk on aluminum entitled “The Tools of War,” and by April 21 he could write: “Things are beginning to move. I have been appointed Consul for Greenland and I expect to be leaving to resume my duties there next month, probably in the latter part of the month.”¹¹

Erling did not tell Raup that there had been another interdepartmental broadside fired from the Central Experimental Farm. On March 24, Anderson received a letter from H. T. Gussow, Dominion Botanist, stressing their need for an Ottawa district flora that he claimed had been started by Dr. Malte when he was still part of their department and contributed to by members of the Farm staff.

Since Dr. Malte’s untimely death, I understand that Mr. Porsild took over the MS and aimed at the preparation of the proposed flora. That was a good many years ago, meanwhile members of my staff continued the study of the flora of the district, since such information is fundamental to much of our work in Agriculture – but we feel that since Mr. Porsild is contemplating such a publication, we cannot proceed with such a project ourselves. What we need is an Ottawa district flora and it is immaterial to us who publishes it, as long as the project is not shelved much longer. What would you feel about Mr. Porsild and our organization joining forces and collaborating on the preparation and publication of the material on hand and to issue a joint publication?¹²
If a Flora of the Ottawa District was truly needed at the Central Experimental Farm, it is a great pity that it was prevented from going to an early completion by the continuing suspicion on the part of the Museum and lack of real cooperation between the two departments. It would be years before Erling could contemplate such work, but his irritated response was reflected in a confidential memo to Anderson in which he noted that Gussow himself, at the time of Malte’s appointment to the National Herbarium, had written to the then Director of the Farm to say that their botanical service should be devoted primarily to agricultural and generally applied related science and “that phase of work relating to systematic and taxonomic botany, botanical surveys and herbarium work,” should no longer be included in their Division. “The present, and apparently urgent desire of Mr. Gussow’s division to commence work on such a large and ambitious project,” said Erling, “seems to indicate that there is not sufficient problems in ‘agriculture and generally applied related science’ for the two systematic botanists that have in the last year or two been added to the staff of the Central Experimental Farm.”

His official memorandum, forwarded to Gussow with Anderson’s reply, noted that the only manuscript on the Ottawa Flora in the Herbarium files was that done entirely by Professor John Macoun and his son J. M. Macoun. It contained skeleton keys to genera and species and a catalogue listing 671 species, supplemented by notes on distribution by the Macouns collected no later than 1911. It had last been updated in 1919 so was now mainly of historical interest. Dr. Malte, who had worked at the Farm from 1912 until his appointment to the National Herbarium in 1921, had added some 10,000 Ottawa District specimens to the Macoun collections between 1922 and 1926, but like the earlier ones his collections were still unnamed and to Erling’s knowledge Malte had left no manuscript. Before any new flora was contemplated, it would be necessary to re-examine every specimen in the Herbarium and implement all the revisions of the last thirty years. Erling had also collected in the district since 1936 and concluded that there was much work still to be done before a worthwhile flora could be published. Since he had been away and would again be away the coming summer on special duty in connection with the war, and the National Herbarium was greatly understaffed, he doubted that funds could be made available for publication at the present time, but needless to say they would welcome any collaboration from Mr. Gussow’s staff which might include revision or determination of critical material made by Dr. Malte. “We can easily supply temporary working accommodation for one or two men in the National
Herbarium,” he suggested disingenuously, an offer also extended by Anderson, and there the matter seems to have ended, at least for the time being.14

Before Erling left for his summer duties in Greenland, he was able to tell Fernald that at last he had found the time to distribute the long overdue duplicates from his Alaska collection. By a bit of “stretching” he had managed to make six sets, the best for the Gray Herbarium containing, with very few exceptions, representative material of all species collected by his brother and himself, including duplicates of all types. “You may find some of the numbers small and scrappy, but it must be remembered that often the collection was done under most difficult conditions, and that transportation and caring for the material always entailed serious problems because botanical collecting was not the primary objective of our expedition.” The second set was being held for the Copenhagen Museum, and, due to the war, “the next few months may decide whether it will ever go there.” The same applied to a third set for Hultén in Lund. The fourth set would go to the U.S. National Museum, and the fifth and sixth to Montreal and Kew respectively. “I have been appointed Canadian Consul to Greenland for the summer,” he added, “and I expect to leave shortly to take up my post at Godthaab. I hope this summer to be able to devote at least some time to botanical work, particularly in the Godthaab district which has been largely neglected botanically since the days of Jens Vahl. Some of Vahl’s best collections came from Ameralik Fjord which has not since been visited by any trained botanist.”15

The official appointment as Acting Consul suggested that Ken Kirkwood would be leaving Greenland permanently as soon as Erling replaced him, and a new Vice Consul might be needed. On April 27, Erling received a long letter from a likeable young biologist named Maxwell John Dunbar in the Department of Zoology at McGill who wanted very much to go to Greenland. Max Dunbar was already a protégé of Taverner’s and had met Erling earlier. “You asked me to send you information about myself which might be relevant to my possibly going to Greenland this summer with you,” he wrote. “I need not stress the great interest I have in Greenland from every point of view.” He had spent two summers in Greenland, one on a mapping expedition to Søndre Strømfjord in 1935, and one to Ata Sound northeast of Disko Bay to study fjord plankton and inshore benthonic fauna and the mechanisms of the bird-feeding zones caused by local upwelling at the faces of the tidal glaciers, and he had two published papers on that work to date. He had spent the summer of 1938 in Glacier Bay, S. Alaska, doing “nothing much more than looking at birds.”
that were new to him because transport difficulties and a rapidly warming climate had made work on glaciers impossible. “As you know, in 1939 and 1940, I was marine biologist in the Canadian Eastern Arctic Patrol in the ‘Nascopie.’ I worked at Lake Harbour and Clyde River while the ship went into Hudson Bay and up to Craig Harbour and Fort Ross.” Two papers on the food of seals and the breeding cycle in *Sagitta* were in process of publication and others would appear in due course.

“I am very keen to work on the economy of seals in Greenland, in particular the harp and fjord seals,” he said:

Very little is known about their food. This can be done from one place, given the possibility of getting the Greenlanders to bring me the stomachs of the seals they kill, and of my being able to see at least some of the seals they come from. I find that the natives never make a mistake in identification of seals. The plankton of west Greenland has had much attention, but it seems that the hydrographic conditions along the coast have been changing in recent years, and it would probably be useful to keep a plankton survey going, say once a week or once in two weeks, if it is possible to arrange this. I could adapt my work, both on seals and on plankton, to fit in with any movements that I should make up or down the coast during the summer.

Dunbar said he was currently working on a National Research Council (Ottawa) studentship, and had been elected three weeks earlier to a Royal Society of Canada Fellowship to continue the work in Arctic Oceanography that he had begun. He would be free to go anywhere after the first week in June, or earlier if need be, and it did not matter when he got back. On a personal note, he said: “I play the piano and the guitar. This is all I can think of, except that I am a product of Edinburgh, Oxford, Yale and McGill. I spent a year on a Henry Fellowship at Yale before coming up here two years ago. My religion is agnostic or rather stronger, and my politics are anti-old school tie. I hope this is the sort of material you wanted; and I hope also that I shall see more of you soon.”

Whether a candidate for the consular service should be anti-old school tie was debatable, but Erling was certainly keen to have him as his assistant on all counts. He told Keenleyside April 28 that he had been to Montreal to see him,
... telling him briefly what the situation was, that nothing definite had been decided upon, and that I was not in a position to make any promises.... His scientific standing is very high and at McGill he is extremely well thought of. I might add that Dunbar impressed me as being a thoroughly dependable person of sound judgment. He has had considerable experience in travelling in the Arctic and knows Greenland conditions very well. He reads Danish and can make himself understood in that language and has a fair knowledge of the Eskimo language. He is twenty six years of age, single and unattached. It seems to me that Dunbar is “just the answer” and I should be very glad to have him along as my assistant.17

The importance of biological collections for Canada was now being added to the need for cryolite delivery from Greenland, and several voices were heard in support of Dunbar joining Porsild in the consular service. “Greenland is one of the key regions in arctic biology in which we as Canadians are specially interested,” wrote W. B. Timm, Acting Director of Mines and Geology Branch to Dr. Charles Camsell, Deputy Minister for the Department of Mines and Resources, on May 15,

... the more so as I know of no particular collections of Greenland birds in any American Museum. In our arctic studies we are greatly in need of Greenland material. Through Mr. Porsild’s agency we have arranged a small exchange for such specimens as the Greenland College Museum at Godthaab has in duplicate but many more are desirable. Conditions have been such that foreign collecting in this country has been very difficult if not impossible, and it seems that Mr. Porsild’s coming residence there is a providential opportunity for us to make up important deficiencies, and one that may never occur again. As Mr. Porsild will have other onerous duties, he will probably not have a great deal of opportunity of collecting and preparing specimens personally, but he will have many contacts with natives and residents, and through them could obtain much valuable material at little cost.

He proposed giving him a small sum for this purpose, originally proposed as $50, which received another exclamation point from Erling, and was raised to $100.
Since the appointment of an assistant to Mr. Porsild was contemplated, Timm felt that it would be in the interests of the National Museum if someone could be appointed to the post who could make use of incidental opportunities to the advantage of Canadian Science. “I am advised that there is just such a man available in the person of Dr. Max Dunbar, PhD, of McGill University,” he said.

Dr. Dunbar has had some arctic experience and is deeply interested in certain fundamental arctic biological problems such as arctic plankton and the food of marine animals, both of extreme practical as well as speculative interest in Canada, the fisheries and the fur trade. He has further, and most importantly, a working knowledge of both Eskimo and Danish languages, is a man of enthusiasm and initiative and without family responsibilities. On the face of it, he seems ideal for the purpose, his linguistic and scientific attainments being outstanding qualifications. If no better qualified candidate is in view I should suggest that this Department urge Dr. Dunbar’s appointment as strongly as under the circumstances is consistent with official procedure.18

Sadly, Dr. Skelton would no longer be there to decide on the suitability of Max Dunbar for his group of elite diplomats. In January 1941, on his way back to work after lunch, he had collapsed and died at the wheel of his car. Lester Pearson wrote movingly of him in his memoirs, saying that this quiet, unobtrusive, retiring man, with a first-class, well-trained mind and relentless capacity for work as Mackenzie King’s right-hand man in External Affairs, had been one of a half-dozen most powerful men in the country but few Canadians had ever heard of him. “He had worked himself to death and was as much a casualty of the war he so deeply hated, and had hoped Canada could avoid, as any soldier killed in action. He was the firm foundation of our department, at home and abroad. He was more. He was at the centre of all its decisions and of many of those of the government. He appeared to be irreplaceable. Of course, he was not – no man ever is – but his death left a gaping void.” Although Pearson had hoped for the job, Norman Robertson was appointed as Dr. Skelton’s successor. There were other significant changes in appointments and positions at External Affairs since Loring Christie, the Canadian Minister in Washington, had become mortally ill and had had to be replaced by Leighton McCarthy, a prominent Liberal and personal friend of President Roosevelt. Lester Pearson
was recalled from London to assist Robertson in Ottawa, although eventually he would go to Washington to assist McCarthy.\textsuperscript{19}

It would be some months before the vice-consular appointment to Greenland could be settled and Erling would have to sail north alone. On June 27, Keenleyside wrote to Dunbar to tell him that his name was among three that were being considered but a final decision would have to wait for Kirkwood’s return from Greenland.\textsuperscript{20}
CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO
GREENLAND’S WAR OF NERVES

“Greenland taken as a whole has enjoyed a quiet and undisturbed winter,” Kenneth Kirkwood reported to Hugh Keenleyside on March 27, 1941. “There is general approbation of the policy followed by the Administration in its external relations; its strict neutrality, and its essential but cautious contacts with the United States and Canada. Unless the theatre of war or hostile raids should spread to this region during this year, there is thought to be no reason for worry, although everyone is anxious and at times jumpy when he hears of occasional enemy flights over Iceland or torpedo-ings in the West Atlantic; the ‘guerre des nerfs’ sometimes reaches even to this region.”

Life in Godthaab had been quiet with everyone going about their own tasks, the only discontent being among Danish teachers, doctors, pastors and colony managers who had been shifted and transferred in a game of musical chairs that pleased nobody as it appeared to have been based on intrigues, private favours, or prejudices – “a situation pretty much the same the whole world over, especially in small circles.” Much of the blame for the unhappy changes was being lain on the doorstep of Governor Svane, whose industrious but single-handed efforts to deal with all administrative matters, both major and minor, with sometimes inept results, were often criticize. Although Kirkwood had managed to stay on mutually friendly terms with him and his wife, they were not generally popular in Greenland. They planned to leave for Canada and the United States on a visit in the spring, and Governor Brun, now at Ivigtut, would transfer himself and his family to Godthaab to take over in Governor Svane’s absence.

Kirkwood had participated in some of the usual social activities in Godthaab, although he had felt it wiser to follow a quiet and non-assertive course
because of the nervousness and tension of the Danish population, arising from the general political situation. This seemed to have had a favourable effect and everyone had been generously friendly. “The Greenlanders themselves are now very interested in Canada,” he said,

… and show a smiling disposition towards myself. Porsild was able to work happily with them, and probably helped to promote their cordiality, which I have capitalized wherever possible. On the Greenlanders’ public notice board have been pinned large magazine photographs of King George VI, of Queen Mary, of Mr. Churchill, the Dionnes going to confirmation, Niagara Falls and other Canadian scenes, etc. etc. Interest is shown on the Canadian flag at our Consulate; and some natives have recognized the British national anthem when they hear it on the radio.

It had become fashionable for most of the Danes to study English that winter and he and James Penfield and George West had each been giving private lessons to individuals who requested them. “This English fad partly was initiated by the frequent visits of the Coast Guard vessels here last summer, and by the presence of the Consular officials; but is also a reflection of the subconscious feeling here (sometimes expressed but often not admitted) of a possible future drift of Greenland into a North American orbit, and misgivings as to Greenland’s future political affiliation.” He had been approached about the possibility of sending older children to school in Canada since it was no longer possible to send them to Denmark and he could report by the summer that many families had been helped to do this.

War news on the radio was listened to regularly from Germany, Denmark, and Iceland, as well as England, the United States and Canada, since the more educated Danes were familiar with all the languages.

Naturally the conflicting news and propaganda unsettles them, and the German boasts or threats disturb them a good deal. They usually discuss this political news freely but anxiously with me or with Penfield and West. They are frankly conscious of the fact that Denmark, by submission to Germany, has put herself technically on the enemy side and away from the Allies, though their sympathies here are pro-Allied and they feel that the Allies are in principle fighting
on behalf of all small ex-neutral countries overrun by Germany and for the ultimate liberation of the enchained European states. Therefore they regard Great Britain as a friend rather than as hostile to Denmark, and the Allied cause as their own hope. This feeling is not strong enough, however, to make them welcome any Allied action or intervention in Greenland, which they would strongly deprecate unless it were to counteract an actual enemy attack. On this point they are most sensitive.¹

This sensitivity was about to be tested, however, because, over the winter, Keenleyside had been deeply engrossed in discussions regarding the need to establish an air base, aircraft wireless station, and meteorological stations in Greenland. Urgent telegrams had been sent to Kirkwood to obtain information on the location and power of radio stations either in operation or established but not operating, and the length, breadth, depth, type of bottom, and the prevailing winds of the freshwater lakes located immediately behind Julianehaab as they were considering a landing strip in that vicinity.²

Wartime orders for aircraft to be built in Canada were on the increase. Alcan was feverishly producing sheet metal for the British aircraft manufacture of Hurricanes and Spitfires, and simultaneously for the Canadian Car and Foundry Company in Fort William, which had managed to send some of their Hawker Hurricane fighter planes in time for service in the Battle of Britain the previous year and had stepped up their production considerably since then. On January 4, Keenleyside’s message to the Canadian Minister in Washington stressed the need for an air base in Greenland by saying that:

During the current year ten to twelve thousand short range planes must be forwarded to the United Kingdom. It will be exceedingly difficult to obtain shipping space for these planes in crates. Alternative is to fly the planes, but their range will be little over one thousand miles. This will necessitate establishment of landing field and highly efficient meteorological and wireless service on southern tip of Greenland. We would like to send a Canadian expedition to examine the possibilities of such establishments at once. Please place these views before the United States authorities and invite their assistance in working out a scheme which would meet their approval and accomplish the ends which we desire. Every day that can be saved will be of value.³
It would be over a month before the reply came from Washington that the United States Government had decided to act on its own to negotiate with the Greenland Government over the establishment of air bases, to give them financial and technical assistance “to assimilate any scheme of hemisphere defence in the spirit of the Act of Havana,” thereby making facilities available to all American nations including Canada, and to send up expert expeditions as soon as possible, which could include one from Canada. “The formula under which Canada will use air base and Greenland will preserve some colour of neutrality has not been decided on, but decision will probably be to apply to aircraft from Canada the rule governing the use of neutral ports by belligerent warships.” A notice from Mahoney on February 15 said that the British Embassy staff doubted the wisdom of the proposed formula, fearing that Germany might then argue that German service aircraft forced down in a neutral country, such as Turkey, should not be interned but given twenty-four hours to leave.\(^4\)

The whole situation had to be carefully thought out by all concerned, because the establishment of any air base had enormous implications for Greenland, affecting both its neutrality and its isolation policies. As Governor Eske Brun pointed out many years later, the first negotiations with the United States had clearly stated that no soldiers would be stationed in Greenland and no warships would visit the country. The establishment of air bases with military personnel “could well have totally disrupted the established social patterns of the population,” he said.

For centuries, Danish policy in Greenland had been based on the principle that the Greenlanders were to be protected against unfortunate outside influences.\(...) Now, suddenly, a military force, that in number exceeded the entire adult male population, had to be incorporated into this system. It was only too clear that an uncontrolled and overwhelming influx of foreign impulses would bring about incalculable and irrepairable damage – irrespective of doubts as to the efficacy of the old policy of isolation under modern conditions, and regardless of arguments in favour of a more liberal approach. From the first, the administration was fully aware of the need for stringent controls. Therefore, it was immediately agreed that the bases be located in unpopulated districts, far from any settlement and cut-off from all contact with the population.\(^5\)
The site chosen for a new air base was in an area near the southernmost tip of Greenland called Narssarssuq, a Greenlandic term meaning “the great plain,” and would be given the code name of “Bluie West One” when the airfield had been constructed. A report on the first scouting expedition to South Greenland from Canada was sent to the British Embassy in Washington on May 19, stating that the site was “far better than was anticipated and the difficulties of construction not abnormal.” Three runways were possible, and the first two (4,000 feet unsurfaced) could be ready in five months. Meanwhile, Kirkwood reported that meteorological reports for Canadian and British use were arranged through the United States Consulate during the winter. The stations, so important for forecasting the weather for air operations over the Atlantic and in Europe, were being set up or upgraded by the Greenland Administration with the aid of American equipment, with a careful eye on the northeast coast where German planes had been seen flying over Scoresby Sound. There was some suspicion of men sent to Ivigtut and Godthaab with the knowledge and consent of the German authorities in Denmark, and the U.S. State Department had been informed that the Germans were buying numerous sets of detailed maps of Greenland in Denmark. The long, virtually uninhabited east coast, practically inaccessible for most months of the year, was a prime attraction for possible German activity. Brun claimed that in 1941 “The administration felt that it would be possible to play an active role in the area against the German war effort” and thus succeeded in organizing “The North-East Greenland Sledge Patrol” to patrol the east coast, somewhat like the RCMP in Canada, and draw up weather reports there for the Allies.  

Meanwhile, the British Military Mission to Washington in April, aware that Germany had developed the technique of manufacturing artificial cryolite on a large scale while Canada and the United Kingdom continued to use the raw material, was still concerned about the safety of the mine at Ivigtut. No news or gossip had reached Kirkwood since the close of coastal navigation at the end of the year but he was under the impression that all was quiet on that front. Governor Brun had been there all winter. The chief of the United States police guard, who had “lacked the capacities or resources for amusing himself soberly or for inspiring his men during a rather isolated life,” had gone south for the winter, but the next senior enlisted man, a good RCMP type, had taken charge, and as far as he knew they had had no trouble and there was no news of importance on the side of the miners. “I understand that various protective measures have been taken at Ivigtut,” Kirkwood said, “including a look-out
station at Arsuk at the entrance to the fjord, with a small wireless set communicating with Ivigtut, and a patrol motor-boat stationed at Arsuk or vicinity, used I think by police guard personnel. Regulations have been issued for controlling the entrance of shipping to Ivigtut. Ivigtut itself has relieved the greatly overworked solitary wireless operator, a competent and pleasant Dane, by providing him with a Greenlander assistant ... the first Greenlander to be employed at Ivigtut.” Ever the gently optimistic diplomat, he added: “Reports of recent submarine activities south of Iceland or toward this side of the Atlantic have created some nervousness here; but some of the worrying is the result of a winter of isolation, rumination, and vitamin depression, which will be dispelled when Coast Guard ships appear again and restore moral confidence or good cheer.”7

In further exchanges in May, Ottawa again suggested that “a Canadian garrison” could be set up to guard the mine, which was immediately turned down in Washington since, as Berle said, the United States had taken on the complete defence of Greenland under agreement with the Danish Minister, the Germans knew that any attack on Greenland would bring the United States into the war, which was a very strong deterrent, that further defence plans would be forthcoming but meanwhile the defence of the mine to date was adequate. In Ottawa, Erling Porsild was not so sure. He had been going into the External Affairs office since the end of April to go over recent files on Greenland matters, and on May 27 he sent a memo to Keenleyside:

When looking over the files in your office on ‘Greenland Defence’ I noticed that additional guns were contemplated for Ivigtut Mine but that no important changes had actually been made since I left in December last. In view of my knowledge of local conditions at Ivigtut, the personnel and the topography of the country I feel it is my duty to point out, before leaving for Greenland, that in my opinion the present defence measures at Ivigtut are so utterly inadequate that a landing party of no more than six men, armed with tommy guns, from a vessel no larger than a small, armed trawler, could capture and destroy the mine, even if a U.S. Coast Guard cutter should happen to be in the port at the time.... If you feel that the question is of any importance I shall be very glad to explain fully how such a capture could be effected.8

After looking over Erling’s ingenious plan of attack on the part of possible invaders, based on the fact that suspected German spies had made a thorough
reconnaissance of the mine and fjord two years before the war started, it is tempting to suggest that he had seen too many war movies while in Ottawa over the winter, but the scenario of German spies entering coastal areas in disguise, which had been reported on occasion, was a current wartime pre-occupation. The “defence plan” that he presented to Keenleyside on June 5, complete with sketch map, began by noting that ships entering the fjord in the open summer season usually proceeded south of Arsuk Island en route to the mine, although there was a much narrower but equally safe channel on the north side used chiefly by local ships.

At present an observation post has been established at the native village of Arsuk, near the north entrance to the fjord. A Danish store-keeper and former wireless operator is the only white man in the village. He is an employee of the Greenland Government and has been provided with a wireless telephone set. All ships and boats bound for Ivigtut have been instructed to report at Arsuk before proceeding up the fjord. In addition a 12-ton motor boat, also equipped with radio, is available for patrol work.

The main defence at Ivigtut consists of one 4-inch gun mounted on a rocky point across the fjord from the mine. It commands the approach to the mine as well as the mine and town and roadstead and harbour, but when I left Ivigtut, in December, no radio or telephone communication had yet been established between the gun and the mine. In addition there were three machine guns and a number of rifles at the mine. Although the distance from the gun to the town in direct line across the water is no more than three miles, a telephone cable cannot be laid across the fjord because of icebergs fouling the cable. A land line also would be impossible because of a glacier at the head of the fjord.

My contention is that the present defence is utterly inadequate and that it would be entirely ineffective unless the enemy approached in broad daylight up the main channel. Fogs, however, are frequent near the entrance to the fjord, due to the presence of the ice-pack, and on most days a vessel could easily slip past Arsuk unobserved. A more likely way of attack would for a vessel to approach Arsuk from the north, from which direction a ship cannot be seen from the village, and to have a couple of men arrive at Arsuk on foot. If these men spoke
English and pretended to be shipwrecked fishermen who wished to report to Ivigtut they would arouse no suspicion among the natives and would have no difficulty in gaining control of the radio telephone. Via a short-cut overland, from an inlet directly back of the gun, a small landing party could capture the gun from behind while perhaps other attackers, disguised as native fishermen, attacked the gun position from the sea, using a native fishing boat from Arsuk. Once the gun was captured, the mine and any ship that happened to be in the roadstead could be speedily destroyed. Even a coast guard cutter, if taken by surprise, would have no defence against a shore gun. Once the mine was captured, by a landing party attacking across the hills from Ika inlet while the town was being shelled, a few charges of dynamite would destroy the coffer dam which protects the mine from the sea. The pit, which is 300 feet below sea-level, would thus be flooded. Mining machinery and power plant likewise could easily be destroyed and a ship could be sunk along the loading pier. In this way the mine could be put out of operation for at least six months and a whole year would elapse before shipping could be resumed.⁹

A copy of Erling’s report was despatched to Washington on June 9, two days after he set sail for Godthaab. It seemed that his information had been received seriously, for Keenleyside noted in his accompanying message that by June 7 there were several defences already in the planning stages for Greenland that included intermediate landing fields for planes being flown to Britain, to be established about seventy-five miles east of Ivigtut and ready for use by August, while naval patrols would be maintained at Ivigtut with a battery of two guns to command the channels plus a small garrison as local defence.¹⁰

The reaction to the Canadian proposals for the landing strip and defence of the mine was decisive and almost overwhelming in its speed and scope. Six weeks later, word came back from Washington to the effect that the United States Government had undertaken the sole defence of Greenland and no assistance from Canadian forces would be required. “A force of the United States Army Engineers, together with certain limited ground forces for local defense, has arrived in Greenland. The construction forces are engaged in the construction of defense facilities in the vicinity of Julianehaab and Ivigtut.” When the air bases were completed, a fair distance from either of the towns, it was estimated that there would be 2,000 officers and men at Julianehaab and 500
officers and men at Ivigtut. Additional forces would be sent if need became apparent, plus naval forces of the Atlantic Fleet were prepared to prevent access to Arsuk Fjord by any hostile elements and to support the Army in its defence of the mine.\footnote{11}

The arrival of the first troops was announced in the \emph{New York Times} on August 6 with a photograph captioned “The Long Arm of US Defense Reaches Greenland” plus an explanatory note “Supply ships escorted by destroyers and a coast guard cutter enter the harbour at Bluie West, the name of the new Naval Base. Troops aboard a transport shown in foreground.” The code name “Bluie West” for all the military instalments in Greenland, which included the new naval establishment at Ivigtut, had apparently been kept secret from everyone but the \emph{Times} correspondent. Wrote Keenleyside to the Chargé d’Affaires on August 8: “Will you please ascertain and report the location of Bluie West?” to which the Canadian Minister replied: “Mr. Cumming of the State Department who is well posted in Greenland geography, said that he had never heard of such a place and the Geographer of the Department on being consulted, could find no such reference in any of his maps. It looks as though the \emph{New York Times} had invented the name, possibly in the interests of secrecy.” There was considerable concern that the photograph had been smuggled out of Greenland on either the cutter or the destroyer on its return journey and would not have been released for publication if the authorities in Washington had known about it.\footnote{12}

Meanwhile, Erling Porsild joined Kirkwood in Godthaab on June 23, arriving on the S.S. \textit{Sarniadoc} and bringing materials to complete the consular house along with other supplies. It is interesting to note that he reported “an uneventful crossing,” because for years afterwards Trevor Lloyd, later Consul to Godthaab, enjoyed repeating a great story Erling had told him about that trip. “The captain had never been on the ocean before,” Lloyd said, “didn’t know how to do it, was drunk from the estuary onwards, didn’t have a proper chart, so Erling and a crew member navigated by way of an old school atlas that he had in his luggage.” Certainly Erling’s letter to Anderson on July 7 confirmed that the captain had never made the trip before, for he said “My ship was a lake freighter which for the first time was in salt water since many years ago she came across from Glasgow. I learned later that when we steamed up the Godthaab fiord the natives reported that two ships were coming, one little one pushing a big ship backwards (all the lake freighters have the smoke stack near the stern and the bridge way up forwards).”\footnote{13}
Alcan’s shipping company, Saguenay Terminals Ltd., was having problems finding suitable ships to transport both the badly needed bauxite from Guyana and the badly needed cryolite from Greenland, since almost every available vessel was being impounded for war use with the loss of so many merchant ships to the increased U-boat sinkings in the North Atlantic. Out of desperation, the company had had to settle for the long, flat-bottomed, under-powered, canal-type Peterson Line lakers even if they were unsuitable for use in Arctic waters. Erling reported that the captain of another ship had spotted the Sar
niadoc outside Sydney on her return trip “with her decks awash and the flag half-mast” but the full story was never explained, while on November 3, there was a near disaster with a sister ship, the Lawrendoc en route to Ivigtut from Godthaab, that had been unable to cope with heavy weather due to the same faulty design. She had undergone an amazing five-day saga in a southwest gale that increased to hurricane strength, and her captain had had to cope with a snapped anchor chain, flooded hold, broken cables, and damaged or destroyed cargo, but she was eventually floated and sent on her way, miraculously undamaged. “Had it not been for the sound sense and seamanship of her master, and for the willing help of the Greenlanders, the episode would not have ended so harmlessly,” said Erling.¹⁴

Leaving Erling in charge in Godthaab, Kirkwood was on board the Julius Thomsen en route for New York when the ship collided with an iceberg in dense fog in the Strait of Belle Isle, damaging its bow plates above the waterline. The accident, though fortunately not dangerous, would result in a delay for repairs when she reached port. Conscious of what this delay would mean to the already-stressed system of coastal supply deliveries, he immediately sat down to write a report outlining the shipping problems they had been having that summer in Greenland.

He began by noting the dependency of the settlements on both east and west coasts for the distribution of supplies by steamer or motor-schooner during the open navigation season. Every principle settlement had its own motor-schooner for this critical task, but there was an extreme shortage of vessels in 1941 since one had been lost with all hands that summer, one had been taken over as a police-guard patrol boat for Ivigtut, two others had been continuously in the service of the United States defensive programs for survey work and the transport of officials, and a small steam whaler was lying decommissioned at Sukkertoppen since the war began because of the lack of any qualified engineer. Three larger steamers, the Gertrude Rask, the Hans Egede, and the Ivigtut
steamer *Julius Thomsen*, had been commandeered for coastal relief deliveries when they were not making trips with cryolite to the United States, but they had all had accidents that summer – on May 12, the *Gertrude Rask* was caught in the ice-pack on her return trip from Philadelphia and then hit a rock, and, although fortunately released and escorted back, her repairs had delayed her for two months; the *Hans Egede* ran on a rock off Godthaab on July 9 and had been repaired locally but her service was still somewhat delayed; and now the *Julius Thomsen* was not only delayed by escorting the *Gertrude Rask* but after the accident on July 20 was expected to be in dry dock for at least a week for repairs. All of these incidents were making the delivery of supplies difficult as well as making the Greenlanders extremely anxious.

It had been suggested that the *Nascopie* would be available to distribute coastal supplies in April and May, an offer that was warmly welcomed by the Greenland authorities. However, it later transpired that she would not be available after all, which created a great deal of disappointment. “The reputed reason – namely, that the Hudson’s Bay Company was asking an extortionate charter-age rate for the *Nascopie* – created even more of an unfavourable impression,” said Kirkwood.

The only time that I have seen the characteristic good nature and friendly attitude of Governor Brun transformed into a rather bitter irritation was when he called on Mr. Porsild and myself on June 24th, and in great petulance asked why the rate dispute between two powerful Canadian private commercial companies should be allowed to tie up a very badly needed ship. In view of the general shortage of shipping, he said, it seemed disgraceful to immobilize the *Nascopie* because of a clash of private interests or commercial dickering; “the war,” he exclaimed, “cannot be won by the Allies if such pettifogging private price-disputes are permitted to tie up shipping or obstruct marine services.” Governor Brun’s ruffled temper was allayed during our conversation, but indicated an underlying annoyance. The spring services of the *Nascopie* would have been an exceedingly welcome cooperation with the Greenland authorities.15

As it turned out, the problem with the *Nascopie* had nothing to do with a rate dispute. It was regrettable that her unavailability to help with coastal deliveries had caused worry and disappointment, but the Hudson’s Bay Company had
refused to charter her for Greenland, “not because they desired an exorbitant charter rate,” explained Bruce MacDonald, Secretary to the Canadian Shipping Board, August 12, “but because they were unwilling to risk, in belligerent waters, a vessel which had been built especially for their own Arctic service.” However, as the situation changed in Greenland waters later that summer, the Nascopie was permitted to call at Ivigtut on her way back from the Canadian Arctic Patrol to pick up cryolite for Arvida.16

The 1941 shipping season was marked by favourable weather conditions and an almost total absence of pack ice on the west coast of Greenland, Erling noted. There were more ships than in any previous year, due to the establishment of the United States Naval and Air bases and the considerable amount of naval patrolling of Greenland waters by the United States Coast Guard and Navy. There had been one naval incident in September when the U.S. coast guard cutter Northland had intercepted and examined a Norwegian vessel suspected of subversive intentions in Scoresby Sound on the east coast, but otherwise it had gone well. Between June and November, twenty-five ocean ships entered and cleared from the port of Godthaab, in addition to a much larger number of smaller, coastal schooners of 200 tons or less chiefly engaged in distributing supplies to secondary ports and in distributing coal from the Greenland coal mine at Qudtligssat. In addition to the Canadian freighters chartered by the Aluminum Company, there had been about half a dozen former Danish ships under Panamanian registry making voyages between Greenland and North American ports. Eighteen fishing boats from neutral Portugal were known to have fished on the Greenland banks. One cargo ship had brought salt and taken back salt cod, and a Portuguese Naval hospital ship tending their fishing fleet on the Greenland and Newfoundland banks had called at Godhavn. Consular duties now included services to all Canadian and some Greenland ships during the shipping season, including Marine Protests and issuing Certificates of Origin and Interest. Erling dealt with an increasing number of inquiries related to trade and shipping, including some from British firms and individuals addressed to the American Consulate “because the existence of a Canadian Consulate in Greenland apparently is not well known outside of Canada.”17

In Godthaab on July 7, Erling had written to tell Anderson of his progress with building the Canadian Consulate. “My colleague has now left,” he said,

… and I am slowly getting things ship-shape and the work on the consulate under way. At present the men are toiling with the plumbing
which is all new and wonderful to the Greenland builders who have never seen a W.C. before, in fact the Canadian Consulate will be the first house in Greenland, outside the Ivigtut Cryolite Mine (which is even more modern than most American or Canadian mining towns) to have running water and modern “inside plumbing.” In Greenland I could not permit myself to take active part in this work without “losing face” so I have to content myself with explaining things to my head carpenter who, incidentally understands no Danish.

Max Dunbar supplied additional details. The carpenter’s name was Peter Lynge, and the house, which included very handsome British Columbia lumber, was situated on Skibshavenvej (Skip Harbour Road), then the only road of any length leading out of Godthaab. The Consulate, and the home of Handelsinspektor Axel Malmquist, were the only two houses on the road between the radio station and the home of a sheep farmer named Lambert. The harbour was a mile or so further on. The only other landmark was Kleinschmidt’s Pael, the post on which the Moravian missionary used to hang his lantern when going to the village to find his way back at night. The Mission was on the sea-shore at the end of a side road. The Consulate was not built on rock, as were all the other houses in Godthaab, but on sand and gravel, so that it had a full, man-high basement with a septic tank and drainage, and an electric power generator. “Luxury at that time,” Dunbar commented. When Trevor Lloyd did his term as Consul, he noted that the house was made from the same materials as for Reindeer Station, and the basement, dug Canadian style, created amazement on behalf of the Greenlanders who were sure it would sink. “But Erling,” they cried. “All houses in Greenland are built on rock!” Kirkwood reported on his return to Ottawa that the Canadian model Arctic house installed by Mr. Porsild had the following unique points of interest to Greenland: a) Erection on gravel foundation instead of rock; with special ground drainage; b) best design, lumber, insulation, minimum cost for maximum space; c) best septic tank system in Greenland; d) first hot-air central heating system in Greenland; and e) first Delco lighting system in Greenland when completed by installation of Delco generating plant.18

In his final report to Ottawa on July 26, Kenneth Kirkwood summed up the problems and achievements of the first year of the first Canadian Consulate in Greenland. He was satisfied with what they had managed to accomplish, despite the lack of advice or instruction to Consular officials on arrival that had
created the unfavourable attitude and suspicion toward Canada in the beginning; despite the lack of food supplies for four months that had forced them to be dependent on the Cryolite Mine at Ivigtut, the U.S. Consulate at Godthaab, and private Danish hospitality at Julianehaab; despite the lack of needed office and other equipment for an entire year and the serious delays in supplying the building materials for the Consular house; and finally despite the paucity of information of all kinds and at all levels which proved to be a considerable handicap in providing Consular services. However, the early impediments were ultimately remedied and could now be considered as merely of historical interest, as part of the task of setting up an improvised Arctic diplomatic outpost without prior preparation or full consideration of requirements.

At the end of the year he could report that cordial and friendly relations had been established on a solid basis between the Greenland Government and Canada. An apparently adequate supply of cryolite to the Canadian aluminum
industry had been obtained in 1940 and was assured for 1941, dependent on shipping facilities. Greenland imports from Canada were estimated at about $330,000 for 1941. In some sixty official communications, the Consulate had furnished the Canadian Government with considerable general information on Greenland conditions and internal matters while handling many matters of Canadian interest, such as meteorological organization and reports, provision of special codes, defence matters, airways, etc. Further progress in the forthcoming year should be merely a development and extension of the foundations already laid, with the one exception being the new and unforeseen problems of defence arrangements including Allied use of United States air bases in Greenland.19

Kirkwood’s Arctic Outpost year was over and he would not be returning as Consul to Greenland for the coming winter. On August 2 he cabled Max Dunbar to arrange a meeting. Describing Kirkwood as “a truly remarkable and most unusual man,” Dunbar said later: “I met him first in 1941 … at his home in Ottawa. I have in my library a treasured copy of his Excursions Among Books, which contains a biographical study of Lafcadio Hearn and essays on literature in general, including the best study of Robert Burns I have seen. Diplomat, traveller and writer, he was a shy and modest man, ‘whose modest mien belied his power.’ There is also a chapter entitled ‘On Reading in the Arctic,’ from his Greenland winter of 1940–41. Both in his diplomatic career and as an author, he was a connoisseur’s man.”20

On August 19 Keenleyside wrote to Dunbar: “After thoroughly canvassing the whole Greenland situation with Mr. Kirkwood and others it has been decided to offer you an appointment for the current year as Vice Consul and Acting Consul at Godthaab, Greenland. The proposal is that you should go North sometime before the middle of September and that Mr. Porsild should return leaving you in charge sometime about the middle of November.” To Erling, he sent word that Kirkwood was being assigned to another post and instructions would follow regarding his personal effects. Dunbar had been appointed and would proceed north probably in September. “It is intended that you will return to Canada toward the end of the year leaving Dunbar in charge of Consulate as Vice Consul. Please inform Greenland Governor. You may also inform the United States Consul. Please advise as to ration requirements or other supplies needed at earliest possible opportunity.”21

On August 29, Keenleyside approached R. E. Powell, President of Alcan, to inform him of the new appointment and ask if they had passage for Dunbar
on a ship leaving for Greenland in the near future. “I hope that he may meet the officers of your company before he leaves,” he said. The company had been complaining to the Greenland Delegation in New York about the quality of the cryolite that they had been receiving, that it was not up to the 80 per cent specified in their contract. They would also have had the ear of Governor Svane who had decided to remain in the United States, leaving Governor Brun to be the sole Governor of and in Greenland for what would turn out to be the rest of the war. By October, Alcan was complaining about the quantity as well as the quality of cryolite they were receiving because the shipments were not pure and they were being short-shipped in favour of Penn-Salt. Another meeting was pending with Penn-Salt, but there is no doubt that Dunbar would have been fully informed of the latest problems with cryolite by the time he reached Godthaab on the Alcan-charted *Lawrendoc*.22

Meanwhile, Keenleyside cabled Erling on October 16 for an appreciation of the situation in Greenland with reference to the work of the Consulate and how it related to his personal programme. “Have matters developed in such a way as to make it safe and feasible for you to return to Canada before Christmas leaving Dunbar in charge? Is the Consulate building adequately equipped for the winter months? Your views on these and related questions will be received with interest.”23

Erling’s views were that the Greenland Administration of life and trade seemed to have adjusted to the changed conditions and were running more efficiently under Governor Brun alone at Ivigtut and elsewhere. Cordial relations were continuing with the Greenland Administration as well as with American colleagues and he was being informed on all important matters. “The shipping season now almost at an end, and unless new aerodromes require to be visited by Canadian representatives, there would seem to be no action to be taken during the winter that Dunbar could not attend to alone, provided that he arrives here in time to become familiarized with the general situation. The new building is very satisfactory and comfortable, and, with supplies now on their way, we are well equipped for remainder of the winter months. While I am prepared to remain, if necessary, I feel that probably I would be more useful in my Department at home during the winter.”24

His next communication was headed “Re: Dunbar. Since his arrival October 20th has fully familiarized himself with work here, and with Greenland situations in general. He has been very well received by Greenland Administration, American Consul, as well as can be expected in the Colony, and I am fully
satisfied that because of his sound judgment and winning personality, and his knowledge of Danish, he is not likely to experience any difficulty if he is left in charge of Consulate during the winter.” If Keenleyside agreed to his leaving, Erling requested permission to return to Canada via New York on the last boat of the season to leave Godthaab as it was too late to connect with the last direct ship from Ivigtut.25

On December 1, Dunbar wrote his first letter to Ottawa as Acting Consul. “Porsild will be leaving very soon now, in a flurry of snow,” he told Keenleyside.

He has shown me the ropes to such effect that I do not expect any situation to arise with which I shall not be able to deal…. The social round here is wearing. Conversation topics seem to be limited, and talk is very small. The Danes have a great genius for talking about food without apparently getting tired of it. The complex here being colonial rather than frontier, the formalities of Danish manners and conversation are intensified; but I think that my lapses into Canadian casualness are a relief rather than a shock to them. Godthaab is almost small enough to be “so small that there is no gossip; everybody knows,” but not quite, and to sit by and look on from a Consulate is more fun than taking part in it. Certainly there is lots of room for a Laughing Diplomat here. Nothing but the economy of Godthaab is taken very seriously, and the war is just too bad. I do not believe that the majority are aware that the ships that bring supplies to Greenland are fair game for submarines.26

They would be even fairer game in less than a week. Erling left Godhaab on the last vessel to travel between the neutral countries of Greenland and the United States of America. The ship was still in or not far from Arctic waters when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, and Hong Kong on December 8, when Britain and America declared war on Japan. She was steaming as fast as possible for New York when Hitler declared war on the United States on December 11 and began readying his U-boats to attack all shipping along the eastern seaboard. It remained to be seen whether ocean-going vessels of any type would be able to deliver Greenland’s precious supplies or transport the crucial cryolite back to North America safely in the year ahead. The building of the big United States “Bluie West” air and naval bases had come just in time.
CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

UNCERTAINTIES IN WARTIME OTTAWA

On his way back to Ottawa in December 1941, Erling took the opportunity to spend a night with the Raups and visit the Gray Herbarium in Boston. In meetings with Raup and other botanists on staff as well as Gray Herbarium Director Professor Fernald and Arnold Arboretum Director Dr. Merrill, he was strongly urged to publish his long-awaited flora of the Continental Northwest Territories, if for no other reason than because their work, and the work of a number of other plant geographers, was being held up by lack of information from the region covered in his monograph. Raup especially, having led an expedition to the Nahanni region three years earlier, needed data from the northern parts of the Mackenzie District, and he had a number of new species in his collections that Erling had described but not published which, from consideration of colleagueship, he was reluctant to describe and publish himself. It was decided that Erling should at least put together his descriptions of new species, revision of genera, and the most important aspects of geographical distribution for immediate publication.¹

When he got back to Ottawa at the end of the month, confirmation that these “novelties” could be published came from Raup that Fernald was quite willing to publish the new species in *Rhodora* as long as they did not run into a long paper. Erling had since gone over his manuscript notes. “Frankly I am now awed by finding that I have no less than thirteen new species, two new varieties and four transfers in addition to about 125 important range extensions that ought to be published. To include the latter at this time would probably make quite a large paper and I think I had better forget about that. Even getting the novelties ready for publication is quite a chore; the translation of the [Latin] diagnoses especially is going to worry me a lot – couldn’t I do them in Eskimo?
However, I’ll get busy.” Raup had mentioned that Ernst Abbe from the Gray Herbarium was hoping to get up to Ottawa to do some work under his Guggenheim Fellowship grant on the Flora of the Richmond Gulf area, so Erling wrote to Abbe on January 2 to tell him that the National Herbarium was “still there and ‘doing business.’ Our office space has been somewhat reduced but we can still give you a desk and a chair to sit on if you wish to come here to work on your arctic plants.”

It was amazing that the Herbarium was still there, given the ever-increasing pressure for office space in wartime Ottawa. Anderson had written to Erling back in August to tell him that “The Postal Censorship Branch, after many delays, finally moved out of the Motor Building on July 19th and 20th, and the herbarium question was in suspense for a week, until on July 29th the Wireless Section, Canadian Corps of Signals, moved into the rooms in the new part of the flat south of the herbarium quarters.” For two days, carpenters, painters and decorators were busy putting up a long partition running the whole length of the ‘Annex’ as far as the National Herbarium wall, divided into offices, leaving a narrow corridor giving access to the Herbarium and to the offices in the new part. “None of our stuff was moved except the two large cases of pamphlets and separates which we moved into the Herbarium office.”

Five days later, Anderson wrote to tell Erling of official approval of $100 for bird specimens acquired in Greenland and added:

Of course there may not be any Museum or any place to put specimens by the time you return to Ottawa…. Yesterday morning Mr. Lynch came over and said that there is a drive from more quarters for Unemployment Insurance Board, and that it is almost certain that Patch and Sternberg’s quarters on the ground floor will have to be vacated, with a strong possibility that when they get in they will want to “get together” and the National Herbarium, mammal room and bird room will have to be cleared out. Yesterday afternoon, Lynch asked Sternberg to take Patch and myself over to Hull to look at a building which might be offered to us, corner of Dupont and Frontenac Street. It is a fairly new two-story brick veneer building, but with flimsy wooden supports in basement, and with typical Hull wooden fire-traps on all four sides. Sternberg does not like to move, but if he has to move would like to drag all the rest of us along. He could stand it, as he does not have much more than a lot of heavy machinery which are not in use, but if
we have to move the mammal, bird and plant collections over into the heart of Hull, the authorities are certainly taking an indefensible fire risk. There will probably be a fine bonfire, and they are “asking for it.”

Two other alternatives were being suggested, but “There is not much we can do about it, as any branch engaged in activities connected with war or postwar activities, has ‘priority’ in everything.”

There had been no move for the Herbarium up to January 1942 but the possibility continued to hang uneasily in the air. Erling had told Abbe on January 2 that

Due to war congestion you may find it difficult to get a room in town, but if you are willing to put up with a poor bed at my place, we should be very glad to have you. I have no housekeeper and Edith and I take turns with the preparing of meals, etc., so you may want to get your dinners in town. I may take Edith somewhere skiing at the end of the month or in February when snow conditions improve, so if you can it might be best if you could come here this month. However, we have made no definite plans as yet, so if January does not suit you we may be able to plan our trip accordingly.

By February 26, Erling could tell Raup that he had been “working overtime” to get his notes in shape for publication. “Watching the way the ‘stuff’ is piling up is beginning to make me jittery,” he said,

… not to mention the fact that it seems that on almost every page I have to take “pot shots” at Fernald. Frankly this is worrying me a great deal. It seems like heaping insult upon injury to ask him to publish in his journal criticism of his own work. Still, what can I do if I am in the unfortunate position “not always able to agree”? Abbe left this morning. We have enjoyed having him here and we have had many stimulating discussions about many things. My only regret is that I feel that he should have stayed longer, and that he should have taken the time to clear up a number of problems that I think are better solved here than at the Gray. It is too bad that, having said he would be here for two weeks, he felt that he must not overstay.
Abbe had said that he did not know how he could repay Erling’s hospitality, but later that year, while writing up his report to the Guggenheim Foundation, he wrote an appreciation that amply rewarded his host for his generosity. He enclosed his remarks to the Foundation in a letter to the Director of the National Museum of Canada. “During February I spent two weeks at Ottawa,” he said,

to make a search through the National Herbarium of Canada for material from the Richmond Gulf and nearby areas. My experience there may be of interest to the Foundation, since the National Herbarium of Canada has had in the past the reputation of being poorly organized, and therefore difficult to do efficient research in. I was very pleasantly surprised then to find that in spite of the very small staff for an institution of its international importance and extensive collections, that it is in an eminently useful state. This is really a tribute to the Curator, A. E. Porsild, because it is entirely due to his efforts that the National Herbarium is now a useful scientific instrument. There is not a group of plants in the herbarium which did not give evidence of having been carefully revised by Porsild during his curatorship. I would like to emphasize my opinion that under Porsild’s influence the National Herbarium of Canada has become a real and productive scientific institution, and that it is a research institution well-adapted therefore to the needs of advance workers. I noticed during my stay there that the library facilities are excellent, and that an intelligent librarian is in charge of the biological books at the National Museum. I was able to add very nearly a thousand new records to my own by my research through the National Herbarium of Canada.5

It is unfortunate that this letter had not reached the Director as soon as Abbe returned to Cambridge as Erling was already exchanging memos with “Mr. Lynch” about his status at the Museum. On February 27, he was writing to defend his reasons for not accounting for the $100 he had received for the purchase of specimens in Greenland:

When leaving Greenland in December orders had been placed with a number of native collectors in the outlying districts for birds, skeletons and skulls of seals. These specimens had not yet been received and, thus, could not be paid for. I therefore left the unexpended balance
($86.16) with Dr. Max Dunbar, Vice-Consul, in order that he might pay for the specimens when received and because he would be able to secure much additional material during the winter.... I might say that this advance was made when it was assumed that Dr. Dunbar, who is a zoologist, was to join me early last summer. Dr. Dunbar did not arrive at Godthaab until November, and during the summer other duties made it impossible for me to give much time to the collection of specimens. About 30 bird skins, in addition to a collection obtained by exchange, was turned over to Mr. Taverner upon my return from Greenland. In compliance with your instructions I am enclosing herewith an account for $13.84 with my cheque for $86.16 covering the unexpended balance. In refunding the unexpended balance may I have the assurance that the Museum will be prepared to reimburse me for whatever amounts (not exceeding $86.16) Dr. Dunbar, during my absence, may have paid for specimens ordered on behalf of the Museum by me.

The mean-spiritedness of the demand must have rankled with Erling, as well as the usual year-end concern about the extension or otherwise of his position as Temporary Botanist. A week later, he was picking up the pen again, although there was every reason to believe that his questions regarding a full time appointment would once again be shelved since nothing could be changed during the war. He had been to see the Deputy Minister of the Department of Mines and Resources shortly after he returned from Greenland and presented him with a piece of pure cryolite carved in the form of a polar bear. “During the conversation,” Erling told Lynch,

Dr. Camsell expressed surprise on learning that “I was still on a temporary appointment” and he suggested that I should at once see Mr. Timm. I spoke to Mr. Timm and he in turn sent me to talk to Mr. Pratt. This was in January and I have heard nothing further in the matter. You are, of course, familiar with the facts involved and there is no need to review the matter, but the fact remains that as far as I am concerned, after 16 years with the Government, my position as a “temporary” is frankly a most discouraging one. It is not for me to suggest the method of remedy, but I noticed the other day in the press that since the war started many thousands of “Orders-in-Council” had been passed.
Erling wrote another memo to Lynch the same day to ask if the accumulated holidays of the present and previous year could be carried over for another year as he wished to spend all the time he could spare from catching up with routine herbarium matters in the preparation of a paper on the Northwest Flora. “You may remember that when the war broke out my work of many years, on the Northwest Flora, had reached the point where the final writing for publication was to commence.... Work on this project has largely been suspended because of special duties outside the herbarium.”

Last December, when he passed through Boston on his return from Greenland, Professor Fernald of Harvard University, Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora*, the leading journal in plant taxonomy, had suggested that Erling should prepare a shorter work for publication, and if publication in Canada was not possible at that time, he would be prepared to bring it out there. It was for these reasons that he wished not to take his holidays at this time.

On March 7, Erling had a fourth memo for Lynch, this time to say that it had been pointed out to him that for the last two editions of the Government Telephone Directory his name had been dropped from the alphabetical list and that of the National Herbarium had also been dropped from the National Museum section where his name also used to appear. “Even though I have been absent in Greenland on special duty part of the time, the National Herbarium is still functioning and I think ought to be listed in the directory, and also, since to a number of people interested in botany my name would be synonymous with the herbarium, it also ought to be included in the next edition.”

It seemed that no one fought harder than Erling for due recognition from Government departments. On April 7, he was writing to Keenleyside to know the date of departure if he was to return to Greenland in spring and he needed time to prepare if he was to stay over the winter to allow Dunbar to return to Canada. “If I am returning to Greenland should I not be ‘promoted’ from Vice-Consul to Consul (non career)?”, he asked. He believed that in the past there had not been sufficient actual consular work for two men at Godthaab, but if they were to keep themselves fully informed about shipping conditions and activities at the mine and air and naval bases, it would be advisable to have one man travelling as much as possible while the other remained in Godthaab, as was done by the American Consuls.

In looking at this memo from Erling, it is interesting to wonder if anyone at External Affairs would have noted that it would be equally in the interests of two scientists stationed in Greenland to be able to travel and collect specimens.
for their botanical and zoological work, but, with no comment on either side, the word came back on April 11 that the question of appointment to “Consul” would be considered, dependent to some extent on what was done in other branches of External Affairs, and it was suggested that if it met his convenience he should return to Greenland sometime in July, and Dunbar should leave on the last boat before Christmas and be back to relieve him in the spring. 7

In April, Erling was asked to read a paper on “Reindeer and caribou grazing in Canada,” illustrated by lantern slides, at the 7th North American Wildlife Conference at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, April 8–10. In his lecture, he was at pains to correct the common misconception that areas that would support the wild caribou would be suitable for tame reindeer, because the former could roam at length over sparse pasturage while the latter needed better forage density in order to be close-herded in one location for longer periods of time. Although the bulk of reindeer and caribou food consisted of lichens in winter, the belief that they lived exclusively on “moss” was erroneous. “In summer their food consists largely of the grasses and sedges of the arctic tundra to which, depending on the type of pasture, are added young twigs of willow, dwarf shrubs, and a variable amount of lichen and green herbage. Lichens (reindeer ‘moss’) are not necessary for the deer in summer but are readily eaten when moist. All kinds of fleshy fungi are greedily eaten as are birds’ eggs and even dead mice or birds.” Recent range studies in Norway and Alaska had shown the damage that could be done to lichens with over-grazing but in Canada the allowance of forty acres for each reindeer appeared to be ample on the winter range. Recent aerial mapping surveys, not available in 1927 and 1928, had shown that the area between the Mackenzie River Delta and Great Bear Lake was composed of far more lakes and ponds than he had been able to ascertain from the ground, so he felt that his estimation of the carrying capacity for reindeer would have to be adjusted accordingly.

Regarding the effects on wildlife, in Alaska it had been found that caribou usually disappeared from areas occupied by reindeer, but foxes, wolves, bears, and ravens were attracted by them. Foxes were not a problem, and barren ground bears were not numerous so only a few were shot by herders each year for killing the occasional reindeer, but ravens, “that began to congregate from all over the Western Arctic at the Mackenzie Reindeer Reserve soon after the first herd arrived,” were a great nuisance because they quickly devoured any meat left unprotected and occasionally killed young fawns. Wolves were most destructive and had to be hunted relentlessly by the herders because ordinary
trapping and poisoning methods were dangerous for the reindeer. Canada's reindeer herd had prospered since its introduction “and in time will furnish an increasing part of the meat and skins used for food and clothing by the inhabitants of the North, thereby decreasing the demands made on caribou and other fur-bearing animals of the Arctic.”

Erling's expenses for the Conference had to be explained to W. B. Timm, April 25, and he said that a number of technical sessions dealing with range management and forest and soil conservation had been of particular interest to him. His paper was well attended and a number of questions asked, particularly about wolves. “During the meeting I met a number of people; of particular value to my work and to the National Herbarium were contacts made with botanists in the University of Toronto. Between sessions of the Conference, several visits were made to the Department of Botany at the University where a number of problems were discussed at some length with Professors Jackson, Bailey and Taylor.”

He had no sooner returned to Ottawa than he had to leave again for the Second Annual Meeting of the Canadian Conservation Association held in the Botanical Laboratories of the University of Montreal on April 13 and 14. “Most of the papers presented were of very direct interest and importance since botanical surveys and plant geography is very closely related to problems of conservation,” he told Timm. “The meeting on the whole must be considered a very successful one although I came away with the impression that the Association, being still a very young one, has not quite ‘found’ itself and its place and scope of operation. As with the Toronto meeting some of the most valuable results of this meeting were the renewal of former contacts and the establishment of new ones. Some time between meetings was devoted to examination of botanical material in the fine herbarium of the Botanical Laboratories.”

It must have been very clear by now to the Department of Mines and Resources that Erling Porsild was making a name for himself in several important fields and they still had a problem on their hands as to what to do with him. Lynch went to see him on April 22 and asked him to prepare a brief outline of his services with the former Department of the Interior and the Department of Mines and Resources. The result was a list of accomplishments that included the years spent with the Reindeer Project, which herd now numbered over 10,000 animals, seven years in the National Herbarium filling the position left by the late Dr. Malte “without, however, being given the appointment of Chief Botanist,” the publication of some thirty papers mostly on arctic flora,
and, since the war began, a short service with the Postal Censorship and two years doing Consular work in Greenland. “I am informed that my services will again be requested by the Department of External Affairs during the coming year. Although I have now been in the service for 16 years, during which time I have constantly been assigned to highly specialized work requiring very special training, I am still a temporary, receiving the same salary with which I started in the Service 16 years ago, namely $2,520.00 per annum.” This last piece of information was particularly shocking, considering how proud Malte had been that the Porsild brothers were being given a generous salary in 1926 and comparing this with the lack of appreciation for Erling’s considerable work and achievements in the long period since that time, and it certainly should have given the Department an incentive for serious appraisal of his situation.

Since it had been expected when Erling was hired at the Herbarium in 1936 that he would be working on the flora of the Northwest Territories, he wrote a second memo to Lynch on April 23 to explain how the project had been stopped since the war took up all his time, but now it had been pointed out to him how much it was needed by other botanists working on Canadian problems. For example, Professor Fernald was working on the Flora of Eastern North America, Dr. Raup was continuing his work on the Flora of the Upper Mackenzie basin and Mackenzie Mountains, Dr. Abbe on the Flora of the Richmond Gulf area, while Dr. Hultén, in spite of the war, was going ahead with the publication of his large Flora of Alaska and Yukon. “To these scientists and others who for years, independently or in collaboration with Canadian botanists and institutions, have worked on problems of great importance to Canada, continental Northwest Territories largely remains a blank space on the map, and until my report is published the information which they urgently need, and which we have here, will not be available.” Because it had been suggested that he publish at least the more important new material, he had been working hard to prepare a paper for publication in *Rhodora*, provided that part of the cost of approximately $250 including the cost of 200 reprints “could be financed from here…. An alternative would be publication in the Museum Bulletin Series or as separate publication which, if put out on cheaper paper and without illustrations, would not cost a great deal. While presenting the above suggestions for your information and consideration, I am, of course, fully aware that, due to war conditions, publication in any sort of form may, perhaps, be entirely out of the question.”
Erling had already completed his manuscript “Contributions to a flora of the Northwest Territories” to the point where he thought he could mail it to Fernald for his reactions before finishing the rest, he told Raup on April 7. It totalled 28,000 words, or 75 printed pages in *Rhodora* with 31 pages more to come. He had rewritten some parts a number of times and reduced others to a minimum in order to boil it down, but the completed list came to 12 new species and varieties, 1 new combination, 77 species new to the Northwest Territories, 13 new to Canada, 19 not previously recorded north of Great Slave Lake, and 29 new to Mackenzie District.

The paper contains a few controversial matters that I know Fernald will not like. Thus I endeavour to show that his *Lychnis ‘furcata’* is quite unnecessary and probably not at all what Rafinesque was writing about. Also I have taken other ‘pokes’ at Fernald that I could not possibly avoid taking…. I had first planned to send the ms. to you, but then I thought Fernald might prefer to have the “first look.” I have not attempted to write the Latin descriptions because it would have to be done by someone else in any event. Naturally I am very curious to know what Fernald’s reactions are going to be and if you go over to the Gray you had better prepare yourself to pour oil on the troubled waters.11

Professor Fernald did not have much to say about the manuscript to Erling on April 11 except to comment that it was much more extensive that he had anticipated and *Rhodora* was not in a position to pay the full price for a single long paper. “I would be safe in saying that *Rhodora*, which is published at great financial loss and which has perpetually to fight the Customs authorities to get its copies into Canada and then often without success, would undertake to meet one-third the expense, but that it would not undertake the clearing of customs in getting the copies into Canada; that would have to be handled from the Canadian side.” He added as a postscript: “If you can accomplish anything with the Government which perpetually blocks *Rhodora*, then lets it in, then blocks it again, causing unlimited annoyance to those who give their time and services, we shall appreciate it!”

Fernald made no reference to the controversial aspects in the paper, except to say that in glancing at the manuscript, he had noted a mistaken claim for *Selaginella selaginoides* as being new to the flora of Labrador that he had
personally collected there and had a lot of material of that species in the Gray Herbarium, which suggested that perhaps Erling’s statements of broad ranges or of novelty needed checking on material not necessarily at Ottawa. “Most of the groups treated by you are on our second or third floors so that I have not climbed up to check them, but almost immediately at my elbow is Sibbaldia, for which you seem to give southern limits in Alberta, British Columbia and California, and not to note the occurrence in Newfoundland. We have plenty of material from Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and Utah. It would obviously greatly strengthen the paper if the extra-limital ranges were checked.”

A month later, Erling had taken note of Fernald’s comments. Selaginella selaginoides was obviously not new to the Labrador coast and with Sibbaldia he had merely intended to give the southern limit in a general way, but he would check this point carefully. “I thank you for calling it to my attention. With regard to the difficulties caused by Canadian Customs in passing Rhodora, I expect that the matter can be straightened up simply by having Rhodora placed on a preferred list. The Department of Agriculture already have made some enquiries.”

There would be no National Herbarium field trips to check the flora that summer but Erling noted that the war was affecting botanizing trips everywhere. Lincoln Constance wrote from Berkeley, California, on May 27: “I trust you are finding it possible to carry on your activities despite the war? Of course, curtailment of tires and gasoline is tending to decrease our field work, but if we suffer no more serious handicaps, I feel that we can consider ourselves to be extremely fortunate.” A letter from Abbe on June 15 suggested that Fernald was as easily disturbed by local officialdom on a recent field excursion as he had been with the Canadian border dispute. “Fernald and I came to an agreement whereby he was to look over a lot of my plants, and I was in return to take him on a trip to Virginia in my car,” Abbe said.

Of course we nearly got arrested as German spies because I got out the big Graflex and photographed some Iris verna beside a main highway – and unknown to us there were some gas tanks back of us. A local, loyal citizen promptly assumed that we were planning to blow up the gas tanks, reported us to the state police, and we were hunted all over the state of Virginia by the police for the rest of the day. Although we did not know that we were being hunted, Fernald is so familiar with the back roads that we evaded the police just in the ordinary course
of our botanizing trip. However, when we got back to town for supper, about 8 o’clock that evening there was a state trooper waiting for us [although by then] he had already satisfied himself that we were harmless. Nevertheless Professor Fernald was quite upset, and it was not until after he had showed the policeman his fourth set of credentials from the National Academy of Sciences that the state policeman said “Yes, Professor Fernald, we must take very good care of you, mustn’t we,” that the Professor calmed down. Otherwise it was a quiet and uneventful trip.13

By the end of May, Lynch and other Department officials had come to the conclusion that there was nothing that could be done about Erling’s appointment as Chief Botanist until the war ended, and even then there was still the problem of his lack of university qualifications. However, since it was obvious that they owed him something tangible, it was decided that they could publish his manuscript. Erling wrote to Raup on May 31 that he had put it to the Department about raising the money for Rhodora publication

… but it was obvious from the first that, owing to foreign exchange regulations, little hope was held out that the matter would go through. But instead, to my considerable surprise, it was felt that, war or no war, it was desirable to have a Museum publication out, and today I have been informed that publication of the paper has been approved as a regular Museum Bulletin. I should have preferred to have it in Rhodora, but seeing that that was impossible I am, of course, very pleased with the alternative solution, especially since they will print 2,000 copies of the paper. It will probably take some time to get it out and the fact that I will be in Greenland will delay such matters as proof-reading and checking. I am in doubt as to what to do with my latin descriptions. If I cannot do better I will write them myself and get my clerical friend to weed out the worst grammatical blunders. Do you know of anyone down your way who might be prevailed upon to do the translation? I do not think I should like to ask Fernald or Weatherby.14

Raup had not been able to accomplish much about “pouring oil on troubled waters” at the Gray Herbarium after Erling’s paper arrived.
This was due in some measure to timing. If I had had a little warning, I could have prepared the ground, but I learned about the whole business for the first time … before I had your letter. By that time Professor Fernald had been through the ms. and had already begun to form his ideas, so there wasn’t much I could do. Anyway, it seems to be coming out all right, and I think it is fine that the paper can be published by the Museum, even though it doesn’t get so wide an immediate circulation…. With regard to the Latin descriptions, I will get that done or checked over here at the Arboretum. Dr. Merrill suggests that you put them first into some sort of Latin before you send them down, and then we will straighten out any kinks. Croizat is pretty good at that sort of thing, but it is best to have the principal ideas down in Latin first…. I will be more than pleased to go over the ms. I only had a glance at it while it was at the Gray. Would it help any, in furthering the publication, if I could get the proof-reading done for you, and generally see the paper through the press?

He was involved in a new mapping project that Abbe may have told him about, making ‘spot range maps’ for all the species collected in the Mackenzie Mountains for their distribution in all of Canada and parts of the northern States. “It is one of the most interesting and profitable things I have ever done in this line, as the characteristics and affinities of that flora begin to come out very clearly. Likewise, I am learning a great deal about the ranges of many common northern species – peculiarities that I didn’t know existed. … A lot of your records will surely clarify these range patterns.”

Erling was very grateful for both offers but unable to answer before June 11 as they had been “up to their necks” in moving the Herbarium. “We were ‘blitzed’ out of the Motor Building with very short notice although the possibility had been recognized almost for a year or two. Fortunately the only space available was in the National Museum where the 2nd floor has been partly closed to the public and given over to the Biological Division. We have grand quarters in the Indian Hall where we have about 33% more floor space than before. A sign over my office reads ‘Indians.’ Everything here is still in a mess although the actual moving took very little time.” (He was to tell Fernald the same day that “In the last war, when our Parliament was destroyed by fire, the Senate was moved into a hall in the Museum which someone thought was appropriately marked ‘Vertebrate Fossils.’”)

The date of his departure for Greenland had not yet been fixed but it could be almost any day and there was a good chance that he might go by air, which was fine except that he would be separated from his baggage. He had sold his house and hoped to build something more to his taste when the war was over, meanwhile Edith was getting along well in her course and had been offered a job on the laboratory staff at the hospital when finished. “She will get $70.00 per month and naturally is quite thrilled. She will go and live with a very fine old lady who lives near the hospital.”

His good friend and colleague Percy Taverner was retiring from the Museum after thirty-one years, and Erling told Lynch that a “most appropriate and thoroughly deserved recognition would be to appoint him as Honorary Curator of Ornithology” as he was not only the leading Canadian ornithologist of the day but through his bird books he had done more than anyone else toward making the National Museum ‘bird conscious.’ “In my travels in the United States and in Europe I have constantly been reminded that, as a scientist, Mr. Taverner is even better known abroad than he is at home and that his bird books there, as elsewhere, have achieved universal and deserved popularity. In his long association with the National Museum Mr. Taverner more than anyone now living has had the interest and future of the Museum at heart. As an Honorary Curator his advice and continued interest would for many years be available to the Museum.”

By June 24, Erling’s request for the title of “Consul” in Greenland had officially been turned down, although Keenleyside thought it was not unreasonable in view of his experience and the fact that his much younger American counterpart had been given the full title. Robertson noted at the end of Keenleyside’s memo of June 13: “When the whole Service is frozen in pre-war classifications, I don’t think a case can be made for stepping Porsild’s honorific up to a full Consul for Greenland.” Erling told Keenleyside on June 25 that he was surprised and disappointed because he felt that the fact of his not being accorded the same title as his predecessor would reflect unfavourably on himself and his Government’s confidence in him.

The decision is the more unexpected since no question of salary, allowance or pension is involved, my salary being paid by my own Department. The whole question is, perhaps, of no great consequence and cannot now materially influence my willingness to go to Greenland because the decision was reached at a time when, in preparation for my
return to Greenland for one year, I had already completed all my personal plans, sold my house, completed all arrangements for my family, and, besides, shipped my baggage to Greenland. I should like to be given a few days ‘warning’ for last-minute preparations but, otherwise, I am ready to leave for Greenland whenever air transportation can be arranged for.18

Erling left Ottawa for Greenland on July 5, unaware that the refusal of Consular title was not to be his final disappointment from Government quarters in 1942. Two days after his departure, Anderson received a copy of a memo from the office of the Deputy Minister of Mines and Resources to Mr. W. B. Timm, dated July 7, to inform him that, although the publication of Porsild’s “Contributions to a flora of the Northwest Territories” had been approved earlier in the year, it was felt that “in view of present conditions and the need for exercising every possible economy, no harm would be occasioned if its printing was postponed until after the war.”19

It would be two months before the upsetting news reached Erling in Greenland. In a long letter on October 3 to Charles Camsell, Deputy Minister for Mines and Resources, Erling emphasized the importance of the paper being published sooner rather than later and the missed opportunity of having it printed in *Rhodora*. If the Department had not expressed its willingness to publish this abstract in the Museum Series, he said, he would have found the means somehow to accept Professor Fernald’s offer, but

... in view of the definite understanding that publication would be made possible in the Museum Series, I informed Professor Fernald that the space which had tentatively been reserved would not be needed. From January to the end of May this year, I then spent all available time, including nearly all my evenings and holidays preparing the manuscript, in order that it might reach the Departmental editor in time before I would have to leave for my post in Greenland. It seems unfortunate, therefore, that the decision to stop publication was reached only two days after I had left for Greenland, because if it had been made earlier I might otherwise, if permitted to do so, have made arrangements to publish elsewhere.20
He was not the only person who was aggrieved about the manuscript, printed or otherwise. Miss Harkness received a letter from someone who had written on August 12 to say that, knowing that Mr. Porsild was in Greenland, he still wanted to have it acknowledged that he, “not Fernald, Weatherby or Raup (Dr. Raup being thoroughly and absolutely innocent of any Latin and the like),” had revised Mr. Porsild’s Latin, “which was not a simple affair,” and he had taken the liberty of inserting into the manuscript “the bare truth” that: “The Latin diagnoses have been [kindly] revised by Dr. Leon Croizat of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.”21
On July 5, 1942, Max Dunbar was typing up his official report on what had been happening in Greenland during the first six months of his consular Arctic service. It was Lester Pearson’s biographer, Robert Bothwell, who commented on the incessant need for Canadian diplomats, particularly junior diplomats, to write endless memoranda for their department that were “painstaking, idealistic and largely fruitless,” and he labelled them “the epitaph of their generation,” yet in places as remote and inaccessible as Greenland they were useful for enlightening what otherwise would have remained largely unknown. In his later memoirs, Dunbar noted that part of his assignment was to write dispatches that were “no longer important,” but his honest and irreverent memories of the Greenland experiences, combined with his official report, paint an interesting picture of his life in Godthaab.¹

As had been expected, there had not been much for Dunbar to do in Godthaab beyond the usual winter entertaining “in which the Consulate had taken its full share,” although the Danish population had increased so much in the last two years, and was still increasing, that it was gradually becoming impossible for the whole colony to function as a unit in this respect. He was absolutely right in his earlier report when he remarked that the isolated Danish colony was badly in need of a “Laughing Diplomat,” which quickly became apparent in the new tone at the Canadian Consulate. In 1995, he remembered that he had no sooner taken over the Consulate in the fall of 1941 than he noticed an “alarming smell” in the basement that grew stronger as the weeks went by, which made him wonder whether Erling’s septic tank was going to give trouble so soon.
M. J. Dunbar, Canadian vice-consul and consul (1941–46), Godthaab, Greenland (Photo: in the Arctic, after 1935, unknown photographer)
But it was no more than an enormous Oka cheese from Quebec, which he had not told me about, and which I quickly managed to consume with the enthusiastic help of the Kolonibestyrer [Colony Manager] Thorvald Hedemand, during the next few weeks. Fortunately I had a dissecting microscope upstairs, so that we could examine the cheesemites at the dinner table. Hedemand was delighted, and remarked that all well-equipped homes should have a microscope handy for that very purpose.

“One of my most vivid memories of those Greenland winters was skiing,” Dunbar said, “skiing without benefit of ski-tows or ski-lifts, just skiing up and skiing down those 2000-ft. hills, usually in bright sunlight and well on into July. The ski is, in fact, a means of enjoyable transportation in mountainous country, and many of the Godthaab community enjoyed it to the full.” (It was hard work skiing uphill and one of the United States Vice-Consuls was heard to mutter to the rhythm of the task: “The Danes they are a hardy race; try to keep up and fall flat on your face.”)

Dunbar had instant rapport with James Penfield, the young American Consul, who, he said,

… handled the protocol and the problems of grafting a U.S. military organization on to Greenland, for temporary purposes, with great skill and with straightforward courage. For my part (I was only 26 years old when I first occupied the Canadian Consulate) he volunteered to teach me the skills of consular work and the tedious necessities of protocol, an offer that I accepted at once…. We had long conversations about the situation we found ourselves in, and we understood each other. Together we worked out a ‘code’ for local radio communication (a code that any idiot could have broken in 15 minutes) involving the substitution of letters against sentences agreed upon to begin with. One of the sentences he offered, late in the afternoon, was ‘time for a drink.’

He had got to know Finn and Bente Gad over that first winter. Finn Gad was a college teacher who would later write a scholarly book in Danish on the history of Greenland in three volumes, published after the war. “Both of them agreed that whenever we met, on whatever occasion, we should speak only Danish,
and one may be able to imagine the mental exhaustion I suffered (but hap-
pily) after a whole evening of philosophical discussion with the two of them, in Danish. I shall always be grateful to them. This process resulted also in the organization of our musical evenings ‘Musikaftener.’” The Gads and Dunbar planned the programs based on what gramophone records were available in several homes in Godthaab. Despite the fact that he found the Consulate small for entertaining (“four is the limit of comfort, eight the limit of possibility; the handicap, however, has its advantages”), he said: “It was fun. I even managed to get Eske Brun to our musical evenings, which if I remember rightly took place in the Consulate and in the Gads’ home alternately, once a week. Thorvald Hedemand in particular had a large collection of music which we drew upon, and so did the Fuglsang-Damgaards [who] tried to teach me how to behave in Greenland. I never learned.”

In spite of the Consular duties that he was performing dutifully, he had been able to continue with his marine biological and oceanographic work, receiving every encouragement from the Greenland Administration in the person of Governor Eske Brun, whom Dunbar considered the most important and necessary man in Greenland during the whole of the war, “a big man in all senses of the word,” with a friendly disposition, dry humour and good sense, and one who was at all times practical. “Motor boats were always made available every two weeks for me to sail up Godthaab Fjord (one of Greenland’s very best, one of the best in the world) to haul my plankton nets and measure temperatures and salinities. To be able to follow the biological cycle in the sea throughout a full twelve-month period in the North is not an opportunity that comes often.”

There was bad news in his official Consular Report that Greenland had suffered the loss of two of her most important ships in the first six months of the year. Cryolite ore weighing 24,260 metric tons for the United States and 5,200 metric tons for Canada had left Ivigtut that year, but the Hans Egede, carrying 560 U.S. tons, had been given up for lost since she had not been heard from since she sailed for Philadelphia on February 27. Also in February, the Gertrude Rask had gone aground near Baccaro Point, Nova Scotia, and was abandoned, although no lives were lost and the mail was apparently recovered, while the returned captain had been appointed inspector of coastal shipping. The resulting shortage of tonnage for the transport of general goods to Greenland, especially fresh vegetables and fruit, had caused the Administration to
charter a Norwegian freighter, the *Bencas*, in May. She left Ivigtut on June 13 with a cargo of cryolite for Port Alfred.

The *Villa Franca*, a Portuguese ship, had arrived with a load of salt and had taken back the most valuable cargo ever to leave Greenland, with over 2,000 metric tons of salt codfish, and small amounts of salt halibut, salmon-trout, lamb, and walrus hides. In an outlying fog, with pilot on board, she had struck a rock at the mouth of Godthaab Fjord, but no damage was sustained and after waiting at anchor for twenty-four hours she continued her voyage. Other ships, a trawler and six schooners presumed to be Portuguese, had been seen fishing on the banks in June, and several United States Naval and Coastguard vessels had called at Godthaab in May and June, one leaving a buoy in the harbour for the use of patrol flying boats. “With the United States air bases now functioning according to plan, there has been during the past months considerable evidence of activity in the air. Transports, bombers, and patrol planes are frequent visitors over Godthaab, and the flying boats have called several times. On three occasions officers from these machines have stayed overnight at the Canadian Consulate.” One visitor had been Squadron Leader R. H. Brown, commander of the RAF base at Reykjavik, who was interested in information about any Greenland or foreign schooners, fishing vessels, or larger ships that might possibly be in the northeast region during the summer, as any ship unknown to the RAF would be liable to be attacked on sight.

Radio communication between Ottawa and Godthaab via Resolution Island had been satisfactory over the winter. In Godthaab, there was a new magazine called *Grønlands-posten* which had reached its eighth issue and was considered a great success, the first such periodical to appear in Greenland in the Danish language. Another innovation had been the daily news bulletin, broadcast in both Danish and Greenlandic, with reports from various parts of the world. Two members of the Greenland Delegation had arrived from New York and were making a complete survey of all the technical and mechanical equipment in Greenland, including radio installations, electric lighting and power plants, blacksmiths’ equipment, and the mechanical outuplicings of the coastal schooners, in order to make every possible use of present material and to be in a position to advise on future purchases. It had been decided that a self-sufficient carding, spinning, and weaving industry planned for the Julianehaab district could not be built or operated with the present facilities, and it was too expensive a risk to import the required electrical equipment, so the wool was being shipped to Canada instead. Cod fishing had been sporadic during March.
but had been rapidly gaining momentum and all signs pointed to another record season’s yield. The decrease in the seal fishery off north Newfoundland in wartime probably explained the increase in harp seals, and there had been exceptional hunting of fjord [ringed] seal at Egedesminde and Scoresby Sound over the winter.²

There is every reason to believe that Erling’s arrival at Godthaab in July was a welcome one, although it may have needed some adjustment on the part of Dunbar. He had been very much the junior partner when he had started his consular apprenticeship in Greenland under Erling’s guidance, but a winter had passed during which he had grown comfortably into the job of Acting Consul on his own terms. However, it appears to have been amicably decided that Erling would take over the consular duties in Godthaab, to give him the opportunity of settling back and making his duty calls as well as continuing to make plant collections in that area (even though, as he complained to Polunin in 1944, he “could not go far from a wireless station”), while Dunbar would be free to go up the coast to visit the northern communities on behalf of Canada and look at the harp and fjord seal situation as part of his scientific interests.³

There had been a number of reports of submarine sightings along the west coast in spring and summer, and when Dunbar arrived at Sukkertoppen on July 23, the colony manager informed him that on July 21 a native had reported seeing one while he was fishing. “He described it as ‘lying very low in the water, making a noise like an airplane, and with foam round its bows.’ It was heading south.” This sighting, however, could be explained as something other than a submarine, for on July 22 at 8 o’clock in the morning, Dunbar had seen a powerful U.S. Navy patrol motor launch come into Godthaab from the north. “She travelled fast, lay low in the water, and the noise of her engines could be heard a long way off. It is very likely that this launch caused the Greenlander’s excitement at Sukkertoppen.”

The next stop, at Holsteinsborg, marked the most northerly settlement in the administrative division of South Greenland. From there they travelled to Egedesminde, located in North Greenland, which differed not only politically from South Greenland but in having less snowfall, lower temperatures, coastal water frozen in winter, fewer Atlantic cod and therefore lesser importance of the cod fishery to the natives, a much larger seal population with good hunting especially in winter and spring, winter travel by dog-sled, a slightly smaller native population, lower mountains, and closer proximity of the inland ice to the coast. In general, North Greenland was less affected by the war than
the rest of the country. Ships other than coastal steamers were very rare, except in Egedesminde and Godhavn, and Jakobshavn and Upernavik had seen no ocean-going ship that year before the arrival of the Julius Thomsen in late August. Egedesminde, as distribution centre for the whole of North Greenland, had a busier life now than it had in peace-time. In the early spring, a U.S. “Flying Fortress” B-17 bomber had run out of fuel and crash-landed outside the colony, although no one was hurt and any undamaged material had been salvaged.4

Before the war, the political centre and residence of the Governor of North Greenland had always been at Godhavn on Disko Island. Much of the settlement’s importance was due to the Danish Arctic Research Station under the direction of Dr. Morten Porsild, who was very influential in Greenland politics, according to Trevor Lloyd. “He used to go to meetings and sit with the Governor on one side and he on the other with the Greenlanders, discussing everything with them in Greenlandic, which infuriated the Governor because he had no idea what was going on.” Dunbar, who reached Godhavn on August 12, remembered in 1995: “I was able also to visit Erling’s father, Dr. Morten Porsild, the ‘grand old man’ of Greenland biological science. I was even able to borrow from him two deep-sea thermometers to take back to Godthaab, and to work in the Godhavn area in Disko Fjord. He told me, in his direct manner, that he didn’t like my methods, but I went on doing them as usual just the same. Methods, like everything else, change with time.”5

Godhavn had sprung into general notice that fall since it was chosen as the site of a U.S. Army Meteorological Base. “It is understood that accommodation is being built for twenty men,” Dunbar reported, “so that the base will be more than a mere recording and reporting weather station. This development is worthy of special interest in that it is the first army outpost to be established at one of the West Greenland colonies … [bringing] the occupation and defense of Greenland into Disko Bay. The effect on the life of the colony will be watched with interest.” This base was comparable to a similar one at Angmagssalik in East Greenland where relations between American and Danish authorities were excellent, so “given the same good will and good humour as exist there, the Godhavn venture will doubtless turn out as well.”

At Jakobshavn inside Disko Bay, Dunbar visited the new salting station, “probably the most methodical and efficient in the country,” built for hellefisk (arctic halibut), which was still lucrative in winter but in summer had given ground to cod which had been increasing all along the coast. Sharks were also

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caught in Disko Bay and the oil was an important product. Through the kindness of Aage Knudson, he was able to have another look at the glacier, Eqip Sermia, where he had worked in 1936. “The ice-free upwelling zone, which is a most interesting ecological phenomenon, was still there as usual, feeding the birds and the seals.” By August 27, the Vice-Consul’s travels had taken him to the coal-mining colony of Kutdligssat and as far up the coast as Upernavik, an area rich in fjord seals, calling en route at many “usteds” (small “out places”) where life was lived in the old Greenland pattern. From Upernavik he picked up passage on the Julius Thomsen and travelled back to Godthaab, which he reached September 12 in time to consider making arrangements for his return to Canada for the winter.  

Back in Godthaab while Dunbar was away, Erling Porsild had not heard the news of the postponement of publication of his Northwest Territories paper. Anderson had sent a copy of the memo from Timm and written to both Erling and Raup on July 24, saying: “It was quite a disappointment to all of us that there will be a delay of uncertain length.” Raup and Abbe were particularly sorry to hear the news because they each had papers coming up soon in which they needed to use the very material that Porsild had in his article. However, Raup said he would still go ahead and get the manuscript in shape as though it was to be printed. On September 19, he wrote to say that they were seriously considering an attempt to publish it either at the Arboretum or the Gray Herbarium, but would have to do it with funds raised outside their regular printing budget. “I do not know as yet whether this will be possible, but we are working on it and hope to be able to do something. I have written Porsild to this effect, but have not heard from him as to his reaction.”

Erling left Godthaab towards the end of August, heading for Ivigtut where he spent ten days talking to mine manager, Mr. O. Corp, and to the miners. Ore production that season had been the highest in the history of the mine, and by the end of the year would probably reach a total tonnage almost double what had been shipped in any previous year. There was some concern about the extent of cryolite reserves, given the heavy demand on the available supply, so during the summer, at the request of Mr. Corp and the recommendation of geologist Dr. Edmund Harder at Alcan, measurements of known ore bodies and prospecting for new deposits had been inaugurated under the direction of Mr. Hans Lundberg of Toronto, assisted by two young graduate students from the University of Toronto.
Erling reported that operation and conditions generally at the mine appeared to be quite satisfactory in spite of some shortage of labour due to the almost doubled production and the increasing need for vacations for miners who had been there too long. About 150 miners were now at work and the mine operated twenty hours a day with three shifts. He got the impression that a good deal of the unrest of the past two years had been taken care of to some extent by the longer working hours. A number of miners and employees had expressed a desire to emigrate to Canada. He was discouraging this in favour of making it easy for them to take a holiday in Canada, preferably during winter when little or no ore was shipped.

“In my opinion,” he said,

... the threat of serious labour troubles at Ivigtut, or, as has even been suggested in some quarters, of attempts of sabotage, does not exist. Such fears may have been caused by an inadequate understanding of the temperament and personality of Danish labourers. As a class, the miners at Ivigtut perhaps have been spoiled and pampered by too much luxury, too much money in their pockets and, at times, by too much leisure. Without exception I find that the miners take considerable pride in the mine and in their own work and for this reason would not likely do anything that would interfere with the production and life of the mine.

The presence of several hundred Americans in the Ivigtut U.S. Army camp presented a problem, but it was difficult at the present time to foresee to what extent their presence would affect the mine workers. So far, relations between soldiers and miners had been amicable on the whole, and if sufficient discipline was maintained at the camp such friendly relations might well continue.8

Like Dunbar, Erling was not about to waste his scientific time entirely in consular activities at Ivigtut. From August 28 to September 4, he decided to make a list of all the introduced weeds from Denmark, Scotland, and North America that had established themselves in the sixty years since August Berlin had made the first weed survey in that area. The arrival and spread of weeds was always an interesting study, and ever since the first foreign ship arrived in Ivigtut in 1854 there had been a considerable tonnage of sand, gravel, bricks, and building stone brought in as ballast, as well as shiploads of garden soil and feed, grain, and hay for poultry and livestock. Since 1940, there had been a
chance of North American ships inadvertently bringing in weeds from a new source, so it was an opportunity to study the extent to which the arrivals had established themselves and the impact, if any, on the wild flora.

In 1926, in his Flora of Greenland, Ostenfeld had proposed that an eighth of Greenland’s present native flora had been brought there by the Norse settlers, but Morten Porsild later demonstrated that the introduced species were largely unable to compete with the stable native species. Erling, in his survey at Ivigtut, came to the same conclusion. With the thirty-four introduced species he saw in 1942, he found that not one roadside or garden weed had been able to spread and become established outside the narrowly defined town limits. Since the Ivigtut livestock was stable-fed and never permitted to graze, since there were no birds or animals that would contribute to weed seed distribution, and since the surrounding rocky area gave few opportunities for growth except for hardy native species that were holding their own, he felt that this lack of weed spread had much to do with the absence of cleared agricultural land, grazing animals, and roads and railroads. He thought it would be interesting to observe how the modern sheep industry in Greenland would affect the native flora.⁹

There were no introduced or wild dandelions listed in his weed survey at Ivigtut. A call had gone out from the Farm on May 18 for seeds of Canadian arctic and sub-arctic species, because a Russian dandelion, *Taraxacum kok-saghyz*, from a remote area at fairly high altitude near the Chinese border, had been found to have a 25 per cent rubber content. The United States had lost 90 per cent of its source of natural rubber as a result of the Japanese invasion and control of lands and plantations in the southwestern Pacific and the hunt was on for plants that would make up the shortfall. In 1942, some five tons of the Russian dandelion seeds had been sent to America from the Soviet Union for cultivation but the yield from these plants was so low and costs of culture and harvest so high that the plant was considered an uneconomical source of rubber, even in wartime. Nevertheless, it was being grown experimentally in forty-two states including Alaska, and also in Australia and Canada. Asked about the possibilities of Canadian species, Erling had sent a memo before he left Ottawa to say that all Arctic species of dandelions needed at least three years to reach maturity, which seemed to make them less promising as a possible source of rubber. He heard from Senn in March the following year that nothing they had found so far had proved as good as the Russian species but they were still interested in obtaining seeds and dried roots for analysis of the common dandelion of Greenland.⁹
There was still no news from Ottawa when Erling got back to Godthaab from Ivigtut, but, on September 12, when Dunbar got back to the office, Erling wrote to tell Anderson that his letter of July 24 had just reached him: “Needless to say I feel rather badly about my paper and perhaps most of all over the way the matter was handled. I am, of course, not suggesting that the fact that the plans were changed the day after I had left was anything but a coincidence, but I do think it would have been more considerate if in the first place the thing was turned down because at that time the paper had been accepted by Fernald and would have appeared in *Rhodora*. I shall write Dr. Camsell about this later although I do not suppose he was even consulted about the matter.” It had been a cool, wet summer, and he had had very little time for collecting because “we have been kept quite busy at the office. Still I have added a number of worth while things to my collection of Greenland plants. A few days ago father celebrated his 70th birthday and in that connection was much feted as ‘Greenland’s Grand Old Man.’ I wished I could have gone to Godhavn to be with him but travelling in Greenland is getting to be very much of a problem and besides I could not take the time. I hope the family is well and that everything at the Museum is status quo with no more ‘Blitzes.’”

Anderson, who was relieved that the scientific collections in the Museum were in better shape for study and much safer than they had been before their move in June, told Raup on October 3 that it had occurred to him when he heard the news of the postponement of Porsild’s paper that

… it might be possible to print at least the descriptions of new forms, a practice which is frequently followed when a large publication is delayed. It is, however, something I did not care to suggest without consulting Porsild…. I do not [think] that there will be any trouble about obtaining permission to have the paper published elsewhere. Even before the beginning of the war, the matter of publishing Government records was difficult. On the other hand, the attitude towards ‘outside’ publication seemed to have relaxed, and the impression which I received was that the Department was glad not to have the trouble of publishing scientific papers, and if the author could get publication outside it was all to the good. For a good many years it has been very difficult to get publication of anything that is not economic, and in the Branch with which we are connected that means geology and mining in particular…. If you have any reasonable plan for publishing the
Porsild manuscript, I shall do what I can to facilitate the matter with the authorities here, and I do not anticipate any difficulty in getting the manuscript released by the Department.

Porsild did not submit any illustrations, Anderson said, but “if necessary we could probably get the plates for a base map of the area covered by the report. I think a good map adds much to the value of a zoogeographical or phytogeographical paper, and is a great help to the reader.”

After writing his letter to Camsell on October 3, there was nothing that Erling could do from Greenland about the manuscript problem, so he would have to leave it to Raup and Merrill at the Arnold Arboretum to see what arrangements could be made to make it accessible. With his ebullient Vice-Consul heading back to Canada, he would have a quiet winter alone to work on his plant collections and needed reports. It seemed everyone else was leaving. The mine manager, Corp, was leaving for the United States to confer with the Greenland Delegation, and possibly he would also be visiting business interests in Canada. Max Dunbar left for Ivigtut on November 9, where it was expected that he would be delayed for a week before flying out of U.S. Bluie West 1 to Goose Bay, Labrador, and from there by the RCAF to Montreal. Soon after he departed, the long-serving U.S. Consul, James Penfield, left for good on December 23, and before his transfer to his next post in Chungking, he paid tribute to Dunbar in a letter to Kirkwood which reached Keenleyside in March: “He was extremely well suited for the job and made an extraordinarily pleasant soul to have in town…. I was constantly grateful to you for your part in sending Max up there; he turned out to be an extremely happy choice, both from the Canadian Government standpoint and from my personal point of view.”

Back in Canada, Max Dunbar continued to report to Ottawa at the beginning of 1943, which was shaping up to be a very different year in Greenland. 1942 had been distinguished by worries not only about ship losses and deliveries but about the extent of the remaining ore body at the cryolite mine while at the same time production had been pushed to the limit. By January 1943, cryolite had gone from a sellers’ to a buyers’ market. “The present price of cryolite was higher than the cost of producing a synthetic flux, and the Cryolite Company no longer had the world by the ears,” said Dunbar, “although both the Penn Salt Company and the Aluminum Company of Canada still needed certain amounts of the natural product.” Both companies appeared to have over-stocked in 1942 and had no need of supplies in 1943.
Discussions were already beginning in External Affairs about the continuing need of maintaining a Canadian Consulate in Greenland in view of the enormous American military and naval presence, the scaled-back needs of Alcan for cryolite ore, and the political future of the country when the war ended. With the Casablanca conference between Roosevelt and Churchill in January and the first big reversal of Hitler’s armies at Stalingrad in February, there was a beginning hope that the tide of war might be turning towards different priorities. Phrases such as “When the war is over” and “With the cessation of hostilities” were beginning to appear in official memos, and it was given to Dunbar on February 17 to prepare a document to describe the activities of the Greenland Consulate to date and to justify its continued existence while at the same time giving possible movements of the Canadian representatives during the 1943 season.

Dunbar’s report was clear and persuasive, saying that he thought that the reasons for setting up the Consulate in 1940 were no less pertinent and compelling in 1943 than they had been in 1940, i.e., a channel of assistance to Greenland, a constant reminder of Canadian interest in Greenland, and a means of promoting and protecting that interest. “Greenland’s geographical position makes it essential, from considerations both of national prestige and of national interest, that Canada should maintain representation in Greenland during wartime, even though the actual defense of Greenland is in United States hands. It forms too close and too obvious a brace over northern Canada to be ignored.”

Although the United States Consulate was in a much better a position to advise the Greenland Government and to give effective and immediate aide to the people of Greenland, the Canadian Consulate was no whit less justified. Only the Canadian Consulate could supply the Canadian Government with information on political developments from inside Greenland, and from that inside point of view he noted that “the people of Greenland would feel badly let down if the present convenient means of obtaining information on Canada and permission to visit Canada or to emigrate to Canada were suddenly removed before the end of the war. To transfer this service to the Legation in Washington would be, in practice, to discontinue it, for the Danes would by simple physical law turn to the closer United States Consulate and go to the States instead.”

Greenland trade with Canada had grown steadily and at present the bulk of her supplies were bought from Canada. “Although this trade with Canada was stimulated in a large part by the researches of the Greenland Delegation and
the co-operation of the Aluminum Company of Canada, who act as purchasing agents for Greenland in Canada, it entailed, and still entails, the services of the Consulate acting in an advisory capacity to the Trade Manager in Greenland. The advice of the Canadian Consul is also constantly sought by private citizens ... as to the possibilities of obtaining their varied requirements in Canada. The trade with Eaton’s and Simpson’s mail order houses is increasing in quantity.”

Shipping, in one way or another, occupied more of the Consulate’s time than any other heading. “This is directly a war matter,” Dunbar said.

Reports of ship movements to and from, and between, ports in Greenland have been sent to Ottawa since 1941, all arrivals and departures of ocean-going vessels of all nationalities being grist to this particular mill. Since November 1941, 113 telegrams reporting ship movements have been sent from Godthaab. This work is at its heaviest in the summer and fall. Portuguese vessels, twice or three times a year, have been taking out cargoes of salt fish from Greenland to Lisbon, and will doubtless continue to do so. These ships require certificates of origin and interest and navicerts from the Canadian Consulate.... The Naval authorities have expressed their satisfaction with the reporting of ship movements from Greenland, mentioning its indispensability and pointing out that the Canadian Consulate at Godthaab is the only available source of information on much of the shipping, and the only source of immediate information on all of it. The importance to Naval Intelligence of knowing just where allied shipping is at a given time does not require elaboration.15

In order to have reliable information in a country as large as Greenland with its scattered population, it had been necessary to have two representatives in order for one to remain in Godthaab and the other to travel to some extent.

This has in the past made possible the preparation of more comprehensive and informed reports than would have been possible without first-hand observation.... In view of the astonishing amount of misinformation supplied to governments and to peoples on the subject of the north in general, even by experts in northern matters, it is surely of use to maintain, if only for the duration of the war, the Consulate in Greenland as a source of information on the maintenance and
development of the native population in Greenland, the policies of the Danes, the economy of the country, and related subjects which must be of singular interest to Canada above all other countries. We will then, in later years and for purpose of reference, at least know what the situation was in Greenland during the war years.

Information about Greenland would only be valuable as long as it was kept in mind that it was dated, and that it applied to 1940 or 1943 and not 1950, Dunbar cautioned. There were three causes for the current misinformation about the north and they included the expert on one part of the north as being assumed to be expert on all areas while not attempting to correct the assumption, the popular writer who had to deal in palatable falsehood in order to sell his book, and the current books and articles using bibliographic material or memories dated 1920, 1900, or earlier, as if in the present, which was clearly unsound and particularly so in the case of Greenland where the climate and the economy had changed so greatly in the past twenty-five years. “For reasons of this order, and in view of the growing use of northern lands and waters it would seem good practice for the future to maintain, or to send out at intervals, Canadian observers, not only to Greenland but to Alaska and arctic Russia, and to encourage reciprocal observers from the United States, Russia and Denmark.”

It was difficult for him to draw up a summer schedule of consular movements for the coming summer as plans would naturally depend on local developments, but in view of the fact that the Aluminum Company of Canada did not intend to import any cryolite that year, although they were willing to stockpile it at the mine for shipment perhaps in 1944, this would make Ivigtut a more or less interesting place to visit depending on point of view. “The pressure of production at the Mine will probably be relieved somewhat, and Ivigtut might not therefore be the all-important place in Greenland from the Canadian angle. On the other hand, this very slackening of the speed of production at the Mine may lead to some unrest among the mine workers, and can at least be expected to increase the applications from Ivigtut for permission to travel to Canada for a longer or a shorter period.” Julianehaab was a region of perennial interest and had not been visited for two years. “It is fairly close to Bluie West 1, the United States southern air-base, and has some contact with it; it has a southern climate and is in the vanguard of new experiments in Greenland, notably sheep-rearing, cattle-farming and grain cultivation.”
Dunbar concluded his report by saying that it was impossible to plan itineraries from the Ottawa end. “Mr. Porsild very possibly has ideas on the subject already, or circumstances in the spring may point to this or that course. It is hoped, in the meantime, that this memorandum has served to show that the very small cost of the upkeep of the Consulate in Greenland is well spent, and that Canada has good cause to maintain it for the duration of the war.” On February 22, Norman Robertson approved the recommendation by writing at the bottom of the report in flowing black ink: “I think this memorandum makes a pretty conclusive case.”17
CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE
LAST CONSULAR YEAR

There was good news for Erling Porsild at the beginning of 1943 about his paper on the western arctic plants. Raup was happy to tell Anderson:

We are planning to publish it at the Arboretum, probably in a number of *Sargentia*, a periodical that has replaced our series of ‘Contributions.’ I have a paper on my Mackenzie Mountain collections of 1939, which I have somewhat enlarged to cover all that is known of the flora of southwestern Mackenzie (north to Norman and east to about the longitude of Rae). It has been proposed that this paper and Porsild’s should occupy one number of *Sargentia*, provided mine does not become so large (it is not quite finished yet) that it would make too big a number. In any case I think we can do justice to Porsild’s work.¹

With that important matter settled, Erling could finally relax and turn to his other botanical and writing projects, as well as his consular commitments in Godthaab. He was a good host, as has been seen from letters from friends he had entertained in his “igloo” in Ottawa, and it can be imagined that entertainments at the Consulate would be pleasant and appropriate even if perhaps not quite as lighthearted as they had been with the irrepressible young Acting Consul of the previous year. Unlike Dunbar and Kirkwood, who had each spent time commenting on what for them was a new and interesting situation, Erling did not find it necessary to enlarge on his social activities in Godthaab during the winter, and in fact he left his six-month report for Dunbar to write when he returned in July. Of the winter, all he would ask Dunbar to write was: “Full and constant contact has been maintained with the life of Godthaab and of
Greenland, opinions, personalities and trends. This is assured by considerable social activity, both formal and informal. The Consulate building has taken its second and rather more severe winter with as entire efficiency as it passed its first winter test.” There had been a change of faces at the U.S. Consulate, with Mr. John Ocheltree appointed as Consul and Mr. Gray Bream as Vice-Consul.

Health conditions had been satisfactory overall in Greenland, the report continued, except for an incidence of mild influenza throughout South Greenland, and there had been no serious shortage of staple foods except for an acute lack of vegetables and fresh fruit when the winter’s supply that arrived in January was spoiled by freezing. “Various import restrictions and the general scarcity of goods, together with the free spending in Greenland by United States soldiers and sailors and by Ivigtut miners on leave,” had created a surplus of cash but it was not an enormous sum and was being taken care of in various ways. Coastal ice conditions had been light over the winter but the cryolite mine had had problems with frequent and violent gales and heavy ice-coating on equipment. The last 1942 cryolite shipment had gone out as expected in January and there were no shipments in the 1943 contract up to the end of June. It was another record-breaking year for the cod fishery as there appeared to be more fish than ever before in the fjord waters, and cod were caught at Godthaab all winter long.

Apart from a generally uneventful winter, there had been a lot of war-related activity along the East Greenland coast, where it seemed that the importance of weather reports to the Axis powers had not been exaggerated and earlier fears of German meteorological activities in Greenland not unfounded. On March 11, Erling sent a coded telegram to Keenleyside to inform him that a three-man sledge party from the Danish East Greenland Patrol Base at Eskimo Naes had observed two strangers escaping from an unoccupied hut on Sabine Island at about 74°30’ North. Inside the hut, the patrol had discovered a number of articles that proved beyond doubt that it had been visited by members of the German armed forces which must have come from a base of their own not far away. In a further report on April 24, Governor Brun told Erling the history of the Patrol that had been operating between Scoresby Sound and Danmark Havn for almost two years from bases occupied previously by Danish and Norwegian hunters. “In Greenland the existence of such a system of patrols has been kept very secret,” Erling said, “and while I have known about it and its modus operandi, personnel, and bases, such information has been imparted to me confidentially chiefly through Mr. Penfield, the former American Consul.
I have not reported to you the existence of such patrols because I have felt confident that more complete and authoritative reports would have reached [you] from more competent sources.”

The men for this patrol, in collaboration with the United States Greenland Defence authorities, had been equipped with radio transmitters and other necessary equipment and supplies, but they were not armed. Travelling chiefly in winter, by dog team, they had effectively patrolled the 500-mile-long, uninhabited and forbidding coast-line, keeping at all times in close contact by wireless, in a secret code, with the Governor at Godthaab. Thus it was a routine patrol that had encountered the two Germans at Sabine Island.

Having first investigated the abandoned hut, the patrol at once withdrew in order to reach their base and to give the alarm. In this they were successful, although it appears that in the escape the patrol lost one of their two dog teams to the pursuing Germans. Having given the alarm, two men from Eskimo Naes again started north by dog team, now travelling overland in order to by-pass Sabine Island. The purpose of the journey was to rescue one of their comrades who for some time had been occupying an out-post north of Sabine Island. The patrol reached the out-post safely but, on the return trip, between Sabine Island and Eskimo Naes, was ambushed by a party of Germans armed with machine guns. One of the Danes was shot and killed when trying to escape while the other two were taken prisoner and brought to Sabine Island.

One of these men managed to escape and after great hardships reached Eskimo Naes, having travelled the distance of 100 kilometers on foot without food or proper travelling gear. He reported that the German party numbered ten men under the command of a Lieutenant Richter. They had been landed on Sabine Island by air, and, at their main base at Germania Harbour in the northern part of that island, had set up a meteorological station and a wireless transmitter. They were well armed with small arms and machine guns.²

A few days later, the Germans raided Eskimo Naes. The Danes, however, had expected it, and from a nearby sub-base were able to report the raid by wireless and subsequently to escape to Ella Island to the south. From there they were able to supply detailed information about snow and landing conditions.
for aircraft in that vicinity, which would enable sufficiently large forces from Angmagssalik or Iceland to arrive within striking distance of Sabine Island. Several large American aircraft were observed over Scoresby Sound, flying in a northerly direction, on or about March 27, but although a month had passed neither Governor Brun nor the American Consul at Godthaab had been informed of the outcome. Meanwhile, the Governor had changed the status of the East Greenland Patrol to National Defence and taken steps to supply the men with suitable arms in order to defend themselves.

By May 11, in further conversation with Brun, Erling could report new information about the Germans at Sabine Island. It now appeared likely that they had come by ship the previous autumn, rather than by air, and that they may have operated their meteorological station throughout the winter. When the Dane who had escaped was further questioned at Ella Island, it appeared that he understood some German and had been able to pick up odd bits of information from conversation among his captors, also he had noticed that they seemed to have an abundant supply of coal and were using a heavy type of coal-burning stove, not likely to have been carried by an air-borne landing party, and they had pelts of white foxes that seemed to have been taken early in the season.

Brun had still heard nothing from the Americans on May 11 but on May 14 he learned from Scoresby Sound sources that the Germans had left their base camp in force a month earlier, travelling with dogs for the purpose of capturing and destroying the Danish patrol headquarters at Ella Island. As Erling reported in his telegram May 15, the Danish prisoner had been forced to act as guide, but when they reached another patrol outpost at Mygge Bugt, the German commander despatched the entire force while he remained behind to guard the prisoner. After the raiding party had left, leaving one dog team behind, the prisoner managed to disarm Lieutenant Richter and take off for Ella Island to warn the patrol personnel. However, the Germans had taken a short-cut and when he arrived he found that the Danes had already withdrawn to Scoresby, so he returned to Mygge Bugt, captured the commander and single-handedly brought him 360 miles to Scoresby where he was turned over to the American guard.3

They were still piecing the story together in Godthaab in July. On July 24, Erling could tell Keenleyside that the Governor had told him yesterday that the German commander had been transferred to Iceland by air.
While at Scoresby Sound Lieutenant Richter at first refused to give any information about his operations in Greenland, but recently he had become more communicative and had been able to explain certain details hitherto not fully understood.... It appears that the Germans had landed at Hansa Harbour on Sabine Island in August 1942. The ship used, he stated, had been a German steel trawler which, throughout most of 1941/42 had been stationed in Denmark Strait as a permanent German weather station. The trawler was still at Sabine Island where it had wintered. By the removal of its masts, and by measures of camouflage it had been rendered so inconspicuous that it had apparently not been seen by an American scouting 'plane which had flown directly over Sabine Island.4

As far as Brun knew, no action had yet been taken by the American forces in East Greenland against the remaining Germans at Sabine Island, but the Danish patrol had returned to their headquarters at Ella Island and found that, except for having destroyed the radio equipment, the Germans had done little damage. The Danish East Greenland Patrol had now been augmented by several experienced men from the west coast who had been supplied with dog teams for winter travel. It was planned to reoccupy the abandoned Danish outposts and to set up a new station at Mygge Bugt.

It was left to Trevor Lloyd, Acting Canadian Consul to Greenland 1944–45, to consolidate the full story of German activity and weather stations on the northeast coast of Greenland in 1943 and 1944. In his December 18, 1944, report to Keenleyside, he noted that the United States had bombed the Sabine Island weather station in May 1943, and it was later destroyed by a landing party. At Christmas time, the Patrol had found a new German station further north, on Shannon Island at Cape Sussi. The Patrol had attacked the German post in April 1944 and returned to their base after killing one and wounding two of the enemy, of whom there was thought to be six. That station had been destroyed by American forces in July. Yet another radio station was discovered and destroyed on Great Koldeway Island on October 3, with the capture of three officers and nine men. The U.S. cutter Northland sank a German trawler off Great Koldeway Island and captured another off Cape Bergen on October 4, taking the second trawler to Boston with twenty prisoners.5

German U-boat activity that relied to some extent on these weather reports had been at its highest in the winter of 1943, with twenty-seven merchant
vessels sunk by the “wolf packs” in March alone in the Battle of the Atlantic. The tide was turning, however, as the Allied forces were improving their methods of avoiding and attacking the enemy, and by May 1943 the submarine hunters were being turned into the hunted in Atlantic waters. All the same, when Dunbar returned to Godthaab on May 22, having travelled by RCAF plane to the U.S. Army airbase at Goose Bay, Labrador, from there to Bluie West 1 at Ivigtut and by U.S. cutters Northland and Escanaba to Godthaab, the Escanaba had no sooner set him ashore and was on her way back to sea again when “she was blown to bits by a German torpedo that hit the ship’s magazine; only two of her crew survived.”

It was Erling’s turn to travel that summer. An opportunity arose at the beginning of August for him to go north on the Julius Thomsen on Governor Brun’s annual inspection tour. The ship would not be calling at Godhavn, but according to a letter he wrote to Austin Clark at the Smithsonian on November 29, his father was very well and had “made a trip to Thule this summer and enjoyed it very much” so there may have been a chance to see him somewhere en route. In any case, he would have a chance to see and photograph the communities in that northern part of Greenland and have the unique opportunity to watch the Greenland Administration in action and see the Governor at work away from his office. He was to say later that his conversations with Eske Brun confirmed the high opinion he already held of the Governor’s administrative ability, his excellent understanding of and sympathetic attitude towards the native Greenlanders.

The usual procedure on arrival at a port of call was for the Governor to have a conference with the District Manager (Kolonibestyrer) and then make an inspection of administrative buildings and plants owned by the government and discuss plans for new construction or replacements. Next, the native council (Kommuneraad) would be summoned, and matters of local interest, complaints, etc., would be discussed. If there had been a criminal case beyond the jurisdiction of the local magistrate (Sysselmand), a jury would have been called, but in the past year there had not been any criminal cases requiring the attention of the Governor and most business that year was trivial, although of considerable importance to the small community.

There had never been police in Greenland yet somehow law and order had been maintained. One of the most effective methods of control was by wise Administrative use of the trade monopoly. A case came up for the Governor involving the disposition of articles that were classified as flotsam. According
to Greenland law, anything found in the sea or on the beach was the property of
the crown and the finder was paid a certain percentage of its value. However, in
ancient Eskimo law, anything found or lost that was not claimed by its rightful
owner belonged to the finder. The Governor listened carefully to the witnesses
and ruled that the Greenlanders had acted against the law but recognized that
he had no way of enforcing it, so he ordered that no tobacco or coffee was to be
sold to Greenlanders in the district until the articles in question had been de-
ivered to the local authorities. The articles were handed over a few hours later,
and thus the case of obvious disobedience to the law was peacefully settled
without the use of force or loss of face to the Administration.

“Later, at Akunaak near Egedesminde,” Erling said,

… I had occasion to observe another example of administration of
justice in Greenland, in the instance of two young male ‘convicts,’
each serving a sentence of ‘hard labour’ for petty theft and burglary.
In each case the value of property involved had been less than $20.00.
Greenland has no jails or other penal institutions. Therefore the of-
fenders, having been duly tried and sentenced, had been ‘deported’
from their home town to the outpost where suitable lodgings had been
found for them with private families. While ‘serving’ their time they
were employed as day labourers by the Administration at the usual
rate of pay except that the balance of their wages was being withheld,
after payment had been made for room and board. Except during
working hours these men were quite free and could easily have made
their escape had they wanted to do so. Both assured me that they con-
sidered their ‘punishment’ just and fair. They were well treated in the
community and by the local manager, but suffered somewhat from
homesickness and looked forward to the time when they could return
home.8

It had been stormy but mild along the coast that winter, and many of the usual
routes for winter dog travel had not been open due to lack of winter ice. Much
of the increased temperatures in the waters of Davis Strait were due to changes
in ocean currents over a number of years. At the same time, there had been a
decided amelioration of mean air temperatures. Erling commented in his re-
port that he felt that the present amelioration of the climate might not continue,
for it was known from glaciological, geological and palaeontological evidence
that Greenland in postglacial time had had alternating periods of warmer and colder climate. In historic time, there had been two such periods, known in the previous century, when the Atlantic cod had been as abundant in Greenland waters as it was at present and later it disappeared again. Since most Greenlanders obtained their living from the sea, changes in marine life were of fundamental importance to the country and its economy. Throughout the district that year, the cod had been close to the shore. “The fish are caught chiefly on short set-lines and with hand-lines (‘jigs’). Trawling for cod or the use of cod traps is as yet unknown in Greenland…. Even with the present primitive equipment the fishermen can produce more fish than the Government operated salting and curing plants ashore can handle…. Here, as elsewhere in Greenland, the storage facilities are inadequate for the long storage often necessary due to the war-time irregularity of shipping.”

The rapid development of the recent North Greenland cod fishery had fundamentally changed the native economy, since the fishermen were now better off than the seal hunters and were quickly becoming too dependent on imported foods and an unbalanced and less healthy diet. There had been no serious health epidemics since North Greenland was cut off from contact with the mother country, Erling reported, but there was an increased prevalence of what he could only describe as ‘war psychosis,’ particularly in the more isolated communities. Spells of despondency, irritability and melancholia were naturally most prevalent during the long and dark winter. A common complaint often heard was that North Greenland was receiving a step-motherly treatment as compared with the Southern province. At Umanak people complained that no ‘real’ ship had visited them for two years.

Egedesminde was their first port of call on August 6, and Erling noted that three spacious warehouses and other harbour improvements had been made since his visit in 1940. There was also a new U.S. Army meteorological and radio station manned by seven men. Two excursions were made from Egedesminde, one to the outpost of Akunaak, and one to a “hot spring” at Sarkardlet, an island to the south with a lake that was several miles long. “Its water is subject to a more or less regular rise and fall of several feet, a fact which has given rise to a number of Eskimo legends. The lake is said to have no visible outlet, but in all probability is drained through a natural, subterranean siphon, the orifice of which is the ‘hot’ spring. The water in the spring is not hot, but remains a few degrees above freezing throughout the year, a fact not likely to escape the notice
of the observant Greenlanders in a country where normally all streams freeze during winter.”

At Kutdliggssat, the Julius Thomsen loaded coal from the mine before leaving for Prøven near Upernavik on August 11.

While at Prøven Governor Brun arranged an excursion by motor boat to the head of Laksefjord which is famed for its trout stream and for having the most northerly ‘forest’ in Greenland. Actually its ‘trees’ are merely willow, just tall enough to conceal a man, but form a copse which covers several acres of land. The ground everywhere in the fjord abounds in wild flowers, in strange contrast to the barren outer coast. During an afternoon’s botanizing no less than 97 different kinds of flowering plants and ferns were detected, two of which heretofore had not been known to occur in Greenland north of Disko Bay. In a lake through which a trout stream flowed the water was recorded at 60° F. While I botanized, the fishermen in the party had landed about 40 fine trout weighing from three to six pounds each.

Upernavik, the most northerly settlement on the trip and reached on August 16, was situated on a small, barren, rocky island. Despite a magnificent mainland view of high ice-covered mountains, mighty glaciers and iceberg-filled fjords of unforgettable grandeur, Erling felt that the place itself was dismal and desolate. Due to the lack of level ground suitable for building, native houses were crowded at the back of the administration buildings and adjacent to the cemetery where all the graves were on top of the ground due to lack of soil, the coffins merely covered by heaps of rocks. “Throughout its history the people of Upernavik have been reputed improvident and shiftless,” he said, and even though the district during the winter produced more than half of the seals caught in Greenland annually, the population, in summer, appeared poverty-stricken. The poorest native houses and most unsanitary conditions along the entire west coast of Greenland were observed at Upernavik, he reported.

Two excursions by motor boat were made while the ship discharged some of her coal in Upernavik, one to a long-abandoned graphite “mine” that showed signs of trenching and removal of the black lead from two small open cuts, and the other to the spectacular bird cliffs for which the district was famous. “The principal birds nesting here are Brunnich’s guillemots, razor bill auks and kittiwakes,” said Erling. “Although for centuries incredible numbers of eggs and
birds were taken here annually, the number of birds nesting on these cliffs seem undiminished.” The birds nested on narrow shelves or horizontal crevices on sheer rock walls rising to one to two thousand feet facing the sea. “By their white fronts the guillemots and the auks are visible from afar, and most of all resemble little penguins or tiny men in tail coats and white shirt fronts. When one approaches the cliffs, the number of birds does not at first seem staggering because only a small number of the inhabitants are visible from below and only when frightened do the birds leave their nests. At the time of our visit many birds had already left their nests permanently; however, when a gun was fired, the sky, for a few minutes, was literally darkened by their wings.”

In Greenland, guillemots and auks could be shot throughout the year except near the rookeries, but the collecting of eggs was still permitted there.

To anyone but a Greenlander these cliffs would appear quite inaccessible unless a man were lowered with a rope, which, in view of the great height of the cliffs would seem impractical. The Greenlanders, however, are fearless climbers and gladly risk their lives to secure a mess of birds’ eggs. Our native guide explained how, at this cliff, egg collectors landed from their kayaks on a narrow shelf, and reached the bird cliff by traversing what looked to me like a sheer rock wall at a height of several hundred feet above the sea. In response to my exclamation: “You people must be very daring to risk your lives in this way,” the guide modestly answered: “No, we are not very brave; on the contrary, we are timid people; but we are inordinately fond of birds’ eggs.” He then related how, some years before, he and four other men had gone to collect eggs on this cliff, leaving one old man in a row boat. While the men were on the cliff they saw the old man take ill and fall into the sea. While the egg collectors were helpless on the cliff, the boat drifted out to sea. The men spent five days confined to a narrow shelf on the cliff before they were rescued. Asked how they had been able to stand this terrifying ordeal, he answered that it had really not been so bad. Eggs had provided food and drink and they had been able to sleep for short spells held to the narrow shelf by their comrades. The worst had really been that they had become infested by thousands of hungry bird lice that gave them no peace.”
The August 21 visit of the *Julius Thomsen* to Umanak on the way south, the place where no “real” ship had called in over two years, had been looked forward to by the people of the community for weeks, and Erling said that when the ship was still several miles out to sea, the entire population could be seen on the look-out hill above the town. All the officials and their families were invited on board the ship for a gala dinner when they arrived. As he had done at all the other overnight stops, Erling offered to show “movies” ashore for the native population if a suitable place could be found. He had always been proud of his still photography but this year he was also carrying a camera for taking moving pictures. His “movies” were a selection of documentary films loaned by the National Film Board and his 16 mm pictures of Greenland that were the first colour film ever shown in Greenland. In places where electric power was not available, the pictures were shown on board the ship. Since there was no hall or room in Umanak that could hold even a fraction of the three hundred people who were interested, it was arranged that the pictures would be shown outdoors. “It was a beautiful calm night,” Erling said, “but not until 1 a.m. (double summer time) did it become dark enough. The crowd which had patiently waited for several hours vociferously vetoed my suggestion that it was perhaps now too late. This was the first time moving pictures had been shown at Umanak, and only when my supply of film had been exhausted, after four hours of continuous performance, did the crowd disperse.”

Continuing south, the *Julius Thomsen* again stopped at Kutdligssat to take on coal for Sukkertoppen and Godthaab. A stop was made at Jakobshavn to take fifty sledge dogs on board, destined for a United States Army base on the east coast, and several hundred barrels of salted arctic halibut, recently introduced on the American market as “blue halibut.” More dogs were taken on board at Egedesminde but there was no sign of the naval ship off Søndre Strømfjord that had been arranged for their transport so, when no ship came, all the dogs were put ashore on a nearby island together with their caretakers and a quantity of food. When half the cargo of coal had been off-loaded and a quantity of general cargo for Godthaab put aboard at Sukkertoppen, the ship set sail for Godthaab where she docked on September 4.

Erling now had less than three weeks to pack his bags, say his goodbyes, and get ready to leave Greenland, at the very least for the winter, although in fact his goodbyes this time would be final. Max Dunbar would stay until the next summer and be relieved by geographer Trevor Lloyd, who would be bringing his family with him over the next winter, and finally Dunbar would return
with his new wife Joan and be there for the closing of the Greenland Consulate in 1946. Meanwhile, Erling would make one last official trip to South Greenland, leaving Godthaab on the Julius Thomsen on September 23.

With brief stopovers at the U.S. emergency airbase of Marrak at Bluie West 7 and Ivigtut, the ship reached Julianehaab on September 26. “Julianehaab is the administrative centre of the most populous and in many ways most diversified and interesting district in Greenland,” Erling wrote in his report on December 7. “The town is situated on the north side of Igaliko Fiord, near the entrance. It has a small, but quite good natural harbour. A stone pier has been built, along which small vessels can tie up…. With its streets, public square with a fountain, its quays and substantial stone buildings, Julianehaab is certainly more urban in appearance than other Greenland towns. The population is about eight hundred [and it] has a radio station, a hospital with X-ray equipment and beds for sixty-odd patients.”

From a map of Greenland, it can be seen that the district of Julianehaab extends down the southwest tip of the country around to the extreme southeast, including the area around Cape Farewell. Although the outer coastline facing the sea is only a hundred and sixty miles long, due to the numerous long fjords and indentations the total length of coastline is actually closer to two thousand miles. In 1943, Erling could say that the population of the district was almost as large as that of the Yukon Territory in Canada, and numbered about four thousand Greenlanders and about sixty Danes distributed around thirty trading posts and villages.

Much of the interest of the district lay in its history. In the Middle Ages, from the year 1000 to about 1300, a Norse colony had flourished in what was then Eystri Bygd (Eastern Settlement) with a farming population estimated at about six thousand. In 985, Eric the Red had taken land on Tunugdliarfik Fjord, across from the new American base of Bluie West 1. At its height, it was estimated that the settlement had a hundred and ninety farms or homesteads and twelve churches, all of which had been located in recent times. Disease in Greenland and in the home countries of Norway and Iceland where so many died of the Black Death between 1349 and 1402, isolation, and hostile Eskimo attacks from the north were some of the factors that led to the decline of the Norse, and it was believed that the last inhabitants of the Eastern Settlement probably died about 1490.

Erling spent three weeks in the Julianehaab district, making a full report on the cod fishery, seal hunting, and sheep farming, and taking excursions by
motorboat to Igaliko, where a large number of natives had been trained to keep sheep, Nanortalik, which he found was the most isolated and primitive of the entire west coast dependent mainly on seal hunting, and Tassermiut, which in Greenland was famous for its birch “forest.” Kingua Valley, hidden in a narrow valley among high, ice-capped mountains, was of outstanding scenic beauty, he reported. The forest was limited to the most sheltered part of the valley where the tallest trees were all birch from fifteen feet to twenty feet high; but the lower reaches of the hills were covered with a dense birch scrub ten feet high. Erling was particularly interested in the idea of growing Canadian tree species in generally treeless Greenland. He had sent seeds of some hardy species to Governor Brun as early as February 13, 1941, for experimental tree planting in Ivigtut, and could now say that “Botanical studies carried out in Greenland during the last three years … conclusively prove that the absence in Greenland of coniferous trees is not a climatic one. Hardy conifers such as the Canada spruce (Picea glauca), larch (Larix laricina) and others could be successfully grown in the fiords of Greenland at least as far as Godthaab provided that the planting experiments were carried out in a scientific manner.”

The Julianehaab district led the country in the production of salted cod.

The per capita production, however, is very low compared with other districts because of the more primitive fishing methods used. Thus, the majority of the producers of the district are a priori seal hunters, and fish for cod only when the spring seal hunt is over. Few of them own fishing dories and most of the fishing is done from kayaks with hand lines or ‘jigs.’ The kayak is a most seaworthy one-man craft, wonderfully suited to seal hunting, but is not very practical for commercial fishing. On its deck it will carry about two hundred pounds of fish, and the fisherman therefore when ‘loaded’ must bring his catch to the shore.

A native trader at Sardlok had told him that a kayak fisherman when fish was plentiful could produce 350 pounds of cleaned cod per day while a dory fisherman on good days could produce 2,000 pounds. The fish were split, cleaned, and prepared for curing by the fishermen and their families, and this was usually done on the beach near the Government-operated fish-curing plant. He noted that the cleaning was more carefully done than by the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador. The cured fish were graded and packed in fifty kilo
burlap wrapped parcels for shipment. Greenland salted cod was considered the finest on the world market, Erling’s report concluded.

He left Julianehaab on the Julius Thomsen on October 19 for Ivigtut where he looked at the U.S. Army and Naval camps before leaving for Narssak and Bluie West 1. The main runway at the airbase had been surfaced with concrete and a new hangar and workshop was being built to replace one destroyed by fire earlier that summer. Administration buildings and barracks were situated along a well-graded road about five miles long that followed the south side of the valley. At the end of the road, by a small clear lake, surrounded by birch-covered hills, a new hospital was nearing completion, and on a rocky ridge north of the lake, several hundred feet above the airport, a water reservoir had been constructed. Erling would not have been Erling if he had not explored the vegetation around the area to see the effect of all the construction on the native flora and whether introduced plants had begun to take any hold.19

On October 27, he was flown in a U.S. Army plane to Goose Bay, Labrador, where he landed at night and had to spend four days waiting for the weather to clear. “One day was spent making a botanical survey of a nearby peat bog and of the black spruce forest,” he reported. Only a botanist or naturalist could wander around a cold, desolate airstrip in the middle of nowhere and write happily about what he was seeing.

Following two weeks of freezing weather the deciduous trees were all bare and all summer-green plants were frozen and wilted. The ground was frozen but fortunately not covered by snow. The bog, which appears to be typical of much of the Lake Melville lowlands, occupies an almost level, sandy plain about 50 feet above the level of the lake. The bog is a typical black spruce bog, with spruce 15–25 feet high, scattered balsam fir, white birch, larch, spotted alder, and willow. In general aspect, except for one or two plants, notably the baked-apple (Rubus chamaemorus), the bog was astonishingly like some such southern bog as the Mer Bleue of the Ottawa district. In wet places among the trees the ground was covered by sphagnum and hepatics (Marchantia polymorpha) with a dense undergrowth of Chamaedaphne calyculata, Ledum groenlandicum, Alnus incana and Salix candida, etc. In somewhat drier places the ground cover was chiefly the lichens Cladonia rangiferina and C. sylvatica with Kalmia angustifolia and Vaccinium pensylvanicum forming the undergrowth. On fallen trees
and on stumps were seen species of *Polyporus* and on a birch stump a single species of *Fomes* sp.\textsuperscript{20}

He counted ninety annual rings on the stumps of a balsam fir and measured other trees in an area of richer, alluvial soil near the lakeshore where trees were larger and better developed, and concluded that the balsam fir and black spruce had been capable of remarkably rapid growth for their first sixty years. There were few birds due to the lateness of the season, but he did see two small flocks of pine grosbeaks, a few redpolls, and one chickadee. “Signs indicated that rabbits and meadow mice were plentiful. A number of red squirrels were seen.”\textsuperscript{21}

On October 31, Erling left Goose Bay by RCAF Command, arriving the same day at Dorval, Montreal, which he left by train and arrived in Ottawa that night. There was wonderful news waiting for him in Ottawa. While he was finishing the last of his consular service in Greenland, two things had finally come to fruition that he had been wanting for so long. In the September that had just passed, a long article had appeared in the *Sargentia* September issue, an article entitled “Materials for a flora of the Continental Northwest Territories of Canada,” by A. E. Porsild. Even more importantly, on September 22, a meeting of the Treasury Board of the Privy Council of Canada was held in Ottawa in which the Board recommended that “under the provisions of Section 59 of the Civil Service Act, the position of Botanist, National Museum of Canada … be exempt from the operation of the said Act insofar as the principle of competition in appointment is concerned, to provide for the permanent appointment of Alfred E. Porsild, but that in all other respects this position be subject to the provisions of the said act, such exemption to apply to the present appointment only.”\textsuperscript{22}

There is no knowing when Anderson’s letter of October 2, enclosing a copy of the Order-in-Council with accompanying memorandum, would have reached Erling, but Anderson had been up to see Mr. Lynch about it and been given to understand that “while the Order-in-Council authorizes your eventual appointment to a permanent position, it is doubtful whether the Department will be able to put it into effect until you are finished with your employment by the Department of External Affairs.”\textsuperscript{23}
CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX
ROAD TO THE YUKON

“Gosh, it is good to have you back from furrin’ parts!” Hugh Raup exclaimed as he wrote to tell Erling of the successful collecting trip that he and Lucy had made over the new highway to Alaska through northern British Columbia and the Yukon in the summer of 1943.

... In fact, it was incredible – one of those rare occasions when you make a lot of wonderful plans with the understanding that only a part of them can be expected to materialize, then they practically all turn out as you had originally made them. When we went North in the spring we could find out practically nothing about the road or the kind of transportation and supplies we would have. We simply had to take the Army’s word for it that they would be forthcoming. Naturally we had our fingers crossed. Then we had all the transportation and supplies we could desire, and the best of cooperation. The Army not only did it, but did it gracefully! In addition to the general success of the plans, we had an uncommon lot of sheer luck – meeting the right people at the right times, and being in the right places at lucky moments.1

He had seventy-five reprints from Erling’s “Materials for a flora of the Continental Northwest Territories of Canada” paper in Sargentia, which he would send when he heard from him, but in the meantime he was mailing a few copies. “I think the paper turned out very nicely,” he said. Erling had received the first reprints when he wrote to thank him a week later:
I did not know that my paper was out, in fact I did not expect it to be out for quite some time. I have just thumbed through it. It looks first rate, in fact much better than any publication that the Museum might have given me, and I am truly grateful to you and to Dr. Merrill for making its publication possible. I have not been able to locate the second copy of the manuscript, which should be here, but I can see that, in spite of what you say, you must have spent considerable time on it. Thanks a lot! By the way, how was its publication financed? I am going to write a note to Dr. Merrill shortly and also one to Dr. Croizat.

He was glad to hear that the trip over the Alcan Highway had been so eminently successful. Austin Rand, Taverner’s ornithological successor at the Museum, had been up there and met the Raups that summer, and he was now talking about getting out a manual of the birds and mammals of the highway. “I see in the Arboretum Journal that yours is a two year project. I suppose then that you plan to continue where you left off this year. If I am not going back to Greenland I should like very much to look over the country opened up by the Norman–Whitehorse road.”

Raup mailed the rest of the reprints on December 6. “Both copies of the manuscript are here,” he said, “and if you want them I’ll send them along. When we decided to print it, I thought it best to have both copies, on the chance that you might have made notes in the Ottawa copy that did not appear in ours. You will eventually note, if you haven’t done so already, that I made sundry minor changes in the manuscript. I hope I didn’t go outside your meaning. With regard to financing – forget it! I told Dr. Merrill the other day that you wanted to know where the money came from, and he said to tell you not to ask.” Raup wasn’t sure if the money could be found for his party to go back north in the coming summer, but when he was in New York a few weeks earlier he had had a couple of talks with Dr. Camsell from the Department of Mines and Resources, and he thought the Canadian geological parties would be working on the Canol pipe line in the year ahead. “Should this be the case, there might be an opportunity for somebody there. If you are not going back to your post, why don’t you see if they won’t take you north?”

Why indeed. It had been understood when Erling came back from Greenland that Rand might be going up again if the Department of Mines and Resources wanted him to do it and would pay his expenses. “But our own people did not seem to think that we ourselves ought to have a biological party,” Erling
told Raup at the end of April. “I then saw Dr. Camsell and suggested that the Museum ought to do something, and that I thought a botanical-zoological party ought to spend this summer on the Canol road while the road ‘was still there.’ The idea interested Dr. Camsell and later we were able to get the Museum direction to push the matter.” The opportunity was really too good to miss. Both the new Alcan Highway (later called the Alaska Highway) and the Canol pipeline road had suddenly opened a great many previously inaccessible areas for firsthand study. An Alaska that once could only be reached by sea or air was now within driving distance, even if it was over a thousand miles from the nearest railhead, and all the miles from central British Columbia to the Yukon-Alaska border were shouting to be explored botanically. Raup had happily “picked flowers by the roadside” along the new highway that summer and it looked as if the Canol Road would be even better.

Only the war could have made possible this incredible access to the North, and, just as the Nazi threat to Greenland had brought instant and amazing military response from the United States to that part of the world, so the Japanese threat to the isolated and vulnerable northwest of the continent had resulted in a massive U.S. military operation to carve a highway and pipeline out of endless northwest mountain, forest, and muskeg, with the 1,500-mile Alaskan Highway from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Fairbanks, Alaska, and the 525-mile road and oil supply pipeline from Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories to a new refinery in Whitehorse in the heart of the Yukon.

The threat of attack from the other side of the Pacific Ocean was not an idle one. Already, in the summer of 1940, Alaskans had realized their vulnerability when they learned of a large Russian military air base to be placed on Big Diomede Island in the mere fifty-six mile stretch of the Bering Strait that separated North America from Asia. Significant spying had been carried out for a long time by Japanese military men posing as fishermen along the necklace of the Aleutian Islands strung neatly across the North Pacific from Japan to Alaska. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, there seemed nothing to stop Alaska from being next for invasion because that would give the Japanese forces a comfortable base from which to attack shipping lanes and cities along the west coast of Canada and the United States and beyond. U.S. Defence troops poured into Alaska, and the U.S. Army did some secret work of their own in the Aleutians. When the Japanese attack on the U.S. Naval Base at Dutch Harbour finally happened on the morning of June 3, 1942, the invaders were suddenly counter-attacked by American planes emerging from secret airfields hidden on
Rocky Mountain Parks, Alaska Highway, and Canol Road, 1944 (Cartography: Faith Carlson)
the islands at “The Blair Packing Company” and “Saxton and Company,” two innocent-looking apparent salmon-packing operations. The Japanese were successfully chased back, but if the Allied offensive was to continue, the plan was to invade Japan by the same route, for which they would need all the back-up the roads and pipeline could give them, as well as the string of airfields across to Alaska that were being constructed by Canada.

Work on the Highway had already begun that winter after several changes of route. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, as consultant to the U.S. government agencies, had recommended building a highway to Alaska via the Mackenzie River Valley and laying the oil supply pipeline along a northerly low-altitude route from Normal Wells to Mayo, Dawson, and Fairbanks, but to his dismay, when the United States Army began to build the Highway with the agreement of Canada in March 1942, it would be a route far to the west of his proposal. Equally, the Army chose a more southerly mountainous route for the pipeline project. Stefansson always felt that the Alaska Highway had been built over “the worst possible route” and the accompanying Canol (short for Canadian Oil) Project that covered miles of remote and difficult terrain was “not the project that anyone but the Army would have chosen, but it did produce and deliver oil, although at enormous cost.”

Early in January, Erling had written to Richard Finnie, son of his old friend in the reindeer years, for information about the Canol Road. The pipeline project had been kept very secret and the road that ran beside the above-ground pipes was not open to anyone without a special permit. “Dick Finnie,” as he was known to his friends, had been liaison officer and historian with the Canol Project since May 1942, assisted by his wife Alyce, and he wrote back February 1 to tell Erling that they had spent the first year attached to Bechtel-Price-Callahan, the constructors, then were taken over by the U.S. Army Engineers and had since been on the staff of General Worsham, Division Engineer, in charge of all construction on the Alaska Highway as well as the Canol Project. As the latter was nearing completion, they hoped to get their tasks finished within the next month or so.

“The Canol Road starts from Johnson’s Crossing, where it branches off from the Alaska Highway, 80 miles east of Whitehorse,” he said.

It skirts Quiet Lake, follows the Rose River to Lapie Pass, then goes down the Lapie River to the Pelly, which it crosses at Ross Post at the mouth of the Ross. Then it ascends the Ross River to Sheldon Lake,
passes Mount Sheldon and ascends to Macmillan Pass (altitude about 5,200 feet). It then follows and crosses the northerly headwaters of the Keele River. It finally reaches the Mackenzie Valley by a tributary of the Carcajou River, crossing this river at a point 23 miles from Canol Camp, continuing to the Mackenzie over the valley. Canol Camp is exactly opposite Normal Wells. The length of the Canol Road is about 525 miles from Johnson’s Crossing to Canol. Johnson’s Crossing, by the way, is at the lower end of Teslin Lake.

I have just returned from Canol and Norman Wells. I reached there last week after having spent three weeks between Whitehorse and Canol, driving alone in an Army truck. I had previously been over most of the road from both ends, and had repeatedly flown back and forth over the Mackenzie-Yukon divide, but this was the first time I had driven right across (the road was ‘holed through’ on December 31), and it was a memorable experience. I am sure you could do a wonderful job of botanizing across the divide. You should start on your trip before April unless you want to wait until summer, because much of the road will be impassable over breakup. A jeep or four-wheel-drive truck is what you will need. General Foster, the Special Commissioner for Northern Defense Projects, is the man through whom your arrangements can be made.6

Erling had returned from a short holiday when he wrote to thank both Dick and Alyce Finnie for the “fine lot of information” they had sent him:

I am more than pleased to have all this most useful information, and to find that you are so optimistic about both the Alcan and the Canol routes. As you no doubt know it is exceedingly difficult to find out what the actual conditions are, at least in Ottawa it is. People who have been on the road either give you a glowing account or tell you that it is almost impassable, depending upon what conditions prevailed when they happened to be there – perhaps months and months ago. Your information is, of course, the very latest and most authoritative, and I feel it is possible now to know just what to expect. I notice that you advise a start before April because the Canol road will not be passable during the break-up. There will of course be very little doing in botany before the middle of June, so I may have to take a chance on finding
the road still there after the break-up. So far the plans are still in the making, and it seems very difficult to get any definite authority to go ahead with the plans.7

While he waited for official permission to go ahead with the plans for the summer, Erling was busy in other areas. Back in November, he had been asked by Brigadier Chisholm of the Department of National Defence to join a committee formed in his absence to prepare a manual on emergency foods in Northern Canada. (It is interesting to speculate as to whether this was the military man who had been his neighbour in Rockcliffe where, the story goes, Erling was playing with a Copper Indian bow and arrow in his garage when the arrow shot out of the open door towards the rear of a man leaning over to dig a dandelion out of his lawn. Fortunately, the arrow landed in the grass behind him, point down, and Erling strolled over very quietly to pick it up, put it behind his back, and said “Good morning, Brigadier!”)8

The letter from the Brigadier stated that the committee would greatly appreciate his advice, especially if he would also prepare the section on Animal Foods. Since Erling had already published a paper on “Edible Roots and Berries of Northern Canada,” it was not long before he was working on a manuscript for use by the Royal Canadian Air Force on “Emergency Food in Arctic Canada” to be published a year later. One of his edible plant booklets was sent to an old northern friend, Fenley Hunter. Hunter sent it on to John Logan of Trans-World Airlines in New York City and asked him to return it to Erling with thanks as he did not intend to take it on his next trip to the Arctic, preferring the four-legged kind of food. Erling knew John Logan had made a name for himself on a daring motorcycle trip in May 1939 with Slim Williams of Alaska, travelling over brutal terrain from Fairbanks to Hazleton, BC, to demonstrate the possibilities of an early plan for the Alaska Highway, this time paralleling the coast. Logan also passed on a copy of Hunter’s letter with a reminder of that event:

Erling’s interesting and most scientific article reminded me immediately of the tummy-aches you and Slim Williams contracted shortly before you came to Bob Porsild’s cabin on your motorcycles while enroute from Fairbanks to the World’s Fair right here in Flushing Meadows. I have looked in vain in Erling’s list of specimens for the water lilies or lily pads you two hungry fellows took to eating in some
moose pond – but have no doubt that you will be able to recognize your old botanical friend somewhere among the few poisonous plants to be found in the Arctic or sub-Arctic. Your tummy-acher must be there because the Great Botanist at Ottawa has very sharp eyes and misses nothing.9

If Erling’s plans for the Canol Road worked out in the summer ahead, the Porsild brothers would be reunited for the first time since Bob and Elly had left Reindeer Station. Bob had worked at towing logs in the Vancouver area until 1935 when he and two friends had decided to go north looking for gold in the Yukon, even though Elly was nine months pregnant at the time. Their son Aksel was born in Whitehorse while the men were building a riverboat, and one week later they started for Dawson where Bob hunted and trapped and worked for Consolidated Gold Corporation and then on the construction of Snag Airport near Beaver Creek. The family had been back in Whitehorse since the end of 1943. By now they had four children, including their daughter Betty who had been born in Aklavik in 1931, son Aksel who had been born in Whitehorse in 1935, and two younger girls born in Dawson, Ellen in 1937 and Johanne Julie in 1940. Bob was hauling wood for the newly enlarged airport that was part of the chain of new and updated Canadian airports en route to Alaska, and there would certainly be time for a family reunion if Erling got up there in June.10

Erling had some statutory holidays to take before the end of the Museum’s financial year in March so he went back to Sunshine Lodge at Banff for ten days of skiing, after which he called at the Park Headquarters to discuss the possibility of future work. “During the conversation I obtained much information that will enable me to plan a future botanical survey of the park,” he told James Smart, Controller of the National Parks Bureau in the Department of Mines and Resources.

Accompanied by [Chief Warden Bruce Mitchell] I visited the elk, sheep and moose winter range at Hillsdale and elsewhere in the vicinity of Banff. Also I was shown a small lot which had recently been fenced for the purpose of range recovery studies. On March 9th Mr. Holman came up from Calgary. Together we drove to Lake Louise and back to Banff. In the evening we continued to Kananaskis Forest Experimental Station, where I spent the next day. While at Banff I spent two entire evenings examining Mr. Sanson’s extensive collection of plants
from the vicinity of Banff. In the course of this examination I named about 500 specimens that were unknown to Mr. Sanson.\textsuperscript{11}

It had been interesting for him to compare the changes at Sunshine Lodge from the time when he had been there five years earlier. His stay had been “most pleasant.” On his earlier visit, everything had been more primitive and skiers had had to ski up carrying their own baggage.

The bus service to the door of the lodge has made a change in the type of skiers that visit the place. The food is excellent and abundant and the menus are more varied…. The price is $3.00 per day for meals which is not unreasonable. Since my first visit, electric light and a central heating plant has been installed. All bedrooms have been ‘done over,’ and the beds are much better. Otherwise the accommodation is pretty much the same but with the increased number of visitors there is a tendency to crowd the bedrooms. At $2.50 per occupant per night, two occupants should be enough for each room. However, when making my reservations, I was informed by the management that 3 to 5 persons occupied one bedroom. All visitors knew beforehand what to expect and accepted conditions cheerfully. During my visit I did not hear complaints…. In conclusion I might say that I thought the place was well managed. I might add that I have skied in Switzerland, Austria, Norway and Sweden but I do not recall any place where the skiing conditions are better than at ‘Sunshine.’\textsuperscript{12}

With ideas for the next year’s fieldwork at Banff already taking shape, Erling returned to Ottawa in time for a very important meeting on March 31 with a group of men with northern interests, including Diamond Jenness from the National Museum and Trevor Lloyd from the Department of Geography at Dartmouth College in Hanover who was soon to be appointed Acting Consul in Godthaab to relieve Max Dunbar for the winter. The meeting had been suggested by Dr. Lincoln Washburn, now of the Arctic, Desert, Tropic Information Center (ADTIC) of the U.S. Army Air Forces in New York, who thought that a group of Canadians interested in the polar regions should meet with a group of like-minded Americans in New York to discuss setting up a permanent organization. Stateside, Vilhjalmur Stefansson had expressed a wish privately to give his Arctic Library to some organization or institution that would maintain
it as a centre for polar research, and the ADTIC in New York had also built up a valuable store of maps, memoranda, and other data on the polar regions in the past two years. The U.S. Government had trained many men in Arctic techniques and several of them wanted to retain an interest in the north. It was now proposed that the Canadian group should discuss whether an international organization was desirable, where its headquarters should be located, and the nature of the work it should undertake.

It was very quickly agreed at the Ottawa meeting that there was a need for an international organization in North America to interest itself in the polar regions from a scientific point of view, and it was felt that it should be based in Canada nearer to the scene of northern operations, although for other considerations it might have to be in the United States. Montreal, with its two English and French language universities and its accessibility to the eastern United States, was suggested as the logical location. There was also room for a distinct Canadian organization, possibly affiliated with the above, that concerned itself with peculiarly Canadian problems of the north with particular emphasis on their social and administrative aspects. Its duties would include research, coordinating information, maintaining a library, organizing expeditions and other scientific work, encouraging northern research and training in Canadian universities, supplying expert advice to government agencies, and promoting public awareness in regard to Canada’s responsibilities and opportunities in the North. Names that were suggested for a further meeting in New York concerning the formation of an international Arctic Institute included those present and Wynne-Edwards from McGill University in Montreal and Hugh Keenleyside from the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa.  

By the end of March, Erling’s plans for the Canol Road had been approved and he had written to Tisdale, Saskatchewan, to ask August Breitung if he would like to come with him as his field assistant that summer. He had been in correspondence with this unusual young man since January 1939, and over the years the shy farmhand with a consuming passion for botany had sent him hundreds of carefully collected and pressed plant specimens of excellent quality. In return, Erling had sent books and articles on botany and every encouragement he could give this dedicated, untrained enthusiast.

There was no doubt of Breitung’s keenness about plant collecting. One letter to “My Dear Friend Mr. Porsild” on 2 January 1941 told him of the success of his 1940 season:
Well, I had a good collecting season, though others think its hard work, I just love it. I made an interesting trip to Hudson Bay Junction, about 75 miles to the east of here or more, and while absent 4 days I collected over 100 numbers, of 3 to several specimens of each number, many species were new to my herbarium and a few new to Sask. I travelled by bicycle, as that is the way I do most of my collecting, most of the way until I would get tired and took the train for a short distance, after pushing the bicycle all day in the heat over the railway ties, as there is no road for much of the way toward Hudson Bay Junction from Tisdale. I spent one whole day south of Hudson Bay Junction, at the Red Deer River, collecting, and when I had collected everything that I thought was new and interesting it was around 6 o’clock and I had forgotten about time altogether. Well I sure was loaded with plants, all I could handle across my back and on the handle bars of my bicycle, all in newspaper. Some people asked me if I were selling newspaper, etc. The trip cost me a lot of sweat but I believe it was successful.14

“I enjoyed your account of your collecting trip,” Erling wrote back, “it shows that you have the true make-up of a Naturalist. As I have told you before you have done remarkably well so far and I am sure that if you can manage to continue in the way you have started you will make some very worth while contributions in botanical exploration of your province. Tonight we have a meeting of a small group of Naturalists, the Macoun group, a section of the Ottawa Field-Naturalist’s Club, and I shall read part of your letter and tell them about the work you are doing.”15

A Christmas card he had received in Greenland from Breitung in 1942 showed a young man standing straight and stiff and solemn in a square-cut jacket and cuffed trousers with straight, well-pressed creases, white shirt and tie, high colour in the cheek bones, in front of a snow-covered house and garden. Enclosed with the card was a medical file for the Army which included questions about his occupation: “Were you brought up on a farm?” “Yes.” “What other work can you do well?” “Botany. 7 years on my own.” “Can you handle horses?” “Yes.” “Drive a tractor?” “No.” “Can you milk?” “Yes.” “Is there any particular occupation in which you would like to be specially trained?” “Botany.” By 30 October 1943, Breitung could tell his “Dear Friend” that after a great deal of effort and sacrifice of sleep and time he had managed to get out
and put up a parcel of pressed plants for the National Herbarium of Canada. He hadn’t counted them, he should have been in bed hours ago as he was doing hard physical labour working on farms wherever he was needed as farm help was so scarce, “more so than the army authorities realize.”

In response to a hint from Erling on 14 February 1944 that he might be able to offer him employment in the field that summer depending on his status with the military, Breitung’s letter of February 19 spoke of his lack of time for botany since he was out working.

I wish I could spend 100% of my time to botany! I am working at mounting plants or writing labels or putting parcels of plants every evening till late at night or early in the morning. I don’t think I am really carved out to farm work, though I can do more botany work than I could if in the army. I have postponement from military training till next fall, and likely can get another postponement if I stay on the farm (if in the meantime the war don’t end). I don’t know what would happen if I left the farm? In other words I am drafted for farm work as you thought. I guess that’s what it amounts to. I have been working on the farm steady for two years, without a break, summer & winter. Perhaps I could get away for a few months in the summer as a vacation. I think I earnt [earned] one anyway. I don’t think I could leave Saskatchewan and take up employment in an industry, factory without the Selective Service. I know a boy who left the farm and went to B.C. on his own to look for a job in a factory there. They could not hire him as he had no permission to leave Sask, so they put a uniform on him! I guess we can’t do just as we please anymore. The only way I know that I can see I can leave for a few months in the summer is as a vacation. I guess no one could refuse me that. During that time what could I do for you? What is your offer? I am 30 and should be doing more to help mankind for generations to come!16

Erling wrote to him from Banff and an excited letter came back from Breitung on February 24, saying he would be exceedingly glad to go with him to the Yukon as his assistant. There was talk of their meeting in Regina (“I have never been to a larger city than Saskatoon”) but he could not get away from the farm. Letters went back and forth about his getting permission to leave the farm until April 22 when he wrote jubilantly that he had received a letter from the selective
service in Regina granting him permission for the Yukon expedition. “So now you can let me know about what day to meet you in Edmonton as I think that will be where we likely leave for the more or less wilderness.”

Everyone, it seemed, was going north that summer. The Raups had managed to find money for their continuing expedition along the Alaska Highway and had written to Anderson to ask if their old arrangements for the loan of field equipment could be made again. Raup told Erling that all their arrangements seemed to be going through all right and he would be in Ottawa on the afternoon of June 1 to pick up their gear before leaving on the night train. “We expect to go to Whitehorse by way of the coast, and then work through southwestern Yukon into Alaska,” he said:

… We shall probably spend two or three weeks in the Kluane Lake region west of Whitehorse in the early summer, and hope to do some collecting there in the latter part of the summer when the grasses will be in good shape. Our plans for the Alaskan end of the trip are not complete, but we expect to spend some time in the Tanana valley and hope to arrange matters so that we can work on both sides of the glacial boundary. Although a part of the trip will be outside Canadian territory, I am hoping that our arrangement for the loan of G.S.C. equipment can be made. The second set of all our collections will, of course, be deposited in the herbarium at Ottawa.

Erling was checking out the equipment for his own and the Raup party at the end of April. He was very pleased that they were able to go back to the Yukon that summer and continue along the highway to Fairbanks, and his trip was practically a fait accompli although there were still a few important details such as from which Government pocket the money was to be provided. “I have, however, been told to go ahead and get my outfit together and to hire field assistants,” he told Raup on April 25:

… The plan is now that Rand and I are going together on a joint party, each with an assistant and a cook. We are getting an army truck and hope to be able to ‘steal’ a jeep somewhere. We plan to go over the Alcan road, get our outfit together at Whitehorse and to spend about two months on the Canol. We hope to be able to leave Ottawa toward the end of May. I do not expect I can count on collecting on the Canol
much later than first week of August, when we may return to Whitehorse, and from there make a ‘look-see’ trip to Dawson and perhaps the Ogilvie Mountains. We should be back in Ottawa in September.

I am trying to get Breitung released from a farm job and to take him along as assistant. He is ‘crazy’ to go and I feel he will be a pretty ‘safe gamble.’ He is probably a little bit queer in some ways, but he certainly can collect. The other assistant [W. H. Bryenton] is a chap I had with me on the Kazan River in 1930. He is a trapper and prospector by profession and a first rate field man. We even have the cook picked out so you see we are practically ‘all set to go.’ The trip will be no joy ride with our ¾ ton 4-wheel drive army truck to transport five men and ‘tons and tons’ of supplies and equipment. We plan to assemble at Dawson Creek, and if things look too tough to use our ‘thumbs’ to get some of the stuff hauled to Whitehorse where we plan to outfit.19

“Between us we should have materials for a voluminous addition to Hultén’s Flora of Alaska and Yukon,” he continued. He had just received copies of Part 2 and 3 of the Flora through the “diplomatic bag” and was glad to have them as they would be a great help in the field that summer. “At the same time I cannot help being somewhat irritated by the omniscient manner in which he has decided everything. It may be too that he is quite justified in the harsh treatment he is giving me, but it seems to me that he is not quite fair in some places – and certainly not very gracious about it. Some fault can be found with most larger papers; even Hultén’s present one is not without mistakes.”20

The meeting to discuss the formation of a joint Canada/United States Arctic association had been set for May 13 in New York, and Erling hoped to see the Raups in Boston on the way back to Ottawa. With approval for both, he left for New York on May 12, where, the following day, he would attend what would be the beginning of a long and rewarding association of people with a special interest in that area of the world bounded by the Arctic Circle, the birth of the Arctic Institute of North America. The eleven Canadian delegates at that first meeting included those Canadians suggested and present at the March meeting, also Dr. Camsell and Major Baird, among others. The nine American delegates naturally included Stefansson. It was decided that the proposed institute should be formed to represent the United States, Canada, and Newfoundland, with other arctic institutes in Denmark, United Kingdom, and USSR invited to join at a later date. The term ‘Arctic’ would be applied in a broad sense. The
institute should be located in a large eastern city, preferably in Canada, where it would be a research and information centre and would work to sponsor and finance arctic research. September was mentioned as a suitable time for a meeting in Montreal to draft a constitution and to suggest a director and a Board of Trustees. With these important preliminaries concluded, Erling left New York for a few days in Boston with the Raups, and when he got back to Ottawa he wrote: “I enjoyed my visit very much and hope I did not take too much of your time. Best regards – see you all in Whitehorse!”

Before he left, Erling received a memorandum from Anderson outlining his work in the field, which would have the object, as far as was practical, of obtaining material and information that was most likely to be useful to the National Museum. This included general collections of vascular plants, of which six duplicate sets should be obtained for exchange purposes, a mile-by-mile transect or survey of forest types, general ecological studies of vegetation types with particular emphases on ecotypes and local and general distribution of plant species for the purpose of determining the age of the flora, post-glacial history and immigration, general notes on forest cover that included timber resources, and general observations on forage cover for grazing animals, and on agricultural and horticultural possibilities along the road.

Erling had been working on a manuscript on the “Mammals of the Mackenzie Delta” over the winter and sent Anderson his second copy from the MacDonald Hotel in Edmonton on May 26. While the party proceeded northwards, on June 7 Anderson put in a request for it to be published by the Museum. It is a great pity that he did not write to Erling the same day to tell him of what he had done, for he usually commented on the news of the day, and the newspapers in Ottawa that morning would have been full of the D-Day landings along the beaches of Normandy the day before. For the first time in the war, the entire Canadian army was on the battlefield, and while the stories of the relief of France were encouraging and exciting they were intertwined with the sad news of heavy infantry casualties. August Breitung would have daily reason to be grateful that he was not “over there” with the army as he joined the party heading north.

As Erling had predicted, there was not enough room for men and gear on the truck they picked up at the start of the Alcan Highway, so field assistants Breitung and Bryenton were sent to Whitehorse on an army bus while Rand and Erling and the cook followed. By July 7, when Erling wrote to Anderson from their camp at Lapie River, he could report that they had had good luck.
with everything and had had some wonderful collecting to date. “This is a most interesting flora due to the complex geology of this region and because of the mountains,” he said:

The Canol Road is open only a short distance past Sheldon and it may not be passable until September, so I do not expect that we shall be able to do much collecting once we cross the divide. We are still in hopes of being able to reach Norman…. So far everything in the expedition has worked out well. Rand’s and my assistant are both doing nobly, in fact better than I had hoped. We have all been working pretty hard, in fact I think we shall have to slow down a bit. So far we [have] been at it all of us from seven a.m. to twelve p.m. including Sundays.²⁴

He had sent two shipments totalling nine packages of dried plants to date. Only the wrapping paper needed to be removed and the inside bundles placed intact in a storage case.

Anderson had received both shipments by July 25. He was glad that they were doing so well and noted that “anything from that area is good, as anything collected will add something to our distributional records.” Miss Harkness had been in hospital and then taken a holiday after her sick leave to visit her old home, so she would not be back until August 15, and Miss Hurlbert was holding the fort in her absence. “Parliament is still in session, but have begun to have sessions on Saturday mornings, and that usually means it may be near to closing. I read in the paper not long ago that Mrs. George Black was going back to Yukon to stay. The Blacks have always been good friends of the N.M.C. and I hope that you see them when you go to Dawson.”²⁵

Erling had been down to Whitehorse to ship another “truckload” of specimens from Rand and himself when he wrote to Anderson from their Sheldon Lake camp on August 2. The serial numbers in their plant collection now numbered over 2,200,

… probably a record for a season’s collecting. Quite some time ago, I counted 110 species in our collection not heretofore collected in the Yukon. The published parts of Hultén’s Flora of Alaska-Yukon now includes the willows. We have 41 species not recorded by H. from the Yukon and a large number of plants not included in his Flora at all. At that rate we should add about 1/10 to the recorded number of species
in the Y.T. [Yukon Territory]. That is, of course, not surprising because so little has been done by professional collectors. In addition I am getting some very interesting distributional data that do not fit in too well with Hultén’s theory of distribution given in his ‘Arctic Biota.’ So far the flora has been almost 100% Cordilleran and practically all the ‘new’ stuff belongs there. It is still too early to see what amount of endemics we have since all our ‘new species’ are in critical groups such as Antennaria, Senecio, Taraxacum, and Salix. Rand likewise continues to get ‘new’ stuff and is very pleased with his findings. In fact, I am sure that we both feel that the expedition has been successful beyond all expectations.26

Anderson was delighted to get the ongoing results of the expedition from both Rand and Porsild, and sent his congratulations on August 16: “My opinion for years has been that southeastern Yukon Territory is one of the most promising large areas in North America which has been almost entirely neglected by biological explorers and collectors, and I am glad that the National Museum of Canada is getting in on the ground floor in the research work. You are fortunate in being able to investigate a comparatively unexplored field, and the National Museum is lucky to have two men on the staff with the knowledge and energy necessary to bring back as great a harvest of specimens and other data as is humanly possible.”27

He hoped that their party would at least get a little time on the eastern slope of the Mackenzie Mountains before the freeze-up as that barrier should make a great difference in distribution of species, and they had very little details west of the middle Mackenzie River, between the Liard (Wahanni) and the Mackenzie delta. As for news at the Museum, Miss Harkness was back in the Herbarium looking well, and they were having the hottest August weather ever known in the district, with offices everywhere closing early in the afternoon due to the heat, although the Herbarium was relatively cool. “Parliament adjourned a few days ago and things are more quiet in Ottawa. The war seems to be going well, with the Allied forces having Normandy and Brittany pretty well liberated, and moving rapidly ‘nach Paris.’ Yesterday the announcement was made that the Allies had made a landing in force in southern France and made a bridgehead for several miles inland without encountering very heavy resistance. The Russians are steadily moving ahead and are on the edge of East Prussia. How fast
things will move later is a matter of conjecture, depending upon a great many factors which are still uncertain.”28

Erling’s last letter from the field was written on August 19 at Sheldon Lake:

In a week or two we should be able to get through the Mackenzie Mts. to Norman. We are moving up the line 30 miles tomorrow and from there we are but a few miles of bad mudholes from the high mountain country. It has rained a lot lately and the rain has slowed down the road work and our work too. Still, our Sheldon camp has been most productive and has added several interesting species some of which undoubtedly are new. We plan to be back in Whitehorse on Sept. 15. Due to the delay on the road we have had to give up the trip to Dawson since wages are ‘eating up’ the money tentatively set aside for this purpose.29

Nowhere in Erling’s field reports to Anderson does he mention taking Breitung to Bob and Elly Porsild’s house in Whitehorse, although Elly complained that she “hated that little man August” because he put all his plants to dry all round her wood stove, leaving her no room to cook or hang her wet laundry. By the time the Museum party officially got back to Whitehorse in September, Bob Porsild was working on the Canol Road as a carpenter. He had been building riverboats all summer when, as the story went, late in August 1944 some Americans ‘dropped by’ to watch him at work. At the time he thought nothing of it but later one man returned and introduced himself as the superintendent for Standard Oil on the Canol Road. He needed a special carpentry job done because the crude oil from Norman Wells was highly explosive due to its entrapped gases, and Bob was asked if he could build airtight partitions for the pumps to minimize the danger of explosions. There were ten pumping stations, each about eighty miles apart, and Bob worked his way along the road until the order came in 1945 to “drop everything no matter what – the war was over.” A little while after the war ended, he and Elly built and operated a lodge and garage at Johnson’s Crossing, where the soon-abandoned Canol Road met the soon-to-be burgeoning Alaska Highway.30

Erling also had not noted in his field reports that he had visited the Raups at the beginning of their expedition, but on October 22 he heard from Raup that “in some ways the most interesting part of our trip began very shortly after you visited us at Kluane Lake. We found some very good alpine collecting on a
mountain at the east end of the lake, and some that was fairly good back of Burwash Landing. John Stitcht made a series of trips up Slim’s River and found some good data on glacial and post-glacial geologic history. And it was only a few days after we saw you that Fred Johnson began to find artefacts. From that time on he hit one jackpot after another.”

Back in Ottawa on September 29, Erling had already told Raup his news of the end of his Canol trip.

Since I saw you we covered the Yukon part of the Canol Road pretty thoroughly. We had fine weather throughout June, July, but in August and September a lot of rain fell. This rain delayed the work on the road and not until September 5th could we start on the trip across to the oil wells. On September 3rd the temperature had dropped to 12 degrees F, so very little collecting could be done. As was to be expected there is a complete break in the flora when crossing the divide into the Paleozoic. One night we camped on the bald summit of a mountain at close to 7,000’. I here noted 61 species more than half of which had not been seen on the Yukon side – including *Melanidion boreale*. We started back on September 8th reaching Dawson Creek on the 20th. Owing to the prolonged spells of rain the Peace River road was closed, and we had to store the truck and proceed by train. We crossed your trail a couple of times, last when we visited Mr. Christensen’s camp and found that you had been camped there a few days before.

Altogether I am more than pleased with the results of the summer’s work, and my chief worry now is how to get ‘through’ all that hay and get my report finished before the end of the fiscal year. The summer’s work comprised a total of about 3,000 numbers with 10,000 specimens and a lot of ecological notes. We have about 150 species that are ‘new’ to the Yukon including a fair number that may prove undescribed. The flora is decidedly cordilleran in its affinity and it is very old. There is a good deal of endemism and some very curious distributional problems. To what extent this will affect Hultén’s maps I cannot estimate at the present. Needless to say August has been invaluable, and after our initial difficulties were overcome has been a wonderful help. I wish I could have him here this winter. Naturally I am dying to know how you fared and where you went from Kluane Lake. What are your plans and when are you coming up here?”
Bob and Elly Porsild’s lodge, Johnson’s Crossing, Yukon (Photo: P. W. Dathan taken in 1984)
It is noteworthy that in his letter to Raup, for the first time in his correspondence Erling used the word “hay” to describe his huge plant collections of that summer, little knowing that one day he and others like him, who had gone out to gather plants in challenging remote areas, braving bears, wolves, biting insects, brutal weather, difficult transportation and plant drying conditions, sickness, pain, injury, and a host of other problems and dangers, could be dismissed as “mere hay-gatherers.” Although most of the material needed for present-day tabulation and research is now safely sorted and stored in elegant herbarium cases, perhaps this is the time to pay tribute to all those “hay-gatherers,” including not only the early and late pioneer plant explorers and collectors but those of today who still go to further fields to bring back a wealth of plant material, for their important contributions to the advancement of botanical knowledge and what we now know of the flora of North America.
CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN
THE YEAR THE WAR ENDED

When Erling Porsild returned to Ottawa from his 1944 summer in the Yukon, the Government of Canada was on the verge of collapse. Colonel Ralston had come back from the front saying that more troops were needed and the shortage could only be met by taking reinforcements from the home-defence conscripts who had been in training since 1941. In Europe, the Canadian Army was holding the sea flank of the Allied front in France and the Low Countries and had been involved in very severe fighting in the Scheldt estuary. Casualties were heavy, with the loss of 6,367 men between October 1 and November 8 alone. Mackenzie King’s biographer, J. L. Granatstein, noted that these casualties and the thousands that preceded and followed them precipitated the greatest political crisis of the war in Canada, while the conscription crisis of 1944 very nearly destroyed the government of Mackenzie King and could conceivably have produced something akin to civil war in Canada. The problem was that the Prime Minister had promised Quebec that he would never order conscription. When all attempts failed to persuade the National Resources Mobilization Army (NRMA) to volunteer for the front, he had no choice, so on 27 November 1944, Mackenzie King gave the speech of his life in the House of Commons, turning his back on the Opposition and directly addressing the French Canadian members of his party who gave him their reluctant support and thus averted the fall of the Government.¹

Anderson had referred to this situation on November 30 when he wrote to Erling in Boston, where he and his daughter were staying with the Raups while he worked at the Gray Herbarium for a couple of weeks. “There has been a good deal of excitement in the country as well as in Ottawa for the past week,” Anderson said, “and although there have been many extreme statements made,
they only go to show that in our form of government elected officials are responsive to the demands of the people, and do not have to wait four years to make a change if necessary.”

As December and then the New Year of 1945 arrived with hopes for the approaching end of the war, change was on the horizon at the National Museum in Ottawa. On January 9, Erling wrote to Fenley Hunter at Flushing Meadows, Long Island:

So the new year has started, and may it end with less chaos in this unhappy world of ours that we have been having now for so long! I am glad that I am a pessimist, for then things always turn out a little better than one suspects. Just now I cannot see that the prospect is overly bright ahead. You will be interested to know that Dr. Camsell was retired today. Personally I am not sorry to see him go for in his 25 or more years of office he has done very little for the Museum. So little, in fact, that whoever takes over could not very well do less. Dr. Anderson too is officially on retirement leave but comes in every day just the same. I think myself that he will be a ‘gonner’ the day he cannot come to his office and potter around with the beloved ‘mice’ and bear skulls. There have been very heavy casualties on the Museum staff during the last 10 years and today there is barely a staff left. In a year or two I will be the ‘old man’ in the Museum. Just now something seems to be in the air and things may actually begin to happen. I have even been promised four new appointments in my department. For years there has been talk of the Geologists moving out of the building and it may happen yet.

Although they were enjoying a real, old-fashioned winter with greater piles of snow than he had ever seen before and the skiing was superb, Erling told Raup that he was hard at work on his report on the east slope of the Mackenzie Mountains, which he had allowed to grow into something bigger than first planned because there was a fair chance it would be published as a Museum Bulletin that spring. “It will depend somewhat on the political outlook. Just now ‘we’ seem to be quite anxious to make a ‘show.’ Also we are busy in the Museum making up great plans for post-war work. The fact that we have practically been told that ‘the sky is the limit’ makes me suspicious that these fine plans are not intended for anything but the ‘files.’”
He had been asked to prepare a memorandum for Mr. Lynch of what was needed in the Herbarium, and he sat down to write a document that was memorable on several counts. It was a long memo when it was finished, and it was very carefully thought out and expressed, but what is immediately obvious is the different tone between this and the many others that had preceded it. For the first time in his dealings with the Museum administrators, this is not an overt or hidden plea to the department coming from a man who is uncertain about his position, for this memo comes from a confident man who is now secure in his post and able to ask forthrightly for what he and the Herbarium really need and dare to imagine will get in the near future.

“The thought that first comes to my mind,” he wrote 8 January, “and one that cannot very well escape anyone who has had occasion to look into the workings of the National Herbarium, is that today the Herbarium is carrying on with exactly the same staff as when it was founded eighty-three years ago, namely one trained botanist and one non-botanical assistant. And this notwithstanding the fact that the National Herbarium in the past eighty-three years has grown from a small reference collection, housed all in one cabinet, to a major Herbarium – measured even by American standards – with a total of 250,000 mounted and inserted plants.”

After carefully discussing the importance of the “largest Herbarium in Canada and most complete collection of Canadian plants anywhere,” he then outlined the complex services it was necessary for it to be able to undertake, although, because the National Herbarium for many years had been inadequately staffed, it had “never been able to furnish as complete a service as an institution of its kind should be in a position to provide.” He outlined the history of the considerable field collections that had not been worked up due to lack of personnel. “Thus, my predecessor, Dr. Malte, during his twelve years of curatorship, made voluminous collections of plants, but never found the time to study or report on the collections he has made. In 1936, when I came to the National Herbarium, not a single plant collected by Dr. Malte had been inserted in the Herbarium and a very small portion of them had even been named or classified. Three small and comparatively unimportant publications, totalling less than a hundred pages, constituted the total published results of his labours during twelve years as Curator of the National Herbarium.”

By comparison, he pointed out that between 1936 and 1939, with the very able assistance of Miss Harkness, some 60,578 plants had been received as the result of field work sponsored by the Museum or as donations, 52,340 had been
labelled, 32,340 had been named, 19,768 had been mounted and inserted in the Herbarium, 15,006 duplicate specimens had been distributed to Canadian and foreign botanical institutions as exchange and 4,389 as donations, while Erling had published a major paper on the Flora of Alaska in *Rhodora* and fourteen smaller papers in various publications. Since then, another important paper had been published by *Sargentia* in 1943.\(^7\)

It should be quite evident from the above that during these years the small staff of the National Herbarium worked quite hard; I myself put in an average of sixty hours of voluntary and non-paid overtime each month. It was discouraging, therefore, to find that, in spite of it all the work kept accumulating, with no prospect of assistance forthcoming. Today, after several year’s absence in Greenland on special war work as Canadian Consul to Greenland, I am getting farther and farther behind in my own work as well as in the endless task of keeping the nomenclature in the Herbarium up-to-date. At the same time our storage cases are ‘bulging’ with perhaps 75,000 plants awaiting study and naming, not to mention my collections of 12,000 Yukon plants made last summer, and numerous smaller collections submitted for naming and revision. The present situation in the National Herbarium is, in part, the cumulative effect of the natural development and growth of the collection, but is due primarily to the lack of adequate help now and in the past.\(^8\)

Since “the sky was now the limit,” he was not afraid to ask for it. “To carry on properly the work which is even now in sight would require three additional trained taxonomists, one of whom should work as a full-time cryptogamic botanist; further there is urgent need for a full-time preparator for mounting plants, and for another girl who could be trained to do library research and filing of botanical data.” He already had two trained taxonomists in mind. “My particular reason for bringing this whole question under discussion at this time is that perhaps for the first time in the history of Canadian botany, there are just now two fully trained young Canadian botanists, who will soon be available and who are prepared and anxious to make the taxonomy of Canadian plants their life-work.”\(^9\)

One of these men was Dr. Bernard Boivin of Montreal who had been trained at l’Université de Montréal and had obtained his PhD from Harvard.
He had joined the army a year earlier and was at present serving in the Pacific, but before going overseas he had called on Erling to discuss his future plans. He had been offered a position in the United States, but wanted to work on the flora of Canada if a suitable position became available. The other candidate was Dr. James Soper of Hamilton, Ontario, who was a graduate of McMaster University and had also done post-graduate work at Harvard before obtaining his PhD in 1942, after which he had joined the RCAF. Dr. Soper had recently spent several days in Ottawa when he also called on Erling to discuss his future. He had been offered a position with the Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, but would much prefer a position at the National Herbarium, because it would permit him to carry on researches in taxonomic botany. Both of these men, whom Erling knew very well, would soon be available, Dr. Soper probably in spring and Dr. Boivin after the war. “Both men are of exceptional calibre and have received the best training possible. As members of the Armed Forces they will be eligible for Government positions. There is not the slightest doubt that these men will receive attractive offers from the United States, and that, if they are not provided for here, Canada will lose two young men of great promise.”

Lynch passed on Erling’s memo to the Director of Mines and Geology Branch with the comment:

I think Mr. Porsild makes a very good case for the urgency of enlarging the establishment of the National Herbarium. In my opinion it is physically impossible for Mr. Porsild to keep up unaided even the current work of the Herbarium. Apart from his efforts there is no way of giving to the public any benefits from the National Herbarium. The potential benefits of the Herbarium extend throughout the fields of forestry, agriculture and related resources.… If it is the policy of the Department to foster the development of the various resources based on one or other of the many branches of botany, I think serious consideration should be given to Mr. Porsild’s memorandum with the view of establishing the National Herbarium, in the matter of man-power, in a position to serve the public and the country generally, in an efficient and progressive manner.

With such encouragement going up the line, Erling was asked to prepare a memorandum on post-war botanical field work in Canada, which could be profitably carried out over a five-year period if sufficient trained botanists and
adequate financial support was available. “There is in Canada to-day urgent need for field work in nearly all branches of botany,” Erling wrote on January 18, “and for floristic work in nearly all parts of the country.” The need was particularly great in the Northwest, he stated, because the relationship between the floras of North America and Asia could not be fully understood until more was known of the plants growing in Alaska, Yukon, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia. His field work in that area to date had shown that there were very important and unexpected discoveries yet to be made in these unexplored areas. A more complete understanding of the present day floras would throw much light on the past history of the floras, he said, and thereby help to understand other problems such as the post-Pleistocene history of the country and the pre-historic migration of animals and man, etc.

He pointed out that the military air posts constructed in various places across the Canadian Arctic had made many parts of the far North readily accessible. No professional botanist had ever visited the Canadian Arctic Archipelago west of Ellesmere and Baffin Islands and since these islands were believed to have remained unglaciated during the Pleistocene their botanical exploration might be expected to furnish very important data. Almost no botanical work had ever been undertaken in the northern parts of the provinces where practically all land a few miles from railroads or waterways remained totally unexplored. The same was true of the interior of Ungava. Botanical exploration of National Parks, with a view to publish suitable manuals on their floras had long been needed. Such manuals would be in great demand by professional botanists as well as by tourists visiting the parks, particularly Jasper, Banff and Waterton Lake Park and would serve as permanent advertisers of these parks.12

He proposed ten areas of exploration in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Northern British Columbia and the Queen Charlotte Islands, and Ungava, estimated at a cost of $75,000–$100,000 over five years if accompanied by a professional botanist on staff and planned on the usual summer season basis that was adequate for nearly all types of floristic field work. He concluded with the startling suggestion, although he acknowledged that it was “perhaps outside the scope of present plans,” that he could also see the need for establishing Arctic Research Stations. “For plant physiological work and for detailed ecological studies, year-long residence and laboratory facilities are required for which more or less permanent research stations should be established at well chosen points.”13
Perhaps he went too far, for the administration was struggling with practical and reasonably obtainable objectives. Word came back asking him to prepare a memorandum on the economic value to the country of the botanical work of the National Herbarium. Knowing that it was always easier to justify spending money on tangible needs than for pure research, it took Erling some time to reply. He had been through the same arguments six years earlier when the Department of Agriculture wanted to take over the National Herbarium. Enclosing a copy of his arguments on that occasion, he added on February 15:

Research in plant taxonomy and plant geography is basic or fundamental botany, the value of which cannot be directly translated into dollars and cents. All branches of applied or economic botany such as the various branches of agriculture, forestry, wild life management etc. etc., all use the information gathered by the taxonomic botanist and the plant geographer.

In Canada the classic example demonstrating the relation of plant geography and taxonomy to economic, applied botany is the work done by Professor John Macoun, the creator and first curator of the National Herbarium. By his botanical surveys and classification of the aboriginal flora of the west, Professor Macoun correctly predicted the agricultural potentialities of the West. When [he] first claimed that wheat would grow in the Peace River district, this was considered visionary or even absurd. In fact, Macoun’s work accurately showed that some soils in the Prairie Provinces were capable of growing wheat while others should be left as grass lands. Had his advice been followed millions of dollars could have been saved in the Province of Saskatchewan alone during the drought years.

Recent examples of the relation of fundamental botanical research to applied botany could be seen from botanical surveys carried out in northern British Columbia and the Yukon in the last few years, he said. “These will clearly show what parts of the new lands made accessible by the Alaska Highway and the Canol Road are suitable to agriculture.”

A different kind of incident showing the importance of the National Herbarium had occurred quite recently, outlined in a number of internal memos. On January 28, a ten-pound bag of what looked like ordinary white sand was delivered to the Museum by the Department of National Defence, and with it
came the urgent request that the contents be examined to determine the place of origin. By careful sifting, the sand was found to contain tiny particles of organic material which were sent to the Herbarium for Erling to identify. He was able to detect fragmentary parts of a red pine that he could not bring down to species, and grains of rice that he was sure came from Japan, but in order to be certain of species identification he flew down to Boston on January 29, where he was able to ascertain that the plant material could only have come from the Japanese island of Honshu or from south Korea. Erling reported that the condition of preservation of the fragments showed that they could not have been transported by water, and therefore could not have been carried to this continent by the ocean currents. The geologists at the Museum, Dr. R.T.D. Wickenden and Dr. Eugene Poitevin, confirmed the diagnosis of the place of origin.¹⁵

At the time, the reason for this investigation was kept under tight army security wrapping, but when the war ended it could be told in a postwar story in the Ottawa Journal that a number of Japanese paper incendiary balloons had drifted across the Pacific in the winter of 1944–45, soared over the Rockies and touched off grass fires as far east as the Saskatchewan prairies. “Today everybody knows the balloons were launched from a beach on the main Japanese Island of Honshu, and drifted at 60 miles an hour with the prevailing winds to the North American continent. But two years ago when the balloons first started descending on this side of the Rockies, their source was unknown, and with summer only a few months away, it was grimly necessary that it be located and destroyed before the air-borne incendiaries could touch off what might have been tremendous forest fires in the rich stands of West Coast timber.” Once the scientists in Ottawa had ascertained the place of origin of the balloons, the launching site near Tokyo was subsequently bombed and destroyed.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Erling was hard at work in the Herbarium on his summer collections. He told Breitung that he was having a hard time with the antennarias as he thought they were in a terrible mess, “and I may have to revise all our western members of the genus before I can do anything to our Yukon collection…. I have been very busy this winter and although I seem to work quite hard the work seems to pile up ahead just the same. In a week or so I shall have finished the report on the east slope of the Mackenzie Mountains…. At the same time I have been putting in a good deal of work on the Canol report which will be quite a book – at least 250 pages. So far I have written up a lot of ecological notes and the catalogue as far as the grasses.” He did not know what
he would be doing next summer but expected to be in the field somewhere in the west, possibly Banff.

By March 10, he was writing to the Selective Service again to see if Breitung could be released to join him at Banff that summer. “I have been working on our antennarias lately and have all but finished. Some job I can assure you. I have not counted the species but there must be about 25. I had to describe no less than eight new ones. I have named one for you. You probably do not remember it, but you took it on the mountain at mile 116.” August was overjoyed. “I am very glad of our success in collecting about 25 species of Antennaria and at least eight new ones,” he wrote in April, “and am also exceedingly excited over the one you named for me or after me. At mile 116 I remember I made one or two collections of Antennaria, but don’t remember just what they look like, but I remember that day I collected Apocynum androsaemifolium, Amelanchier alnifolia, Potentilla sp., Melandrium, etc.”

Erling told Raup on March 14 that he had just finished the antennarias, … and a pretty tough job it was. It has taken me about three weeks and many headaches. I do not think that what I have done will be the last word, but I have at least some semblance of order…. The highlands of the Yukon apparently has been another centre where a great many species of Antennaria have evolved or survived much the same as Gaspé and Newfoundland in the East or Chilliwack Valley in B.C. where a lot of Greene’s new species came from…. In all, I have 25 species including seven new species and a new variety described. I have, consequently, been spouting Latin lately and have even gotten to the stage where I dream in Latin – or perhaps I should not call it Latin! I have even had the temerity to construct a key for the 30 species of Antennaria in Yukon and Mackenzie. It seems to work for me. I wonder if it will for anyone else?

He had been to Montreal in February to speak to the Province of Quebec Bird Society about the “Wild Flowers of Yukon and the Canol Road” but March brought him back in contact with the disturbing developments at Reindeer Station. He wrote to Mrs. V. Hatting on March 16: “I was very sorry to learn of the tragic disaster last fall,” he said. “I thought very highly of Charlie and his family and it was too bad that a thing like this should happen. Stanley, too, I knew very well although he did not work for me while I was at the station.” The disaster he
was referring to was the wreck of the schooner *Cally* in a storm off the Arctic coast in the fall of 1944, which resulted in the loss of the two native reindeer herd owners with eight members of their families and the white supervisor Stanley Mason, and was not only a personal tragedy but was a serious setback for the whole Reindeer Project.\(^\text{19}\)

The first native reindeer herd had been established in 1938 by separating about 950 reindeer from the main herd and transferring them to an area in the vicinity of Anderson River. The 1942 report on the station noted that the new herd was placed in charge of an Eskimo, Charlie Rufus, and his father Rufus Kalealuk. The younger Rufus had received several years’ training as an apprentice herder on the reserve. His father was the owner of a schooner used in transferring the native families and supplies. A second native herd had been established in December 1940 with about 825 reindeer taken to a location near Horton River, several miles east of Anderson River. The natives entrusted with this herd were Peter Kaglik, trained as an apprentice reindeer herder on the reserve, and Amos Tama, another native of the district who provided a schooner. Herd No. 2 had also been under the supervision of a departmental officer who kept in touch with Reindeer Station.\(^\text{20}\)

Following the terrible accident that had taken the lives of both reindeer herd owners and the supervisor, Deputy Commissioner R. A. Gibson of the Department of Mines and Resources had contacted Erling to discuss the problems of finding and re-locating the scattered deer. Erling felt that, in view of the very difficult situation confronting the men in the field, the best solution would be to join the two eastern herds at least for the time being. “If a corralling was not possible, due to lack of help,” he said, “the best estimate possible should be made of the number of deer in Charlie’s herd. It would be too bad if it becomes necessary to bring these two herds back to the main herd because it would swell its numbers beyond the capacity of the range.”\(^\text{21}\)

He was anxious that the native owners’ families should be treated fairly. “In view of the fact that Charlie, three years ago, was ready to return the original nucleus of 900 deer, there would seem to be no question that, according to the contract, he or his heirs (his father, Rufus Kalealuk and his sister Bessie) can claim ownership to the balance of his herd. Likewise, Peter Kaglik’s widow would have a claim to whatever number of deer there might be in Peter’s herd above the original nucleus. If the department is forced by circumstances to take over these herds some equitable compensation should be made to these people.”\(^\text{22}\)
Erling had received a letter from Mathis Hatta, one of the Laplanders whom he had hired in Norway and had returned home, which he translated for Gibson on March 19. The letter was undated, but was postmarked Jan. 27th, 1945, and mailed from a small town in northern Sweden. “Dear Mr. Erling Porsild,” it read in translation,

I am now in Sweden having travelled here with reindeer teams and I want to tell you that the Germans have burnt down all of Kautokeino [his home town in Norwegian Lapland] and also my house. And I do not know what to do unless I can go to Canada. So will you please let me know if I can get a job with the reindeer work for things are bad here and our houses are gone. Please do write me. I have come to Sweden with my brother Isaac to get food. At home we live in a small cabin in the mountains. I would like to tell you more but I am in a hurry to get back. We have no mail service in Kautokeino so send the letter to Knuttainen, Sweden. Best greetings to you from all of us. I have three girls, one boy and a wife too. We are all well. Isaac Hatta too is well. I am giving this letter to a Norwegian Army Major who is going to Stockholm.23

Gibson replied that of course it would be impossible to bring Hatta and his family back to Canada at the present time. “The situation at the Reindeer Station is a bit difficult these days owing to the loss of the two native reindeer herders and Supervisor Stanley Mason. We had hoped to get funds this year for increased scientific activities and for that matter for strengthening our administrative organization in the Mackenzie Delta but unfortunately we have been unable to do so.”24

As Erling had predicted in his letter to Raup at the start of the year, optimism about unlimited funds for the Herbarium as soon as the war ended was beginning to fade as spring advanced. The original request for his summer field work in the Rockies was for a four-man party with the use of packhorses, but in the end he was forced to cut his expenses in half and plan on having only one assistant and the use of an Army truck. He was still hoping to have Breitung as his assistant again and a number of letters were exchanged in April about his release from farm work for the summer. Meanwhile, on April 9, Erling was asked to give a radio address to the people of Denmark and Greenland on the fourth anniversary of the German occupation, and on April 20 to speak to the Ottawa
Field-Naturalist’s Club on “Greenland, its Nature and People.” Although the war on Germany was going well, the country was shocked and saddened on April 12 when the news came from the United States that President Roosevelt, who had done so much for the Allied cause even before his country officially entered the war, had died from a brain haemorrhage. The war in Europe ended less that a month later. On May 9, while debris from the wildly excited V-E Day Parade in Ottawa the day before was being cleaned off the streets, Erling was still trying to get clearance for his field assistant that had not yet arrived in the mail. He told Breitung that he was getting letters from all sorts of people about the summer trip. “They all tell me that you have told them that we are going. Some want to go along. In as much as the trip has not been finally ok’d and since the Selective Service have not yet released you it would be better not to tell anyone that we are going.”

Finally, on June 1, Erling wrote to Raup saying that it was difficult to believe that in ten days or so he would be on his way west to spend the summer picking flowers in Banff, Jasper and Waterton Lakes Parks.

You may wonder why I do not go somewhere else where the flora has not been studied by a host of people but, as I may have mentioned, I am going, first to get some much needed personal experience with the Cordilleran flora and second to obtain local distributional and ecological data on the species we already have in our herbarium from these Parks…. If you can think of any problem that I should look into this summer I would be glad if you would mention it and I would see what I can do. I am, of course, planning to do a fair amount of collecting but not on the grand scale of last summer, provided that I can control August, for he is going with me again. I know it will be difficult. Perhaps I can think up some kind of rationing system by which August is to collect vascular plants on Mondays and Fridays only, mosses on Tuesdays, and so forth ad lib....

I have been working on the willows lately and, probably because “ignorance is bliss” they are not giving me very much trouble, except in the Arcticae group, thanks to Schneider. I wish I had his papers with me in the field and that I had noted the stomata on live material. I find it difficult to see the stomata on dried leaves and so far I have not taken the trouble to soak any material. By the way, is the wetting test for stomata any good for fresh willow leaves? I am probably not
qualified to speak on the subject but I find Hultén’s treatment rather unsatisfactory. He certainly has left a lot of loose ends. I suppose you have Part 5 of his flora which came some time ago.26

Erling could not have imagined when he wrote that letter how quickly and dramatically his summer plans would be changed and how soon he would be seeing Hultén in person. Only four days later, on June 5, an urgent telegram went out to Breitung from Ottawa.

**D**ue to unforeseen developments I am leaving for Europe June 8 and may not return until end of July /stop/ If you are agreeable I propose that you should go to Banff and collect plants in the Banff Park according to instructions that I shall prepare for you /stop/ Arrangements would be made for your lodgings and transportation while at Banff /stop/ I expect to join you in Banff towards end of July and to carry on from there as originally proposed /stop/ Please wire your acceptance and possible suggestions collect and I shall forward instructions ticket and spending money by mail.

On June 6, he sent Breitung the money and instructions of what he needed to do and wished him luck before leaving the next day.27

It was to be nearly the end of August, writing to the Raups from Banff, before Erling was able to explain what the change was all about, and how, with practically no warning, on the eve of his departure for the Park, he was asked to go to Moscow as one of three Canadian delegates to the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences Congress from June 15 to June 30 to celebrate the 220th anniversary of the founding of the prestigious academy. Canada was represented by Erling Porsild, ex-Acting Consul for Canada in Greenland and Botanist at the National Herbarium, as well as Professor Harold A. Innis, author of several books on economic aspects in Canada and head of the Department of Political Geography at the University of Toronto, and Dr. Hans Selye, histologist at McGill University and delegate of the Royal Society of Canada.

Needless to say I was glad to accept even if I am still wondering why I was chosen. Left Ottawa by special plane on June 7 and landed the next day at Fairbanks where the RCAF turned us over to the Russians.
who had a big transport plane waiting. This, incidentally was the same plane that Molotov flew to San Francisco in and was nicely fixed up with silk curtains, deep club chairs and Persian rugs. We were told that the plane “was ours” and to tell the pilot if we wanted to stop anywhere in Siberia and that he would travel by day or by night according to our honoured wishes. We chose day travelling and suggested stopping at Markova on the Anadyr, Jakutsk, Omsk and Sverdlovsk. The trip took 6 days of leisurely travel through Siberia with 36-hour stops in some places. The weather was good and we saw quite a lot of the country because the Russians like to travel at 18,000 ft. or better. I had been permitted to take all the pictures I wanted and should have some fair Kodachromes.

You have probably seen or heard full accounts of the meeting so I won’t go into details. It was a grand show and well staged. It was also an all-Russian cast and no place whatsoever was left for talks or lectures by the foreign delegates of which there were some 127 from U.S.A., Canada, France, England, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Roumania, Turkey, Iran, India, Australia and China. In addition to the Academicians there were close to one thousand Russian scientists and we listened to a lot of 45 minute speeches in Russian. The more important were translated and we had a fairly good interpreter service at our disposal day and night. The programme was a very full one and we rarely got to bed before two a.m.

In addition to the spiritual food we were wined and dined overwhelmingly. We had, or could have had, vodka and caviar for breakfast every blessed morning. We had three grand banquets, including a farewell dinner given for us by Joe [Stalin] at the Kremlin. Also there [were] receptions galore, by the U.S. Embassy, the British d[itt]o, and many others. Besides we saw four ballets, four operas, three plays and, of course a lot of museums. A tour of the Kremlin, and all-day excursion on the Moscow-Volga canal, a four day trip to Leningrad and much more besides. Throughout the visit [we] were the guests of the Russian Government and my total expenses in Russia came to $1.14 for a laundry bill and a dollar for a box of matches that I could have got for nothing at the hotel. Even our bar expenses were paid for by Joe.
There were very few botanists; besides Hultén and myself there were a Pole and a chap from Iran. Naturally I saw a lot of Russian botanists and I am much impressed with what they have done, even during the war. The Moscow herbarium and Botanical garden does not amount to much; but the Leningrad one is something. The herbarium contains close to 5,000,000 sheets ... and duplicates ready for distribution – 400,000. And they say they are very anxious to exchange plants just as soon as possible. They showed us lots of books, in and out of print. Of the former we could have any one we wanted. I came away with 75 lbs. while Hultén who was greedier brought five meters. I got a personal copy of the Flora of the U.S.S.R. when I told them that we already had the set at the Herbarium.

Following the congress my two fellow Canadians returned by Siberia while I had been asked to do a job for the Govt. in Sweden where I spent about two weeks. My travels took me through much of Sweden where I met a lot of Swedish foresters and forest botanists. I was flown by the Russians, first to Finland and from there to Stockholm. (Did you know that Hultén now is director of the National Herbarium at Stockholm where he succeeded Samuelsson?) From Stockholm I flew to Copenhagen and from there to London where I spent a week and visited Kew and British Museum. The damage to the herbarium at South Kensington is negligible and Kew was not touched at all. At Bloomsbury they lost a quarter of a million books, but not botanical ones.28

Erling did not say that he had also visited Polunin at Oxford and found, he told Wynne-Edwards, that he liked him better than he had in earlier days, but in answer to a query from a Major Per Scholander, he said they had discussed the second part of Polunin’s “Botany of the Canadian Eastern Arctic” that was ready for the press when the war put a stop to publication of all matters not directly concerned with the war.

Polunin was deeply concerned by this because he felt that some of his collaborators might wish to withdraw their contributions for publication elsewhere. At one time he thought that he could arrange to have the volume published in Britain and asked permission to do so. The permission was readily granted and the first copy of the manuscript
was sent to Polunin who, however, found it impossible to arrange the publication. This was the state of affairs when I visited Polunin recently at Oxford. I had expected to find him somewhat impatient over the delay: actually he was not too sorry because he had come to realize that much more information was needed, at least in some of the fields covered. He now hoped to be able to make a trip to the Eastern Arctic next summer, when he expects to add very considerably to the collection made during his earlier trips.29

After leaving Oxford, Erling told Raup:

On July 26 I flew from Prestwick to Ottawa in 14½ hours thus completing my little trip around the world. On August 1st I left for Banff to salvage what could be salvaged of the summer's field work. Happily August Breitung had been working there for six weeks and there was practically nothing left for me to collect when I joined him. We now have 2,600 numbers and still a month to go.... I hope to be permitted to bring August to Ottawa in the fall and to keep him there for a few months putting the collection into systematic order and sort in the Malte and Watson stuff. After that I hope to get him a job where he can get himself some training in landscape gardening unless, of course, I can see a way to keep him at the herbarium. I would hate to see him go back [to] the farm work which he hates. He is still a problem child and will always remain a rough diamond, if a very likeable one.

Edith came out to Banff with me and spent almost three weeks climbing mountains and riding horseback. She has now returned to Ottawa and will soon be on her way to New York where she is to take a 3-months course as introduction to her new job with the Department of Health at Ottawa. She is quite excited about it and also a bit awed. She doesn't quite know what her work will be except that she is to do lab work and is to specialize on some new technique that was developed during the war.30

The war with Japan ended during those happy weeks at Banff. Back in the Herbarium in Ottawa, Erling told Raup on October 4: “This summer’s harvest I am even afraid to open.... We had a good time in the West this summer and, chiefly due to August’s colossal energy, we brought back about 2,900 numbers. Most of
the time was spent in Banff Park, but before returning we made hurried trips to Jasper, Kootenay and Waterton Lakes.” Before coming East, he had made a trip out to Vancouver and Victoria where he had a nice visit with botanists J. W. Eastham, Professors Davidson, Hutchison, and McTaggart-Cowan, Dr. Brink, Clifford Carl, and others. In Edmonton, he had given an informal showing of his slides taken on his trip through Russia. It was reported in the *Edmonton Journal* of September 24 that “permission to take the pictures was extended to the party by the Russian government and Dr. Porsild said he understood he was one of the few foreigners ever to be given the opportunity.” By March 1946, he would be telling Raup that he was having a grand time spouting about Russia and “Soon I will be ‘an expert’ on Russia, or else locked up with the spy-suspects,” a reference to the Soviet spy ring which had been exposed by Igor Gouzenko, a cipher clerk in the Russian embassy in Ottawa, in the fall of 1945. The “spy-suspects” included the private secretary to the British High Commissioner in Ottawa and a cipher clerk in the Department of External Affairs.31

By October 1945, Erling had managed to arrange for lodging and work in Ottawa for Breitung, although not in the National Herbarium. However, he was able to help him edit his “Catalogue of the vascular plants of central eastern Saskatchewan” which was accepted for publication in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* on 27 February 1946. August’s Christmas greeting to “My Dear Friends, Dr. A. E. Porsild and Edith Porsild” came in the form of a calendar

… in appreciation for everything you have done for me, to make me happy among the mountain wilderness, scaling the highest peaks and looking down into deep valleys or over [precipices] many hundreds of feet down, walking over snow banks or glaciers in midsummer, or inhaling the aroma of fields of fragrant wild flowers on alpine meadows, and looking over range after range of mountains like the waves on the ocean, stretching as far as the eye can see, and the fun of collecting plants. All this has greatly stimulated my interest in Botany…. And hoping we can be companions on many more expeditions in the future, with fragrant flowers, mountains, streams, forests, pure & fresh air, sunshine, clouds & stars as additional companions.32
CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT
POSTWAR SETTLEMENT

The war had ended, but Erling Porsild was still keeping in touch with the postal authorities to find out when he could exchange parcels with Sweden. “We have a lot of plants for you,” he told Eric Hultén, now Director of the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockholm, “and I should like to get rid of them as soon as possible because we need the space.” It was not until November 1945 that he was able to mail four packages, including the third set of duplicate material from his Alaska plants and the J. P. Anderson collection that had been sent to him in 1941 with the understanding that he was to ship them on to Hultén as soon as possible after the war.

Their meetings at the Congress and in Stockholm had been amicable and Erling told Hultén on 21 February 1946 that he would send him a copy of his account of the trip to Russia when it was published in the *Canadian Geographical Journal*. After discussion of future exchanges, Erling felt that the time was right to bring up the unpleasant subject of what he considered to be Hultén’s unfair treatment of him. In acknowledging receipt of part 5 of the Alaska Flora, which he was finding very useful in working up his Yukon collection, he said:

I must confess that it sometimes irks me slightly to see the way in which you often, and deliberately, disparage my efforts in my Contribution to the Flora of Alaska. Typical examples are in your History of botanical exploration of Alaska, where, in the map, the symbols giving the relative importance of the collections made, my collecting stations are generally assigned the lowest rank, comparable to those of mere chance collectors. When the truth is that up to 1926 my collections probably were amongst the largest ever made in any part of Alaska.
A typical example in the Flora is in part 4, under *Silene Menziesii*. Anyone reading your treatment would certainly get the impression that I ‘missed the boat’ entirely, whereas the truth is that I actually emphasized the importance of the seed character, not, as you say, the differences in the calyx. We make mistakes, even the best of us, but why point out mistakes where there are none?

Hultén responded by sending him 1,545 sheets of Scandinavian plants, but it was not until April 2, on holiday in Lapland and in the middle of a blizzard that made it impossible to ski in the mountains, that he resolved to answer Erling’s letter of February 21. First, he said, in his long handwritten missive, he would be sending duplicates of his own Alaska collection as soon as it could be labelled and sorted into sets, in exchange for any plants he could send him in the future. He would be sending back earlier loan material when he had finished *Epilobium* in the Alaska flora. He wondered if Erling could be interested in doing the genus *Antennaria* in the Alaska flora as he had too little for comparison and the antennarias of North America appeared to split into apomictic types in much the same way as the European *Taraxacum*. To answer Erling’s complaints, struggling with difficulty to express himself clearly in a second language, he said:

I am sorry to see that you do not think that I tried to be objective when handling your contributions to the Alaskan flora. I myself think that I have been very careful in this respect and only rarely made remarks concerning your treatment although I thought that they should have been made. On the whole I believe more in a building up method in science than in criticising, but in a work that aimed at a sort of monographic treatment it is often impossible to avoid criticism.

I think that your position concerning the Alaskan flora was extremely unfavourable and I was very astonished that you was choosing the way you did. You knew that I had for years tried to penetrate all literature and to see practically all material collected in the country and still you tried to make a hasty review in advance of my treatment. Such a policy is bound to lead to trouble whoever makes it because there is not enough time to penetrate the problems to the bottom. By this time I know this. When I started with Kamtchatka, Komarov said he would never write a Kamtchatka flora (although he
had a large part ready), but when I had published two parts his flora appeared. I never wrote about it but it is pretty full of mistakes, part of which are corrected in Fl. U.S.S.R. but part of which are blessed [considered correct?] there. He is the chief [editor] of this work. When I started with the Aleutian Islands Tatewaki and Kobayashi made the same thing with still less good results and when I was ready to start with what will certainly be my last large flora Alaska-Yukon you considered – as I understand – that your collections were too large to be left in other hands and made the same [mistake].

In my opinion we both have had much advantage to do in another way. I had handled the Alaskan material and you had made a flora of the district between Mackenzie and Hudson Bay of somewhat the same type as my Alaskan flora. Then we should have specialized on the critical genera and sent our material of them to one another. In this way the world had got a good review of all known between Bering Sound and Hudson Bay and the work could have been made more quickly and adequately than now and we could have help of one another. When you were in Lund I proposed this as you remember, but without result.

It has been very troublesome for me during the work not to have had your collection available, in fact it is the only important collection that I have not had an opportunity to examine. When you say that your collection probably were amongst the largest ever made in any part of Alaska this may be true concerning the mass of material, which I have not seen, but in surprisingly many cases the same plants were collected in the same places by earlier collectors. Your contribution is very easy to see in my maps as they are marked with rings in all cases when I have not seen other specimens of the same species collected from the same place.

I have been more than astonished that you really dared so often to say ‘new to the flora of Alaska’ when you knew that a work trying to summarize all previous records were under the way. Only when it was too much I have mentioned anything about mistakes in this field as I think it gives very little but I must confess that they have been trying. Sometimes they must have been made merely as a habit as there are cases of at least ten earlier reports. I have noted most of these cases in my copy of your work but usually mentioned nothing in the flora.
Concerning the map of collections it is based on a mass of statistical material and I worked more than a month on summarizing everything and draw out the percentage as correctly as I could. I therefore think that I am absolutely right there. You had another job and could not devote all time to the botany and you had very little station work. Travelling it is not possible to get the entire flora, the spring-flora is, for instance, usually missed. To this needs station work.

Concerning the new species you must admit that you handicapped me badly by not sending even a fragment of them. As I am not apt to accept new species merely on authority this naturally can lead to that species that possibly are good were not accepted. I never understood why you did not send me at least fragments of the new species already published. You could only win by doing so. As it is now they are nearly the only species described from the area of which I have not seen authentic material. This seems very strange to me.

In the example of *Silene Menziesii* mentioned in your letter you say that I did not point out that it is the seed character that is most important but [I used instead] the calyx. The thing is that very few specimens have ripe seeds and that this character thus is very difficult to use, while all have a developed calyx. I took up your *Melandrium macrospermum* which differs in practically only a seed-character and I tried to contribute to the understanding by picturing the seed, but I must say that I would hardly have made that species myself after having examined numerous seed-bearing specimens of different Caryophyllaceous plants. The state of ripeness is a very important and much overlooked factor and bad mistakes can be made. I hope that this is not the case with *M. macrospermum* but it is hard to feel sure.

Everyone, also the best, can make mistakes, as you write, and this is only natural as no one can have an experience covering all cases. The only thing to do is to try to do ones best. I earnestly feel that I never hunted for your scalp although I must confess that I have had more difficulties with bringing your collection in harmony with the other material than any others which seems unnecessary. I think that we both could come along much better with full cooperation.

When Erling had voiced his “little grievance,” he had expected to be rebuked for holding back his Alaska collection and for going ahead with his own publication
to prevent the material being “stolen” from him (regardless of the fact that he had in fact “stolen” the title to the collection from his brother in view of their joint collaboration), but Hultén’s long and masterful argument may have given him pause to consider that he could have done things differently if he had not been ruled by his frustrated ambition under uncertain circumstances. Perhaps he could now see that in the long run he might have profited from giving up his own dreams, and that something important had been lost to the larger world of science because of the lack of cooperation, but it was still necessary for him to thank Hultén for his “very full and frank discussion” and explain his own position.

“It is very helpful towards understanding many things that have been puzzling me,” he replied:

I am sorry that things have worked out the way they have and that you were not able to consult my Alaska collection. This, however, is not entirely my fault. You must not forget that even in 1933 I had done considerable work on the Alaska flora, and it is only natural that I then wanted to publish it myself rather than turn the entire collection over to you, as you asked me to do. I never could see why this seemed so unacceptable to you, because what I planned to do could in no way be considered competitive to your flora. Naturally, I could not then foresee that a World War, lasting almost six years, would prevent me from sending even fragments of my types to you. Had this not intervened I would, of course, have been more than willing to send you my material after it was published in my annotated catalogue.

As regard my frequent remarks ‘New to the Flora of Alaska,’ I willingly admit that in some cases these remarks were premature and erroneous. Actually, in nearly all cases I was correct, however, for my paper was never intended to cover southeast Alaska, which phytogeographically belongs in the Pacific coast region. The original title of my manuscript made this clear, but it made such a long and cumbersome title. When this was changed by the editor, I failed to realize the full implication as regards some of my remarks about distribution. Even so, in some instances, where you draw attention to my ‘error,’ you have not even yourself seen Alaska material, but base your remark on unsubstantiated records in literature (e.g. many of Kurtz’s and Turner’s records). In other instances the only existing
record was based on obscure U.S. Geological Survey papers on Alaska or on manuals such as Rydberg’s *Rocky Mountain Flora* or Britton & Brown, where no locality or authority is given.

Also, you must not forget that when I examined the Alaska material in the U.S. National Herbarium, the bulk of the material was inaccessible to me. Naturally, the genesis of an error does not actually matter as long as the error is there, and I am sorry if I erred in important matters. Nevertheless, I refuse to believe that my contribution is altogether without merit as anyone using your flora could very easily be led to believe.  

Hultén was not anxious to continue the argument but rather to close it. On September 19, he told Erling that he was glad that they were able to discuss their affairs frankly and openly in their last two letters and thought that they had come to understand their respective points of view a little better. Except for the antennarias, most of the long disagreements, misunderstandings, and battles over the flora of Alaska were over, even if they would always continue to disagree over some Arctic plant taxonomy problems. In Erling’s 400-page *Botany of Southeastern Yukon Adjacent to the Canol Road*, which would not appear until 1951, he commented: “Hultén’s monumental Flora, as shown by the frequent references throughout this work, has been a constant source of stimulation and of invaluable help even though I have frequently found myself in disagreement with the opinions expressed. Through Dr. Hultén’s kindness, and despite the difficulties of war-time mailing, the first three parts of his Flora had reached me in 1944 in time to be taken to the field.” He included his key to the genus *Antennaria* in the Yukon and paid tribute to August Breitung “who accompanied the writer in the field for several seasons and contributed large series of splendid material of many rare and several new species of *Antennaria*. *A. Breitungii* differs from all other pink-flowered species of our area by its short, somewhat crowded basal leaves that in age become perfectly glabrous above.”

For his part, Hultén acknowledged his debt to the National Herbarium in Ottawa for examining specimens and mentions Erling under authors and publications in his ultimately colossal work on the *Flora of Alaska and Neighbouring Territories* in 1968, but there is no *Antennaria Breitungii* listed among his antennarias and it is noted that the seeds of *Silene Menziesii* are described as black and shining in the text but are not given as a major factor in identification.
Melandrium macrospermum Porsild, however, is still to be found intact in the Caryophyllaceae section.\(^5\)

During the Hultén/Porsild correspondence over the winter and spring of 1946, the decision had been made for the first time in the history of the National Herbarium since John Macoun retired in 1912 that there would be more than one botanist on staff. James Macoun had complained up to the time of his death in 1920 that he “was all alone in the Herbarium” after his father left for the West. As his replacement, Oscar Malte had earnestly begged for assistance up to his death in 1933, and Erling had managed on his own with only the indefatigable technician Miss Harkness through all the years of the war, but on April 25 he could tell Hultén that “at long last I am getting some assistance, including two young and very promising taxonomists.”

In fact, he would only get one for a year as Dr. Bernard Boivin started work on 9 May 1946 only to resign on 8 May 1947 to work on a personal research project with a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation. Meanwhile, he accompanied Erling on the four-man party organized for that year in the Rockies, with Breitung and young Karl Raup from Boston also helping with the field work. Between them, they collected 6,000 plant specimens. By all accounts, Erling had a busy year. The Annual Report for the National Herbarium noted that on May 10 and 11 he attended meetings of the Arctic Institute of North America in Montreal, and on May 20–22 he went to the annual meetings of the Royal Society of Canada where he was made a Fellow. On July 1, in recognition of special services during the war, which included the identification of the plant material in the Japanese war balloons, he was awarded the M.B.E.\(^6\)

“The news has reached us by some round-about means that you have been included in the list of those getting the M.B.E.,” Trevor Lloyd wrote from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, on August 28:

Both Joan and I are very glad that some of the authorities have at last discovered the importance of your Arctic work. For myself I can think of at least a half dozen reasons why you should have got far more than that, and included in that is your pioneer voyage on the Great Lakes Freighter across Davis Strait. However, the main thing is, so we hear, that you are at last getting sufficient help in your work room to be able to handle research work properly. A note from Max indicates that the Department of External Affairs maintained to the end its long reputation for botching the ordinary everyday problems of shelter
and transportation connected with the consulate. He apparently only spent three weeks sitting at BW-1 [Bleue West One]. Maybe he was lucky to be brought back at all.7

Lloyd and his wife had enjoyed their consular tasks in Godthaab in 1944–45, although they found the consulate small for entertaining, and somewhere in the consular papers it is recorded that every time they entertained Greenland visitors their guests insisted on being shown the indoor toilet installed by “the mighty Porsild.” However, it was left to Max Dunbar to close the Canadian Consulate in a manner that would impress the Danes of Canada’s position. “My last year in Greenland, 1945–46, I shared with my new wife, Joan Jackson of Hamilton, Ontario,” Dunbar said:

We arrived in Greenland after the war in Europe was over, and life in Greenland had changed, with new faces appearing from Denmark.... The standard of living seemed to mount in peacetime, and the ‘stemning’ [morale] was high. There was an enormous Christmas party in the Seminarium. But for those of us who had been there since 1941, something was missing. So many of the people I had learnt to know so well had gone home to Denmark; a community structure had been broken. But Greenland itself remained, and will always remain. So Joan and I enjoyed that to the most until we closed the Consulate permanently in the summer of 1946.

Erling was happy to hear that Dunbar had got the position in the Department of Zoology at McGill University to replace Vero Wynne-Edwards who had left for the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.8

Erling’s letter to Raup on October 5 told of being at a rather unusual loose end. “I have only lately [been] doing any serious work,” he said:

It always takes me the best part of a month to get going when I have been away on an extended holiday; and to make matters worse carpenters are hammering away in and outside my office from morning to late, so that all conversation and even thinking let alone serious work is out of the question. Besides we have been having such wonderful weather up here that it seemed a shame to spend it at the office; accordingly I have been away up at Blue Sea Lake in the Gatineau a-visiting
with the Taverners. They have a lovely place up there and needed a strong man around in case anything went wrong with Percy. He, by the way has been doing much better this summer than he has for some years.9

Erling had dreamed of building a new house in Ottawa when he got back from Greenland but his builder,

... who seems an honest man, says that it just isn’t any use. He cannot get the materials he needs and besides, since last spring the price of such materials as you can get has gone up [by] 25%. I have now moved in with the Taverners where I am about as comfortable as one can be in someone else’s house.... Father has gone to Denmark where he plans to spend a couple of months; then he plans to come to Canada for a visit and to go all the way to Whitehorse. I wish now that I had a house so I could induce him to stay in Ottawa where he would be much happier than in Denmark.10

The Museum carpenters continued to be busy all through the winter, but by February 1947, when Erling was informed that from now on he had to report to Dr. F. J. Alcock as the new Acting Curator of the National Museum, a different part of the building was being fixed up for yet another National Herbarium re-location. The move came in March, and on April 12 Erling told Raup that their new quarters were a vast improvement over anything they had had before and when they got everything squared away they would be very comfortable. Boivin was leaving in May and a new man was taking his place. He hoped to fill the stenography vacancy soon.

This has been a busy winter in the Herbarium and in spite of school classes and increased transit traffic, and finally a long drawn-out process of moving to new quarters on the fourth floor, I have managed to complete the catalogue part of my Yukon Flora which now totals about 700 pages. I probably won’t find time to do more to it this spring because I have to complete a revision of Dryas for the Trans. of the Roy. Soc. of Can. And also, in a misguided moment, have promised to write up the antennarias for Hultén’s Alaska Flora. He has sent me all
his material which, however, will add very little to what I already had for my treatment of the genus in the S. W. Yukon.11

He was still struggling with *Dryas* in his April letters to Raup, saying that matters were much more complicated than he had first thought and the thing to do was a revision of the genus in North America. He asked for a loan and returned the material with the comment “You will, no doubt, be dismayed to note, on the enclosed list, what a mess I have made of what heretofore was a perfectly simple and ‘well-understood’ genus.... The paper is coming along and will have to be submitted soon.” He thought Raup would have heard of Percy Taverner’s passing on May 9. “He had a pretty bad time of it although the doctor claims that his mind was pretty well gone the last week. Strangely enough the only thing that stood up was his heart that had bothered him all his life. I came to know him very well during the last year and shall miss him very much. Mrs. Taverner has been wonderful through it all. She has looked after Percy for so long that now she feels sort of lost.”12

The Herbarium was well settled in the new quarters in the West Wing of the Museum by the coming of summer. Behind a rather forbidding array of “gray-green cabinets arranged in long rows like city blocks” could be found “the botanical offices occupied by the Chief Botanist, A. E. Porsild, and his small staff of botanists and technicians, consisting of H. J. Scoggan and W.K.W. Baldwin, Miss Hilda Harkness, Miss Barbara Schwartz and Miss Norma Roberts.” Bill Baldwin, formerly instructor at the University of Toronto, had been appointed on May 15, and Homer Scoggan, Assistant Professor of Botany at Macdonald College of McGill University, on June 3. Erling thought that Dr. Scoggan was “a young and very promising chap from McGill,” but he was a little doubtful about his other new man. “Baldwin has been teaching at Halifax and at Toronto since he got out of the Army,” he told Raup. “Unfortunately he is not a taxonomist and is a dark horse all around as far as I am concerned. All I can do is to hope for the best. Who k-n-o-w-s!”

Nicholas Polunin was now teaching in the Botany Department at McGill University and showed up to do research in the Herbarium several times that summer. Word came from Morten Porsild that he had booked passage on a freighter and would arrive sometime towards the end of June. “Great was my consternation, therefore,” Erling told Raup June 2, “when, at Quebec, I received a cable saying that he was on his way by air and would arrive in Montreal the next day. He is here now and none the worse for his first flying experience. He
is heading for the Yukon but I am trying to talk him into going with me down the Mackenzie first. He seems quite chipper in spite of his 74 years, but a 14 day canoe and camping trip may be too strenuous for him.” Dr. Porsild spent a week in the Herbarium before going up to Whitehorse for the summer to “pick flowers” along the Canol Road with Bob Porsild, returning to spend another three weeks in Ottawa in September.13
Erling, meanwhile, was heading north for the Mackenzie River and beyond. For years, Gibson had wanted him to look at the lichen-grazing situation at Reindeer Station, and now, with the setback to the project due to the schooner tragedy, it seemed more urgent than ever that he should see for himself what was happening there. “I had hoped to be able to stay ‘in’ this summer,” he had told Raup April 12,

… but find that I shall, at last, have to give in to Mr. Gibson who wants me to go down to the Reindeer Station where, by giving the ‘boys’ a pep-talk, he expects me to invoke a minor miracle which is to solve all their problems. I had hoped to be able to tie this in with a ‘grazing survey’ of the territory I covered in 1927–28 but find that the Airforce will not supply the transportation needed. The result is a compromise which gives me air transportation to and from Aklavik and the use of a chartered plane to cover the Reindeer Reserve east to Anderson River, but not the country between the Arctic Coast and Bear Lake…. Some time during the summer I am to go along on one of the trans-Arctic flights from Fairbanks to Peary Land and back. The flight will be non-stop. It will be an interesting experience but probably not much else.14

Leaving Scoggan to settle into the Herbarium and work on his flora of the Gaspé Peninsula, and Baldwin to leave Ottawa on June 23 as head of a National Museum botanical survey of James and Hudson Bay “with a young man from the Montreal Botanical Gardens [J. C. Kucyniak], two Finnish botanists [Dr. Ilmari Hustich and Dr. Risto Tuomikoski] and a Swiss geologist [Dr. E. H. Kranck],” Erling left Ottawa by train on June 25, heading for Reindeer Station. His later report to Gibson would carefully recount all details of his activities and findings. On July 1, he and his old trapper friend Ralph Bryenton of Herb Lake, Manitoba, left Edmonton to fly to Hay River, N.W.T., where a 22-foot canoe and equipment for the trip down the Mackenzie was waiting for them. Due to poor visibility, the plane was unable to land and they were forced to spend two days in Yellowknife, but on July 4, travelling from Hay River by canoe, frequent stops were made along the Mackenzie River for botanical collecting and for studying biotic problems connected with the natural afforestation following destruction of the original forest due to fire. A collection of plants was made along the Mackenzie totalling 350 numbers including several rare and little known species heretofore known only from single collections made by early travellers in the Mackenzie District.
They reached Reindeer Station on July 21, and, accompanied by Bryenton and H. J. Hargrave, Superintendent of the Dominion Range Experiment Station at Manyberries, Alberta, Erling made a survey of the reindeer-grazing reserve by plane, with fourteen landings to make detailed examinations on the ground. He was particularly anxious to see how the winter range of the main herd had stood up to twelve years of grazing. “During four winters the herd had been wintered within a radius of four to eight miles of the main station,” he said in his September report,

... in addition this range has been grazed each year for periods of from a week to ten days during the spring and fall migration between summer and winter grounds. A 15-mile hike over this ground showed that the lichen cover of this particular range, which originally had formed approximately ten per cent of the total vegetation, had now been materially reduced and that as a result of grazing, grasses, sedges, and forbs had increased. Willow and other dwarf shrubs had neither gained nor suffered. Although the reindeer had not wintered on this particular range since 1937–38, practically no sign of recovery or new growth of lichen was noted. Nevertheless, the forage on this range is by no means completely destroyed, and similar country in Lapland would still be considered good winter pasture.

Other wintering places were visited on Noel Lake and Peter Lake, where the herd has spent only one winter.... In both places the effect of one year’s grazing was scarcely noticeable.... From these observations it would appear that one winter’s grazing does practically no damage to good browse-lichen range, provided it is not used until the ground is frozen and snow covers the carpet. The reason for this is that in the frozen ‘reindeer moss’ carpet, the grazing reindeer merely nibble the tips of the lichen plants. The tips of the branches are the only parts of the lichen plant that are capable of growth, and when lightly grazed, are able to regenerate in a few years. Where ‘holes’ have been plucked into the lichen carpet by grazing, these ‘holes’ quickly fill in by lateral growth and also no doubt by expansion of the lichen mass. Thus, in a lichen carpet six inches deep, only the upper two inches show active growth; the lower third is dead and undergoing a slow process of decay. Therefore, when the entire upper layer of the lichen carpet is destroyed by grazing or trampling, regeneration ceases or, at best, is
greatly retarded. Also, other plants, such as dwarf shrubs, sedges and grasses, or the true mosses, with all of which the lichen plant competes for space, occupy the place formerly taken by the lichens. For this reason, winter range should be allowed from three to four years of rest between grazing. When this rule is observed, winter range such as is found in the Reindeer Reserve will last indefinitely.\(^{15}\)

The summer range for the main herd during the past twelve years had been on the low and rather wet coastal tundra, with one year near Kittigazuit and the rest on the north end of Richards Island. Some concern had been expressed from time to time regarding the ability of this pasture to withstand continued year-after-year pasturing of a herd of 5,000 animals but a detailed examination of several local areas that had seen some of the heaviest grazing showed that the range had stood up remarkably well. Far from being depleted, grasses and sedges had actually increased, due to the “tilling” effect of trampling reindeer. In his report, Erling said that he considered that the summer pasture on the north end of Richards Island would be adequate indefinitely for a herd of 5,000 reindeer.

At Reindeer Station itself, all the buildings appeared to be in good repair, but he was critical of the newer mechanical equipment that suggested “an extraordinary lack of planning.” The power plant that had replaced the original system was expensive and inadequate. The old “Ram” tugboat had stood up well over the years of rough usage by untrained operators but was now in somewhat run-down condition and needed a complete overhaul by competent mechanics to keep it going for another fifteen to twenty years. The fishing boat used at Anderson River was in good running order and seemed well-suited for requirements but, with the worries of the recent Cally losses still freshly in mind, Erling did not hesitate to say that he thought that the present boat used by the chief herder was “as poorly built a boat as I have seen; in my opinion it should never have been accepted as it is not only poorly designed, but of poor workmanship, unseaworthy, and safe only for use in rivers and estuaries.”\(^{16}\)

On July 29–30, the party attended the annual round-up of the main herd at the Kigdluait corral that had been constructed according to Erling’s plan in 1935. A few years earlier, two work pens were substituted for the single chute originally installed; and in 1946 the lead-in fence was extended along the shore of Kigdluait Bay for about one mile to form a large holding pasture. In addition to the regular reindeer crew, a number of local men had come to work during
the round-up. Most of them had attended the round-up for several years and thus all had experience in handling deer. He did not think the pens worked as well as the chute because it held things up and involved much chasing and needless excitement for the animals, and the shape of one of the pens appeared to be responsible for some broken legs and horns. “It must be admitted, however, that with the crew on hand the work progresses faster than I have ever seen it done before.”

His general impression of the main herd was that it was healthy and that the females and fawns looked strong, but there was a marked deficiency in the size of males. One reason for the decrease in size could be due to killing immature steers in order to supply the increasing demand for meat, but another could be laid at the door of one of his original Lapp herders. “During the mating season bulls become aggressive and a large powerful bull can be quite dangerous,” he said:

Some reindeer men, and notably one of the Lapp herders I brought from Norway in 1931 – Aslak Tornensis, who resigned and returned to Lapland in 1939 – outspokenly maintained that all large bulls should be castrated; when not closely checked he vigorously practised this rule. This man was the oldest and probably the most experienced of all the Lapps and while in the service taught many of our Eskimo apprentices herding and handling of deer. It would thus seem quite likely that over the years there has been a deliberate tendency to eliminate the largest breeding animals. Even today among farmers and livestock men the principles of modern selective breeding is not always followed, and it can scarcely be assumed that Lapp or Eskimo reindeer men fully understand the genetic principles involved in the breeding of animals.17

He had discussed the matter with Hogan, the Superintendent of the station, who admitted that he knew this unfortunate practice had existed in the past but believed that it had been discontinued for some years. The present chief herder, Mikkel Pulk, claimed that he fully understood the importance of selective breeding, and Erling observed that during the corralling he seemed very anxious to select strong and large fawns for breeding stock.

A visit was made to the Anderson herd on August 24–25. Travelling by plane, Erling flew over Nicholson Island where he saw the herd near the corral.
They landed at the station in Wood Bay, which on the map is called Stanton. A new frame house had been erected a year earlier but there were no other buildings. The assistant foreman, Malcolm McNab, in charge, was there with his boat “Stanton,” getting ready to cross the bay to Nicholson Island where corralling was to start the following day. At the station, he met Chief Herder Edwin Allen, a native of Alaska who was an experienced reindeer man and veteran of the long drive from Kotzebue Sound, and Peter Rufus, the only surviving son of Charlie Rufus, who was now part owner of the herd. “A promising young lad of about 19 who even now is a good reindeer man and told me that he wanted to remain in the reindeer business. He is as yet unmarried and too young to manage a herd of his own, but as soon as possible he should be given every encouragement to establish himself in the reindeer business. There is some question as to what part of the herd legally belongs to Peter; the broadest possible view should be taken in settling this question.”

At the 1946 round-up after the Cally accident, only 276 adult female deer and 121 adult steers bore Charlie Rufus’s mark. No deer had been marked to Charlie’s estate since 1,659 animals were actually counted in the 1944 round-up, which did not include 579 reindeer that were estimated as “missing” at that time due to sickness, accidents, separation from the herd, fawn exposure, and being killed by wolves. “The Rufus estate is still in the hands of the Public Administrator and as far as I know no settlement has been reached,” Erling said.

I understand that from a legalistic point of view some doubt exists as to what number of deer Charlie’s sole heir, Peter, owns. The matter is complicated by the fact that the 950 deer which were originally loaned to Charlie were never returned to the Government. This, however, was not Charlie’s fault because on several occasions he had been anxious to return the original stock but each time was told that the Government was not yet ready to receive them. Further complications arose when, in the winter of 1942–43, 305 steers from Charlie’s herd were marketed. Of the total sale price of $7,475.50, a portion was allotted to Peter Kaglik, the owner of Native Herd No. 2. This was to be a first instalment paid to the Government for deer received by Charlie. Peter in turn was to hand over a certain number of live deer to the Government.

I understand that Charlie Rufus had felt that this had been unfair to him and that he had been entitled to the full proceeds of the sale
from his herd, because Peter Kaglik had not participated in the drive and because Charlie’s contract called for payment in reindeer. In as much as Charlie had repeatedly tried to return the 950 deer to the Government and as failure to do so was due to the unwillingness of the Department to receive them, I feel that Charlie had a just cause for complaint. I also think that when the estate is finally settled the Department ought to take this into consideration so that as generous a settlement as possible may be made with young Peter.19

When Charlie Rufus had first established his herd at the mouth of the Anderson River, there were a number of native and white trappers in the district, but these people had all departed in recent years and the Anderson River herd was now without a local market. The Department had intended that this herd would be used as a nucleus for future herds to be established further to the east and south, but with the loss of the owners of both native herds and their families, the eastern development received a very serious setback, from which it might never recover. Erling commented that it seemed very doubtful that new herds would be established in the Anderson River district or to the south of there. He recommended that the herd should be divided into two to four smaller herds which should be re-located somewhere on the shore of the Eskimo Lakes where a market for surplus meat could be found at Tuktoyaktuk or at the main Reindeer Station on the East Branch.

Morale was low at the main Station. Superintendent Hogan was near retirement age and in failing health, and he wished to be replaced. Erling recommended a game warden in Aklavik who was interested and could be trained to take over when Hogan retired. The chief labourer was also getting on in years and could no longer cope with the work in hand, and Erling felt that he should be replaced by first open water by a carpenter-mechanic who should be a young married man preferably without children. The chief herder and one remaining Laplander was Mikkel Pulk, who had grown with the added responsibility, and under the guidance of a younger superintendent might do even better. Pulk had told Erling that he hoped to retire in the next few years and have his Eskimo son-in-law take over a reindeer herd. “Although Pulk is a Laplander his social status is that of a native. I should like to see him as part owner in a reindeer herd when he would do well.”20

The Eskimo reindeer herders were largely recruited from Mission schools, and “some have not lived the life of their parents since early childhood and if
compelled to do so now would probably experience difficulty of adjustment to the life of a hunter or trapper.” Although on the whole Erling thought that they were “willing and capable and altogether potentially a fine group of boys” and at least half a dozen of them had sufficient experience to become owners, none at present wanted to assume the responsibility and preferred to work for wages. They all appeared to him to be normal, intelligent boys but with one or two exceptions showed little initiative or ambition and were content to live a day-to-day existence, spending their leisure hours loafing or gambling. “Half of the boys are unmarried which, to a native boy over 20 is an abnormal and unnatural state of affairs; they all wish to marry but with the unfavourable ratio in the Mackenzie Delta of unmarried males to females, they are unable to do so.” Another factor was that “the younger generation of Eskimo, particularly the women, have become accustomed to the amenities of ‘civilized’ life and are no longer willing to endure the hardships of life in isolated areas far from stores, movies, medical services, schools etc.”

In his report, Erling knew better than to compare these young people with those he had found in Greenland, where he had been impressed with how positively they had adapted to a changing world. The secret was that it had happened slowly for the Greenlanders, and they had been able to do it in their own way. Already, in one short generation, these young Mackenzie Delta herders were not the people for whom the Reindeer Project had originally been envisaged. They had been educated only up to a point and then left somewhere between the hard Arctic-wise world of their grandparents and the easier but inappropriate white man’s takeover of the north for which they had not been adequately prepared.

Erling knew from experience how readily they responded to leadership and he recommended that the Station install a carefully planned educational program in which he believed they would eagerly participate. “A teacher should be appointed to the Reindeer Station who should run a day school and from time to time visit the herd camps where he/she should direct evening classes and correspondence courses. Much progress could be made by supplying suitable reading material to the herders. This should be partly instructional and partly entertaining,” he said. He recommended specially prepared and well-illustrated pamphlets covering such subjects as reindeer handling, breeding, range management, mechanics, hygiene, etc. “Some school texts would be suitable for distribution to the boys. I do not know of any Canadian school books that I would recommend; but I have seen excellent school books published in
Something needed to be done about a banking and purchasing system at Reindeer Station. Most of the herders were continuously in debt to the traders and mail-order credit. The system of herders rations that Erling had proposed in 1931 was no longer workable under present circumstances and had led to waste and abuse of one kind or another. He suggested that the Department promote the establishment of a regular store at Reindeer Station, operated by a private trader under contract, and that the herders and staff in future should be given a cash allowance in order to buy their own rations, equipment, and fuel. The trader could maintain a stock of necessary dry goods and suitable clothing, and he could also run a post office and handle reindeer products and surplus meat. Again, Erling had a capable man in mind from the Hudson’s Bay Company post in Tuktoyaktuk.

“It is most unfortunate that Family Allowance has been extended to natives living in the Northwest Territories,” Erling said. “I have talked about Family Allowance to many Eskimos as well as to a number of white residents who know natives and know conditions in the Arctic. They all condemn it. One native said to me ‘If the Government has money to give away, why must I pay Fur Export Tax or Income Tax. I make enough money to feed my children properly; but Government officials have told me that I must take Family Allowances although I do not need it; if I must take it why can I not use the money to educate my children?’”

“The time has come,” Erling said,

… when it must be decided if the ‘progress’ made in the reindeer industry in Canada is good enough; when it must be decided whether to admit failure, or do something really constructive. When it was decided to introduce domesticated reindeer into the Canadian Arctic, the purpose was to train Eskimo to become reindeer owners and to give them reindeer.… But there are today no native-owned reindeer herds and none of the many boys trained in reindeer work are today showing a desire to acquire herds of their own, because the Department has failed to convince them that reindeer raising is as profitable and sound economically as trapping for fur. On the contrary, they feel today that the life of a reindeer herder is more insecure and involves more hard work, isolation and hardship than that of a hunter or trapper. Unless
it is decided to write off the experiment as an economic and social failure, something really constructive should be done towards making reindeer work a better and more economically and socially attractive occupation.23

Erling felt that the early years of the Canadian reindeer experiment had been slow and faltering when everything was new and untried and a number of courses had been taken with little success, but that stage had now passed and a definite policy should be outlined and plans laid for the next five-year period.

The future success of the reindeer venture depends very largely upon the department’s ability and willingness to place a man in charge who is capable of leadership. This man must have vision, energy, tact and ability to inspire the natives; he must be young enough and of strong enough physique to be able to travel and to live outdoors for prolonged periods; he must be resourceful and of sound judgment and at the same time willing to learn. Given those qualifications he will quickly learn what is needed about the reindeer business, for there is today a sufficient number of trained herders; the necessary technical equipment is there; the reindeer herd is in good shape and we know that the climate and the country is suitable for the raising of reindeer.24

When he left Reindeer Station for the last time that summer, no one could say that Erling Porsild had not tried. He, like so many people in the project, had done their best, but there had been too many problems beyond their limited scope from the start, and now there were too many factors already lined up to inhibit the venture in future. A lot of Erling’s recommended changes for Reindeer Station would be made successfully – at its height, there were four native reindeer herds as well as the Government herd, and the mosquito-ridden station that became almost a town (called ‘Qun’nglaat’ by the Inuvialuit) boasted a Hudson’s Bay Company store, a school for twenty pupils, a post office, a church, and a population of 90 people – but the times were changing too much and too fast in the North. The distant early warning (DEW) line radar posts to protect North America from hostile activity around the Arctic would be coming, and the building of Inuvik as an administrative centre for the Mackenzie district, the discovery and development of Beaufort Sea oil, and the settlement
of indigenous land rights among a host of other things would all detract the people of the Delta from the difficulties of raising reindeer.

Looking down the years into the future, all the native herds reverted back to the Government, and Reindeer Station was abandoned in 1969. The one large remaining herd was sold in 1974 to “Canadian Reindeer Ltd.,” an outfit owned by one white man and two Inuvialuit brothers from Tuktoyaktuk. It prospered and then declined and was ultimately sold to “Kunnek Resource Development Corporation” at the end of the twentieth century, and today there rests only one consolation connected with the herd of almost the same number of animals as those that came all the way from Alaska. The last of the herd that roams the land from Richards Island eastwards is owned by Lloyd Binder, grandson of Mikkel Pulk, but even he was quoted in 2008 as saying on CBC News, when the animals had been temporarily scattered by wolves, that the previous owner had said that reindeer herding was all about heartbreak, “and I could say that it’s all about that and disappointment.”

25
CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THE “OLD MAN” OF THE HERBARIUM

By the fall of 1947, Erling Porsild could look back on more than twenty years in the history of the Canadian Reindeer Project and the National Herbarium. He was the last remaining veteran of “the old days” at the National Museum, for all the associates and friends who had been there when he arrived in Canada as a young man were now gone – Malte, Jenness, Taverner, Anderson – even Rand had gone to the Field Museum in Chicago – and now he was surrounded on all sides by the “new boys” who sported doctorates from Canadian and American universities, whereas he was still “Mr. Porsild of the Herbarium” even if he was an increasing force to be reckoned with, especially in Northern affairs. At age 46, he was seen by fellow staff members of the Museum as a big, soft-spoken man with a smile that would break into a broad grin when his wry sense of humour was stimulated, a man who had his own ideas about how things should be done but was more interested in getting on with the job than in making issues.¹

It would be almost another decade before he would cross the last scholastic barrier to earn his PhD on his work on the botany of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. He had looked at the western Arctic islands from the air when he accompanied a U.S. Air Force Polaris non-stop military surveillance trip from Fairbanks to Northwestern Ellesmere Island after he left Reindeer Station in August 1947, but was still working on the Rocky Mountain field collections and his Yukon flora that winter. At the same time, he was part of the establishment of a congenial new group in Ottawa called “The Arctic Circle” that started when Tom and Jackie Manning remarked to their friends and fellow arctic travellers Graham and Diana Rowley that their dining room table could no longer accommodate the growing number of people who gathered there regularly to talk about the North. On November 24, Erling wrote to tell George Douglas, with
A. E. Porsild in his office at the National Herbarium, Ottawa, ca. 1947 (CMNA)
whom he had kept up a friendship since they first met to share their experiences of exploration around Great Bear Lake: “You will be interested to know that we are hoping very soon to have an Arctic Club in Ottawa which is to provide an informal meeting place for people interested in the Arctic. We plan to have short talks followed by informal discussions, and even beer. We also plan to send out a bulletin where we intend to keep track of arctic people and what they are doing. I have had your name on the mailing list, thinking that you would be interested.”

The first official meeting was held on December 8, and no one there that night could have imagined how successful “The Arctic Circle” would become at hosting presentations by experts in every aspect of northern fields and producing an impressive list of important publications about the North. But it was not only the new circle of Arctic friends that was making life pleasant for Erling in the winter of 1947–48. He had been living a bachelor life for far too long, without a home of his own and no one to share it with even if he had had one, since Edith was by now working and living independently. However, sometime during or between his many friendly or official meetings, or, as has been rumoured, in the government map department where a certain young woman was reputed to have been working, Erling met a nice Englishwoman named Elizabeth Williams, with an eight-year-old daughter, named Antoinette, from a previous marriage. By the time he was planning an official two-month trip in the summer of 1948, travelling to California to visit important botanical institutions and western botanists and become acquainted with the southwestern flora in the desert subalpine regions, it was clear that he would not be going alone. In a letter to Bassett Maguire at the New York Botanical Gardens on April 15, Erling thanked him for his helpful information regarding the best means of travel in the United States and said: “Naturally we shall plan to visit as many of the herbaria as we can along the route. It is probably not the best time to visit botanists in the west but I hope to find some of them home. I am particularly anxious to see Rollins, Mason, Clausen and Hitchcock and have written them about the trip. With kindest regards and thanks again in which my fiancée joins me.” To the delight of the Raups, who met Elizabeth in Ottawa in spring, they were married just before leaving for the south. “Mr. Porsild got away on Saturday,” Miss Harkness wrote Raup on April 26. “The last few days were a terrific rush!”

Travelling by car, they left Ottawa in time to reach Ann Arbor, Michigan, by April 28, when Erling was scheduled to give a talk on “Problems in Plant
Distribution in the North American Arctic.” From there, they drove to Chicago, hoping to see the Rands but they were not at home. There was still snow in the mountains as they continued west so there was not much botanizing to be done at Mesa Verde Park in Colorado, but there and in Arizona they visited pueblos and canyons and park museums en route to Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, where Dr. Reed Rollins was about to leave for Cambridge, Massachusetts, to take over the directorship of the Gray Herbarium. Having met several botanists and staff at the Dudley Herbarium, the newlyweds had a week’s honeymoon at Monterrey before heading north for San Francisco and the California Academy of Science, where Erling was delighted to see 91-year old Alice Eastwood was well and in great shape to give them a luncheon with several scientists, a tour of the Golden Gate Park with its exotic trees and shrubs, and show them the superb African dioramas at the Academy.

From San Francisco, they crossed the Oakland Bay Bridge to Berkeley where they called on Dr. Herbert Mason, Director of the Botany Museum at the University of California. Although the campus was cramped by the encroaching town, Erling was impressed by the size of the Herbarium, its large number of species and equally large annual budget, as well as an almost room-sized vault heated by steam radiators that was used for drying specimens. The Masons invited Erling and Elizabeth to stay with them in their beautiful house set into a hillside overlooking San Francisco Bay, and late at night they sat and talked about the set-up in Californian Botany, including the Dudley Herbarium at Stanford and the California Academy in San Francisco. “He confirmed what I had already noted,” Erling said, “that the district had in these institutions an unusually diversified and most active group of botanists and biologists covering practically all fields. Therefore, their meetings are never dull. Mason who himself seemed quite well grounded in genetics commented on the fact that with such an assortment of geneticists it was always possible to get up a general discussion which invariably brought out the fact that no two geneticists ever agreed, so that a plant taxonomist here need never let himself become ‘brow-beaten’ as was sometimes the case in other places where geneticists undisputed could maintain that ‘they alone knew all the answers.’”

Leaving Berkeley behind, Erling and Elizabeth drove north through the redwood forests to picturesque Oregon, looking at sea birds and seals, and large sand dunes covered with brown and yellow lupines or bright yellow broom shrubs. At Seattle, Erling spent several hours in the University Herbarium with Leo Hitchcock who was busy preparing for his summer collecting expedition.
“He has quite a system by which he takes a large number of students of both sexes in the field for the summer. His regime is quite a strenuous one. Up at five to cook breakfast served at six. From seven to eight, morning classes. Collecting all day. Supper at six; seven to eight, classes and study of collections. One summer he took 46 students in the field.”

The end of the trip took them to Vancouver for the Royal Society of Canada meetings June 12–16, at which Erling read a paper by Scoggan entitled “The Flora of Gaspé and Bic,” and they had lunch with George Douglas and his brother Lionel. Erling had not met “Lion” before and found him to be quite unlike his brother, very English and urbane after years of commanding large passenger ships. Leaving Vancouver on June 17, they had two more weeks for Erling to collect additional alpine species at Banff before heading back to Ottawa on July 9.

During the rest of the year and over the winter, Erling worked on his report on the flora of southeastern Yukon adjacent to the Canol Road, which he submitted for publication in March 1949. He wrote several book reviews and a number of articles for the *Arctic Circular* and prepared a report for publication on a collection of plants from Nueltin Lake, N.W.T., made by Francis Harper in 1948, aided by a grant from the Arctic Institute of North America, for which he also edited and rewrote a report by Finnish botanist Hustich on his forest botanical field work in Ungava. During this time, he was in contact with Dr. A. L. Washburn, Executive Director of the Arctic Institute of North America, who was doing geological research on Victoria Island. The result was a plan for field work in July and August 1949, combining air and land exploration on Banks and Victoria Islands in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.

Accompanied by Peter Jenness of the Geographical Bureau, son of Diamond Jenness, Erling left Ottawa July 5 and reached Yellowknife July 7. “Spring was exceptionally late north of Slave Lake,” he told Raup in September.

We had hoped to be able to land on a lake at Holman Island by mid-July but were unable to do so until two weeks later. This delay gave me an opportunity to revisit Scented Grass Hill Peninsula on Bear Lake. A very hurried visit in 1928 produced some rather startling discoveries above the 1,500-foot level which made me think that the peninsula might have escaped glaciation. My second visit definitely dispelled any such notion and added very little floristic information; the most startling being *Ranunculus Eschscholtzii*. Even though the peninsula
was glaciated at one time, it certainly was not submerged and may, somehow, have been connected with the Cordilleran system when the Mackenzie basin drained through the Dease Valley.

At Port Radium, near the main pitchblende deposit, I found a colony of *Salix Scouleriana* in which, besides normal staminate and pistillate plants, occurred plants with hermaphrodite catkins and even perfect flowers. I do not know what the significance is, nor if radiation conceivably could have been the cause of this strange aberration. Have you ever heard or seen such a case? As I remember it your monoecious *Salix glauca* from Kluane Lake had normal pistillate and staminate catkins. Have you reported on this? My hermaphrodite *S. Scouleriana* might merit a note of some sort but I am not sure that I can do it full justice. However, even a photograph with descriptive data, in *Rhodora*, might suffice.⁸

On July 30, Erling and Jenness reached the Holman Island Post in a Norseman plane piloted by Ernie Boffa, and joined “Link” Washburn and his wife, the Hudson’s Bay Company post manager Bill Calder, and Father Buliard of the Roman Catholic Mission. Most of the Inuit of the district were at their sealing camps at Minto Inlet and elsewhere, and even Father Buliard was at the time living at his sealing camp ten miles up the coast, where he had 200 large seals temporarily buried in beach sand to preserve them. From the air and the land, Erling could look around the Hudson’s Bay Post more completely than Malte had once done at similar posts in the Eastern Arctic. “Although the sea was still icebound,” he said in his report that was later published by the Arctic Circle, “as far as we could see from the air, summer appeared to be at its height in the Holman Island area, and the landscape, which from the air had appeared rocky and barren, on closer inspection was ablaze with colour. In full bloom on the hillsides back of the Post were masses of creamy-white mountain avens, purple loco weeds, and magnificent yellow cinquefoils. On south-facing slopes we could even find miniature ‘rock gardens,’ all gay with purple gentians, daisies, and Lapland rhododendron, yellow arnicas, and in rock crevices even three kinds of rock ferns.”⁹

Owing to the difficulty of access by sea, Banks and Victoria Islands had until recently been among the least known islands in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Erling said: “No professional botanist had previously visited these islands, and for floristic information we had largely depended upon the
collections of plants made by officers of the early British expeditions under McClure and Collinson. It was not surprising, therefore, that in the first two hours of botanizing on Banks Island I doubled the known number of species of vascular plants.”

The first two weeks of settled weather made it possible to do a good deal of useful flying and plant-collecting on Banks Island, but with the late season break-up of the sea, a period of unsettled weather made things more difficult. On August 22, they landed at the foot of Mercy Bay.

The lateness of the day and the threatening fog, which was slowly creeping from the Polar ice pack, made it inadvisable to remain here long enough to explore the foot of the bay for remains of McClure’s winter quarters of 1851–2 and 1852–3 where his ship, the Investigator, was abandoned later to be broken up by Eskimo. On the beach I picked up bits of flotsam that undoubtedly were from the Investigator. The surface of the wood was bleached white, but scraping revealed one piece to be English oak and another to be mahogany; both were perfectly fresh and sound after nearly a hundred years. Climbing the hill to the east we could not but wonder how many times McClure and his men, during the 3 years they were frozen in here, had climbed this identical hill to look toward the Polar Sea that never opened enough to release their ship. In the steep cliffs facing the bay we found beautifully preserved fossil corals in beds of Devonian rocks.10

“Altogether we put in about 60 flying hours in the islands with a total of about 20 different places visited,” Erling told Raup.

On a number of those we were able to spend only a few hours but then the flora is so comparatively simple that even such a brief visit gave me sufficient time for obtaining what I believe are fairly complete local lists…. According to a preliminary count Victoria has about 190 species of vascular plants and Banks about 160. Contrary to expectations the flora of these islands have fewer species in common with ‘Berin-gia’ than with the Cordillera. Although probably all of Victoria and perhaps all but the northwest end of Banks Island were glaciated and later submerged at least to the 600–700-foot level, there appears to be a fairly high incidence of endemism.
Washburn confined himself almost entirely to Victoria Isl. and primarily to landform problems, particularly those related to frost action, solifluction etc. He is very pleased with the results of the summer and should have some pretty good stuff. I am, myself, almost completely baffled by the multiplicity and complexity of the frost action problems seen in Banks Island; the existing nomenclature certainly is entirely inadequate for the galaxy of polygon-forms seen there. In fact I am seriously considering renaming the island; Polygonia!¹¹

Back in the Herbarium over the winter of 1949–50, there were administrative changes to adjust to when another new year arrived, and Erling had a new letterhead on his office stationery when he wrote to Raup on 31 January 1950. “The old Dept. of Mines and Resources has been split into three new departments,” he said.

We are the largest, known as Resources & Development which, besides, embraces forestry, lands and development, N.W.T., the Film Board, etc. The Geological Survey is under the new Mines and Technical Surveys Dept., together with Topographical, Geodetic and Hydrographic Surveys, Dom. Observatory etc. and, finally, Immigration [and] Indian Affairs etc. are in a separate department. Thus far things seem rather confused and we do not know yet if the change will help or hinder the Museum. One immediate and far reaching result is that it will speed the departure of the Geologists and the Art Gallery so that the time when we have the use of the entire building is in sight. One bright spot is that Dr. Keenleyside remains Deputy Minister of our department. As long as he stays there the Museum will probably be in clover (relatively speaking). On the other hand, Mr. Gibson, in the shuffle, became our Branch Director. He is due for retirement next year and we do not know who will replace him.¹²

He was hoping that the Raups would be going to Stockholm to attend the Seventh International Botanical Congress that summer. “I want to put in some time looking at arctic plants in London and arctic Eurasian ones in Stockholm,” Erling said. “Elizabeth and Nette are going along and will visit in England with Elizabeth’s parents, except for a short visit to Sweden and Denmark.” The Porsild family left Ottawa on 4 May and returned on August 20. From
July 6–20, he attended the Botanical Congress at Stockholm to which he had been elected a Vice-President, and from July 21–30, he took part in a botanical excursion to Swedish Lapland organized by the Congress. Before and after the meetings, he spent considerable time in the herbaria of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew and the British Natural History Museum in London, the herbarium of the University of Copenhagen, and the herbarium of the National Museum of Sweden in Stockholm, for the purpose of examining historical collections of plants made in the Canadian Arctic by early British expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage. He also studied methods of preservation and exhibition of plant material, and in England he consulted the curators with regard to their war experiences in emergency evacuation and preservation of irreplaceable plant material. “The experience of the staff of the British Natural History Museum, which was bombed and partially burned during the war, was particularly valuable,” he reported.

To Raup on September 15, he said he was sorry that they had not been able to come. He was pleased that Elizabeth had left Nette with her grandparents and joined him in Denmark and Sweden. It was her first visit and Erling said she had enjoyed it very much before returning to England before the congress opened.

It was a very good meeting, I thought. You probably have had full and better accounts of it from Merrill, Rollins, or Wetmore so I shall save my story until we meet again…. Before and after the meeting I spent some time in London, Copenhagen and Stockholm browsing through the arctic collections. In London I particularly wanted to look up McClure and Collinson collections for Banks and Victoria Islands. It was a very slow job, especially at Kew where, sometimes it would take me an hour or more to locate some particular specimen. One really would have to spend at least six months to really see what is there! The Stockholm herbarium is in very good shape and is a wonderful place to work. For years they have had a flock of D.P.’s [displaced persons due to the war] available for any jobs they cared to give them (at no cost to the herbarium). Hultén said that at one time during the war, he had forty of them working! I saw the proofs of the last part of the Alaska Flora which should be out some time in 1951. You have, I suppose, seen Hultén’s *Atlas of Distribution of Vascular Plants in N.W. Europe*. It is a fine piece of work.
He hoped to see Raup at the Alaskan Science Conference in Washington, D.C., November 9–11. Meanwhile, after three months absence from Ottawa, he was bogged down with office work. “I have been writing a lengthy report on the congress which may be useful if, in 1957, we again extend an invitation to the Congress to come to Canada. Next on my list is a pile of 167 galleys of the Yukon flora. I have been afraid to look at them, but must get busy.”

At last, he had a new botanist on staff to work on the long-neglected lichen herbarium. Ivan Mackenzie Lamb had joined the National Herbarium on 26 April 1950 and at once began the reorganization of the Cryptogamic section. Scoggan was working on his proposed flora of Manitoba, while Baldwin spent considerable time that year in sorting and cataloguing the ‘Lawson Herbarium’ which had been presented to the National Herbarium by Mount Allison University. Baldwin was also increasingly involved in numerous museum outreach activities that included organizing the program for the Macoun Field Club for enthusiastic young naturalists “which involved 57 meetings and excursions and two special exhibits and two meetings with parents, friends and sponsors” in that year alone.

Sometime in the winter, Hugh Raup sent Erling his paper on the “Vegetation of the Central and Southern Mackenzie River Basin” and Erling returned it with the comment that as always his presentation was very clear and stimulating and he had found it most helpful. On his part, he complained that he seemed to have undertaken to write a total of 20,000 words for Stefansson in three papers entitled (1) Economic Botany of the Arctic (2) Edible Plants of the Arctic and (3) Flora and Vegetation of Arctic Alaska and Northwest Canada.

I really didn’t think I would get it done but when, for a couple of weeks, I was more or less laid up after having my varicose veins excised, I finally got busy, throwing in 7,000 words for good measure. Naturally I have been wondering if any of this material will ever be published, and when recently I was down in Washington for the Arctic Institute Board of Governors meeting, I had a chance to talk to John C. Reed, who seemed very doubtful that the Navy would even wish to see the work completed let alone have it published. Later I spent the best part of a day in New York with Stef, who admitted that the Navy had cut down his appropriation, and that there was a distinct possibility that there would be insufficient funds for the completion of the remaining fourteen volumes. The first six I believe are ready for the printer. Stef
said the printing was assured on a commercial basis as soon as the Navy would agree to having the balance of the work completed.

For some time we in Canada have been having grave misgivings about the recent trend of development in the Arctic Institute. We are not happy about Link’s somewhat autocratic and unilateral decisions, and we think that the recent move to Washington will make it imperative that the Canadian cooperation should be quite independent, since otherwise we shall be quite unable to obtain financial support in Canada.¹⁵

There were other grave misgivings that winter about what was happening on the other side of the Pacific, with reports of the build-up of the Soviet-backed North Korean army near the boundary line with U.S.-supported South Korea. “The Museum, and various other Government agencies, have had their field appropriations cut severely as part of the new war-scare economy move,” Erling said. “Still we hope to have Scoggan and Baldwin back in Manitoba; and Mackenzie Lamb and I may be able to spend a month or two in Banff and Jasper Park, where I have a few things to do before I can really get busy on the Rocky Mountain Flora. What are your plans for the summer?”¹⁶

The Raups had just come back from five weeks in Honduras when they received Erling’s letter on March 12. They were not going far that summer as they had a new scheme of student instruction, provided the Army did not pick up too many eligible people. It looked as if their older son, Karl, who had assisted Erling in the field one summer, might be drafted into the forces, but they wondered if Erling would like to take on their second son, David, who was doing his first year at Colby College in Maine and planned to major in geology. “Do you want to take on Dave if you go to Banff and Jasper? Please speak with complete frankness. We probably can scare up the cost. It would be the best thing in the world for him.”

Erling said he would love to have Dave come along, although he could not afford to pay him and could only offer transportation as he was going to drive to Banff with Mackenzie Lamb, but by mid-April “most of the `shopping’ has been done and there, somehow, seems to be enough money left in the Museum kitty for some field work and, if all goes well, I plan to leave Ottawa for Banff some time early in June…. Following the division between Museum and Geol. Survey the Museum was left with very little field equipment and almost with no motor vehicles. So, rather than depend on the Parks people for transportation,
which would be most unsatisfactory, I am being ‘permitted’ to drive my own car west and to use it in the field (collecting 3 cents a mile).” He did not think the trip would be a very expensive one and thought the summer would be quite interesting if Dave did not mind the long ride in the car. “I plan to go by Sault St. Marie and then to cross into the States and to come back north into the Cypress Hills where we may spend a week or so. The return trip, too, will be through the States, possibly by another route. I have tentatively planned to be back early in September. Actually the field season is pretty well over by the end of August.”

On June 25, the North Korean army crossed the 38th parallel boundary line into South Korea, and Canada was soon once again at war, as part of the twenty-one United Nations countries that joined the United States in the defense of South Korea. By the end of the summer, young Karl Raup had finished his boot camp and was waiting to be called up for the front. Meanwhile, it was a good collecting summer in the mountains. Mackenzie Lamb left in early August and David Raup was home by August 22.

Erling flew north on August 20 from Edmonton to Whitehorse where Bob Porsild joined him for the first botanical collecting trip the brothers had done together since Great Bear Lake in 1928. He told Raup that it was “a most enjoyable and profitable excursion into the Carcross area. I have always wished to examine the sand dune area and to have a first hand look at its most interesting flora. Unfortunately the summer had been extremely dry and everything was pretty badly dried up, but I did, nevertheless, get a pretty good idea, and a collection of specimens including some of the rather puzzling things found there. In my Yukon Flora I questioned whether some of the strange lupines of that area were really indigenous, but after seeing them in the field, I am fully convinced that they are.”

While he was visiting Bob and Elly and family at Johnson’s Crossing, Erling said the fishing was excellent and there was a run of king salmon “the like of which I have never seen, and my brother told me that one day a tourist hooked a 60 lb. one which dragged him off the bridge into the water.” From there, he continued to Fairbanks and McKinley Park for the Second Alaska Science Conference from September 4–8. “The meeting there was very pleasant and it was nice to see and talk to many old friends; but I must admit that after the Washington meeting, the one at McKinley Park seemed somewhat anti-climactic.”
The “Old Man” of the Herbarium

R. T. Porsild (CMNA)
Meetings on Northern affairs were taking up more and more of Erling’s time. In October, he took Elizabeth with him to New York when he had to drive down for a Board Meeting of the Arctic Institute of North America, which had been an important one. “The morning session was stormy,” he told Raup October 27,

…and just before the recession for lunch it looked as if we had reached a deadlock. When the Canadians made a move to appoint an executive director, the Americans countered with an ‘amendment’ to appoint two executive directors, one for Washington and one for Montreal. We thought the amendment nullified the motion, but to our surprise the chair maintained that it didn’t. For a while it looked as if the Institute was going to break up with board members resigning right and left. Then someone moved adjournment for lunch. A lot of martinis were passed around and they acted as oil on the troubled waters. During the meal there was a lot of visiting around the table when most of the difficulties were ironed out. At any rate, when the meeting was resumed, the amendment was duly voted on and defeated whereupon the motion for one director with executive powers was carried unanimously. So, in the end, all ended harmoniously and it now remains to be seen if the new executive director-elect will accept the job.20

Erling and Elizabeth stayed with Hugh and Lucy Raup at Petersham during the meeting and then spent three nights in the family’s apartment in Cambridge while Elizabeth went shopping and Erling visited the Gray Herbarium. He would have liked to have had more time but managed to have a good talk with Rollins and hoped to get down again sometime in the winter after working on the Banff collection. “It will be strange to be working there again and to come into the library without finding Fernald at work on the long table,” he said. Driving back through the Adirondacks, Erling said he could not recall a more enjoyable trip through such pleasant and colourful country.

His next report of family happenings was not nearly so happy, however. Writing to Raup on January 21, he said that Elizabeth had had the misfortune of picking up measles at a New Year’s party. Fortunately there did not seem to be any complications but she was quite miserable, and of course had to be isolated and in bed for over a week. “She is up and around again, but feels rather weak,” Erling said. “She should be back to normal, however, by the end of the
week.” Despite his optimistic forecast, Elizabeth Porsild would not be well even when she was over the measles as she had been waiting for months for an operation to repair problems from a previous operation and could return only to some semblance of normality while waiting to hear from the hospital.21

Meanwhile, Erling was on the Publications Committee for Arctic, and Diana Rowley had left him a handful of manuscripts to consider. Among them was one written by Nicholas Polunin that he considered was “Nick at his worst” and was curious to see what Raup thought of it. “Diana Rowley tells me that he must have a decision soon because Scientific Monthly is anxious to print it. He is rather scornful of the S.M. but if Arctic cannot use his msc, he will let them go ahead and print it. Now, I ask you, how can anyone bring himself to make such a statement on paper? The Scientific Monthly would no more print Nick’s present ms. than fly – and if they do I shall think less of them.”22

Raup returned the paper on January 23 with the comment that it was not to be highly recommended.

It falls far short of doing what it sets out to do. To begin with, it is much too wordy. Everything of consequence in it could be said in a fraction of the space. It is full of divergencies and gratuitous remarks that don’t add anything. Furthermore, there seems to me a lack of a ‘critical attitude.’ I don’t know how to say what I mean. It has to do with a great deal of Nick’s work. Everything seems to be about equally interesting to him, and he seems not to be able to sort out what is genuinely significant. I suspect that this is some sort of hold-over from his early and more or less romantic approach to arctic problems. He decries the early lack of direction in arctic botany and then proceeds, in expressing his own views, to seek to perpetuate the same thing. It seems to me that critical evaluation of the course of events in arctic research is one of the most essential things just now.

Later, he added: “Incidentally, Nick Polunin is in something of a dither, for he has no job for next year. It is pretty hard for me to keep from saying things I ought not to when he talks to me about it.”23

March brought discussions of the new Grants-in-aid Committee of the Arctic Institute on which Raup had agreed to serve. Erling hoped that he could make some improvements as to how the grant applications were handled. He had often wondered, he said, if the committee had really taken time to consider
each application on its merits, or if, perhaps, those applicants known to committee members had not been arbitrarily favoured. He had been acting as a botany scrutineer and giving his opinions on the respective merits of each application to the best of his ability. “By and large my recommendations have been followed – at least to the extent that rarely has a grant been given against my recommendations. Naturally the committee should be free to accept or reject a recommendation of the scrutineers but I do not think that the committee ought to award grants to applications that had bypassed the scrutineers, as has happened on some occasions. This year, for example, more than half of the very small amount awarded to botanical projects was given toward a project that neither you nor I had seen or heard about which was submitted by a man that I, at least, had not even heard of.” He was hoping that the new research committee might concentrate on worthwhile arctic research projects, “for I feel that a number of projects which were submitted in the past have not been too carefully planned and not always well chosen, while other and more worthwhile projects have been completely overlooked.” Raup agreed, and thought that a great deal of the difficulty stemmed from a consistently uncertain and occasionally poor policy in selecting grantees for its research funds. “I think that any program for getting together and publishing statements of research needs is wasted effort until this basic problem is dealt with.”

The Raups were hoping to get up to Ottawa for a spring visit, and Erling wrote on April 22 to say that he and Elizabeth certainly hoped and expected to see them “before you get too bogged down with visitors.” He was planning to spend a week or ten days at the Gray Herbarium, probably the end of May. “I had hoped to get down earlier but various reasons have caused me to put it off, including the uncertainty of when Elizabeth could get into hospital. She has been on the hospital waiting list since July last and only a few days ago was told that she could come in on May 6th. She will be in hospital no more than a week, we hope. While she would be sorry to miss you, there is no reason why you could not come, even if she is not here, if you would be willing to risk Nette’s and my cooking.”

Another reason for Erling’s postponement of his trip was that his daughter Edith (who now preferred to be called Karin) was getting married sometime in May. The Raups decided to put off their visit until later, and it proved to be a wise decision because Elizabeth had to be rushed into hospital on May 5, when “her condition, which had long been quiescent, suddenly became acute. All is well now,” Erling wrote on June 2, “and we hope that her troubles, that all date
Karin Porsild and Harry Lumsden were happily married on May 23 before going to live in Tweed, Ontario. With Elizabeth improving at last, it seemed that life had a chance of returning to normal in the Porsild household after the long months of being kept on hold.26

Things would not, however, be normal for quite some time in one area of Erling’s life, although ostensibly his work in the Herbarium continued as before. A quick look at the April–June quarterly report for the herbarium shows that Mr. Porsild completed the first draft of a 139-page manuscript on the Flora of the Islands of the Western Arctic Archipelago and began writing a Manual on the Botany of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. He determined and checked numerous plant specimens, wrote reports and briefs, and attended several meetings. On May 19–20, he attended all-day meetings of the Inter-departmental Committee on Eskimo Affairs; on May 30, the meeting of the Advisory Board of Wildlife Protection, on June 13–14 all day meetings of the Annual Provincial-Federal Wildlife Conference; and, on June 16, a meeting on the Administration of Arctic Affairs. On June 19, he left for Boston and New York to spend two weeks working on critical plants and plant illustrations in the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University and the New York Botanical Gardens.27

All this and more was normal routine work for Erling and was duly reported in the proper channels, but nowhere in the official reports is there mentioned a word about a damning review that Erling wrote for The Beaver, the magazine of the Hudson’s Bay Company, that would raise a storm of letters and editorials across the country for the next several months, a storm out of all proportion to his usual sphere of northern and botanical activities.28
CHAPTER FORTY

STORM OVER THE ARCTIC

In the fall of 1949, a young man named Farley Mowat began a book about a group of northern people, based on two summers in Keewatin that had shaped his concern for their welfare. “I would like to keep myself out of it as much as possible,” he told Dudley Cloud, editor-in-chief of Atlantic Monthly Press. “I want to let the Eskimos tell most of their own stories. I think this can be done with authenticity since one of my labours was the compilation of an Ihalmiut vocabulary, the doing of which made me at least somewhat familiar with their language…. The book must have a heart and, equally vital, a purpose. The fate of the Ihalmiut is at the heart of the story, and the purpose is to draw attention to their plight and to that of all the native peoples of the north. And elsewhere, for that matter. So you can expect me to beat the drum about that quite a lot.”

The book came out in the early months of 1952, and in the calm before the resultant storm of controversy began, a letter came to Ottawa from George Douglas in Lakefield on April 1, saying that he thought Erling was the person to write a review for The Beaver of an “irritating” book by Farley Mowat called People of the Deer. This was followed by a telegram from Clifford Wilson, Editor, at Hudson’s Bay House in Winnipeg: “Agree with Douglas you are best man to review Mowat’s book for Beaver /stop/ Trust you will do this please please reply collect.” Without any idea what he would be letting himself in for, Erling agreed to write it. On April 8, Wilson wrote to say that he was glad that Erling would do the review and was sending him a copy of the book, in which he had made several annotations with the help of some of the Company men who knew the area in the Barrenlands of which Mowat had written. In case it would be of some additional help, he was also sending the remarks made by P. G. Downes for the New York Times on February 24 on “some
of Mowat’s more outlandish statements,” because it was the only unfavourable criticism he had seen, and because it was “the only one written by a person who knows the country.” Could Erling let him have his review, that might be a thousand words long if he so wished, in about a month’s time?

Although “in a month’s time” would be during the same period when his life at home was in complete turmoil, Erling buckled down to read the book that by now had received glowing reviews from many quarters, including no less a person than Hugh MacLennan at McGill University, who was quoted as saying that it was “the finest book of its kind ever to come out of Canada.” Stefansson, who had once taken a beating for his claims of finding the unknown “Blond Eskimos” of the Arctic coast, had given his blessing to this new book about an unknown and threatened Eskimo tribe named Ihalmiut that was starving to death in the Canadian Barrenlands. “A book of rare force, beauty, and vigor which most readers will find difficult to put aside and impossible to forget,” announced a reviewer in the Boston Sunday Herald. “A continuously interesting account of one of the least known regions of the North American continent and a collection of entertaining stories. Some of these are about Mr. Mowat’s own adventures. Some are his recreations of Ihalmiut legends, folk lore and oral history,” said the one in the New York Times that was not written by P. G. Downes.

Taking account of the adverse comments that came with People of the Deer from the Hudson’s Bay Company sources but bringing to it his own depth of arctic experience and his long training in scholarly exactitude, Erling later told the editor of Natural History that in reviewing the book he was shocked by its numerous misstatements and half-truths. “Perhaps I should take a more charitable view of authors and their statements,” he said,

… but in this case I do find it rather difficult, knowing the background of the book. Or perhaps it is merely that, as a scientist, I object when writers deliberately contort the truth or fabricate evidence to ‘prove’ their point.... On general principles I do not think writers should be allowed such license when writing to inform or instruct; for if they do, how is the uninformed public ever to know what to believe? … It is, of course, an undeniable fact that the Caribou Eskimo, as well as other primitive tribes of Canadian Eskimo are dying out. This, if you will, is the only truth contained in the book; but the sensational slant which Mowat gives their tragic story in order to sell his stuff has little or no relation to actual facts.
In view of all the trouble that would later ensue, it is a great pity that he did not phrase his review in *The Beaver* in much the same general vein. Instead, carefully avoiding any reference to his own extensive background in the north, he went through the book and tore it apart down to the smallest details. Mowat was writing about the inland Eskimos who were allegedly being exterminated by neglect in the Barrenlands around Nueltin Lake, a place a little to the south of where Erling and Bryenton had travelled in 1930 and where they had given some of their own supplies to needy people whom they met along the way. Mowat was recommending that the government should bring in reindeer to relieve the starving people, yet Erling knew the land was unsuitable because he had seen it for himself. Far from no one in government caring about these people, the whole Canadian Reindeer Project had been based on trying to help them. Yet Erling did not mention any of this, no doubt because he did not wish to draw the government into his arguments, and when he submitted his review on May 21 he asked Wilson to bear in mind that it was written as a private individual rather than as a spokesman for the Department of Resources and Development.5

Apart from what Mowat would later claim were minor discrepancies, what for Porsild was the most damning thing about Mowat's book were the population figures he was claiming for the “Ihalmiut” that had been all but wiped out due to government neglect. Who were these thousands of mythical “people of the deer” that everyone else seemed to have overlooked? Erling had read all the literature giving more realistic figures that Mowat discounted, he did not believe there was such a separate group of people, and he could not believe that the writer had learned the difficult Eskimo language in the short period he claimed, which made the stories of their history as told to the author without an interpreter seem even more unreliable.

As far as people with experience in the North could see, a major problem with *People of the Deer* had to do with Farley Mowat’s apparent claim that it was all true, when, in fact, to strengthen his narrative as he later freely admitted, he had skillfully altered details and woven fiction into the circumstances of his expedition, circumstances that could easily be proved to be other than those depicted. His first creative change was the description of how he had gone to the Nueltin Lake area entirely on his own in the summer of 1947 but Erling had been working on the plants collected by Francis Harper at Nueltin Lake that summer and knew that Mowat had not been alone. When Harper’s grant from the Arctic Institute of North America had been approved in April 1947, he had
written to tell Erling that he was hoping “for the participation of Farley Mowat, of Richmond Hill, Ontario. He seems to have exactly the right qualifications, and it is merely a question of financial support, on which I am trying to get help for him.”

A relayed report, dated 9 April 1952, to Clifford Wilson from Doug Clarke, Supervisor of Wildlife Management in Toronto, confirmed that Farley Mowat had joined Harper’s expedition in Toronto in the spring of 1947. “They flew from Churchill into the Schweder establishment and set up headquarters there,” Clarke said. “Mowat parted company with Harper some time during the summer and made a trip into the Barrens. I presume that he was with Charles Schweder and that he made some brief contacts with Eskimos. He got a flight out to the coast with someone and came back to Toronto. Harper stayed at the Schweder cabin until Christmas.”

Erling now contacted Francis Harper at Mount Holly for the correct information and received a reply that left no doubt as to Harper’s opinion that the “certain person” in question was so odious to him that he wished there was never an occasion to be reminded of him. “When I dismissed him for intolerable conduct in early July, 1947, I insisted that he should never mention my name in print, and I said I would do likewise by him. I hope nobody else will refer even to our temporary association.” No one could say that Farley Mowat had not stuck to his side of the bargain when he avoided mentioning Harper in his story, for his feelings about his superior were equally critical, but it certainly added fuel to the flames that his account was not to be trusted.

“I am beginning to think that my acceptance of the assignment was ill considered,” Erling wrote to Douglas on April 16, “for of the many bad books about Eskimo in the arctic which have been published in recent years, I am sure this is easily the worst. I have not yet completed the reading but the more I see of it the less I like it. However, the book has already been given too much publicity and serious consideration, and I suppose a review in Beaver may do some good.” On May 28, he said the review of People of the Deer was done and he had already seen the proofs. Making light of all the work it had involved, he said: “It was fun doing it, and I am wondering now what Mowat will think of it. Somehow I don’t think he will like it.”

The review by “A. E. Porsild” came out in the June issue of The Beaver and began with a summary of what was known of the people of the northern interior.
The Caribou Eskimo are a small tribe of Canadian Eskimo who live in the interior of Keewatin and, until a few years ago had few contacts with the outside world, depending almost entirely on caribou for food and clothing. Although they lived within a few days’ travel of the west coast of Hudson Bay, J. B. Tyrrell, in 1894, was probably the first white man to visit them, and not until after 1921–22, when members of the Danish Thule Expedition visited them, was much known of their life and primitive culture.

During the summers of 1947 and 1948, Farley Mowat made brief excursions into the land of the Caribou Eskimo, and in People of the Deer presents what is claimed to be a factual account of the past and present of one small band of Eskimos living on the upper Kazan River, near Ennadai Lake. By evidence that is far from convincing, and very often totally erroneous, Mowat attempts to show that this small band a generation ago numbered into the thousands, but is now rapidly approaching extinction, largely because of Governmental neglect and indifference. People of the Deer is a book of pungent charges and accusations, not only against those Government officials in Ottawa who are charged with the welfare of Canadian Eskimo and Indians, but also against those who have assumed the responsibility for their spiritual care and, last but not least, against the traders and trading companies whose exploitation, according to Mowat, most of all is responsible for the present plight of the Caribou Eskimo. Some of these charges are very grave, and they will, unfortunately, be read by many who lack first-hand knowledge about the Arctic.10

It was in the latter part of his review that Erling pointed out some of the more “serious errors and half-truths” that he had found in the book, and his “few samples” to illustrate them are best summarized in an unpublished internal memo accompanied by a letter from Clifford Wilson, July 14.

Mr. Porsild charges that Mowat claims falsely to have spent two years in the Arctic; that he conceals the fact that in 1947 he was a junior on an expedition led by Dr. Francis Harper; and that he was junior to Andrew Lawrie on a government expedition in 1948. He implies that Mowat lies when he describes thousands of caribou crossing Windy Bay, by quoting Harper as saying the largest herd seen by him
numbered 75; and that his estimate of thousands of deaths caused by tuberculosis boils down, on analysis, to 73. Porsild also charges that it is impossible to learn [to speak Eskimo fluently] in a month, that Mowat traded without a licence and as shabbily as the traders he attacks, and that his estimate of earlier population in the north is wildly exaggerated.11

Reviews of the “A. E. Porsild” review were soon hot off the press in places like the Montreal Star, which printed an article favouring Erling’s points on June 21. The very specificity of Erling’s attacks invited corrections, and Farley Mowat, enraged by the charges against his work and personal veracity, was not long in demanding that The Beaver should print his counter-attack. Wilson refused, on the grounds that he did not want the argument to go on forever, nor did he wish to continue to promote the book by this means. “I wonder if you have received, like we have, the six page mimeographed rebuttal by Farley Mowat to your review?” he asked Erling July 14:

It’s a weird sort of thing – on the surface almost as plausible as his book – though in one place he says that you accuse him of spending a full two years on the Barrens when he says that he never made that statement anywhere in the book. On page 89, however, he does say that after two years in the Barrens he still calls them by that name, and nothing could be much plainer than that…. One interesting point he brings out is that he wilfully mixed up the chronology … in the interests of ‘literary craftsmanship,’ though why, it is hard to make out. Possibly he took liberties with the chronology of other parts of the book going back into the 19th century.12

The question of whether The Beaver should or should not publish Mowat’s defence was further debated in the press. Eventually, a copy of the rebuttal was sent to the Montreal Star by the publisher and an extract was printed in the “Letters to the Editor” on July 15. In his rebuttal, Farley Mowat said that Mr. A. E. Porsild clearly intended to prove that he was “a congenital liar on the basis of a few minor errors.” In return, he pointed out that Porsild had deliberately misrepresented his claim that the book dealt with only one small band of Eskimos when he had stated clearly that it included most of the former inhabitants of over 100,000 square miles with an original aboriginal population of
2,000 individuals. Mr. Porsild had also talked of his vagueness as to routes and dates of his own travels. “I frankly admit to this vagueness,” he said, “and fail to see that I have sinned. My book was an attempt at a work of literary worth and to preserve its unity I transposed occasional events to suit the needs of good craftsmanship. At no time did I attempt to write a personal diary or a journal but, instead, I wrote a book about The People of the Deer.”

He flatly denied that he was an assistant to Dr. Harper “in his one-man expedition” to collect birds, small mammals, and plants in the Nueltin area. “In fact Harper and I were together for only a few weeks in all. I should add that in an article published in Natural History some time before my book appeared, Dr. Harper in writing of his Nueltin experiences signal failed to make any mention whatsoever of myself. This neglect draws no raised eye-brows from Mr. Porsild – but when I do the same thing in my book I am accused of deliberately altering and distorting facts.” Similarly, when he and Andrew Lawrie had planned their trip to the North in 1948, “it was made quite clear to us that unless we worked for the Government, we would be unable to go north at all. Perforce we agreed. I was enrolled as a student-biologist and was paid accordingly. Neither Mr. Lawrie nor I was subordinate to the other, in any sense except a purely administrative one in Ottawa. I find it hard to see why I should be blamed for neglecting to recount all this in my book.”

He also denied having claimed to have spent a full two years in the north; in fact, he said, he made it abundantly clear in his book that he entered the Barrens in the spring and left in the fall of 1947 and did the same in 1948. Regarding Mr. Porsild’s implication that he had not seen anything like the numbers of deer he described, he quoted Banfield and Lawrie who reliably reported seeing thousands of animals in one day in the same general area and at the same time of year. Harper might have been correct in saying he had only seen seventy-five at once but “he did not witness the occasion described in my book when the deer trekked north in the spring of 1947.” He acknowledged that he was only at fault in saying that the deer he saw at that time “were largely without antlers.”

Mowat said that Mr. Porsild claimed that he falsified figures but countercharged that he was equally capable of juggling them himself when it came to numbers of deaths from tuberculosis. Mowat quoted his source from the Canadian Tuberculosis Association to back up his statements. As for the statement that it was impossible for him to have learned Eskimo in such a short time,
Mowat agreed that many white men in the Arctic never learned it because they refused to speak the language of what they considered to be an inferior race.

Nevertheless a glance at many arctic works by men of authority will show that it is possible to acquire a good knowledge of Eskimo in a very short time. For example, let me refer Mr. Porsild to the work of Dr. Douglas Leechman, Dominion Archaeologist; and to the book, *Hudson[’s] Bay Trader*, by Lord Tweedsmuir. Old ‘arctic hands’ to the contrary, the ability to understand, and to be understood by Eskimos can be acquired – with hard work – in three or four months. Mr. Lawrie learned the language during the same period that I was studying it, and we were both able to carry on long and fairly involved conversations with our Eskimo friends, without much trouble.15

Erling wrote to Clifford Wilson on July 22 saying: “I do not think that Mowat’s effort requires any further statements beyond what you have already made. I have checked it point by point, and I can find no case where his comments have, in any way, disproved or invalidated what I said. I have checked with the records of the Arctic Institute which show that Francis Harper, not Mowat, was given a grant in support of the Nueltin Lake expedition.”16

If Mowat had dealt with all the Keewatin Eskimo across a hundred thousand miles, as he said in his rebuttal, Erling questioned, how did he explain his statement in the book that members of the Fifth Thule Expedition did not meet the “Ihalmiut” or even learn about them? Since when was it “good craftsmanship” deliberately to falsify facts and events, or to transpose events, or claim to have travelled by canoe on a trip that was actually made by plane? As to his examples of other men who had learned to speak Eskimo in a short time, Erling said: “Many and better books have been written about the Eskimo without their authors having found it necessary to claim that they had learned to speak Eskimo – let alone in one month. Neither Douglas Leechman nor Tweedsmuir or Michae [Miche] claim to speak Eskimo. They have all managed to get their information from real Eskimo – perhaps less glamorously, but probably more accurately – by the use of interpreters.”17

There was no evidence whatsoever to support Mowat’s claim that there were ever 2,000 Eskimo in Central Keewatin. Hearne found no trace of Eskimo there in 1770, Birket-Smith on the Fifth Thule Expedition stated that the total Eskimo population of Keewatin district was 432 of which only about 200 lived
in the interior in 1921, and according to the 1951 census, the Eskimo population of Keewatin District was 1,286.18

Erling sent a copy of Mowat’s reply to George Douglas on July 29, commenting that he thought it was a very poor effort. “I don’t know how long this controversy shall be going on,” he said. “The time I have spent on this book is all out of proportion to its value, and what worries me most is that it is probably all grist to his mill. I do, however, derive a certain amount of amusement from it and, I suppose, it has killed its chances of being included in the list of required reading for Ontario High Schools. This alone would be worth some effort.” He added that he was staying home that summer in order to complete a couple of books on arctic flora, and after almost six weeks of hot and sticky weather he was taking the family for a week’s camping and canoeing somewhere on the Georgian Bay north of Perry Sound. By August, he could tell Douglas that it had been a very hectic summer in Ottawa. “I decided not to do any field work in order to catch up with two latish reports on the Arctic Flora that I just had to get off my hands. Actually it has not worked out very well for with most of the Museum staff away and with Dr. Alcock away on frequent trips, I find that I have had very little time free to carry on my own work.”19

While Erling still hoped that it would all die a natural death, the Porsild–Mowat controversy continued to simmer into the fall. “A literary battle without modern parallel in Canada,” Scott Young of the Canadian Authors Association described it when he threw in his unqualified support on the side of the author in an article entitled “Storm out of the Arctic” in the October 18 issue of Saturday Night. “The fight is over the book called People of the Deer, by Farley Mowat, a young ex-infantry officer who spent most of 1947 and 1948 in Eskimo country,” he said.

The antagonists are the author and a magazine called The Beaver, which is published by the Hudson’s Bay Company. In its June issue, The Beaver, among whose functions is that of professional debunker of all views of the North which do not conform to the Hudson’s Bay Company’s long and not entirely distinguished experience in that area, blasted Mowat’s book in a review … written by A. E. Porsild, an Arctic expert employed by the Government, which Mowat criticizes more strongly even than northern traders in his book. Therefore, you might say that the two agencies criticized most bitterly in the book teamed up to answer it.
“Some people counselled Mowat to sue,” Young said:

Mowat wisely refrained, just as the Hudson’s Bay Company had wisely refrained from suing Mowat for criticisms of northern trading policy in the book…. One factor which gives this controversy an importance (even above the moral one that an author called a liar has been refused the right to defend himself) is that the book has been such a success here and abroad. In the United States, where it was published by Little, Brown & Co. after parts of it had been serialized in The Atlantic Monthly, the book was chosen for distribution by the Literary Guild. In England, it was a Book Society choice for September. It is being translated into French and Swedish…. It has been praised by Danish Government officials who in Greenland have met with vigor, intelligence and much success, many of the problems of northern natives which have been bungled by the Canadian Government through a combination of half-measures and no measures at all. And a French anthropologist who is also an Eskimo linguist has called the book “certainly one of the best books ever written about the Eskimo,” and he also verified in general material Mowat gained (in the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories) by conversations with Eskimos of the dwindling tribe of caribou-eaters called the ‘Ihalmiut’ with which the book is mainly concerned. This French anthropologist thus supported Mowat on a point which was the object of some of The Beaver’s strongest ridicule – the very possibility that Mowat could learn the Eskimo tongue well enough to understand it. If one is to believe The Beaver, most career Arctic specialists find no time to learn the language.

People of the Deer is, to me and to many other readers, a magnificent book, an unforgettable portrayal of the present and past of a victimized people. Its enthusiastic public acceptance here and abroad attests its basic appeal, which is that of any vital, well told story. The attempts by these old Arctic hands of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Government to discredit it seem to reflect the narrowness of their approach to the Eskimo problem. Any real humanist among them must admit that the major contentions of the book are true – that before we came the Eskimos were happy aborigines, able to combat their natural enemies, but that the weapons and diseases of white men
have corrupted them to the extent that they no longer can cope with the forces that are destroying them.\textsuperscript{20}

Prior to the publication of Scott Young’s article in October, the Editor of Saturday Night, R. A. Farquharson, sent the manuscript to The Beaver for comment. Clifford Wilson promptly passed it on to Erling, who wrote to Farquharson on September 15, hoping to dissuade him from publishing it. “Because of certain imputations made by Mr. Young,” he said,

I should like to point out that my review of People of the Deer was written solely from the point of view of a scientist whose work has brought him in close contact with the Arctic and with Arctic problems, but not with the actual responsibility for the administration of the North. To show why I consider myself in a position to write at least with some authority on the Arctic, I might mention further that I spent my boyhood in Greenland among Eskimo and have spent a considerable part of my adult life in arctic work. I know the North American Arctic from Alaska to Greenland from personal observation, and I have travelled extensively in arctic Europe and Asia as well. I have travelled and lived among nearly all Eskimo tribes, including those that Mr. Mowat is concerned with. I speak the language of the Eskimo, I know a good deal about their customs and problems, and I am deeply concerned with their future welfare, for I have found among them some of the finest people I have ever known.

Unfortunately the problem of what to do with and for the Eskimo is a very difficult one for which there is no entirely satisfactory solution because conditions vary so greatly from tribe to tribe over the many thousand miles of arctic coastline along which our few thousand Eskimo live. It is pointless to make direct comparison between our Eskimo and those of Greenland where, for two hundred years, the native population has been kept completely isolated by a paternalistic Danish Government mindful of the needs for a deliberately slow but gradual education of the Eskimo. I might point out here that the system which has worked so well in Greenland is, in many respects, similar to that adopted by the Hudson’s Bay Company in the early days when that Company held what amounted to a trade monopoly in the Canadian Arctic.
It is well known that for a number of years there has been a decline and a worsening of conditions among the more primitive Eskimo tribes in Canada. Owing to improved means of transportation, even the most remote tribes have at last come into contact with civilization; and the impact upon them has almost invariably been disastrous because they were unprepared for it, and unable quickly to adapt themselves to the white man’s food, his tools and his diseases. But the question whether the Government could or should have prevented this contact, is at best academic; and it may safely be assumed that if it had, there would have been no lack of critics who would have found such a policy high-handed and unrealistic.

In my review of *People of the Deer* I am defending neither the policy of the Canadian Government in dealing with our native peoples, nor the past or present policy of our northern trading companies. That of the Hudson’s Bay Company, at least, can well speak for itself. My only concern was to show that Mowat’s book, notwithstanding the favourable views expressed by numerous reviewers, is misleading and utterly worthless as a crusade against alleged maladministration, because the premises upon which its conclusions are built are wrong or even fictitious. To prove this, it was necessary to cite some of the more glaring examples of errors and falsehoods. Some of these errors Mr. Young pronounces unimportant and trivial. They might be in a work of fiction, but not in a book that claims to be factual; for, if the author of such a book, whether through ignorance or design, is consistently wrong about his ‘facts,’ how can his conclusions be other than worthless?

In his treatment of figures and facts Mowat is completely unscrupulous. In posing as an authority on Eskimo and arctic problems, he leads his readers to believe that he has lived in the Arctic for considerable time, or, to be exact, two years. Thus, on p. 89, when speaking about the Barrenlands, he says: “… after two years in the land … ,” and in a letter printed in the *Globe and Mail* on March 31, 1952, he categorically states: “I myself spent two years in the so-called barrenlands.” An examination of official reports and Government files actually shows that Mowat was in the Barrenlands no more than 47 days altogether and that, during 1947 and 1948, he spent no more than six months all told in the Northwest Territories. Such ‘inaccuracies’
may seem trivial to Mr. Young but they make me wonder about Mr. Mowat’s veracity, especially when later, in his reply to my review, he flatly denies having ever made such a statement.

Because Mowat lacks first-hand information about Eskimo, he manufactures it. Hence the ‘Ihalmiut’ tribe which Mowat has created solely as a vehicle for his attack on Government administration and on the ‘wicked’ traders. There never was such a tribe, nor is there even a thread of evidence in support of his claim that there ever was a tribe of Eskimo, several thousand strong, living on the upper Kazan River. In 1770 Samuel Hearne saw no Eskimo there, nor any indication that they had ever been in what was then Indian country. When the discrepancies between Mowat’s story and the 730-page scientific report of the Danish Fifth Thule Expedition becomes too evident, Mowat (p. 256) merely dismisses Rasmussen and Birket-Smith’s contacts with the Caribou Eskimo as having been brief and clouded.

In his reply to my review Mowat claims that I deliberately misrepresented him by stating that his book “deals only with one small band of Eskimo … for I state clearly that the Ihalmiut – of whom I write – include most of the former inhabitants of central and southern Keewatin Territory – an area of over 100,000 square miles.…” This, of course, is absurd, for an area of 100,000 square miles would comprise all that part of Keewatin lying between the 60th parallel and Wager Inlet or, in other words, all the inhabited parts. Furthermore, on p. 256, Mowat specifically states that “Rasmussen never met the Ihalmiut, and never even suspected their existence.” Rasmussen for obvious reasons did not mention the ‘Ihalmiut’ because there never was such a tribe, but he and Birket-Smith did write a large volume about all the Eskimo of Keewatin District. If Mowat had taken time to read this volume more carefully, he might have avoided a number of mistakes, for Rasmussen, being part Eskimo himself and a great scholar, was undoubtedly the greatest authority on Eskimo.

Most telling is Mowat’s claim that he obtained his evidence and background information, including such matters as folklore, history and religion, direct from Eskimo who knew no English at all, and without the aid of an interpreter. To get around this difficulty he claims to have learned to speak the Eskimo language, and to have accomplished this astounding fact in just one month. Says Mowat
“In a month’s time I was able to make myself understood and I could understand most of what was said to me.” And on p. 123, “I found I was able to speak about quite abstract subjects, and incidentally give the lie to those who say that these ‘natives’ are unable to think, or express themselves, in abstract terms.” To have learned French or German in a month’s time would have been a considerable accomplishment; since philologists agree that the Eskimoic is one of the most difficult and complicated languages known, this claim shows how utterly worthless his evidence is.

If Mowat had been content to write a book about his travels and personal impressions, or if he had chosen the novel as his medium, no great harm would have have resulted; but in a book which claims to be factual there is, in my opinion, no place for ‘poetic licence.’ To judge from the present article by Scott Young, and from the numerous favourable reviews of People of the Deer, Mowat’s style must, somehow, be convincing to writers who know little or nothing about the Arctic and who do not care to check statements. But it seems to me that such reviewers should be content to discuss only the literary merits or demerits of the book.

In conclusion may I suggest that rather than printing Mr. Young’s article you obtain an independent opinion on People of the Deer from Dr. R. C. Wallace, Director of the Arctic Institute of North America, or from Col. Graham Rowley, Arctic Advisor to the National Defence Board.

Erling sent a copy of his letter to Farquharson to Clifford Wilson, who replied immediately on September 17:

I thoroughly enjoyed your letter to Farquharson of Saturday Night, and if anything will dissuade him from publishing Scott Young’s article, I am sure this will; in fact, the more I read of your writings the more I wish you would do something for The Beaver along any lines you choose. I am afraid you let yourself in for something when you reviewed that book of Mowat’s, and I can only hope that you got some enjoyment out of it. I hope that Farquharson does obtain an independent opinion from Dr. Wallace, or Graham Rowley. I had a letter this morning from Dudley Copland, in which he pointed out that Gerald
Waring is doing an article for the *Montreal Star* on the Eskimo from the angle of the ‘impact of civilization’ on those recently primitive people. Dudley says he was able to correct some of his impressions, so perhaps it won’t be so bad after all. Copland wanted to know if we had any repercussions on your review of *People of the Deer*. He doesn’t know the half of it.

In the September issue of *The Beaver*, it was briefly noted that Mr. Mowat’s defence and Mr. Porsild’s reply had been received, but both letters had been too long for space limitations in a quarterly magazine and the review still stood as originally published.22

Erling certainly hoped that this would be the end of it, so it came as a complete shock when he received the *Saturday Night* response on October 3. “Dear Mr. Porsild,” the letter from Farquharson read. “I am enclosing a proof of your letter answering Scott Young. We are running the Young piece in the October 18 issue with a footnote saying that a letter by you will appear in the issue of October 25th. The formes, as far as your letter is concerned, close a week from today and the last part of the letter has already gone on the color formes – one of the difficulties of getting out a magazine. I would appreciate your sending as quickly as possible a picture of yourself. I very much appreciate your writing the letter.”23

Erling was immediately on the phone to Farquharson to try and stop the publication of his letter but he was too late. On October 7, he wrote:

As I told you over the ‘phone yesterday, my letter of September 15th was not meant for publication in *Saturday Night*, but written in the hope that it might dissuade you from printing what I consider just another ‘plug’ for a thoroughly worthless book. Far too much has already been written about *People of the Deer*. However, since you are printing Young’s article, I suppose some sort of reply is needed, but I would have preferred to write a straight answer. Since this is not now possible, you may print my letter, provided certain changes are made in the text. I am particularly unhappy about the last paragraph which has no place in the reply to Mr. Young. Since, unfortunately, that part has already been set up in print, the best solution seems the restoration of the article to the original letter form. I have made this and a few
THE REINDEER BOTANIST – Wendy Dathan

other necessary changes in the galleys which I am returning to you herewith, together with a photograph which you requested. 24

Wilson must have heard from Farquharson about Erling’s reply to Young going into print, as he phoned him on October 15. When they talked, they could see that the book affair was escalating beyond anything they could have imagined, and it seemed prudent for Erling to inform the Deputy Minister of the Department of Resources and Development, now no longer Hugh Keenleyside but Major General H. A. Young, before Erling’s “letter” came out in Saturday Night. Erling wrote to the Deputy Minister on October 16, telling him that he thought it quite obvious that it was written, not for publication, but in order to dissuade Mr. Farquharson from printing an article in defence of what he considered a thoroughly worthless book. He had been surprised and dismayed when he received the proofs of what was then to appear as an article over his signature. He had tried to stop its publication, but since the last part had already been set up, he had agreed to have it published as a Letter to the Editor when certain changes had been made to the first part. Enclosing a copy of the original, which differed little from the changes he had made, he said: “I trust that there is nothing in my letter to which you will object; in fact I think I made it quite clear that my review in The Beaver was written entirely from the point of view of a private individual.” 25

The Saturday Night Letter to the Editor from “A. E. Porsild, Arctic expert,” was printed on October 25 under the heading of “Arctic Storm in Reverse.” It contained few changes, although Erling had been careful to re-phrase the comment that “Because Mowat lacks first-hand information about Eskimo, he manufactures it.” He also added new volleys to the Arctic fight as he made his correction.

My argument that Mowat could not possibly have attained even an elementary knowledge of the Eskimo language, does not impress Scott Young as much as Mowat’s claim that an unnamed French anthropologist and linguist verbally pronounced his book ‘one of the best ever written on Eskimo.’ One wonders if this is what Mr. Young means by ‘a balanced and unbiased view’?

Or take the now famous case of the dried deer tongues. Mowat, on p. 78 of his book, reported that “one outpost of a world-famous trading concern actually encouraged the sale of tremendous quantities
of ammunition to the Northern Indians by offering to buy all the
deer tongues that were brought in! Many thousands of dried deer
tongues passed through that post, while many thousands of carcasses,
stripped only of their tongues, remained to rot in the spring thaws.”
Fortunately, as pointed out in the March, 1952, issue of Beaver, ‘deer
tongue,’ in northern trade parlance, means the leaf of a certain plant,
used in the flavoring of tobacco! Thus far, Mowat has not admitted
that he slipped up on the deer tongues but, on the other hand, has not
questioned the correction printed in The Beaver. Nor has he explained
that mysterious tribe – the Ihalmiut – that, as far as I can see, was
created solely as a vehicle for his attack on Government administration
and on the wicked traders. There never was such a tribe. Nor is there
even a shred of evidence in support of his claim that there ever was a
tribe of Eskimo, several thousand strong, living on the upper Kazan
River. In fact, the very idea that there might ever have been enough
game to support such numbers of people, is utterly ridiculous.26

The response by Scott Young, as the author of “Storm out of the Arctic” and
in his capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Authors Association, was
printed in the Letters to the Editor in Saturday Night on November 1, saying
that Mr. Porsild’s reply to his article repeated many of the statements made in
the original review and so needed no further comment.

However, one inference I would like to correct. Mr. Porsild says that
people who know little or nothing about the Arctic “should be content
to discuss only the literary merits or demerits of this book.” I agree,
to this extent – that nobody but an Arctic expert should step between
Mr. Mowat and Mr. Porsild as they slug it out on points of fact. Mr.
Porsild’s record certainly qualifies him to criticize work on the Arc-
tic. However, in Mowat’s unpublished reply to Porsild’s review he is
also able to show errors of fact in Porsild’s review. These errors of Por-
sild’s are as trivial as some of Mowat’s errors, caused in both cases by
misunderstanding or carelessness, and I’m not qualified as a referee
in that kind of infighting. My intervention is based entirely on what
I feel to be the unfairness of The Beaver’s attitude in not publishing
Mowat’s reply to their many serious charges against him. Mowat is
quite capable of fighting for himself, if allowed to do so. If The Beaver had published Mowat’s reply, I would still be a bystander.\textsuperscript{27}

Of all that was written about the whole business of who said what, who was right or wrong, and what really mattered about Mowat’s People of the Deer, the best comments were written by Arctic photographer Richard Harrington. They appeared in Saturday Night under the heading of “Arctic snowball fight” on the same day as Young’s last letter. Harrington wrote:

Mr. Scott Young made a gallant but ineffective attempt to restore Farley Mowat’s reputation as a northern observer in this snowballing (October 18) issue. Young, too, has been spellbound by what I would term ‘imaginative non-fiction.’ But like the majority of readers, he has no firsthand knowledge of the Arctic and Subarctic. Both complain loudly that all adverse criticism comes from ‘traders’ and ‘Government officials,’ that the book is being picked on by biased reviewers. Well, this one is free of that, as I am “the free-lance photographer and newspaper reporter who wandered into the northern Barrens” (p. 324) and brought out the news of famine.

Mowat really has two books here. The colourful prose of his travel observations, including places he has not seen, and enriched by a fertile imagination. Plus a treatise of Government, missionary and trader mismanagement, mixed with endless inaccuracies. It is true in part. Our aggressive and greedy white man’s civilization should be blamed. Every one of us is guilty of destroying the stark realistic culture of the Eskimo – including Mowat, who did not feel ashamed to hand out two plugs of tobacco for a suit of caribou skin clothing which usually brings $40–60 to a native at a trading centre. With Mowat’s miraculous linguistic ability, he could easily have given the Eskimo a note to the nearest trading post, less than 100 miles away, and established a credit there. In fact, I feel like complaining, “Look, here is a flagrant incident of the white man taking advantage of the Eskimo!”

Contrary to Mr. Young’s statement, numerous cautious and adverse reviews have been levelled at this book, by reviewers who should be free of the taint of bias. To my mind, the best one came from Ottawa’s anthropologist, Dr. Douglas Leechman. Says he, a bit sadly, “It’s a dangerous book, because it is well-written, and it is also
an inaccurate and prejudiced book.” The Beaver magazine has made it a point to strive for accuracy and authenticity in its pages. It is the accepted authority on the Canadian North in its fields. Behind it are men with lifetime knowledge and study of Arctic affairs. As Young says, Mowat’s book is not the only one to be panned in its pages. What if every wounded author demanded space for retaliation?

Personally, I would happily travel by dog-team along Mowat’s miles, that shrink from his 300 to 100 – but I would be disappointed to arrive at his Deer Lake post, and find it named Duck Lake. Since the book is meant to be factual, I have read an article by Mowat in Argosy, covering the same area and period, but including new characters. Which is correct? There is much that is good and strong in this book. But by its wordy violence, by its ranting, by its errors, the strong and authentic arguments are thrown away, wasted.

Of his comparisons with Greenland Eskimos, I would suspect that he has been reading Government reports. I know only opposite views from other Danes with Eskimo ancestry. But Eskimos in Alaska that I have seen were a sorry-looking, Government-supported lot. ‘What ought to be done about the natives’ I have found to be a favorite topic of conversation in the tropics as well as in the Arctic, amongst the white people. In Canada, Ottawa officials spend their days worrying about it; in the north, the long Arctic nights are spent worrying the subject. Only a few are puzzled as to what ought to be done with the white man. Before Mowat’s book gets a banned-in-Boston sort of popularity, we should remember that a dash of fact in fiction may be good; but the opposite gives every expert and scientist the right to let fly with demolishing snowballs. 28

This last snowball should have been the end of the whole regrettable fight as far as Erling Porsild was concerned, except that he reckoned without the irrepressible one-up-manship of one Farley Mowat. As found in the office files in the National Herbarium, in December 1952, he received a personal Christmas card. It was a child’s card, showing a cute small animal saying “I’ve got something for You!” while holding a big wrapped parcel. Inside was another box that said “You’re getting HOT!” and inside that another one “You’re BURNING UP!” and finally “You FOUND it! Warmest Christmas wishes!” and it was signed “Cheers chum – Farley Mowat.”
“A. E. Porsild, Arctic Expert,” with all the weight of his position and influence in Arctic circles behind him, should probably have simply thrown the cheeky card into his wastebasket, but Erling Porsild, Botanist, with his dry sense of humour, could not resist retaliating with his own Christmas greeting. It was a drawing by L. Crosby showing the North Pole on which there was a sign dividing the top of the world between F.M. and A.E.P. On one side of the Pole, it showed Farley Mowat in hooded Inuit attire outside an igloo marked “FM Co.” In one hand he was holding out a dove of peace with a leaf in its mouth, but the other hand was behind his back where he had a stack of snowballs. On the other side of the Pole, Erling Porsild was sitting at his desk with his typewriter and microscope. He was smiling in greeting, but one hand was behind his desk where he too had a stack of snowballs.

The last word in this private battle behind the public war must definitely be left with Farley Mowat, who responded with a New Year’s greeting that he had composed, entitled “Reflections over an Empty Glass.”

My eyes are dim, I cannot see,
Contrition overwhelmeth me.
The hot tears scald my swollen eyes,
My heart is anguished with surprise
That I had ever wished to smite
So stout, so humorous a wight.
Oh pity me —
A. E.

Deluded by your vivid prose,
I wished to punch you on the nose!
Incensed by your too lurid words,
I wished to feed you to the birds!
Imagination helped me build
A most unpleasant E. Porsild.
I thought he was a carle, a loon,
A gaberlunzie, a buffoon,
A caitiff, Vandal, and gossoon.
A cavaliere servante, yet.
A courtier, a teacher’s pet.
These thoughts, poor Mowat so beset
    O’mi(z)ho hiakpagpa
(His anger, to descend, he let.)

So I believed Porsild, A. E.,
Was the true soul of pedantry.
A solemn owl of ponderous mien,
A Don who wrote in bitter vein,
And yet whose sallies – far from mattering –
    Ugpis(h)o’p ookalrosia
Were (Owl, the big’s, loud gnattering.)

So pity me, who must, alack,
Now take it back.
Who finds the man he would have shot,
Is not.
Who can no longer hold his wrath,
Against one who knows how to laugh.

For now I cannot be consoled.
My dreams are shattered, I am old.
My sun has set, my sky grows cold.
(And the last copy of my book is sold.)
Dispirited, denied the battle,
I turn me now toward the bottle.
Oh Gods, Oh Fates! How can this be?
This bottle that stands in front of me,
The label that my poor eyes see –
    Says, Best Procurable – H.B.C.!

It was signed by Mowat, who scribbled in the margin: “I shall be in Ottawa –
with bodyguard – Jan. 10 or there abouts and I’d be delighted to autograph your
copy of P.O.D. over a dram in the local wineshop.”

Whether or not the two antagonists ever met over a friendly dram, the
poetic signal of truce should have been the last of the affair, but there were
postscripts to come. In July 1953, Erling received a letter from Andrew Lawrie
at the University of Toronto, who had been trying to bring together his notes on
the birds of southern Keewatin ready for publication.
With the appearance of Dr. Harper’s recent paper it seems to me that it is now possible to write something a little more definitive than an annotated list and with this in mind I have been for some time engaged in carefully summarizing the literature. In so doing I have twice seen references (in Clarke and Manning) to certain unpublished notes of yours from Yathkyed Lake and the Lower Kazan River. This letter is to enquire whether you would permit me to use these same notes. I should, in all fairness, add that I am also using Mowat’s notes and collection from Nueltin and Brochet and his name will appear with mine as a co-author.

Erling agreed to lend his Keewatin bird notes with the understanding that the purpose of his trip was a botanical reconnaissance, and collection of plants and botanical and geographical information had been his first concern. “You may use any of the data given in the list provided it is understood that I do not claim to have assembled a complete list of the birds of the area traversed,” he said. His list was returned by Mowat “in Lawrie’s absence,” thanking him for letting them see them. “We shall not, however, be making use of them.”

Later in 1953, Farley Mowat received an Anisfield-Wolf Award of $2,000 for *People of the Deer*, an annual recognition given, it was announced, for sound and significant books published in the United States or around on the subject of racial relations in the contemporary world, which, by their presentation of these problems may help in their solution. Committee member Ralph Linton of Yale said that Mowat’s book was “a full-scale, well rounded picture of an inspiring people, as well as a plea for the understanding help without which these people will vanish from the earth forever.” Erling promptly picked up his pen to write to Professor Linton on November 24. “I am sure Farley Mowat is pleased with the award,” he said, “and perhaps a little amused too – for he has a keen sense of humour – that his ‘plea for the understanding help without which these people will vanish from the earth forever’ has been heard. What worries me is that the Ihalmiut people never did exist, except in Mowat’s imagination, see ‘Beaver,’ June, 1952, p. 47.”

The problem of Mowat’s alleged starving Ihalmiut people came up in the House of Commons on January 14, 1954, reminiscent of the long-ago concern about the “starving Eskimo” in the early days of the Canadian Reindeer Project. There was much argument about the truth or falsehood of Mowat’s
allegations of government neglect of these people in the book. It was suggested and then withdrawn that both Porsild’s review and Mowat’s defence should be mimeographed for the benefit of the members. The most passionate advocate for the book admitted to ignorance about the subject while the greatest admirer of Porsild, who had read the book but not the review, made the extraordinary claim that “he [Porsild] was the man who brought the Eskimo from Alaska to the Northwest Territories.” An argument regarding possible censorship of the book, based on rumours from the Hudson’s Bay Company, was an exercise in political obstruction tactics and got nowhere. It was stated that if the allegations in the book were true, it was a terrible indictment on the part of the government that was responsible, and the question remained as to what had been done to ascertain the truth and send relief to these people. The Hon. Jean Lesage, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, was convinced that Porsild was right and the book was false because it was based on partial information and with some outrage on the part of the supporting member the House agreed with the Minister’s verdict and moved on to other matters.32

Farley Mowat continued to fight. In an article in Saturday Night under the heading “The Case of the Disappearing Eskimos” on October 30, 1954, he said that he had been “haunted for some time by the Eskimos Who Never Were.” His book had been “an attempt to draw attention to a great and continuing evil being perpetuated upon the native peoples of the north.” In writing it, he was critical of what he believed to be “the callous indifference and sublime stupidity of those men appointed as administrators over the Eskimos and southern Indians,” and he was also critical of trading concerns. A few weeks earlier, and several months after the Hon. Jean Lesage had slanderously labelled him as a liar in public debate in the House of Commons, “the Department of Northern Affairs announced that it was sending several plane loads of emergency food to ‘a band of about 40 Eskimos living at the north end of Ennadai Lake, 230 miles from Hudson Bay, and about 50 miles north of the Manitoba border.’ The location of the Eskimos who never were could not have been more closely pinpointed had it been taken from my book, People of the Deer.”

Porsild’s earlier review of his book “read more like a deliberate attempt at character assassination than anything else,” he said. “At the time Dr. Porsild wrote his review, he could not have been unaware that most of his charges were false; the proof lay in the files of the Government Department to which he belonged.” An attempt to stop the book from being put on the supplementary reading list for Ontario schools due to that review had not succeeded. As
to Dr. Porsild’s brief communication to the Anisfield-Wolf Award committee in his official capacity as an employee of the Government, “It stated clearly that the Award Committee had been duped – that the Eskimos about whom I wrote never existed. Certainly someone is lying.” As far as he was concerned, there was conclusive proof in Government files under the signature of Tyrell that in 1897 the “mythical Eskimos” of whom he wrote numbered more than 600 individuals, and official Government censuses referred to populations of up to 200 of these “non-existent Eskimos” as late as 1931. He had a formidable list of “real authorities” including Linton, Stefansson, and Lord Tweedsmuir, who had all publicly supported his book and attested to its accuracy, and no anthropologist or other scientist had publicly supported Dr. Porsild’s opinion of his book. “He is the sole ‘expert’ accuser,” he said.

Behind the scenes, Erling was certainly not the “sole expert accuser.” One of Mowat’s listed authorities was Edmund Carpenter from the University of Toronto, who wrote to Erling on November 2: “I have not seen Mowat’s latest Saturday Night attack, but I understand my name appears in it. I do not know in what context he could have used it, since my only comment on his book was in a letter to his publisher – who sent me a free copy and asked for an opinion – which he got: ‘Mowat suffers from an inability to tell the truth.’”

It began to seem as though the tedious and nasty exchanges of charges, counter-charges, and insults would go on forever, with both sides equally convinced that they were right and the other more or less stretching the truth for their own purposes, but a blessed silence fell on the subject in the National Herbarium until November 29, 1957, when an extraordinary letter arrived for Erling, extraordinary because of its politeness of tone and language, and its unbelievable request after all that had gone before.

“Dear Dr. Porsild,” wrote Farley Mowat,

As you may know, I am preparing a two part work on the Interior Barrens of Keewatin and Mackenzie, with the co-operation of the Dept. of Northern Affairs and National Resources. One of the aspects of the work upon which I hope to write at length, concerns the movements and centres of population of the Barrenland Eskimos. I am therefore most anxious to collect and examine all information which is relevant to this subject. In your botanical expedition up the Kazan River to Yathkyed Lake, you no doubt encountered Eskimo families. So far as I know you have not published your observations, made on this journey,
and I am therefore at a loss to know where they may be seen. I assume that copies of your MSS notes are on file, but I thought that you might be able to elaborate upon them as far as the Eskimos were concerned. If you feel able to co-operate with me in this matter, I should be delighted.

True to form, there was a postscript that Mowat could not resist. “P.S. You snatched that copy of Hanbury’s book right out from under my nose at Dora Hood’s. But I forgive you.”

The reason for this amazing request would become apparent two years later when a new book by Farley Mowat appeared on the scene. In his foreword for his continuing story of his Ihalmiut tribe in *The Desperate People*, Mowat was careful to explain his extensive background research for this book and his indebtedness to all sorts of sometimes unexpected people, including the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, the Territorial Court of the Northwest Territories, and

… a number of scientists and scientific organizations and a great number of individuals with experience in the Arctic who provided me with invaluable material, including personal journals and diaries. In some cases the transmission of this material involved a considerable degree of potential risk – a fact which I am not free to dwell upon but which I feel bound to acknowledge publicly. Finally I wish to acknowledge my debt to the several members of the Department of Northern Affairs of the federal government who gave me the most unstinted co-operation even when it was clear that the results would not redound to the credit of the Department.

All the major events in this book, and most of the minor ones, have been documented from official sources. Other sources which were used included published works, signed statements and private correspondence, together with many hours of tape-recorded conversations with survivors of the Ihalmiut, other Eskimos, and white men who were involved in the recorded events. To obviate the possibility of error, all Eskimo conversations were independently translated by at least two Eskimo linguists.

At the time *People of the Deer* was written it was impossible to obtain documentary corroboration of much of the material. Consequently I
was obliged to use pseudonyms for some of the Eskimos and many of the whites as well as to deliberately misidentify some individuals. I was also obliged to refrain from identification of certain events in terms of time and place. In the present book these problems no longer exist and all names given are the correct ones, while all the events are presented in their actual spatial and temporal contexts. Where apparent discrepancies occur between this book and my earlier one, the version given here is the factually correct one.36

This time there would be no review, critical or otherwise, by A. E. Porsild. Back in the quiet Herbarium of December 3, 1957, Miss Harkness sent a note to Farley Mowat to say that Mr. Porsild was in Europe, and the letter of November 29 had been forwarded on to him by airmail. An inter-departmental memo on January 6, complete with marginal notes by Erling, suggested that the report dealing with reindeer grazing and the suitability of the parts of Keewatin and Coats Island, visited by him in 1930, had been sent to Mr. O. S. Finnie, then Director of the N.W.T. branch of the old Interior Department, where it should still be on file.37
CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

STUDY YEAR IN EUROPE

“I am beginning to think again about getting to Ottawa to see a lot of stuff in your herbarium,” Hugh Raup wrote 19 January 1953. “I had about given it up for this winter and spring, because we thought we would be off to Honduras – but plans for this have exploded, and we are left with some leeway. Could you, would it be convenient, to have us for a week or so sometime in February?”

Erling responded that it was very good news, and he and Elizabeth were looking forward to the visit. He was still struggling with the “Manual of the Botany of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago” because he was trying to do too many things at once. “You will be interested to know that I shall be able to illustrate all species with line drawings thanks to Mrs. Johannes Lid of Oslo who has very kindly offered to do them for me. You may have seen her drawings in Norsk Flora’ by Johannes Lid, and elsewhere. I think she is tops.” His paper on the “Flora of the Mackenzie Basin” was what was really ‘gumming up the works’ the most. “It started out merely as additions to your list but I gradually talked myself into expanding it to include Bear Lake and the Delta, thereby paving the way, as it were, for a future manual of continental N.W.T.”

The Raups arrived February 14 and from the later exchange of letters, it would seem that the ten-day working visit was a huge success as these old friends accomplished what was needed by day and relaxed together in the evenings, but it was also significant in view of the far-reaching results. Lucy was so impressed with the work that Mackenzie Lamb had done with the lichens that it was not long before he was going down to see her at the Farlow Herbarium, and by the end of July he wrote to Erling from his field station in Newfoundland that he would be returning to Ottawa only to pick up his family as he had accepted the position that they had offered him. Meanwhile, both the Raups
were encouraging Erling to work on his manual of the Continental Northwest Territories and to apply for a grant in order to do a year’s work in the European herbaria. Further encouragement came when they got back to Boston. “I saw Prof. Harlow Shapley in the Faculty Club the other day,” Raup wrote from Harvard on March 23, “and told him that you were about to apply for funds from the Philosophical Society. I told him that I was going to support you in it with all stops pulled out. He said that the applications, for consideration at the June meeting, should be in by the last of April.”

It was April 3 before Erling had a chance to get back to him. They were leaving to visit Karin and Harry and going on to Toronto, he said, but when he got back he would get busy with his application.

It has been a somewhat hectic time since you were here and I am way behind, not only with letters but also with my writing schedule. First Miss Harness goaded me into starting the distribution of my N.W.T. duplicates, mostly collected between 1927–28, but also the 1947, and several other smaller collections, including those of Keewatin and James Bay. These duplicates have been on my mind for a long time and I realized that it would take some time to make them into sets…. It took the two of us 14 days. They are sorted into 8 sets and all wrapped up but not yet mailed.

After that, he took his unused leave and spent ten days doing odd jobs that needed to be done around the house, including varnishing all the upstairs floors and putting a new roof on his garage. “I haven’t done any manual work for so long and my back and muscles are so sore that I can barely move.”

Erling sent a draft of the grant application to Raup on April 11, hoping he could tell him what changes he thought he should make. “You have had much experience – and success – in obtaining grants, so I shall be very glad to listen to anything you care to suggest; and I won’t blame you if the grant should not materialize. There is always the possibility that those who vote the money will not be too impressed by my project.” He was in doubt about how much to ask for.

I do not want to be greedy, so I consulted External Affairs and the enclosed draft budget is in part based upon their advice about cost of living and travel abroad. You will notice that the total estimated cost for
a year abroad with the family is $9,000.00. This seems a lot of money. I have thought of asking for $6,000.00 and hope that I can supply the balance out of salary. If Dr. Alcock is right I can get leave of absence without much trouble and he thinks that there is a very good chance that I may be granted leave on part salary. I hope he is right. It would do no good to apply until I definitely knew that I was going.

There was the question of who, besides Raup, would be able to sponsor him. “I am afraid my academic accomplishments will not impress. I really ought to do something about this – or at least ‘qualify’ for an LLD! I don’t suppose my F.R.S.C. [Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada] and M.B.E. would impress them?”

Raup had gone over Erling’s application on April 14 and had only a few suggestions to make:

At the outset, I shall go back to some things I probably said when I was in Ottawa. I think you should aim this thing at a ‘flora of boreal America,’ rather than at a ‘flora of Keewatin and Mackenzie.’ Actually in your ‘argument’ you have set forth the larger purpose on the first and most of the second page. Then when you come to the specific problem, without saying you were doing so, you ‘come down’ to Keewatin and Mackenzie. The whole project, as outlined on those first two pages, has force, and I think it is really what you are shooting at. If this is the case, I think the title of your request should be ‘Studies in connection with the preparation of a descriptive manual of the flora of boreal America.’ If you can bring yourself to change the main title as I have suggested, then maybe you will have to set some kind of southern limit. Latitude 56°? Then, if you want to concentrate the work for which you want the money on Keewatin and Mackenzie, where it is most needed, you can say so and go on from there. If you do this, you should make it clear what you are doing, and indicate why the need is greater there than in either the eastern arctic or in Alaska and Yukon.

I would like to see you do this. You are the logical person! You have more material at hand with which to work on it than anybody else in the world, and you have more personal knowledge of the whole problem than anybody else in the world. You have had experience in the preparation of such things, and you are sufficiently well known in
all the places where you need to get help. Neither Hultén nor anybody else abroad or in America is fitted for it. You know yourself what Hultén can do to prevailingly American groups. All the objections I have ever heard you make to doing it are stuff and nonsense!

You need to do a little more personal horn-tooting. Put in a little life history – your field training in Greenland before you came to America – your ten years’ experience on the reindeer problem. By all means mention your F.R.S.C., and your membership in the Order of the British Empire. Also you could mention that you are an honorary foreign member of the American Academy.

The budget looked all right to him. “Can you properly say that it would actually be cheaper to take Elizabeth and Nette with you to Europe than to leave them in Ottawa? If so, this would be a good point. I should think it might be true, particularly if you could rent your house in Ottawa while you were away.” He thought Dr. Merrill at the Arnold Arboretum and Herbert Mason at the University of California would be good references, but it might be a good idea if another one was Canadian and suggested Diamond Jenness, even though he was retired, for a Museum perspective.  

Erling duly filled out the form as suggested on April 15. He wrote to Merrill, Mason, and Jenness, who all agreed to support him. The answer was not long in coming from the Philosophical Society. Erling told Alcock on June 24 that he was informed on June 10 that he had been awarded a $2,000 grant for the purpose of study and photographing of historically important botanical collections from arctic and boreal America, chiefly in the herbaria of London, Paris, Copenhagen, and Oslo. “The grant was given on the understanding that I would be able to finance ordinary living expenses for myself and my family from other sources,” he said.

In order to carry out the herbarium researches for which this grant was awarded, I now request that I be given a year’s leave of absence on full salary, commencing about April 1, 1954, and that I be authorized to attend the Paris Congress [the Eighth International Botanical Congress in Paris from July 2–14, 1954] at the expense of this Department. In 1950, my total expenses in connection with my attendance of the Stockholm Congress, including the six weeks spent in Stockholm and London, amounted to about $1,300. Cost of living and travelling
in Europe has increased sharply since 1950, but I believe that the cost of attending the Paris Congress and some of the excursions would not exceed $1,800. For the rest, I am prepared to use my salary, so that the entire cost to the Department will be limited to the above amount which, in any event, would be required to send me to Paris to attend the Congress. During my absence, Dr. Scoggan should take charge of the herbarium, and with the rest of the herbarium staff would, I am sure, be able to handle routine maintenance and other ordinary business of the herbarium.⁷

On July 25 he was writing to thank Raup for offering further help and advice in regard to supplementary grants:

I do not yet know what the score will be in regard to Governmental support etc. Our Deputy Minister has been away from Ottawa for six weeks and has only recently returned. I expect, however, that the reply will be favourable…. Meanwhile I am off on a 2-week trip to Axel Heiberg Island. I know I have no business going but the temptation was too great. I am going as the guest of the Tower Co. of Montreal who for a number of years have been doing construction work in the Canadian Arctic and who are sending a small party north to carry out some measurements. We shall be leaving Ottawa on the 27th travelling in the company’s Catalina plane. Axel Heiberg is, of course, almost completely unknown botanically, and I hope to get some worthwhile information.

Unusually, no letter describing this trip was found in the correspondence, but it was recorded in the Herbarium Annual Report that “a total of 151 specimens of vascular plants, besides much other botanical and biological information, was obtained from this island, which had not been visited before by a professional botanist.”⁸

Both Scoggan and Baldwin were also out in the field that summer, Scoggan completing his survey of Manitoba and Baldwin looking at the botany of the Clay Belt in Ontario and Quebec. It was now important to replace Mackenzie Lamb, who officially resigned from the Herbarium in September. Erling received a letter from John Thomson, Associate Professor of Botany at the University of Wisconsin, recommending Dr. Mason E. Hale as an exceedingly promising student of North American lichens, and Erling was glad to hear from him.
“because his name has been mentioned to us by other people who think equally well of him and think that we should offer him Dr. Lamb’s position. Among his principal sponsors is Dr. Lamb himself who is very favourably impressed with the work Dr. Hale has done on arctic lichens.” The position would have to be advertised and an application form would be sent out to him at that time.9

By September, Erling’s plans for his sabbatical leave were finally coming together. He would have to go without his family, which was disappointing, as he had originally hoped that he and Elizabeth could rent their Ottawa house and take thirteen-year-old Nette with them to England for at least part of the time. Now it seemed, they would have to stay and mind the fort at home while he went overseas alone, but at least a new reward had been added to the trip. “I have been given a grant by the Philosophical Society of America,” he wrote to Vero Wynne-Edwards in Aberdeen on September 29,

… which, together with a year’s leave of absence granted me by the Department, will make it possible for me to attend the 1954 Botanical Congress in Paris and to carry out protracted herbarium studies in London, Paris, Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm. I hope to be ready to leave early next summer. Meanwhile the University of Copenhagen has offered to accept any paper I care to submit as a thesis for a Ph.D. I am not sure what I shall do about this. As it happens, my paper on the Botany of the Western Arctic Archipelago, based largely on the 1949 expedition, will soon be ready for the printer. It may fill the bill. What do you think of this suggestion?10

A letter from the university records office in Copenhagen confirms that the circumstances of Erling Porsild’s acceptance were “a little unusual” because the University of Copenhagen had accepted the title of “Chief Botanist” as ranking with an academic title. They noted his work in the Botanical Museum of Copenhagen since 1945, studying the arctic collections, but the final granting of a PhD would be determined by the scientific value of his forthcoming paper that would be judged like all other theses submitted for that purpose.11

Erling set aside his other writing over the winter in order to have the manuscript of “The vascular plants of the western Canadian Archipelago” ready for the printer before he left in June. Simultaneously, he was working on marking distribution maps with plant “spots” in preparation for work on “Atlas of Canada” which he had begun the year before. Meetings continued to consume
a major portion of his time. A look at the Annual Report for 1953–54 shows
that in that year alone, he attended Board and Executive meetings in Ottawa,
Montreal, New York, and Washington as Vice-President of the Arctic Institute
of North America, besides meetings of the Royal Society of Canada, the Prov-
incial-Federal Wildlife Committee, the Canadian Conservation Association,
the Advisory Board of Wildlife Protection, a joint meeting of the Departments
of Agriculture and Resources and Development on a proposed National Bot-
tanical Garden, and a meeting of the Advisory Committee called by the N.R.C.
in connection with the proposed moving of the site of Aklavik, N.W.T., not to
mention his informal meetings with the “Arctic Circle” and various speaking
engagements.12

In January, Erling received a letter from Professor Mogens Westergaard at
the Universitetets Genetiske Institute in Copenhagen. “I have now been elected
one of the directors of your father’s old station at Disko,” Westergaard said. “It
is with great pleasure that we hear that you have decided to submit a thesis for
the Ph.D. at the Copenhagen University. We are looking forward with great
anticipation to your visit here, and there are a great number of problems which
we want to discuss with you, especially concerning the collaboration between
the Disco Station and the other arctic institutions.”

For some time, Erling had been hearing reports that his father, now retired
and living in Denmark, was failing and suffering from bouts of amnesia. “I
suspect that such difficulties and lapses are to be expected in an old gentleman
of eighty-one,” he had written to Max Dunbar in May 1953. “The unfortunate
thing is that he has arranged his life in such a way that no one can help him
when he needs it. One reason for his hermit existence may be that he is self-
conscious about his occasional absent-mindedness and unwilling to admit that
the time has come when he is no longer as efficient as he used to be.” It was a
great relief to all when “the marvellous old boy,” as Joan Dunbar described him,
got to live with his youngest son, Sten Porsild, in the spring of 1954.13

By March 1954, Erling told Raup: “It looks as if I will be sailing for Europe
from New York on June 11. I still do not see how I am going to get through in
time but having booked my passage I guess I shall have to.” By then, the official
advertisement for a cryptogamic botanist for the National Herbarium had gone
out, and among the returning applications was one from Howard A. Crum
at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. He was a bryologist, trained at the
University of Michigan under Dr. Steere, with a background in the moss-flora
of Mexico, and “considerable experience” with the mosses of temperate and
arctic North America as well. “My background in lichenology is sketchy but adequate, I think, for curatorial duties,” he said.

The long-awaited decision on the post had not been made on May 8 when Mason Hale wrote to Erling: “I am extremely hopeful that the final decision, whenever it may come, will be in my favor. There are few individuals in North America who have spent an entire academic career aimed at becoming a professional cryptogamic botanist in the face of the painfully obvious fact that there are virtually no job openings for them and who have worked with energetic interest on the Canadian flora.” The final decision was in favour of Howard Crum, and Hale wrote to Dr. Alcock on June 28 of his keen disappointment, especially in view of his experience in mosses as well as in lichens.

I believe that I had all the qualifications listed on the Civil Service bulletin. Had you desired a bryologist all along, it would have saved me no inconsiderable expectation and wasted plans to know so nine months ago. I do not speak out for my own personal loss but for the irreparable damage that has been done to lichenology in North America. There are approximately 10 professional bryologists for every lichenologist in North America, and while a number of them are in positions of research, only one lichenologist, Dr. Lamb, is professionally employed. In this respect the Committee’s decision was notably shortsighted. Lichenology may not improve its present medieval plight for another generation.14

Leaving Elizabeth and Nette in Ottawa, Erling sailed for Europe on June 9. Writing to Dr. Alcock on August 15, he said:

I arrived in Paris on June 16 and spent the next two days in the Botanical Museum where Michaux’s herbarium is kept. I was delighted to find this exactly as left by M. and it was thus a simple matter to locate the 50-odd Michaux types of Canadian plants. Although the Paris herbarium is a very large one, it contains very little of interest to us.

I had arranged to join one of the pre-Congress excursions, and on June 19 met a group of 16 botanists who, under the leadership of Dr. and Mrs. Paul Jovet, were to spend 10 days in the Landes et Pays Basque occidental. I had selected this excursion because it was composed entirely of professional botanists and because its itinerary
included the western part of the Pyrenees. The first days of the excursion were spent in the low country along the Atlantic coast where problems of land reclamation and dune control were studied. Several large dune areas got out of control during the war when the Germans established extensive road systems through the dune areas to service their fortifications along the coast.

Although collecting was difficult due to the tight schedule, he had enjoyed the experience of seeing unfamiliar plants and vegetation types and succeeded in collecting some 160 numbers of which there was very little or no representation in the National Herbarium. “The Pyrenees offered some excellent opportunities for observing the results of century-long bad land use in alpine pastures where more than 50% of the available pasture now produces nothing but bracken.”

The Botanical Congress opened with a plenary meeting at the Grand Amphitheatre at the Sorbonne. Between the speeches, the Garde Republicaine entertained the delegates with selections from Mozart, Bach, and Handel. Following this, an invitation to hold the next Botanical Congress in Canada was extended by Jacques Rousseau. There was much confusion about the afternoon sessions in the twenty-odd lecture rooms, with many delegates ending up in the wrong sections, and with much delay and confusion caused by having different offices for registration, mail, information, exchange, etc., which all became bottlenecks owing to insufficient staffing and lack of competent interpreters. The last individual sessions were held on July 12 and the final plenary meeting on July 13 for resolutions, addresses, and votes of thanks. There the Congress officially accepted the invitation to hold the next congress in Canada in 1959.

Between the sessions there had been the usual official functions, receptions, and excursions. Erling had attended a reception on July 3 in the Zoological Gardens at Vincennes, spent a day at Versailles on July 6, an evening session at the Sorbonne to celebrate the Centenary of the French Botanical Society, an all-day excursion to Fontainebleau on July 9, and an evening reception in the Louvre given by the Ministry of Education on July 12. When it was over, he joined a post-Congress excursion to the French Alps

… led by the eminent French ecologist Braun-Blanquet, doyen of European ecologists and father of the Swiss school of ecology who was ably assisted by Prof. L. Emberger of Montpellier. About 66 botanists took part in this excursion; travelling by chartered bus we visited a variety
of places between Chambery and Nice where the excursion ended on July 21. This section of the French Alps has a very rich flora with representation of alpine and Mediterranean species. Of particular interest was the region around Mont Cenis with a large number of endemic species. In the pass, above timberline at 2,400 m. botanists have listed over 2,000 species of plants, including bryophytes and lichens.

The last stop was in Nice, where the Congress officially ended on July 26 after meetings and all-day excursions related to Mediterranean and tropical botany. Erling had been sorry that Dr. Merrill, his long-time supporter at the Arnold Arboretum, had not been able to get to the Congress, and he wrote to tell him that his experience and sound views were missed:

I am sure you have already heard a good many reports on the Paris Congress to which I should have little to add. My own impression was that many things were less efficiently done than at Stockholm and that the time has come when some rather drastic changes will have to be made if such large meetings are to be manageable. Personally I very much question the wisdom or useful purpose of such masses of individual papers that take up time that could be better employed in general symposia given by carefully selected speakers. I have never been happy about having the 9th Congress in Canada and what I saw in Paris has made me even more doubtful of our ability to do a creditable job; in fact I am at a loss to understand how some of our botanists, knowing how few truly qualified people we have who can take charge of the more important jobs, can hope that we may even do as well as the French. True, the language difficulty will not be so great as at Paris where scarcely anyone in the secretariat spoke any language other than French; but the lack of people of large enough calibre and experience will be serious enough.

He said that he had enjoyed and learned a lot from both his excursions in France, although the second was too large, with too many “tourists,” but what impressed him the most on both trips was how greatly the European landscape and its vegetation had suffered at the hands of man and his animals. “I was constantly puzzled by the seeming futility of statistical ecology applied to unstable plant communities so greatly modified by centuries of grazing and
tree cutting,” he said. After the second excursion had ended in Nice, he went to Copenhagen with a short stop-over in Hamburg where he had hoped to find Lehmann’s herbarium. “In this I was disappointed for it appears that it was stored during the war in what is now the Russian zone and that the herbarium was carried off to Leningrad.”

In Copenhagen, Erling settled down to work at the Botanical Museum, checking arctic Canadian specimens collected chiefly by Amundsen’s expedition in the Gjoa and by members of the Danish 5th Thule expedition under Knud Rasmussen. “I am hoping soon to have completed the introductory chapters of my report on the flora of the western islands of the Arctic Archipelago,” he told Alcock in August.

The Botanical Museum is almost closed up for the summer. Most Danes seem to go away for the summer holidays but fortunately the director had left instructions for the janitor to let me in. My work has been somewhat hampered, however, by the lack of books and references and it was only when the librarian returned from holidays that I was able to obtain some of the books I needed for my writing. Meanwhile of course, the plants in the herbarium were accessible and I was able to put in my time to good advantage. I had hoped to be able to see Professor Jessen about my doctorate when I arrived in Copenhagen but he, too, was away and is only expected back this week. A meeting with him and other members of the faculty has been arranged.

Before leaving Ottawa, Erling had been asked to represent Canada’s Wildlife Service at the 4th session of the International Union for the Protection of Nature held in Copenhagen from August 25 to September 3. In a three-day committee session on Arctic Fauna, he felt that a brief statement might be useful on the administration of Wildlife Resources in Arctic and subarctic Canada, and later he answered questions on the present status and protection of black, brown, and grizzly bears in Canada.

Erling continued to work at the Botanical Museum until November when he visited Oslo and Trondheim “where I found much of interest,” he told Merrill. The Norwegian herbaria were rich in recent collections from East Greenland, Spitsbergen, and Novaya Zemlya, while of special interest to North America were the collections made by H. G. Simmons in Ellesmere Island during the 2nd Norwegian Expedition in the Fram (1898–1902) and those made by
members of the *Gjoa* expedition (1904–6) along the route of the Northwest Passage. In Trondheim he gave a lecture on the flora of the Canadian Cordillera at a meeting of members and guests of the Royal Society. “In Oslo Mrs. Lid, the wife of the curator, had completed the pen-and-ink drawings which are to illustrate my manual of the flora of the N. Am. Arctic, the manuscript of which I completed last winter. Mrs. Lid’s drawings are excellent and I hope I managed to [convince her to do?] the flora of the southern Canadian Rockies which I hope to have ready before too long. There seems to be some hope that I may be able to interest one of our large oil companies in this project, and that they may consider paying for colour illustrations.”

He reached London at the beginning of December and was soon working in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Richmond, on the collections cited by W. J. Hooker in his “Flora Boreali-Americana” (1833–42). “It is going to be a very slow job, but I think a rewarding one,” he told Merrill in January 1955.

I am finding a great many Hooker types that have not heretofore been recognized as such and I have, I think, solved several problems that have long been puzzling me…. I am not sure how long it will take me to finish at Kew – or perhaps, I should say to finish what I have to do. And I haven’t even been to the British Museum yet. I am sure I could easily spend an entire year here quite profitably which, unfortunately neither time or funds will permit. Still, it is a very wonderful experience being here if only for a few months and I shall certainly make the best use of my time.19

Kew and the British Museum (Natural History) were rich in botanical collections brought back by the early British expeditions in search of a Northwest Passage. Of primary importance for Erling’s present study were not only those cited by Hooker but also Douglas, Richardson, and Drummond collections made prior to, during, or resulting from the 1st and 2nd Franklin Overland Expeditions to the Polar Sea, a substantial part of Pursh’s herbarium on which was based his *Flora Americae Septentrionalis* (1814), and the important collections made in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago by members of Parry’s 1st and subsequent expeditions (1819–20).

In his official report to the Philosophical Society, Erling said:
Several thousands of specimens from these collections were examined in some detail and nearly 300 photographs were made of critical specimens, ‘types’ or of original letters or notes dealing with historical materials. Because a large part of the material examined is critical, it was often necessary to annotate, or in various ways verify or check literature references for each specimen. During the period spent in Britain, visits were made to Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Oxford for the purpose of examining historically important collections in the herbaria of those cities and certain critical material in the herbarium of the University of Cambridge was borrowed for study at Kew. In the British herbaria special attention was paid to the genus *Dryas* and upwards of one thousand specimens from the British Isles and Central Asia were examined. This resulted in some important information supplementing the results of an earlier study.\(^20\)

He had told Dr. Alcock that there had been a very sharp increase in the cost of living in Europe since 1950, particularly in France where the U.S. State Department allowed $18.00 per diem living allowance against $12.00 for most other European countries, and heard from him December 10 that the Treasury Office would like to have his accounts of expenses incurred at the Botanical Congress. The chances of his thesis report being printed in time for his defence were not looking good, Dr. Alcock told him, but if the proof-reading could be done in Ottawa, it might be finished by April.

I note that you have to assure the University in advance of this so that the date of your public defence could be set by the University. We could let you know, say by February, what the chances of this would be. I wonder whether this being such a special case the University would make an exception for you. I would be very glad to write assuring the authorities that your report is in process of being published and that the report is like the manuscript which they have seen and that the necessary copies would be sent to them just as soon as they leave the printers’ hands. It does seem too bad that the granting of your degree may be held up and that you may have to make a return trip to Copenhagen.\(^21\)
On January 17, when Erling heard from Miss Harkness that there was now a fair chance that 300 copies of his paper would be ready to be delivered to the University of Copenhagen by mid-March, he wrote to Dorothy Burke in the Editorial Division of the Department of Mines and Resources:

I understand that if the printers are to have the report ready in March I shall have to forego seeing the proofs. Naturally, I am sorry about that but I expect the few and rather minor additions that I have can be mailed to you or to Miss Harkness. I expect Miss Harkness will keep me informed about the progress of the printing and about deadline for possible additions and corrections to the galleys. I know that much can happen between now and March, and I shall certainly keep my fingers crossed. If it isn’t ready, however, I shall only blame myself for taking so long in finishing the introduction; if, by some miracle, it is, I know that it will only be because someone has pushed pretty hard at your end to make it possible and I want you to know that I am very grateful to you for what you have done.

I expect to be in Copenhagen again early in February when I shall know the report of the University committee on my thesis and when I shall also know the latest date for the public defence. According to the rules of the University a certain interval is required between the distribution of the printed report and the public defence in order to allow the official opponents appointed by the University (and anyone else who might wish to criticize the thesis) ex auditorio time to study the thesis. It is quite a business, and very different from the procedure at Canadian or American universities! It is quite a solemn affair although a lighter touch is sometimes introduced by the opponents in poking fun at the poor doctorand. Everyone attending wears full evening dress – no caps and gowns – and the function is usually well covered by the press because doctorates are not as common in Denmark where, last year, only 35 degrees were given by the four Danish universities.

I have now spent a bit over one month at Kew. It is a fine place to work and very rich in historical collections of plants, manuscripts, letters and rare botanical works. I am sure I should have no difficulty in passing a whole year profitably, provided, of course that I did not perish from cold. As an arctic ‘veteran’ I am amazed at the hardiness of the British; at times I even think they enjoy being utterly uncomfortable.
Still, in my own case, the work I am doing is most rewarding and I am daily ‘finding’ things and facts. Thus far I have only been up to London a few times but I really must take time off to see a few plays and hear some of the wonderful music that is so abundantly available in London.22

Before he left Kew, he gave a lecture at the Royal Botanic Gardens before the combined staff of the institution, and in February, at the invitation of Wynne-Edwards, he travelled up to Scotland to give a talk on the boreal flora of N.W. Canada to a botanical audience at the University of Aberdeen. Back in Copenhagen on February 15, he wrote to Max Dunbar to tell him that when his father went to live with his younger brother the previous spring he had asked Erling to see that his library and herbarium were taken care of. “The books were moved to the Arctic Institute in Charlottenlund, and the herbarium to Botanisk Museum,” he said:

I have gone through his various manuscripts and have had several meetings with Professor Jessen, Bøcher, Sørensen, et al., and the upshot is that a committee has been formed to see what can be done with Dad’s ‘Flora of Greenland’ and I think that there is a good chance that it will be published. But first there is a good deal of work to be done on the manuscript. I am afraid that it will not be possible to keep the library intact. I am to have some of the botanical books that I do not already own; the University would like to buy general works of reference for the Disko Station and for the Arctic Institute. As you know, Dad has a good deal of zoological literature, and when rearranging the books after the move it occurred to me that you might know of someone who might be interested in acquiring the lot…. If I remember correctly, you have spent some time at the Disko Station and probably are familiar with what is there and you probably have a much better idea than I as to the approximate value.

He told Dunbar that he had expected to stay in Europe until the end of May “but it looks now as if I had to return sooner than expected. I had asked for, and was granted a year’s leave, commencing April 1st. When owing to pressure of work last spring I was unable to get away until June, I should have asked to have the period changed, but omitted to do so.”23
In his final grant report to the Philosophical Society, Erling wrote: “Returned to Canada on May 1, 1955, having spent approximately 6 weeks in France, 3 weeks in Spain, 4 months in Denmark and Norway, and the balance of the time in England.”

There is nothing in any of the official reports to explain the three weeks in Spain, but in a letter to Joseph Ewan on July 11, in whose house he had been staying while working at Kew, Erling said that his trip to France and Spain “was a delightful one and, except for the sad ending, it certainly was the most enjoyable holiday I have ever had.” An unconfirmed report says that his wife joined him there for a needed holiday for both of them. According to that source, Elizabeth became very ill during their stay and had to be flown back to Ottawa, with Erling booked to follow her on the first available sailing. Whether the story is true or not, by only reaching Canada on May 1, Erling did not make it home in time. After a serious illness, Elizabeth Porsild died, just short of her thirty-seventh birthday, in the Ottawa Civic Hospital on April 19, of “unresolved pneumonia.”

It was a shocking homecoming after all the months away. Although some people felt he should not have left his ailing wife alone for so long, Ottawa friends, family, and colleagues rallied around. Messages of sympathy from botanical friends across North America and Europe all echoed the feeling of shock and sorrow, including the one from Joseph Ewan to say that he and the ladies in the house where Erling had been staying in Richmond were all deeply stirred and saddened by the news of his wife’s death. “We can only send our very real sympathy and hope that by now things have eased a bit and some semblance of peace of mind returned to you,” he said.

Two months after Elizabeth’s death, Erling finally was able to write to Dr. Merrill at the Arnold Arboretum. “Owing to the illness and tragic and sudden death of my wife, I had to cut my year short,” he said, “leaving a number of things undone.” Even though he had not been able to do all he had hoped, he still felt that he had been able to accomplish most of what he had intended to do in his ‘year’ in Europe and he was sure that the experience he had gained would be of some value in years to come, not only to himself but to others in the field of Arctic and subarctic research.

It was coming to the end of the year when Erling heard from Professor Norman Radforth at Hamilton College, Hamilton, Ontario, that he had only recently heard the sad news of his bereavement, and sent his deepest sympathy for his great loss. “I hope for your own sake that the adjustments you will be
facing will soon become less trying for you,” he said. In thanking him for his
kind expression of sympathy, Erling said: “Adjustments such as this must be
made because we have to carry on, but as we grow older, they are less easily
made.”25

He would have another deep loss to face almost exactly a year later when he
wrote to tell Trevor Lloyd that his “dear old Dad, teacher and travelling com-
panion of many trips,” had died on 30 April 1956. Lloyd replied: “I am sorry to
hear of the death of your father, for whom all of us had immense respect…. The
remarkable thing about Magistar Porsild was, of course, that he was not only
an outstanding scientist and the pioneer of all the other Arctic Stations, but he
also took an active and constructive part in governing Greenland and planning
its reform. I have a thesis that the real reformers of Greenland have seldom
been the government officials but so often were men like your father who knew
Greenland well but saw the problems from the outside.”26

Due to his wife’s death, Erling was unable to attend the public defence of
his thesis, but under the circumstances the University of Copenhagen allowed
it to lapse and granted him his PhD degree based on “The vascular plants of the
western Canadian Arctic Archipelago,” published by the National Museum in
1955.27
CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

ROCKY MOUNTAINS AND HUDSON BAY LOWLANDS

The soon-to-be Dr. Erling Porsild returned to work in the National Herbarium 11 May 1955, relieving Scoggan who had taken charge during his absence. Baldwin had completed his botanical survey of the Clay Belt region of northern Ontario and Quebec during the past summer, and the newly appointed bryologist, Howard Crum, had joined the staff on September 20 and spent the fall collecting mosses in the Gatineau Hills north of Ottawa. Scoggan’s *Flora of Manitoba* was at the printers and he had begun work on a proposed flora of maritime eastern Canada.

It was a particularly hot summer in Ottawa in 1955, with high humidity and temperatures reaching 94° F for prolonged periods, which made for trying working conditions in the Herbarium. Crum went out to the Canadian Rockies for two and a half months and Scoggan left for New Brunswick in July and August, leaving Erling and Baldwin to make plans in the hot office for their next year field trip to the Hudson Bay lowlands. Over the summer, Erling read and reviewed a number of papers submitted for publication in *Arctic*, wrote his report for the American Philosophical Society, prepared an abstract for a symposium on arctic-alpine floras to be held at Michigan State College, East Lansing, on September 5–9, and resumed work on his manual on the flora of the Arctic Archipelago and looking at the illustrations from Mrs. Dagny Lid.¹

He had sent his stepdaughter to his brother’s family at Johnson’s Crossing for the summer. When she came back from “waitressing” at the end of August, she said that it had been “just super” and she had made “a lot of dough to boot.” Nette was growing up, and like Edith/Karin before her, she wanted a new name, so her shortened form of Antoinette was now to be Toni. Erling told
Raup September 2 that he had enrolled her at a girls’ school in Whitby for the coming year and was glad that “her summer in the wilds of the Yukon” had turned out so well.

As for himself, “The vascular plants of the western Canadian Arctic Archipelago” was finally out.

When I get up my nerve to look at it, I shall think of a lot of things that I could have said, but didn’t. Thus far only a few advance copies have been run off for the University of Copenhagen (they require 289!). When I get more, I shall send a copy along. Meanwhile, the manuscript of the “Manual of the Arctic Archipelago” is almost ready for the printer…. I should like to show it to you before it is submitted, and if I can get away for a few days, I should like nothing better than a visit with you and Lucy. Perhaps some time after the Lansing meeting, towards the end of the month, if you are not tied up then.²

Raup was working on the “Flora of the Alaska Highway” at last and there was nothing he wanted more than for the two of them to compare manuscripts, but he and Lucy were very busy until the end of October. They managed a get-together during an Arctic Institute meeting in Montreal on November 17 when Erling was appointed Secretary and he could tell Raup that he had submitted his Flora of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago to the printers the day before. In response to an invitation to go down to Boston for Christmas, Erling said it was most kind of them

… but Karin tells me that Jennifer and Deborah insist that they want to see their grandpa for Xmas and since travelling to Ottawa in mid-winter by car will be a bit too risky, Toni and I shall have to go to Toronto. However, if you are not tied up otherwise between Xmas and New Years, I would very much like to spend a day or two with you talking about the maps we have to produce for the new Atlas of Canada.

It seems that we are expected (whether we can or not) to prepare one map in 1:20,000,000 (or larger) showing ‘Native Vegetation’ and to fill that balance of two map sheets with anything else we can think of in plant distribution other than trees and agricultural plants. I have thought of using the space to map ranges of species illustrating some of the major phytogeographical groups; not quite the way Hultén
and you have done, but along the lines I have followed in Bull. 135, and to use colour instead of dots. I can have space for 34 small maps measuring about $4 \times 6$ inches, or half as many as that at twice the size. I can use up to three colours if I wish. The editorial board is averse to the introduction of circumpolar maps and would prefer not to let me show ranges extending beyond Canada. So far I have not pressed for the circumpolar maps, but I believe I could insist on showing ranges extending into Alaska and Greenland. I have been ‘playing’ with these distribution maps off and on now for a couple of years without, however, reaching beyond the ‘cooking’ stage. But I shall have to ‘produce’ fairly soon and would like very much to have your reaction to the method and my choice of species.\footnote{Raup replied on December 14 that the map problem sounded as if it could be troublesome. He would be glad to see what Erling was doing with it, and also take advantage of the opportunity to talk some more about the Alaska Highway when they met on December 28. Meanwhile, as well as doing the maps, Erling started work on the manual on the Flora of Rocky Mountain National Parks, based on field work during 1945, 1946 and 1951. Two days before Christmas, it was recorded that he attended a meeting in Toronto with officials of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests dealing with a proposed biological reconnaissance in the Hudson Bay lowlands in 1956, and from December 27–30 he consulted faculty members at Harvard University, in connection with Atlas of Canada and problems related to the 1959 Botanical Congress.\footnote{The first meeting of the General Programme Committee for the 9th International Botanical Congress was set up in Montreal on 14 January 1956. Those present included R. D. Gibbs, Paul R. Gorham, J. W. Groves, Pierre Dansereau, A. E. Porsild, H. B. Sifton, and chairman Jacques Rousseau. With his experience with several congresses, Erling had prepared a list of his thoughts of what they had better try to do with this first one in Canada, since it was obvious that they had to be realistic in their thinking. To begin with, no two Congresses have followed the same plan. We are free to set our own pattern, at least about many things. There are several possibilities. We can outdo the French and make things even more elaborate. Or we can try and have a simple Congress. But first we must take stock. We are rich in natural resources, we are told. That}}
holds for our scenery and native, unspoiled Nature, too. But we are very poor in botanists. This is not something we have to be ashamed of. But we must realize it and cut our cloth according to our purse, because if we do not, [there will be] people from elsewhere who do not understand our peculiar circumstances – that we are young, and that much of Canada is still a frontier country – at least as far as scientific exploration is concerned. Our botanists so far have been preoccupied with local problems. Not many are familiar with problems and conditions elsewhere or have many contacts with botanists in other lands. Such knowledge and experience is necessary to organize and run an International Congress and therefore we but few [will have] to do the work.

To emphasize the problem, Carl Skottsberg, president of the 7th Congress, had told Erling that they had two hundred botanists in Sweden of sufficiently broad training and experience from which to choose the fifty-odd needed for key positions. He made a plea to keep the Congress simple.

Large Congresses are no longer a novelty, especially not in North America. Since we are not bound closely by patterns of earlier Congresses, let us make ours simple. Cambridge was simple. Eight sections. Only invitation papers. Abstracts presented in advance in book form. Papers and subjects in form of round table conference and symposia. We hope to make the 9th Congress the first truly International Congress on this side the Atlantic…. Many European botanists will be coming for the first time to North America. They will want to see our country, our flora and our herbaria and institutions. They will also want to meet our botanists but they will not come to hear papers they can read later at home.5

It was a good beginning as the ground plan for the Congress was laid out, and back in Ottawa Erling had little to add to the results. Meanwhile, he was deep in the organization of a complicated summer of field work, where essentially he would have to be in two places at once. He expected to spend most of the summer in the Rocky Mountain parks, but he would have to come east for a two-week break with another project. “Some years ago,” he said in his summer field trip report,
... I planned a botanical survey of large bog and fen areas in the low country west of James Bay hoping to persuade the Swedish bog specialist Hugo Sjörs to join a National Museum field party. I was delighted when Sjörs expressed interest, promising to join us during the summer of 1957, and to bring his wife who specialized in hydrology and who has been his field assistant on all his recent bog and fen projects in Scandinavia. During several visits to Toronto, I had succeeded to interest officials of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests in such a project and had come away with firm promises of air support to be provided in 1956 for a two-week air and ground reconnaissance when two of their field biologists would accompany a National Museum of Canada sponsored field party consisting, besides myself, of W.K.W. Baldwin and Dr. I. Hustich of the University of Helsingfors. During this survey several areas were to be selected for the 1957 survey. In preparation for this survey, Mr. Baldwin and I were to assemble aerial photos of the selected sites and to have enlarged detail maps prepared from the photos. As far as possible landings were to be made in one or more of these areas.

Turning towards his plans for the summer work in the west, Erling had been in contact with Johannes and Dagny Lid at the Botanisk Museum in Oslo about their combined work in the Rocky Mountains. Johannes Lid was due to retire as Curator in 1956 and the plan was that both the Lids would join him for the summer. “While it may yet be premature to say that we can do it,” he said,

... the first and most important obstacle has been overcome when authority was obtained, in principle, for the publication of a book on ‘Canadian alpine flowers’ to be illustrated by 135 plates of water colours. It is to be approximately 6 x 8 inches in format and to have 165 pages of text. This means that as soon as the National Museum can produce the manuscript and illustrations the ‘Queens Printer’ will proceed with the work. Whether the work will be done here or elsewhere is to be decided. The next step is to obtain a grant to make it possible for Mrs. Lid to come here to make the illustrations. That may entail some difficulties because our estimates ... for 1956 have already been passed and additional appropriations of this kind are difficult to get through Parliament. However, our Minister has shown
considerable interest in the plan and I expect that his Department has some funds somewhere for ‘unforeseen expenditures’… Provided that I get the money, my plan would be to have you come here in early June and to commence work near Banff (elev. 1,100 m) where springs come early. As the season advances, we should move up and spend most of July and August in the alpine zone. In Banff we would try and rent a cabin outside the town. Not far from Banff is a very fine alpine plateau where, at 2,400 m, most of the alpine species may be found. There is a hotel for skiers that some years remains open in summer. At any rate I think it may be possible to rent a cabin with kitchen facilities. Naturally, we shall plan to have a girl to look after the cooking and housekeeping.7

By January 1956, the plans for the Rocky Mountain parks were pretty much approved. Ralph Bryenton would join them as Erling’s field assistant. However, in April, Dr. Alcock informed him that the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Department had decided that “it would be unwise for the Government to proceed with this work which, he had been informed, would compete with existing works privately published” and therefore he could not permit the National Museum to enter into a contract with the Lids to make the illustrations. Despite Erling’s objections that the work would in no way compete with other works and there was an urgent need for such a book, the decision was final. Since the Lids had already accepted his offer, he offered to proceed with the book at his own expense and was finally given permission as long as the work in no way interfered with his field work, and “I was to make no use of technical information obtained by me in the field or in the office in my capacity of a Government botanist.” It was a ridiculous restriction in view of all his past work on the project but Erling at once wrote to the Lids and offered to personally finance their travelling and living expenses, proposing that they should jointly complete the work and try and have the book published by a commercial publisher.8

Somehow, it all came together in the end. On September 23, Erling wrote to the Raups, who had spent the summer in East Greenland with Link Washburn (“I have always thought it curious that your first physical contact with the Arctic was to be Franz Joseph Fjord in N.E. Greenland!”) and was looking forward to hearing about it.

“I returned to Ottawa at the end of August after a hectic but otherwise very enjoyable summer,” he said.
The Lids proved very good travelling companions. Despite his 70 years, Johannes is as active and enthusiastic as a youngster just out of school. He climbs mountains like a mountain goat and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping up with him. Everything I proposed met with great enthusiasm and never once did his interest flag. Even the long trip by car from Ottawa never tired him or her and when I asked them if they would not prefer to return by train or by air they said they would, but only if that would make it easier for me; but they really had been looking forward to going back with me in the car. Although Dagny is actually much younger, she acts more like his age. She was happiest when she could be quietly at work with her drawings and she did not mind being left in camp when Johannes and I went off climbing mountains. And she did a wonderful job completing 187 drawings that are all superb. She hopes to do 40 more from notes and sketches, a good many of them monocots and ferns that do not change much by pressing. The problem now is to find a publisher. Thus far only the Oxford University Press has shown real interest and I am to see their editors in Toronto some time this fall.

This winter I shall be working again on the Rocky Mountain manual; but I shall have to abandon my original plan of dealing with only Banff, Jasper and Waterton Lakes parks and expand the area to take in the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserves opened up by a new road which extends from Crows’ Nest Pass north behind the first ranges almost to the Edmonton-Jasper Highway. This summer I was only able to work the southern part, from Canmore to Coleman. It adds a number of foothill species but its flora is essentially similar to that of my original area.

I had hoped to do the northern part this summer, but had to go east to take part in a reconnaissance trip to the James Bay lowlands where we plan to have a party working the next two or three summers in close collaboration with Ontario Dept. of Lands and Forests. In four days of flying under ideal conditions we saw a lot of very interesting country. Unfortunately we could not land in some of the most interesting spots but I obtained some quite good colour photos. I should like to show them to you some time and tell you of some of our problems there. The whole area is a huge swamp which appears to be drying out. Over
thousands of square miles larch is the dominant tree which has not been recognized before. There are many kinds of ‘patterned’ surface, but none due to frost action and as far as we have been able to discover this summer there is no permafrost anywhere, unless deeply buried. In one place I dug down 7 feet in a black spruce muskeg forest without finding frost although the top layer was two to three feet of peat.

Baldwin worked out of two camps this summer, from places selected during the reconnaissanced flights and was able in one or two places to penetrate by canoe into near-inaccessible swamps or bogs. But to really get anywhere we shall have to use helicopters and I hope we can get the ear of the military to do this. Our first landing was the Mattawatawa River in the southwest portion of the lowlands, and to me it was quite a surprise to walk through river forests of elm and ash, some of them with trunks 24 inches in diameter.⁹

He had had to make an unexpected flight back to Ottawa before returning to the Rockies.

I cannot remember if I told you that the Museum is to attain Branch status when Alcock retires in November. I am sorry to see him go into retirement and I know that he would have liked to carry on. Jacques Rousseau, who has been fired from the Montreal Botanical Garden, is applying for the job, and I am afraid that it is all being tailored to fit him. As a matter of fact, it looks as if it had been the intention of the Department to ‘rig’ the appointment, so that no one else would have a chance to apply. It seems that a lot of office politics are involved and also some nepotism – it appears that Jacques went to school with someone in a high place etc. At any rate, Alcock managed to get his foot in the door in time, and a proper board was appointed. Unfortunately, there wasn’t enough time to advertise the job properly and I know that two of the most likely candidates for the job did not have time to consider it before the competition closed. At Alcock’s insistence I applied, but only as a ‘protest.’ I knew I could not do a good job as an administrator and that I would hate it. I was hauled back to Ottawa to appear before the board which, incidentally, appeared to be a very fair one. As yet no decision has been announced. It would be
disastrous for the good of the Museum if R. was given the job. If he is I may seriously consider resigning.10

There were problems too with the Arctic Institute, which Erling said was “having a difficult time” one way or another.

I have long felt that we are overexpanding and in danger of becoming a mere ‘holding company’ and that we are getting into too many things, and mostly so that we can collect overhead. We should never have become involved with the Northwest Project. Some very curious things have happened there, as it seems unknown to and contrary to the agreement reached by the Board of Governors. I suppose you have seen the letter Graham [Rowley] wrote to Gustafsson of Resources of the Future, in order to find out who submitted the prospectus that was quite at variance with the one the Board had considered and approved. Tom [Manning] is resigning in November and for which I am sorry. He has done a good job and has the interest of the Institute at heart. He feels very frustrated over the way things have been going. We do not seem to have anyone in Canada who can take his place.

It seemed that Erling’s friends in the Arctic Circle had certainly been doing their bit for the Institute, but another friend would soon be solving some of the problems when Dr. H. M. Raup, Director of Harvard Forest, became the new chairman of the Arctic Institute of North America.11

On November 5, Erling told Raup that they still did not know who would be the new Director of the Museum. “The place is rife with rumours; some said to come from the ‘horse’s mouth’ are that the National Museum is to be divided into Natural History and Historical Museums, each with its own director, and that both are to be placed directly under a minister of the Crown. The last would be a good move but I see no advantage to the former. The same source ‘claims’ to know that J. R. is to be our new director. Phooey to that one!” In fact, the “horse’s mouth” claimant had been right about the division of the Museum administration into two branches. Loris S. Russell was appointed to the Directorship of the Natural History Branch, and Jacques Rousseau was appointed as Director of the Human History Branch, but two years later, “following internal friction in the Human History Branch, Dr. Rousseau severed his connection with the Museum” and Dr. Russell took over that Branch as well.12
In June of 1957, Erling was elected a Guggenheim Fellow, which provided him with a grant to carry out studies of boreal eastern Asiatic plants in European herbaria that were outside the boundaries of his earlier studies. “This, at any rate, was what I wanted to do,” he explained,

... although the document sent me by Mr. Moe, Director of the Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation specifically stated that the fellowship was designed to assist me in carrying out studies “when, where and how I wished.” For the summer of 1957, field work had been planned in the Rocky Mountains and in the Hudson Bay Lowlands and for the latter, Dr. and Mrs. Hugo Sjörs of Växtbiologiska Institutionen, Uppsala University, Uppsala, had accepted an invitation to join a National Museum field party under my direction. Accordingly, I applied for Special Leave of Absence from the end of October until June 1, 1958. This was readily granted by the Department with the understanding that I would be back to Canada in time to make all necessary preparations for the botanical excursion to the Rocky Mountains and to the Canadian Arctic under my leadership planned for the 9th International Botanical Congress to be held in Montreal in 1959.¹³

For the past year, Erling had been playing an active part in the Field Trips Committee for the Congress. As far back as their second meeting in Ottawa on 14 April 1956, chaired by H. A. Senn, it was felt that these trips would be a very important part of the Congress, with so many scientists coming to North America for the first time. Short and inexpensive trips could be planned comparatively easily while longer trips would have to be either more expensive or limited to small numbers. Under discussion were something in the order of twenty field trips, including one to the Canadian Arctic, one or more to Western Canada to cover the Prairies, the Rockies and Vancouver and beyond, two to Gaspé and the Maritimes, one to southern Ontario and another to northern Ontario for the Clay Belt and Boreal Forest, several around Montreal, Ottawa and Lake St. John which would include mycology and phycology and other specialized trips, and others to bring the United States into the picture, which would include the Great Lakes, Appalachians, and Southwestern Deserts. It was decided that Erling would be responsible for the Rocky Mountain trip around Banff and the trip to the Arctic. He had been making enquiries about the possibility of RCAF support for the latter but it was too early to obtain promises for assistance in
1959. There would not be much chance of a “Grand Tour” except on commercial rates, and accommodation would depend on the co-operation of one of the services, so that “it might be that only a very small group would be invited to take part and such a trip could be organized quite quickly at the last minute.”

By April 1957, Erling’s plans for the Museum field trips for that summer were well advanced. He told Raup that he had been working furiously on the Atlas of Canada maps as they had to be handed in that week and he was coming down to Washington for an Arctic Institute meeting when he hoped to go over the last problems with him. It was a short trip but he took Toni with him for a visit with the Raups. After that, it was time to get ready for the bogs and fens of the Hudson Bay lowlands. “I am fascinated by some of the problems facing us in Hudson Bay,” he told Lucy Raup, “but I do not like the flat, swampy country we will be in. We shall all have webbed feet when we return!”

The Banting Committee of the Arctic Institute had awarded a travel grant to Hugo Sjörs, the Swedish bog ecologist who was considered the leading authority on northern bogs in Europe. Erling told Dr. Russell that it would cost the Museum nothing for his participation unless a contribution could be made to publishing an independent or joint report of the field work. Sjörs would be joined by his wife who was his usual assistant. Erling later told the Lids that he had found Hugo and Gunnel Sjörs very good and stimulating company and the very best travelling companions and he felt that it was largely due to them that they were able to accomplish so much in such a short time.

The plan called for Erling, Baldwin, and the Sjörs to meet with officials from the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests at Timmins on June 20 ready for departure by plane and later transfer to canoe. The lowlands area that they would be looking at was so wet that it could almost be described as a swamp sea, with wet bogs, pools, surrounding raised ‘islands’ of black spruce. A central camping spot was chosen on the only horizontal and not too soft and muddy area on a clay bank at the junction of the Attawapiskat-Muketei rivers west of James Bay. To Raup he said: “We have solved some of our problems, but as so often happens, for every one problem solved, two new ones develop. It is a truly amazing country, and a tough and forbidding one too and I am afraid that we shall never come to grips with some of the most important problems until we have a helicopter. Also we must find out more about what happens up there during spring breakup, freeze-up and what the country looks like in winter. We should actually set up a small observation post which could be visited at different seasons and be used as a field laboratory in summer.”
Leaving Bill Baldwin to continue work alone in the field, Erling and the Sjörs returned to Ottawa at the end of July. After a few days together, the Sjörs boarded their plane for Sweden and Erling headed once again for the Rockies where he planned to study the flora of the eastern ranges that had recently been made accessible by road improvements. From Calgary, where he picked up a Museum-organized jeep, his destination was Cadomin and Rocky Mountain Park, “both now ghost towns in a formerly coal mining district now abandoned owing to decreasing markets for coal.” From there, he and Ralph Bryenton, his old travelling companion from so many northern trips, could make excursions into the nearby hills along former, barely passable mine roads.

The flora of this area was rather different from that of Banff Park, he noted. “Unfortunately, the season was already far advanced; 6 inches of snow fell on August 25, putting a stop to further collecting. Our return was by a different route north from Cadomin to Hinton on the Jasper highway. The first part of this road was very rough. From Jasper, an excursion was made 30 miles up the Indian Snake R. and others to Maligne Lake and to Saskatchewan Glacier on the Jasper-Banff Highway.” Although too late for a number of species, he felt that the overall results of the trip were most satisfactory. Their collection included some important new discoveries and significant range extensions, many of them being arctic species not heretofore known so far south in the Rocky Mountains, which confirmed Erling’s impression that the eastern ranges must have been an important refugium to arctic plants during late Pleistocene time.17

“For our trip we had a powerful truck equipped with 4-wheel drive and a power winch which made it possible to travel over roads and trails quite impassable to ordinary cars,” he told the Lids in October. “We were even able to drive to the very top of a number of mountains. I rather suspect that you would have frowned on climbing mountains in this manner, but I must say that I found it very convenient and not nearly as strenuous.” He told the Sjörs that it had been very fine mountain country and it had “felt very good again to be on terra firma” after the wet swamps of the Lowlands.

On the train to Ottawa I picked up some kind of bug which has made me feel rather low for a couple of weeks, and from which I am only now recovering. In consequence I am only now slowly ‘digging’ into the accumulation on my desk…. It was my intention to continue checking through your plants, hoping to be able to finish them in a few days and to return them to you together with the cryptogamic plants and
books you left. However, coming to the collections from the Attawapiskat camp I came to realize that Bill’s and my collections are, perhaps, more complete than yours and that by concentrating on them I shall avoid duplicating the work and that a list of our collections will provide you with all the information you need to check your own. I shall try to have the complete list ready before I sail for Europe on November 7 and to have your phanerogams shipped before that date.

He looked forward to seeing them again and comparing notes and results of what had been a good and profitable summer. The trip to Europe was coming almost faster than he could plan it. He wrote to Wynne-Edwards in September to tell him that the Department had granted him six months leave from November 1 to continue studies in European herbaria and libraries. “I am not so sure that I have any business going off again at this time,” he said, “or that the Guggenheim people used good judgment in making me the Fellowship. But the temptation to accept was very great, and I yielded. My plans are still somewhat uncertain and flexible but I intend to devote more time to visiting institutions, and to talk to [more] people than I did last time, and to see what I can learn about arctic and boreal Eurasian plants and their relation to species in the floras of arctic and sub-arctic parts of N. America.”

At the end of October, Erling told Hugo Sjörs that he would be coming to see him at their convenience. “I am leaving Ottawa on Nov. 2 and expect to arrive in Copenhagen on Nov. 20. Then I shall go to Stuttgart to pick up my new car and perhaps proceed to Switzerland and Austria.” Erling’s choice of buying a new Mercedes Benz in Germany might seem extravagant, but it was actually quite reasonable at that time to sail to Europe from North America, buy a car on the other side and drive it around on holiday, and then have it shipped while travelling back by sea.

Although he was now confident that he could make the trip, he was still under the weather when he wrote to Raup on November 1. “For six weeks after my return from the field I was ‘laid low’ by the flu and its after effect. I am recovering rapidly now although I still have a cough and am almost deaf on my one ear from some infection. This has put me so far behind in my work and for a time I did not think I would be able to get away. I only finished working up the collection we made last summer and some of the other most urgent matters a few days ago.” Karin had been to see him while he was recovering. “I have had
a very nice visit from Karin who had her first holiday away from children and puppies. It was grand to have her all to myself for four days and the comparative rest did her good.”

The trip across the Atlantic was coming up rapidly, and ahead lay Europe, with an unforeseen encounter waiting for him that would change his personal life for the rest of his years. Unaware of what the kindly fates had in store, Erling was confident that he would see everyone and everything he had in mind.

I am sailing on a small Danish freighter which will take me direct to Copenhagen, in 13 days they say. I am looking forward to the trip, because I am sure it will give me a chance to rest and, I hope, also to do some writing. Despite the ‘flu’ I have been working quite hard between spells in bed and I have completed the working up of the collections from the ‘Lowlands’ which contain a great many interesting things, including some quite unexpected range extensions. In all we have about 50 species not recorded from the lowlands in [Abbé Ernest] Lepage’s catalogue. I am taking with me a lot of field notes, plant lists, maps and field data etc. hoping that Sjörs and I can find the time to work on them this winter. For this reason I have kept my European itinerary flexible; also I shall have to talk to a number of people in order to find out where I should go to look at Eurasian arctic-alpine plants and who I should see and talk to. I have been granted a visa to visit USSR and plan at least to visit Leningrad, probably in February or March; I also want to see what they have in Vienna, Geneva and Helsingfors.21

The Quarterly Report for the National Herbarium October–December 1957 ended with the brief note: “Left for Europe on November 2nd.”
CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

NINTH INTERNATIONAL BOTANICAL CONGRESS

Crossing the cold and foggy North Atlantic in mid-November 1957, Erling Porsild was grateful for the twelve days of sea-going rest on the freighter to Copenhagen, although he spent three hours each morning and afternoon with his books, papers, and typewriter in order to write up the summer’s work and to outline the details needed for the excursions with the Ninth International Botanical Congress in 1959, as well as sorting out slides and going over notes for several lectures he expected to give in Europe.

On arrival in Denmark, he spent a good deal of time in the Copenhagen library and herbarium before picking up his new car in Stuttgart and going via Heidelberg and Basel to Geneva, where he was disappointed to find comparatively little material from the Far East in the DeCandolle Herbarium. He found it was “unheated and poorly provided with lights so that, at this time of year, it was difficult to work there except for a few hours during the middle of the day. A few days after my arrival I was taken ill with some sort of intestinal ‘flu’ and for the next ten days was laid up at my hotel with a fairly high temperature which left me very weak. In the end I thus accomplished very little in Geneva beyond looking up a number of things in the very excellent botanical library.”

He visited Zurich, Salzburg, and Munich before returning to Copenhagen to spend Christmas with his brother Sten and family. Over the holidays, the brothers went ski-ing together in Austria. It seems obvious from Erling’s journal entries that, unlike the gruelling pace he had set himself on his last study visit, he intended to make the most of this trip to Europe by taking excursions, going to concerts, operas, and plays, and spending more time with family and botanical friends as well as working in selected herbaria. On January 9, he
wrote to Joseph Ewan, who was back teaching at Tulane University after his research at Kew had ended and had written a letter of support for his Guggenheim fellowship: “I am in Europe, thoroughly enjoying myself, accomplishing very little in the way of useful work, and, as usual, frequently suffering pangs of remorse and guilt for being lazy.” He gave as his excuse the fact that he had lost three weeks over the A-influenza attack with complications, but had now completely recovered.¹

He gave a talk on the Hudson Bay Lowlands to a capacity audience in the Botanical Institute in Copenhagen on January 23 before leaving on the overnight boat to Oslo to see Johannes and Dagny Lid and talk about their book on the Rocky Mountain alpine flowers. “In the Oslo Herbarium I came across a collection of Labrador plants made by Moravian missionaries in the early part of the 19th Century,” he said. “The collection must be one of the earliest from Labrador and is of considerable historical interest. It had been given to the herbarium many years ago by Professor Axel Blytt but no one in the Museum knew how and when it had come into his possession. It was of little or no interest in the Oslo museum and I was delighted to accept it by way of exchange for the National Herbarium in Ottawa.”

He had been invited to go to Trondheim by his old friend Olav Gjaerevoll, Mayor of the town and Director and Curator of that branch of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences, where he was asked to give a talk to members of the Botanical and Zoological Societies. From there he took the train to Stockholm to spend a delightful couple of weeks with Hugo and Gunnel Sjörs, discussing their past and future work concerning the Hudson Bay Lowlands. While there, he was asked to speak to staff and botanists from a number of botanical institutions on the Alpine Flora of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. “Following the lecture, I was invited to a very grand dinner to which came most of my audience of some 60 people. I was told that it is customary thus to entertain out-of-town lecturers who in this case are given an opportunity to meet and talk to the people who come to their lectures. At the dinner, the speaker is the guest of the society while the other guests pay for their own dinners and drinks. This seems an excellent and most civilized custom which we could well adopt in Canada.”

Although he had been told at the Russian Embassy in Ottawa that there would be no problem with obtaining his diplomatic passport to Russia while in Europe, he had endless difficulties in Copenhagen and Stockholm until he was finally given the necessary papers in order to proceed to Leningrad via Finland. Hustich met him in Helsingfors and entertained him royally. Erling
met a number of botanists and gave both his talks on different evenings, but at the one he gave on the Lowlands, he was amused to note that “everyone became so interested in the slides I showed and discussed them so loudly among themselves that I almost gave up giving any commentary at all which, after all, wasn’t needed.”

He was the only passenger on the plane to Russia on February 19 and the hour and a half journey was spent chatting with the stewardess in English. He was met with courtesy at the airport in Leningrad, and, despite a certain amount of confusion over various official rules at the outset, his month’s stay turned out to be a heartwarming as well as a rewarding experience. A certain quantity of vodka may have added to the warmth but he really felt that he had never been surrounded by so much kindness and generosity on all sides. His hotel was reasonably comfortable, he had no trouble with ordering or talking to anyone at meals, his working conditions at the Botanical Institute were more than ample, the staff were helpful in finding a great amount of Dryas and other interesting material, his colleagues were extremely warm and friendly, the Intourist girl who showed him around the city and the Hermitage could not have
been more pleasant and charming, and there seemed to be an endless number of excellent concerts and operas held in the evenings. The equipment supplied for his talks did not exactly give justice to his photographs but they still seemed to be enjoyed, and when he was at work at the Institute during the day, there was a constant stream of visitors at his desk. Before he left, they all came bearing presents for him to take back.

He returned to Copenhagen on March 18, took his car out of storage, and went back to work at the Museum until the end of the month. On April 1, he and Sten set off for another skiing holiday in Austria. It was not until April 15 that he settled in to try and work in the herbarium of the Botanical Museum in Vienna, which he found was another very difficult place in which to work.

The collection is housed in 5 large rooms or halls, each with 30 ft. ceilings. Herbarium cases are wooden and placed in 3 tiers, so that tall ladders are needed to reach the cases. The arrangement of cases is poor and wasteful of space and working conditions in the herbarium are bad. Not only is there no heat but the only light is provided by a few low-watt bulbs suspended from the ceiling. Everywhere tables are piled high with unwrapped collections showing that the staff is quite unable to cope with the work on hand. The library is old and possesses many rare old books and is fairly well up to date. Library space too is scarce and books are scattered through many rooms, in bookcases reaching to the ceiling, often two rows to each shelf. As a result books are hard to find and use. One girl looks after the library and also helps in the herbarium. She told me that at the beginning of the war the entire herbarium and library was removed to storage in various Austrian castles. The plants were tied in bundles and carried downstairs – 176 steps – no elevator, and packed into crates in the yard and there loaded on trucks. As it happened, no damage was done to buildings whereas the Art Museum across the path suffered a bomb hit that did little damage however. One castle in which collections were stored was destroyed during the war and the collections with it, so that several families of monocots (incl. Cyperaceae) were lost.

It was perhaps fortunate, under the circumstances, that the herbarium was not as rich in East and North Asiatic material as Erling had hoped. He worked on *Dryas* and *Saxifraga* but found little of interest. His entire entry for April 17
read: “Cold. Worked in herbarium. At night to State opera to see Tosca.” On April 19, the day after his brother Sten left him to go back to Copenhagen, Erling worked only in the morning, went for a drive in the afternoon, and returned at night to see “a very fine performance of O’Neill’s Strange Interlude – in German.” It is notable that there is now a distinct lack of information in his daily reporting. His last entry of any real length is of an excursion to Rax, a hundred kilometres southwest of Vienna, on April 20, which concludes, without naming any companions: “On the way back to Vienna stopped near Petershof in one of the famous wine districts and found a small farm house where we spent the evening. Some other places had been too crowded and noisy. This was smaller and less noisy and very enjoyable. The wine was good (and reasonable), and an old chap with a concertina entertained with typical Viennese songs in which most joined.” For four more days, he simply wrote: “To Museum,” and then mentioned brief outings. By the end of April, he was touring in Italy, with no mention of anything but place and date, and by May 17 he was back in Copenhagen ready to sail back to North America on the same freighter on which he had travelled six months earlier. Officially, he arrived in Boston May 31 and was back at work in the Herbarium on June 4.

However, when he arrived in Ottawa he was once again not alone or soon would not be. Miss Harkness said primly: “Mr. Porsild went to Europe with no wife and no car, and he came back to Canada with a new Mercedes Benz and a new wife!” There had actually been no time for a ceremony in Europe but Vienna-born Margrit Guelfenburg Stoeffel, aged 37, divorced school-teacher, and Alf Erling Porsild, aged 57, of Ottawa, Ontario, were quietly married in Edmonton, Alberta, during the field trip to the Rockies in the coming summer.

Erling had been shocked to find that his house had been broken into while he was away. He wrote to Raup to tell him that since coming home “there have been many busy days for me both at the office, and also at home where everything was in a horrible mess after the burglary. I still do not know what the burglars were after, for nothing valuable (except my British order) was taken, nor was any serious damage done. The Police theory is that they were looking for secret documents and manuscripts!” The police theory may have had some basis in his apparent “Russian sympathies” and long stay in Leningrad during the winter, but it would, of course, be impossible to prove. Meanwhile, he was settling back to catch up with work at the office where he expected to spend a couple of months before going out west. All his staff was out of the office. “Bill is back at Winisk, Homer is in the Maritimes and Howard has just gone on
holidays before going in the field,” he told Hugo Sjörs. It is interesting to note the use of the first names, a sign of the changing times after the formality of all the previous years.

By September, he was telling Raup, who had just come back from another summer in East Greenland, that he had recently returned from … a somewhat hurried trip to Alberta and B.C. mainly to prepare next year’s botanical excursion under the I.B.C. to Rocky Mts. The trip was made by car and was a most pleasant one, not least because I was accompanied by ‘that girl friend’ of mine. She enjoyed the trip immensely and it was fun to observe her reactions to all that was new to her and to show her our Canadian west. By now you will have seen from the formal notice about the happy event…. I have promised Margrit to show her some of the eastern hardwood forest in autumn colours. I shall never forget my own reactions to it, many years ago, on a trip through Vermont and New Hampshire, in October. This and a shopping trip to Boston for curtains and blinds for the porch and for a new record player may give us an excuse for a trip south (as if one was needed). If we do make it we shall certainly want to stop in at Peter-sham on our way.⁵

He was “absent on sick leave” from the Herbarium for 13½ days late in the year when he had to go back into hospital for another operation on his old problem from the North. As he told Sjörs at the beginning of January 1959, “I have had some long-needed repairs done to my legs and to an old hernia and am still a bit ‘weak in the knees’ from much cutting and nearly a month on the sick list. However, things are mending fast and I am sure I shall be able to out-walk you next time we get to Attawapiskat.” He had told Gjaerevoll on November 17 that his recent marriage had been a wonderful change for him, and Margrit seemed very happy and contented in Canada. To Sjörs he added: “Many thanks for your letter of Dec. 12 with holiday greetings and good wishes to Margrit and me on the occasion of our marriage. We still think it was a very good idea! We have had a most enjoyable Xmas with visits from Karin, my married daughter and her family, and from the younger daughter Toni who hopes to graduate from high school next summer.”⁶

Plans for the 1959 International Botanical Congress, to be held in Montreal on August 19–29, were now in full swing. In Ottawa, the entire staff at
the Herbarium were actively involved in the planning as they were slated to be leaders in five major excursions – Homer Scoggan in the subarctic flora at Churchill, Manitoba, Bill Baldwin in the boreal forest of Ontario and Quebec, Howard Crum in the Bryology of Mont Tremblant, Quebec, and Erling Porsild in the alpine and subalpine flora of the Rocky Mountains and in the arctic flora and vegetation of the Canadian Arctic. The arctic excursion was presenting the most problems, so much so that Erling wrote to T. W. Bøcher at the Botanisk Laboratorium in Copenhagen on April 8:

There is still hope that we may be able to put on an excursion to the high arctic, although by now I almost wish that I had never suggested the trip. I want to have this trip as an ‘invitation trip’ to be extended only to botanists actively interested in arctic botany. It would, of course, have to be severely limited, owing to the quite small number that could be handled by the military aircraft available and by the limited sleeping accommodation at these high-arctic posts. The decision of ‘which Department should pay for what and why’ has held up the final decision for several months and may, in the end, make it too late to organize the trip.  

A letter had been written to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker by W. P. Thompson, President of the University of Saskatchewan, as early as 4 August 1958, outlining the importance of the Congress:

... where some 5,000–6,000 people will bring together scientists from over seventy countries interested in all aspects of plants. As part of the Congress a large number of field trips are being planned whereby botanists will have the opportunity of visiting every Canadian Province. Several departments of the Dominion Government as well as Provincial departments and private agencies are rendering material assistance in the planning and conducting of these trips. It is most desirable that a small group of specialists in Arctic botany should have an opportunity of visiting areas in northern Canada that are almost inaccessible by commercial transportation and in which there are no privately maintained facilities for accommodation. The visit of such a group of specialists would make a real contribution to the solution of problems in the distribution of plants in the Arctic areas of the
world and also to the knowledge of the botany of the Canadian Arctic. Canada occupies a unique position in holding sovereignty over such vast areas of the Arctic and it is especially desirable that foreign scientists should have an opportunity to visit the North at the time of the Congress.

It is impossible for the Congress Board of Directors to plan and conduct a trip in this area without the full cooperation of the Department of National Defence and possibly some assistance as well from the Departments of Transport and Northern Affairs and National Resources. Would it be possible for the Department of National Defence to provide transportation for the party in Service aircraft and food and accommodation at suitable stopover points? We fully realize that considerations of national security are paramount in planning such a trip. There is absolutely no desire to visit secret bases except as this might be necessary to provide suitable accommodation in areas of botanical interest. Since this is an international meeting of scientists we wish to invite botanists from a number of countries including the U.S.S.R.

If permission is granted for this trip the Congress Board would invite some 35–50 specialists to participate. The leader of the trip would be Dr. A. E. Porsild of the National Museum of Canada. The dates would be about August 1 to 11, 1959. A suggested route would be Edmonton – Coppermine – Cambridge Bay – Resolute – Frobisher – Chimo – Montreal. This of course can be modified to meet security regulations and available facilities.

By 17 November 1958, there had been numerous discussions between all the relevant government departments. Alvin Hamilton of Northern Affairs and National Resources, in writing to George R. Pearkes, Minister of National Defence, said that as a result of these discussions it had been agreed that it would not be necessary to plan as ambitious a trip as that contemplated in Dr. Thompson’s original letter:

It has also been agreed that the party could be kept to a maximum of thirty-five, and that if this size presented difficulties either in terms of transportation or accommodation the party could be split into two groups. Specifically, what is now proposed is a trip from Montreal to
Great Whale River to Frobisher Bay, flying over the [Chubb] Crater en route. From Frobisher Bay the party might return to Montreal via Fort Chimo and possibly Knob Lake. If it could possibly be arranged, it would be desirable to have a side-trip from Frobisher Bay to Resolute, but if this proves to be too formidable an undertaking the shorter trip or some suitable modification of it to suit the needs of accommodation and so on would be satisfactory to the botanists.

With respect to accommodation I might say that while these men are all scientists of world stature, they are accustomed to making field expeditions and would be quite prepared to sleep under canvas and generally to rough it a little. It is altogether likely that the group will include two or three scientists from the Soviet Union or other Iron Curtain countries. For this reason some thought would have to be given to security arrangements. Before the expedition was finally authorized it would, of course, be considered by the Interdepartmental Committee on the Exchange of Visits with the Soviet Union. I understand that the Committee is already aware of the proposal.

By April 1959, it had finally been agreed that a North Star aircraft would be available to transport a group of thirty-five delegates on a ten-day field trip from Montreal to Great Whale River to Frobisher Bay, with a side trip to Resolute, and return from Frobisher Bay by way of Fort Chimo and Knob Lake. The cost of the trip would be in the neighbourhood of $10,000, which would have to be borne by either the Congress or the participants. Without subsidy, the cost per delegate would be approximately $300 for the trip. The Department of External Affairs had agreed to the inclusion of some delegates from Communist countries. On May 5, Erling could finally write to Bøcher:

As you will see from a circular from the I.B.C. Excursions Committee which is being airmailed to all those who have indicated interest in a trip to the High Arctic, we are now in a position to offer such a trip. Unfortunately it will not be the trip I had originally proposed, nor will it, unfortunately, be possible to make it an ‘invitation trip’ to a select group, at no cost to the participants. Still, it should be an interesting one. It is, of course possible, at this late date, that too few people will be able to change their plans, in which case the trip may have to be cancelled.
Raup was in something of a quandary about the Arctic trip. “When we were in Ottawa in February, I told Bill Baldwin that I would go on his trip to the Clay Belt. I haven’t written to him yet, but I have just about given this up.” In fact, he had about given up going anywhere except to the Congress in Montreal because of the number of botanists he expected to pass through on their way to Canada so he felt he should see them there first. “All this doesn’t lessen the attractiveness of the Arctic trip. Can you tell me anything more about the times? Have you got any personal opinions about whether the Arctic trip will actually come off?” Erling said that even though the number of people who had signed up was small, Senn had told him that the trip would go through even though the Congress might have to pay the deficit. “Some of the people I know are going: Hultén, Sørensen, Hedberg, J. W. Thomson, and L. Benson. Senn did not have the additional names when I spoke to him. I do hope you will be able to go. It will be a wonderful opportunity for a quick ‘look-see.’”

Hultén was going to stay with another U.S. botanist, Bill Weber, at the University of Colorado Herbarium in Boulder, en route to the Rocky Mountain excursion. Weber wrote to Erling on June 29, hoping there would be some way that he could go to the Arctic with that gang; I know Hedberg and most of the rest and think it should be a great trip…. I am expecting Hultén toward the end of this week. He is visiting his brother-in-law for a few days before coming on to Boulder, so he should reach here about July 4. I am planning to have him stay at Science lodge for a few days, to get acclimated to the altitude, and then I am going to take him on a five day excursion to Mount Evans, Hoosier Pass, Twin Lakes, and all of our very best alpine areas. He will fly from here to Jasper. As for us, I’m planning to drive to Jasper with the family and camp them in the park during the time we will be in the field. After the excursion they will go down to Seattle to visit family before returning to Boulder. If the Arctic trip doesn’t pan out for me, I would plan to stay in the Park with them and collect until time to go to Montreal.

Erling immediately invited him to come to the Arctic and looked forward to seeing him at Jasper.

On June 9 he told Sjörs that “early in July, Margrit and I leave for the west to check preparations for the Rocky Mt. Excursion. After the excursion we dash back East. On Aug. 5th or 6th the Arctic trip starts from Montreal for a hurried
visit to a few interesting points as far north as Cornwallis Island. Sorry you can’t be along – still, there are no peat bogs!” In the end, Eric Hultén went by car with the Weber family to Jasper, which gave him a chance to visit ‘Old Faithful’ in Yellowstone Park, one of the only ‘wonders of the world’ he had never visited, and in Erling’s official report for both the Rocky Mountain and Arctic excursions, he said he had been “most ably assisted” by Bill Weber who had acted as Assistant Leader, “and,” he told Sjörs, “made some very startling discoveries, among bryophytes as well as lichens.”

The forty delegates in the Rocky Mountain Excursion No. 2 group “met at Jasper on July 20 and during the following 2 days made excursions to Mt. Edith Cavell and Athabaska Valley,” Erling reported. “On July 23 the group moved to Banff where, during the latter part of the month, excursions were made to the general vicinity of Banff, Lake Agnes, Consolation Lake, Snow Creek Pass and the high country along the Continental divide south of Healy Creek. Good weather favoured the excursion which furnished ample opportunities for study and collection of alpine and subalpine flora. An impressive list of new records and discoveries resulted from the tour.”
The Arctic trip began on August 8 at Dorval Airport in Montreal where thirty delegates assembled for transport to Great Whale River on Hudson Bay via RCAF North Star. They made their first field trip that afternoon before leaving the next day for Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island where they stayed for two days. On August 11, they were flown to Resolute for a two-day look at the high Arctic vegetation on Cornwallis Island. They left for Coral Harbour on Southampton Island on August 13, and Fort Chimo in Northeast Quebec on August 16, for a further two days of excursions at each location. On August 18 they made a brief stop at Knob Lake (Schefferville) en route south to Montreal. “Good weather and excellent working conditions again favoured the trip which afforded members of the group a unique opportunity for the study of arctic vegetation and flora as well as a most welcome opportunity for the discussion of numerous problems in arctic botany. The large collection of plants obtained included a number of interesting records and discoveries.”

Raup was delighted to have been able to make the trip to the Arctic. “The more I think back over it, the more amazing that trip becomes,” he said. “I don’t think I ever accomplished so much in so short a time – not just in the things that I did, but in the ideas I got from the things I saw and did and from the conversations I had with people. The trip certainly must have been one of the outstanding ones of the Congress, and you are to be congratulated for plugging away at the thing until it finally came to pass. As you know, when you talked about it with us last February, I didn’t take it seriously at all, and didn’t think it was possible.”

Back in Stockholm, Sjörs reported October 19 that Hultén was giving a lecture that week on the Congress “and on the marvellous Rocky Mts excursion (he will talk later on what he was shown of the Arctic). He is very enthusiastic about it all.” Erling heard from F. J. Hermann, Senior Botanist for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture at Beltsville, Maryland, on November 16:

From Bill Weber I’ve just had a glowing account of both the Rocky Mountain and your Arctic excursion. The latter, especially, must have been an experience of a lifetime for many of the participants judging not only from Weber’s letter but from reports received from several others. Why in the world didn’t the Botanical Congress list this trip among the others scheduled, I wonder, or at least get out some advance notice to the registrants? I heard nothing of it until it was over, otherwise I would certainly have made every effort to take part in it.
After seeing your account of the Jasper-Banff excursion, too, with all its wealth of detail on significant species encountered, I would wish that I’d found a means of joining in.16

Scoggan, Baldwin, and Crum would also report successful completion of their Congress excursions. Scoggan was particularly enthusiastic about his Churchill tour which had begun in Winnipeg on August 7, assisted by Dr. J. M. Gillett of the Plant Research Institute in Ottawa, Dr. J. C. Ritchie from the University of Manitoba, and Mrs. Eva Beckett, a long-time resident of Churchill and
knowledgeable amateur botanist. They had had a fine display of northern lights one evening, to the delight of the group, and the abundant arctic and subarctic plants were in full flower, which amply justified the trip for all concerned.

The Ninth International Botanical Congress was a triumph for Canadian Botany in general. It was attended by over 3,000 delegates from around sixty countries, and the meetings in Montreal had all gone smoothly (“I think everybody was quite happy about everything,” Erling told Sjörs October 2. “At least I have heard no complaints.”) The excursions had all been well planned and executed across the country, and in five of them close to 150 delegates had been personally conducted into interesting floral areas of Canada by the staff of the National Herbarium of Canada. When it was all over, for the Annual Report of 1959–60, Erling could say that the preparations for the meetings and excursions took up a considerable portion of the working time and effort of the
Herbarium staff, but “in retrospect it is felt that the contacts made and the ideas exchanged during these excursions, as well as the information resulting from them in the form of information and specimens has been fully commensurate with the time and effort expended in the preparation and planning of these excursions.” In other words, it had been a huge success, of which the Herbarium staff could be very proud.\textsuperscript{17}

It would not be possible, however, for the staff to settle slowly back to normal routines without new distractions. Erling told Raup October 5th that things were still disorganized, both at work and at home, and he was still trying to pick up the pieces after the summer’s activities. At home, painters had taken over the house and Toni was back home again taking her last year of high school in Ottawa. At work, his office had been removed out of the Herbarium on the fourth floor and set up on the floor below, while he was still naming plants collected during the two excursions, by himself and by people who left their collections with him for naming. “I hope eventually to send out a mimeographed list of plants seen and noted on the trip to the Arctic, because some interesting records may easily have escaped me.”\textsuperscript{18}

The reason for the move was that, in September, the Art Gallery and the Geological Survey finally moved out of the Museum, the latter taking with them the entire photographic staff and equipment. Suddenly, the Herbarium on the fourth floor was provided with a huge amount of space on two floors. In contrast to the preceding years when the Museum botanists who did their office and research work in nooks and corners between the herbarium storage cases, each botanist was now provided with separate office space, and such furniture as he had previously used in the herbarium was transferred to the new offices on the third floor. The problem was that working conditions in the Herbarium itself had now become impossible.

In a memo to C. Allen, Chief Purchasing Division of the Department, September 26, Erling said:

The scientific research of a botanist can only be carried out in the herbarium, where all botanical specimens are stored and where must be available for him the botanical reference works, indices, microscopes and other essential equipment which are the tools of his trade. It is neither practical, nor desirable to carry research material from the herbarium to the offices on the third floor, and desks, chairs and other essential furniture are needed in the herbarium if the botanists are to be able to carry out what I consider their most important function.
In my own case more than half of my working time is spent in research in the herbarium where, for my work desk, for more than a year I have been using a folding table made in the Museum workshop for use in the field, and with it a folding metal chair. Botanists calling on me for professional consultation, I can at present offer a metal chair or the corner of my desk.

He was happy that there would now be adequate space for storing the national collection of plants that had almost tripled since he took office but the present filing cases and index cabinets had long been hopelessly inadequate.

I might add that, except when new positions have been created in the Herbarium, no new furniture has ever been provided for the Herbarium. In my own office, now on the third floor, my desk, I believe was originally provided for Professor Macoun when he came to the Geol. Survey, in 1883. All book cases, cabinets for card indices are hand-me-downs, discarded from other Government offices, the only new furniture being book shelves built in the Museum workshop. My telephone is on the window sill and my coat hangs on the back of my chair.¹⁹

There is no answering memo in Erling’s files like those in 1936 when his first request for a workable desk was turned down due to the economic situation, but, two years later, he wrote to Raup on 25 August 1961 to say:

Nothing much has happened in the Museum during the last year. All the empty halls left us by the G.S. and the Art Gallery are still empty. The temporary partitions have been demolished, but it seems that whenever pressure is brought to bear on Dept. of Public Works someone questions the wisdom of spending money on a building that “is slowly sinking into the ground and will some day tumble down, and that, anyway, will have to be replaced in the next few years.” A site for a new museum has actually been set aside on Elgin Street, in the downtown area, and if the present Government spending spree continues, we may soon have a new museum. But I doubt that I shall be in it. I think I told you that Dr. Anderson died in June and that Mrs. A. passed on a year ago. Jenness is well and busy writing up the history of the administration of Eskimo lands and their inhabitants, working on a Government grant that gives him completely free hands.²⁰
CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE LAST YEARS

A new decade had begun in the National Herbarium in 1960 and Erling was already planning another trip out West. Writing to Raup in February, he said: “I expect to be in the Rocky Mts. again this summer, but first I plan to spend a month or so with Weber at Boulder, and to have six weeks or perhaps two months in Banff and Jasper, mainly in the easternmost ranges that probably were never glaciated, and where there seems to be a significant concentration of arctic species.” He hoped to work with Bill Weber “on some problems of high alpine relic populations,” he told Hugo Sjörs in April, and in October he said it had been a good visit and they had made some “very interesting and profitable excursions to the high country (12,000–14,000 ft.) in Colorado. It was a new and very exciting experience to visit these ancient table lands and to study their vegetation. We found at least three species new to the U.S. and at least a dozen new to Colorado or Wyoming.”

“I had a wonderful summer last,” he told Olav Gjaerevoll on December 22, “in some ways perhaps the most profitable and rewarding of all the seasons I have spent in the west. The trip took me all the way through the Rockies from S.E. Yukon to the high country in Wyoming and Colorado where you can get above 14,000 ft. Margrit came along, of course and we took turns driving – 15,000 miles in all.”

His only complaint was to Sjörs that “while I was in the field this summer, Howard Crum decided he wanted to marry my secretary, who, in the last couple of years has developed so as to become almost indispensable. It will take several years to train a new girl and I expect that, as a result, I shall have to do most of my own typing. However, these are selfish considerations. I like Howard and I am sure he needs a wife and family life – only I wish he could have picked someone else’s secretary.”
He apologized to Sjörs that, “owing to the Botanical Congress and subsequent digressions,” nothing had been done with the Hudson Bay Lowland material, however he would try and do the needed checking as soon as possible. The “digressions” had included his having to go to hospital to have his old hernia repaired again after having been on the hospital waiting list for fourteen months.

It was not a very serious matter and it looks as if the patching may hold together now. Just as I was ready to return to the office I developed a severe case of bursitis in my right shoulder, but, fortunately, it responded very well to cortisone, and I am now as good as new again. But it has delayed me over a month although I have been able to do a good deal of writing at home. As usual I am trying to do too many things at once. Last winter I completed about half of the ms. of a flora of the Mackenzie District, long overdue. I had planned to finish it this
winter but with the appearance of Moss’ *Flora of Alberta* I think it is even more urgent that I should finish a lengthy list which I shall call ‘Materials for a Flora of the southern Canadian Rocky Mountains east of the Continental Divide,’ which is the results of seven summers’ work in the west.

Finally, I am trying to complete a smaller paper resulting from a small job last summer, describing the vegetation of ‘Liard Hotsprings’ in northern B.C. It is an interesting area because the Liard Gap is one of important migration routes and because I suspected that the spring area would harbour interesting relic elements. I visited the area briefly in 1944 and have wanted to return there ever since, before the forests were burned or before someone built a spa there. I wish you could have been along, for I realize that I must have overlooked many features from lack of understanding. I did make a small collection of bryophytes that Crum has named; perhaps they will help to interpret the ecosystem. My own contribution will, of course be floristic and phytogeographic.

As 1960 came to a close, he told Gjaerevoll: “I really must get some work off my hands in the next few years and if I keep going in the field each summer I shall, instead, keep on piling up new material. The years are rolling along and it makes me shudder to think that in five years I shall have reached retiring age. The big job, of course, is the Rocky Mountain flora of which only the Monocots have been done. Then there is the flora of the Mackenzie District which is about one third done and a half a dozen smaller papers that I am committed to have ready some time this spring.”

Raup was having a grand ‘clean-up’ of his collections at Harvard Forest in January 1961, including those from the Alaska Highway, since a young student named George Argus had finished his basic examinations and residence for his doctorate and was staying on for the current year to finish his thesis on willows.

He needed some funds to help out, and I had some research money that I could use for him, so we got together. He moved out to the Forest about the middle of December, and is doing a magnificent job of putting all my collections in order. The 1939 stuff from Brintnell Lake is done, and you should be receiving your set shortly. This is the stuff that had bugs in it, and it had to be completely resorted. I have been
much worried about it, as you know. But when George finally got into it, he discovered that the damage really was superficial, and restricted to only a few bundles. You may imagine my relief!

“I shall be looking forward to receiving a set of your Brintnell Lake and Highway plants,” Erling said, “I have often wished that I had had them.” As well as the major work on the Mackenzie District, he was working on a paper by “a young chap named Arnold from Michigan U.” who had collected very close to Brintnell Lake the previous summer. He was also working on a more lengthy paper on the vegetation of Liard Hotsprings where he had spent a week last summer, as well as a third paper on the lower Liard by “a young forester from Calgary,” and these three papers were all due to appear in an early number of the Museum’s “Contribution to Botany.” On a personal note, he said that he and Margrit were hoping to see the Raups sometime in spring as they were planning a trip to Florida to see her two elderly aunts. “We shall probably leave here about the middle of March and be gone for about one month. My brother and his wife have been visiting us for a couple of weeks and will return to Johnsons Crossing early next week. It has been grand to have them here.”

Erling had been receiving parts of Hugo Sjörs’ Attawapiskat manuscript on the Hudson Bay Lowlands and was returning the final pages to him. He commented that the notes on potential resources were useful and interesting, although he did not expect either of them would see agricultural development in the Lowlands. Sjörs had raised questions regarding his nomenclature suggestions.

My reasons for showing preference for certain generic names, especially in a non-taxonomic paper, are not purely pedantic ones, but because those are the names that are familiar to the majority of the readers of the *Nat. Mus. Bull.*, and are the names still used in most American manuals. It would not matter much if your plants were arranged systematically, but to the reader not versed in systematics it might not be evident that *Trichophorum alpinum* (in an alphabetical arrangement) is what he knows as *Scirpus hudsonianus*. Few, if any, European readers would be in doubt about the meaning of these names, because they were in use in Europe not so long ago.

I know very well that we shall have to ‘modernize’ our nomenclature very soon. But it will have to come about through the
'Manuals.' Furthermore, if generic names not commonly understood are introduced in a primarily ecological paper, one must insert the commonly used names in brackets. This, in fact, is what I suggested doing, even though it is a little cumbersome. As regards the question of capitals, I must confess that I am old-fashioned and that I have never been able to see the advantage or time-saving in doing away with capitals. But I expect that I shall soon be alone in this and that I shall have to 'smarten up.' In America, most bryologists, I believe, do 'lower-case' and I realize the inconsistency in having *Sphagnum dusenii* on the same line with a *Draba Dusenii*…. I think the rule specifies that if capital letters are to be used for specific names they should be employed only for substantives and for adjectives derived from personal names. Therefore, *Warnstorffianum* should be capitalized, but *hudsonianum* (derived from the name of the bay) not…. But I do by no means insist that you should not write as you like. Other writers in the Mus. Bull. (even my own assistants) are ‘permitted’ to follow their own choice.

The Porsilds had a good end-of-winter holiday in Florida. “It was a wonderful experience,” Erling said, “and, I am sure, did us both a lot of good. It was exciting, too, to see tropical (or at least semi-tropical) vegetation for the first time. Most striking was to see a pine forest with an understory of palmetto or to see and collect in the flesh *Taxodium distichum* of which my earliest and only previous experience was from the Cretaceous rocks of West Greenland, when junior assistant one summer many years ago to Professor A. C. Seward of Cambridge.”

It seemed that the years were turning into circles as they moved along. In August, Raup commented: “My heavens! What a lot of letters you and I have written to each other in the last 25 years – and this in addition to all the good talk!” Increasingly, time was showing itself to them both medically. Raup had been in hospital for an eye operation August 2–7. “The eye is getting along OK, but I have some sort of allergic reaction to the post-operative medication, so the thing is swelled up and I look frightful!” Erling hoped the operation had proved successful and he was not too long discomforted. “Perhaps it will be possible some time to replace defective or worn-out organs. I shall be in the market for a better pair of legs!” The Porsilds had spent the summer in Ottawa and had had a nice visit recently from Karin and her three children “who just now are in a very interesting age. They are all well. Toni has been working in Winnipeg this
summer and will be coming home for a short visit next week, before starting her second year in the University of Manitoba.”

Erling was working that summer on his Mackenzie District Flora and he told Raup:

I would have liked to make this a straight manual with keys and brief descriptions, but this would require an additional and preliminary paper in which taxonomical and phytogeographical problems could be taken care of. So now I shall try and compromise with something of a ‘hybrid’ nature in which I give short descriptions of families, and complete keys to genera and species; I hope also to be able to furnish distribution maps for all species not included in my arctic flora, but no descriptions of species beyond what the keys give. It would have been nice to illustrate all species not illustrated in the Arctic Flora, but that alone is a big job, even though we now have a full-time illustrator. [Mrs. Bartosch] came to us a couple of weeks ago and even now shows considerable promise, and is very fast. She has had some botanical training and is quite intelligent. After about one week’s briefing I put her to work on the willows, mainly because I was then working on that genus for the Flora. I should very much have liked to have your opinion of what she is doing.… I am now well into the dicots, and with some luck I might get fairly well ahead with the ms. this summer and following winter. With your revision it was great fun to ‘sail’ through the willows. Since I could not hope to improve on your keys, I hope you will not object when I have drawn freely on them.

“Use anything you can out of that willow effusion of mine,” Raup said:

George Argus has changed some of the ‘glauca group’ names in his thesis, and is probably right about most of them. He makes glauca a rather gigantic species, sinking cordifolia into it. But he also sinks fallax and athabascensis in it, which is dubious. He doesn’t recognize varieties or subspecies of glauca, merely geographic ‘phases.’ Then he recognizes one other species in the glauca group – S. brachycarpa, with three subspecies: ssp. brachycarpa, ssp. niphoclada, and ssp. fullertonensis. He might be right about this. I haven’t read all of his thesis yet, so I don’t know what all of his reasoning is.
Erling said he would certainly be interested to see what Argus was doing with *Salix glauca*, “but, for the present, I am quite happy to follow your latest treatment.”

Sjörs’ paper on the Lowlands was ready for submission in January 1962 but Erling had some questions about the illustrations, text figures, and lettering before it was finally ready to go to the Museum printer. “I think I told you that I plan to spend a month in the London herbaria in March,” he said. “In April I shall join Margrit in Vienna. Before returning to Canada, we shall spend a couple of weeks in Denmark. It would be nice for us if we could include Stockholm in our itinerary; time certainly will be very short of that, but we shall have to think about that.” By September, he could say that they had stuck around Ottawa since their return from Europe in May. “I had hoped to get a lot of writing done, but it never happens. Too many interruptions.” The first proofs of the Attawapiskat paper had arrived from the printer and Miss Burke thought Sjörs, who had just received the good news of his appointment as professor at the university in Uppsala, should see it at that stage. Erling thought it read quite well and Miss Burke had said not to worry about the illustrations that looked pretty terrible in the first proof. The proofs were back to the printer by mid-October with corrections as asked. “We have just had a short visit from Bøcher who brought us up-to-date on botanical doings in Scandinavia,” Erling said, “and told me about the meeting this summer in Reykjavik. I never knew about that one until it was too late to go. I should have liked to be there.”

The “five years” towards Erling’s retirement were beginning to pick up steam, and there were more medical problems to be faced. “I cannot remember if I have told you that I have been away from the office a good deal this summer,” he told Sjörs in November 1963, with only three years left of his herbarium appointment. “First Margrit and I went to Mexico on holidays for six weeks. It was a very fine trip and I should like very much to go back. Soon after our return I had to be rushed into hospital for an emergency operation following a ruptured colon which had caused a massive peritonitis. The first two days the outcome was uncertain but, as you can see, I won and am now almost as good as new.”

He was not quite “almost as good as new” for it had been a serious near-death experience and he was not quite over it. “The first ten days were pretty grim,” he told Raup,

… but since then I have gained strength rapidly and I am now back at the office again when I can work a bit and bring back references and
On November 1, Erling told Sjörs:

Margrit tells me that we are going to Europe next year and that I am to attend the Edinburgh Congress. There is not much point to me going, actually; in view of my approaching retirement someone else should go. You, no doubt, will be there. If we go, I think I should like to make the post-congress excursion, by boat to Ireland etc. It is good to know that all is well with you and the family. I should like very much to show Margrit a bit of Sweden and to have you meet her. We shall see. Meanwhile, please remember me to Gunnel and the ‘children’ that, no doubt, are all very grown-up. They do grow up; Toni is being married next week!

Erling was well enough for them to go down to see the Raups at the end of November and as usual very much enjoyed the visit and talks, but on the drive back, the oil pressure in the Mercedes suddenly dropped to zero. “Fortunately we were near an exit from the throughway, but before we got with walking distance of a telephone, we were in trouble. We had to leave the car in Albany and take the train back to Ottawa. We hope to have word tomorrow that the car is ready; if we do we shall go down in the VW and get it this coming weekend.”

Erling, however, was far from being back to his old self. In March 1964, he told Raup that he had to go back to the hospital on April 27 “for some more, and, I hope, final repairs. Meanwhile Margrit has made tentative plans for us to go to Europe in early June, when the Lids have planned to take me on some pre-Congress excursions to the high country in W. Norway, famed for its large contingent of rare plants.” At work, he seemed to be making progress in completing some of his projects. His “Yukon paper” was completed long ago but “it

other material that I can work on at home. I still have a ‘peephole’ in my tummy that is to be sewn up at a second visit to hospital, Sept. 2. This temporary arrangement has been a nuisance and I must say that I much prefer the scheme intended by Nature. Margrit had a pretty bad time and during the first few days suffered more than I; but her recovery did not take quite so long. She has been a wonderful nurse since I came back from hospital and has spoiled and pampered me ‘something fierce.’ We have had a couple of visits from Karin and the children who spent three weeks with Mrs. Taverner at Blue Sea Lake.”

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seems that our Editorial Division will be completely bogged down with other work for quite a while. My paper on the N. Eastern antennarias is completed at last and is now being typed.”

Just before going into hospital, he was having second thoughts about his paper on the S.W. Yukon. “I have just completed the examination of the fine set, 3149 numbers, of your Alaska Highway plants that we received some time ago by exchange from the Gray Herbarium,” he said:

I need hardly point out that the collection is a major contribution to our botanical knowledge of the flora of Yukon and northern B.C. In the list I have indicated some of the more important range extensions of which there are a great many. Having seen this material, I now cannot help wonder if in view of your stuff it was not a mistake for me to attempt to proceed with my list of ‘New or noteworthy plants in the flora of S.W. Yukon.’ This paper, as you may remember, was originally intended to deal only with the Schofield & Crum collection and with some stuff my brother and I collected in 1951 and 1961. Later, when the ms. was ready for typing, Spetzman [Lloyd Spetzman of the U.S. Geological Survey] heard of it and sent me his stuff, which contributed a large number of important additions. When your stuff came, my re-written Catalogue was already completed. I knew you had been working on and off on your material and something you said some years back made me think that your “Highway Flora” was actually so far advanced that it might even be out before my list, and that this was the reason you had released your duplicate material. It is a pity if it won’t be out fairly soon. If I had known a couple of years ago, we might have been able to join forces and publish the highlights of our combined material before the ‘freshness’ had altogether vanished.

Raup’s response was to say that he didn’t know what was in his forthcoming paper on the S.W. Yukon but could see no reason why Erling should not go ahead with it.

Then this material can be used later in something more comprehensive. I have an idea for this ‘something.’ It is a mere suggestion for you to chew on. What do you say to you and I writing a flora of the Alaska Highway strip together? Mit keys und brief descriptions yet! As you
know, I have a first draft of this through the Monocots, and the willows could be extracted from my willow paper. The Gray Herbarium set of the collection is mounted but not inserted, and I have it here at the Forest where I can use it. When I can work at such a thing is another question. I’m over my head in the Greenland stuff at the moment, but that won’t last forever. Fred and I have our Yukon paper going to the printer now. Anyway, think it over! I think it would be great fun!

It was reported in the National Herbarium Quarterly Report from April 1–July 30, 1964, that Dr. Porsild left June 2 for a summer in Europe, visiting herbaria, attending the Tenth International Botanical Congress in Edinburgh, and collecting in Norway and Sweden, with Dr. Crum acting as Chief Botanist in his absence. He wrote to Sjörs on September 24:

We have been back home for nearly three weeks and are slowly returning to our accustomed way of living. We have had a very interesting, most enjoyable and profitable summer that we shall long remember. I am slowly catching up with the mail that accumulated in my absence and with a considerable pile of parcels containing plants that have been sent to me for determination, revision or report. When I need a rest, I do a little work on the plants I brought back from the excursions in Sweden and Norway, among which are several of which we have little or no material. Yesterday I completed my official report on my trip to Europe and what I did there.

Soon after our return Hultén recently returned from Alaska and Yukon, stopped over in Ottawa for a couple of weeks to look over our Alaska and Yukon plants for additional distributional data for his new Alaska Flora. We put him on a plane for Stockholm last night. He worked very hard while here – often from eight in the morning to late at night and he looked a little tired when he had finished. His energy and his extraordinary ability for sustained work seems undiminished.

Remembering their summer excursion, he said: “As I told you before I left you in Falköping, I very much enjoyed being with you two and with your group and I again thank you for inviting me and for all you did for me. I think I learned quite a lot, and I was much impressed with what I observed and with the broad knowledge of the members of your group, wishing, perhaps, that we had more
people of such high calibre in Canada, or that we somehow could attract some of them to this country.”

Once again there were rumours of changes floating around the National Museum, and there were encouraging signs that they would be forward-looking and exciting. “From what our new director told me a few days ago,” Erling said,

… the National Museum is perhaps due for some years of more liberal financial support, and it has even been hinted that we may soon be permitted to administer the funds voted us by Parliament, with fewer administrative restrictions, and that at least some of our requests for more staff, scientific as well as technical may be more favourably received than has been the case in the past. Our first requests are for a lichenologist and an ecologist – both categories are, as you know, scarce in Canada at present and I expect that we shall have to look for them elsewhere. The lichenologist will be Howard Crum’s responsibility. He might look to Finland where they appear to be in an abundant supply.

In the ecological field, I wonder if you would know anyone who might be interested to come to Canada. As a start we might be able to offer support of, say, a two-year project if such might appear more acceptable than a regular appointment. It might suit some young man working for his doctorate and not yet settled down for good…. When you have the time, I wish you would think about this suggestion and let me know what you think. My own thoughts are that our first attack should be aimed at problems in the boreal forest, or a continuation of the start already made on the Hudson’s Bay peatlands. It should not be difficult to find worth-while problems in either place that would appeal to a Scandinavian ecologist. I am sure such problems would receive very full support and encouragement from our foresters and wildlife management people.

By December 1964, Erling could tell Sjörs that the things he had mentioned in his letter in September as distinct possibilities had already come to pass, and that early in 1965 they would be able to advertise for a cryptogamic botanist for the National Herbarium, looking for a man of proven ability and some experience. “The staff requirements of the new and much enlarged Natural History Museum will, naturally, create favourable prospects for advancements, and for
further appointments to the staff. In fact, we are also advertising now for an assistant technician to help the cryptogamic botanists.”

There would be changes both coming and going in 1965. It was officially reported that Dr. Howard Crum would be leaving the National Museum to take up a position at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, while Mike J. Shchepanek joined the permanent staff as technician in the Cryptogamic section on June 21, and lichenologist Dr. Irwin Brodo made his first field trip for the National Herbarium to the Gatineau Park on July 26. “As far as I am concerned,” Erling told Sjörs 25 May 1965, “I shall reach retiring age in January, 1966. I have been urged to apply for another year’s extension and have been told that this will likely be approved. Such extensions must be approved again each year and will of course depend on health conditions, etc. If my extension is approved, I shall mainly concentrate on the completion of my two major opera, dealing with the floras of the Rocky Mountains and the Mackenzie District.”

Meanwhile, the Herbarium staff had all been busy attending preliminary meetings and excursions in connection with the newly formed Canadian Botanical Association, which met for the first time at Carleton University in Ottawa on May 26–28. About 150 Canadian botanists were congregating in Ottawa for the event. “By the end of the week when these meetings are over,” he said, “I shall be leaving for Vancouver to attend the annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada. On the way, I want to make a series of photographs to illustrate a contribution I am preparing for a new Atlas of Canada. To do this we shall go by car. Returning from B.C. we may drive through the American Rockies by way of Salt Lake City where I have to attend to some matters, returning to Ottawa in late June. A lot of driving in one month!”

In the end, the Porsilds decided to fly to Vancouver for the Royal Society meeting. “Before flying back to Ottawa I took some holidays,” Erling told Raup. “We rented a car and drove to Salt Lake City where we talked Mildred Wood into joining us on a tour of Bryce, Grand and Zion Canyons besides some of the lesser ones in the Wasach Range. The weather was grand and we had a fine trip together. The country we saw makes me wonder if more impressive scenery can be found anywhere in this world.”

Erling’s retirement was extended for a further year in 1966, during which it was officially reported (April 1–June 30) that he “completed his determination and critical study of his Rocky Mountain collection of vascular plants comprising well over 8,000 numbers, the result of nine field seasons spent mainly in Jasper, Banff and Waterton Lakes National Parks. This study … will be the basis
of his forthcoming flora of the Canadian Rocky Mountains.” In July–September, it was reported that Erling, “in collaboration with W. J. Cody of the Plant Research Institute of the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, commenced the preparation of a checklist of the vascular flora of continental Northwest Territories for his forthcoming Flora of Mackenzie and Keewatin District.” In the same period, on August 1, Dr. Robert Lee joined the staff of the National Herbarium as Curator of marine algae, and, on September 6, Dr. Robert R. Ireland succeeded Dr. H. Crum as curator of bryophytes. On October 13–14, Erling attended a symposium on “Terrestrial Ecology” at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, after which he visited the Cape Breton Highlands where he examined the flora of alpine bogs and made a collection of rare bog plants. He represented the National Museum of Canada at the centennial celebrations of the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University, October 26–28. For the rest of his time up to December 31, 1966, he made a final and critical examination and report on collections of plants made in British Columbia and Alberta by Hugo Sjörs from the University of Uppsala and from the Ogilvie Mountains in the Yukon by Bob Porsild, both under contract with the National Museum, and continued to work with Bill Cody on the “Checklist of Vascular Flora of Northwest Territories.”

Bob Porsild had retired in Whitehorse, and Erling had encouraged him to go back to collecting for the National Herbarium, especially in central Yukon as it was being opened up with the building of the Dempster Highway as far as the Ogilvie Mountains. “That’s pretty country up there,” Bob told reporter Lyn Harrington after he and Elly had loaded up their camper and headed north for a couple of summers, “quite changeable with wide valleys and sharp-edged white limestone mountains. It’s a dead-end road, with only a little hunting, fishing and mining, but hardly any traffic yet. And it’s good country for botanizing. The Ogilvies were not glaciated, you see. Plants grow there that won’t in the siltbanks of lower altitudes…. In two summers, my wife and I collected 464 different species, four to twenty specimens of each.”

It was not recorded in the usual herbarium reports for 1966 that Erling had been called to Government House in Ottawa to be given the Massey Medal for distinguished service to the Canadian scientific community and his contributions to Arctic Botany. The ceremony was held on 3 May 1966, and according to the news bulletin later put out by the National Museum, His Excellency General The Right Honourable Georges P. Vanier said: “We may be thankful that such a thing as the Massey Medal exists by which we can honour such men for
the dedication and devotion in the service of their country. I know I speak for all Canadians when I say that this country owes Dr. Porsild more than it can repay.”

The last official letter in Erling Porsild’s office file to Hugo Sjörs, written on 1 December 1966 over the title of “Chief Botanist,” ended: “All is well with us. The Herbarium is buzzing with activity and also badly crowded with people. In the last couple of years, the Museum staff has more than doubled, and in the Herbarium, we are now fourteen in addition to Gunnar Wassen [plant ecologist from Uppsala, Sweden] and Marian Kuc [bryologist] from Poland, who will spend the next year or two on an N.R.C. Postdoctorate fellowship.” His last unofficial letter to Sjörs in the same folder, sans title, was on 15 March 1967: “Margrit has planned a 5-week trip for us, to the Caribbean, by a Norwegian freighter leaving Montreal on April 4. I have been working quite hard since my retirement and I think it will be nice to bask in the sun for a few weeks.”