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The True Northwest Passage: Explorers in Anglo-Canadian Nationalist Narratives

Janice Cavell

Abstract: The Northwest Passage has always held a symbolic role in the mythology of Canadian nationalism, but the imagined geography of which it is a part has changed drastically over time. From Confederation to the present day, explorers have been described as the first builders of the Canadian nation. But in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Canadian historians showed little interest in the Far North. Instead, they were fascinated by the story of westward exploration. They created a romantic grand narrative celebrating the explorers who mapped out the path later followed by the Canadian Pacific Railway. For them, this westward path—the “true Northwest passage”—led both to the Pacific and to Canadian nationhood. Arctic exploration came to the forefront of nationalist concerns only after this paradigm had been established. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, British explorers like Sir John Franklin were also seen primarily as nation-builders. In the second half of the century such claims were re-evaluated. However, the romantic nationalist tradition has persisted, though in an altered form, among the writers who prefer new Arctic heroes such as John Rae and Samuel Hearne. These explorers are now thought to have shown the way to a very different “true Northwest passage” through their sympathetic understanding of the northern landscape and its Aboriginal inhabitants. This article analyzes both the continuities and the differences between the old and new imagined geographies of Canada.

Alexander Mackenzie forced the North West passage by land over the Rockies; the first of his race to succeed in that most perilous adventure ... Within ninety years ... the steel track of a railway stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific ... and among the architects of that great Road are the men who made the trails and little roads amidst the untrodden wilderness. The pioneers, the frontiersmen and the explorers. Especially the explorers.¹

For as long as Canadians have written about their country's history, geographical exploration has been seen as an integral part of nation-building. The men whose successive journeys led from the St. Lawrence River westward to the Pacific—Samuel de Champlain, Pierre Gaultier de

Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Damage in Northern Native Communities: A Practical School-Based Approach

Steven Jacquier, Judith Kleinfeld & David Gilliam

Abstract: This article describes a Fetal Alcohol Syndrome prevention program, “FASD in Lab Mice,” that had a dramatic effect in increasing Alaska Native students’ understanding of the lifelong neurological and physical damage caused by drinking during pregnancy and, more importantly, led them to engage in active prevention efforts in their own and other Native communities. Informational programs typically used in the schools create little student interest and students often do not see connections between their own experience and the atypically extreme examples such prevention programs tend to emphasize. The “FASD in Lab Mice” prevention program, using actual experiments conducted by the students themselves, provides compelling evidence regarding the pervasive effects of alcohol on the developing fetus. The program received strong support from Native communities and incorporated community values of reverence for animal life with the use of animals for practical human purposes. Long-term quantitative as well as qualitative research on the effectiveness of this program model is needed.

Introduction

In recent years a shift has occurred in the thinking regarding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, FASD, an umbrella term encompassing a number of related and often overlapping terms specific to various forms of teratogenic alcohol injury (i.e., embryonic or fetal malformations caused by alcohol). The shift has been toward recognizing FASD as a significant brain injury where the injury itself is often invisible except as seen through its impact on behaviour.

The medical model describes four key criteria for a diagnosis of FASD: developmental exposure to alcohol, central nervous system impairment, growth deficiency for height or weight or both, and a specific pattern of minor

The Historical Roots of a Frontier Alcohol Culture: Alaska and Northern Canada

Mary Ehrlander

Abstract: Alcohol arrived in Alaska and northern Canada at various times beginning in the eighteenth century, by way of abusers of alcohol including traders, military personnel, whalers, miners, and finally construction workers as late as the mid-twentieth century. Likely influenced by newcomers, and perhaps owing to the tradition of feasting during times of plenty, Natives apparently adopted a binge or spree style of drinking soon after exposure. Colonial authorities and later national governments regulated trade in alcohol with Indigenous peoples, but these prohibitions were unevenly applied and widely flouted. In the frontier context, where outside authority was generally resented, drinking heavily and getting away with drinking affirmed courage, virility, and vigour, all valued personal attributes. Between the 1950s and 1970s, alcohol abuse and related harms, which had been limited and/or intermittent, became pervasive, owing to regular access to alcohol that coincided with economic development, settlement, and government provision of social services and transfer payments. In the early twenty-first century, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous northerners abuse alcohol at higher rates than their southern counterparts; however Indigenous Alaskans and Canadians experience strikingly higher levels of alcohol-related pathology, stemming from relatively high alcohol consumption rates, coupled with a binge or spree style of drinking. As northern communities face myriad alcohol-related problems, including high accidental death rates, sexual assaults, child abuse and neglect, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and extremely high suicide rates, an enduring frontier ethos fosters complacency and breeds resistance to alcohol regulations that would limit individual choices in order to reduce harms.

Introduction

Today many northerners view alcohol abuse as the most pressing social problem in the region. Alcohol abuse is not only a serious affliction by itself, but all too often it is also the common denominator for a wide range of chronic social ills, including sexual assault, child abuse and neglect, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, accidents, and suicide. While both Indigenous and non-

Alaska Highway Mythology: Bulldozers to RVs

Laura Pitkanen

Abstract: Alaska Highway tourism has grown steadily since the opening to civilian traffic in 1948, and one of the primary motivations for Alaska Highway travellers is the enduring mythology of this route that is steeped in hardship, wilderness, and survival motifs. Yet how has this mythology been sustained when Alaska Highway conditions, services, infrastructure, and communities have changed drastically from the 1940s to present day? The answer to this question has numerous facets, yet a significant contributor to the endurance of Alaska Highway mythology lies in popular literature, in which highway travellers have ceaselessly disseminated tales of adventure, hardship, and challenge among the general public. However, while the preponderance of travel writers and the tourism industry extol the hardship of the Alaska Highway, this mythology is coming under pressure. This paper explores the complexities of Alaska Highway mythology in popular tourism literature since the 1940s and reflects upon the ability of Alaska Highway mythology to “survive.”

Beginning in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, the Alaska Highway winds approximately 2200 kilometers through the northwest before officially ending in Delta Junction, Alaska. The Alaska Highway was primarily constructed as a military route to link Alaska with the rest of the United States during World War II. Since opening to civilian traffic in 1948, Alaska Highway tourism has grown steadily, and one of the primary motivations for Alaska Highway travellers is the enduring mythology of this route that is steeped in northern wilderness, hardship, and survival motifs. Yet how has this mythology been sustained when Alaska Highway road conditions, services, infrastructure, and communities have changed drastically from the 1940s to present day? The answer to this question has numerous facets, yet a significant contributor to the endurance of Alaska Highway mythology lies in popular literature, in which highway travellers have ceaselessly disseminated tales of adventure, hardship, and challenge among the general public. Literature produced by the tourism industry, including guidebooks and advertisements, has also been an influential factor in the survival of Alaska Highway mythology.

Humble Dreams: An Historical Perspective on Yukon Agriculture Since 1846

Sally Robinson

Abstract: Hudson's Bay Company traders grew the earliest Yukon agricultural crops as they tried to augment their insufficient supplies. Yukon agriculture went from meagre beginnings in the mid-1800s to peak production during the Klondike Gold Rush when farmers prospered by storing and marketing their produce through the late fall and winter. Until the mid-1950s, farms around Dawson City, Mayo, and along the Yukon River produced healthy crops of vegetables and hay, delivered economically by a fleet of sternwheelers. A change away from horse-drawn equipment and vehicles, the loss of the riverboat fleet, and a continued decline in population caused a reduction in the number of Yukon farms. The construction and continued improvement of the Alaska Highway made easily imported produce more economical, and the growth of Whitehorse settled the majority of Yukon's population an inconvenient distance from the best agricultural land. A small number of farms continued to supply central Yukon but the more populated south grew dependent on imported produce and farmers focused more on forage crops. Cool, short growing seasons remain an obstacle but northern crops have proven to be equal in quality and quantity to southern produce. However, a low territorial population and competition from southern markets has hindered the growth of Yukon's agricultural industry.

Introduction

The Yukon's Subarctic environment has not been the biggest barrier to viable agriculture. The history of Yukon agriculture shows that small farms and gardens have been successful in situations of unlimited patience and experimentation, and whenever given a carefully chosen location, the proper crop, and a little luck with the weather.

When fur traders, explorers, and prospectors started arriving on the upper Liard and Yukon watersheds in the mid-1800s, they met Yukon's First Nations populations who were living a semi-nomadic life in a search for sustenance. Extended First Nations families hunted caribou that provided food and clothing materials. Groups gathered to harvest the summer fish