

Webb, Melody, *The Last Frontier: A History of the Yukon Basin of Canada and Alaska*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1985. Pp. 416.

At last the border has fallen. The 141st Meridian, the dividing line between Alaska and the Yukon Territory, has been a formidable barrier to scholarship. Although the districts have much in common as regards both geography and history, few historians have ventured from one to the other. Academic fear of the barrier has created a serious problem, for on such wide-ranging issues as the fur trade, the gold frontier, the construction of the Alaska Highway and post-war concern for continental defence, the two jurisdictions were intricately linked. On others, including political evolution, Native policies, federal government programming and post-Gold Rush economic development, their paths diverged significantly, providing excellent opportunities for comparative analysis.

But until now, these opportunities have been missed. Melody Webb is deserving of hearty congratulations for ignoring the boundary line, integrating the history of the Canadian and American portions of the Yukon River valley, and thus illustrating the need for even more work of this type. As with most pioneering works, this one has some serious deficiencies, but the approach is so novel and the presentation so interesting that these shortcomings can be at least partially forgiven.

Webb's approach is environmentalist, and unabashedly Turnerian. In an historiographical age when Turner's frontier thesis is often given short shrift, Webb adopts it as the interpretative basis for her study. It is not, however, entirely effective. The various frontiers — fur trade, mining, exploration, military, missionary, settlement, transportation — are dealt with successively, as Webb attempts to establish the idea that progressive waves, one building on the other, swept through the Yukon River valley. The suggestion is misleading and forces an artificial chronology on the region. It is also incomplete. Turner's frontiers dealt with white, developmental themes, and traditionally ignored issues like Native-white relations, the evolution and impact of government policy, and the effect that national images of the North had on regional development. Few historians continue to use Turner's ideas as the basis for their scholarship; Webb's book illustrates why that is so. To the extent that the book succeeds, therefore, it is as a narrative rather than interpretive piece.

The book's strengths lie in the early chapters — fur trade, missionaries and early mining frontier — when the destinies of the American and Canadian portions of the Yukon River valley were truly interwoven and

when the artificial nature of the boundary line was clearly in evidence. The research is concentrated on this period, and the author is obviously most comfortable with this material. Webb provides perceptive characterizations of many of the key participants and several less well-known figures, and presents a solid narrative of the pattern of development. From the chapter on the Klondike Gold Rush to the end of the book, however, the coverage is less complete and the descriptions less satisfying.

There are several problems with the latter stages of the book. Major developments are presented in an extremely cursory fashion, while less important — one can say nostalgic — aspects of regional history are covered in much greater depth. The construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II, an event which reshaped the pattern of northern life, merits only four pages; the entire final chapter, in contrast, is devoted to a panegyric on trapping in the twentieth century. This emphasis — misplaced, in my estimation — is understandable given Webb's Turnerian contention that the northern environment created a regional character on the final frontier. The resulting image, one that Alaskans and Yukoners have adopted as their own and developed as the basis of their tourism industry, does not provide an accurate assessment of contemporary life in the Yukon River valley. The trapping frontier is an odd, and even misleading, place to end.

As the book progresses, Webb also loses sight of the balance between Canadian and American developments. In many chapters, brief discussions of Canadian developments are appended to more complete descriptions of events on the American side of the boundary. She suggests, for example, that the opening of the Alaska Railroad in 1923 undermined river transportation. While that is true for major sections of the interior of Alaska, her superficial description of Canadian riverboats fails to illustrate their continuing importance until the 1950s, when roads, not railways, undermined their function.

The imbalance can be traced through to Webb's research. Evidence of thorough research in American archives (although here again the emphasis is on the nineteenth century) is not balanced by similar work in Canadian institutions. An extensive listing of published and government sources on American topics stands in contrast to incomplete coverage of important Canadian materials (she has also not used some of the most valuable interpretive works, especially those by Thomas Stone). Even more inexplicably, she examined eighteen newspapers but ignored publications from two of the most important Yukon River communities, Dawson City and Whitehorse. While the available material on the Yukon

is admittedly incomplete, Webb could have easily strengthened her work by taking advantage of what has been done and by examining more documentary and secondary sources on the Canadian side of the border.

Melody Webb's *The Last Frontier* must, even with its weaknesses, be loudly applauded. Like the Yukon River pioneers she so clearly admires, Webb has ventured where few have dared to tread. In doing so, she has illustrated the need to look more closely at the Yukon River valley as a geographic and historic unit. This book should awaken other historians to the need for more comparative work on the Yukon Territory and Alaska.

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KENNETH COATES

*More Deadly than War: Pacific Coast Logging, 1827-1981*, by Andrew Mason Prouty. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985. Pp. xxvii, 252; illus. \$30.00.

The history of western North America's timber industry is a story of work-related injuries and deaths. Typical of the "carnage" are three turn-of-the-century fatalities in Washington state: James Burns, a timber faller, killed instantly when crushed by a falling tree limb; Hjalmar Anderson, a 15-year-old boy, "horribly mangled" by sawmill machinery; and G. W. Davidson, a hooktender, crushed to death between two logs. Like thousands of other men who held the region's most dangerous occupations, they were the "human victims" of an industry "more deadly than war."

In exploring this theme of physical injuries to woodsmen in California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia, Andrew Mason Prouty adds an important new perspective to Pacific coast forest history. His case rests on evidence drawn from timber journals and the abundant, but mostly untouched, Workmen's Compensation records, as well as government reports, personal reminiscences and novels. After providing a highly evocative description of life in isolated, all-male logging camps into the 1920s, Prouty details logging technology as it evolved through the hand, bull and highlead logging eras. This descriptive background serves as a foundation for the book's core, a chapter documenting the potential hazards at each stage in the timber production cycle from the initial falling of trees in isolated forests to the manufacture of lumber and shingles in mills. A concluding chapter summarizes Workmen's Compen-