

re-examined in this broader context. In addition, students interested in topics such as the role of élites, group dynamics, familial connections among reformers, education and problem solving, evangelism, maternal feminism, and the pursuit of power will find the B.C. WCTU of interest.

*University of British Columbia*

LINDA L. HALE

*The Vagabond Fleet*, by Peter Murray. Victoria: Sono Nis, 1988. Pp. 260.

The story behind the North Pacific sealing schooners — the vagabond fleet — is complicated, and it has taken all Peter Murray's skills as a journalist to describe the several decades of international bickering, human greed and animal suffering which characterized this brief period of history. By and large, Murray has written a very readable book, which includes some good yarns about sealers and the ships they sailed in; despite some reservations, I recommend it. Thirty years ago, as a young scientist participating in yet another international study of fur seals, I would have appreciated much of the historical material which has been brought to light.

The early maritime traders collected a small number of fur seals from Indians living on the outer coast of British Columbia. However, it was not until the mid-1850s, when independent traders located trading establishments along the west coast of Vancouver Island, that the real interest in a pelagic harvest of fur seals began. To encourage Indian hunters, the early traders took the men and their canoes out to the sealing grounds, and returned them to their villages. The first pelts were taken to Victoria in 1864; by 1876 there were nine sealing vessels sailing out of Victoria, and this number increased until the end of the nineteenth century.

This early pelagic sealing marked the beginning of a commercial venture which had near-disastrous results. There was no harvest control and, to make matters worse, the majority of seals killed at sea were pregnant females. Pelagic hunting, combined with a land-based harvest on the breeding grounds, achieved the inevitable: by 1911, when an international treaty was finally reached between the United States, Great Britain (for Canada), Russia and Japan, the seal population had been reduced to about 10 percent of its former size.

Murray's book, although very readable, is a struggle for the serious historian or scientist. To achieve readability, tables and figures are sacrificed, and footnotes are rarely used. There are frequent references to statistics: harvest information, population trends, quotas, numbers of

ships, numbers of men employed, and income figures. Such data would have been easier dealt with, by the reader at least, in tabular form. There are instances of statistical discrepancies and duplication which could have been avoided by using tables: at one point Canada has forty-nine sealing ships in 1894, but later in the text fifty-five are reported for the same year; the 1896 and 1897 catch statistics are reported twice.

Murray's greatest sin, however, is his insistence on the sparing and arbitrary use of footnotes. As an example, he notes there was a "resurgence of otter along the west coast" in 1897. Historical trends in sea otter populations interest me, and I would like to pursue this observation. Not only is there no footnote; there is no title in the bibliography to provide me with a clue where to look.

Murray stresses in the preface that this book is not an anti-sealing book; that is probably so, yet his biases show. He emphasizes that Canadians were the villains in this unhappy period of sealing, but throughout the book there is abundant evidence to indicate that Canadian sealers shared in the killing with their American shipmates; and the final period of over-harvesting was aggravated by the late-arriving Japanese. In his enthusiasm to find fault with the British, Murray ignores some of his own evidence: an 1894 count of 20,000 dead pups on rookery beaches is recorded as "mute testimony" supporting the American claim that pelagic hunting was killing large numbers of nursing females, thus causing death by starvation for their pups; this, despite the claim by a British scientist that all pup mortality could not be blamed on starvation and, finally, recognition from American scientists that hookworm was killing about 45 percent of the pups.

As well, several inconsistencies and errors mar the text. One of the regulations set by the Arbitration Tribunal of 1893 was a five-year prohibition of pelagic sealing in waters north of 35° N latitude, between 1 May and 31 July. This regulation was enforced, yet the *Dora Seward* took 100 seals off Long Beach after leaving Victoria on 21 June 1896. Two issues are worth questioning (but were not): Why were seals taken after the 1 May closure? Why were such large numbers of seals still found off Vancouver Island during late June?

The errors are more disturbing. Sealers always insisted that the majority of seals killed at sea were saved before the bodies sank. Murray passes this off as a predictable claim which sealers would make to protect their industry; at one point he calculates that six out of seven seals sank before being retrieved by the sealers. I checked my field notes for 1958 and found that during May, when we killed 228 seals off Vancouver Island, 215

animals were recovered and we lost 13, for a recovery of 94 percent — very similar to the sealers' claim seventy-five years earlier. Later, Murray argues that fish provide only a small part of the fur seal's diet. Food habits of fur seals have been studied repeatedly, and it is well established that fish comprise over 90 percent of the total annual diet.

The era of uncontrolled pelagic killing of fur seals was a black period by any standard. Canadian shipowners, skippers, and hunters contributed their share to this sorry picture. Murray tells us about it, but he is not content that we see the blackness of it all; he wants it blacker than black. By emphasizing Canadian and British villainy, he diverts attention from the outcome which — late though it was — was not too late. The international agreement of 1911 was a first for maritime nations seeking to protect a common marine resource and, not only a first, it worked. With protection, seal numbers quickly recovered from the alarming low of 1911 to the near-normal levels of today; a victory for the seals (and the biologists), and for the politicians and lawyers who thrashed out the final international agreement.

*The Vagabond Fleet* includes colour plates of marine paintings by Maurice Chadwick. Chadwick's splendid illustrations provide the reader with a graphic reminder of both the old sealing schooners and the changing moods of the west coast: from a howling nor'wester to the fog-shrouded hills of a calm anchorage.

*South Pender Island, B.C.*

DAVID J. SPALDING

*Whalers No More: A History of Whaling on the West Coast*, by William Arnold Hagelund. Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1987. Pp. iv, 211; illus., maps, diagrams. \$24.95.

*On The Northwest: Commercial Whaling in the Pacific Northwest, 1790-1967*, by Robert Lloyd Webb. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988. Pp. xxi, 425; 71 b/w photos, line drawings, maps. \$29.95.

The whaling industry off the British Columbia coast has finally found almost simultaneously not just one but two historians for a story not widely known, even in the province. Since one is a popular history and the other a research monograph, they nicely complement each other.