

***Letters from Rupert's Land, 1826–1840: James Hargrave of the Hudson's Bay Company.* Edited with an Introduction by Helen E. Ross. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. xiv + 402 pp. Maps, figures, illustrations, bibliography, index.**

I can as usual say little of myself. I perform the same duties, write at the same desk, lodge in the same room as I have done for these 5 years past. Time rolls round & brings me back every season the same faces to transact the same business which occupied the last, and so our years slip by. From such a quiet & unvaried round nothing can be drawn worth relating. (219)

So wrote James Hargrave at York Factory on 2 July 1832. His letters, edited by Helen E. Ross in this eleventh volume of the Rupert's Land Record Society Series, suggest otherwise. True, life at York Factory had annual, seasonal, and even daily rhythms, but Hargrave's letters reveal a life of much more than a "quiet & unvaried round."

Ross faced a large task—just fourteen years of Hargrave's outgoing letters run some 320 pages; the abundance of letters meant that there was much left uncovered by the Champlain Society as *The Hargrave Correspondence 1821–1843* (1938). In today's world of cheaply made or "e-books," it is a pleasure to read a well-crafted book of some "heft." That said, why does Sir George Simpson (inevitably in a canoe) grace the dust cover of the book? In addition, some illustrations are quite small, or as with Peter Rindisbacher's sketches, both small and faint (59, 68).

Appearances aside, this book ultimately reflects the rather narrow gaze of Hargrave, whose letters sometimes repeat themselves or offer limited insights into his surroundings. Readers interested in broader fur-trade settings will find only snippets: apart from rare trips "home," Hargrave rarely ventured more than five miles beyond York Factory (167). That said, remarks about officers' "day-to-day" York Factory operations enliven the text. Letters to fellow officers like J.G. McTavish do the same. While other Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) officers condemned McTavish for abandoning his Métis wife Nancy for a Scottish woman, Hargrave is sanguine about the matter. (184) That attitude reflects his general if muted racism toward the First Nations, and his doubts about "mixed" marriages. Hargrave's writings also reveal careful loyalty to the HBC: he writes that York Factory has "luxuries & refinements," with accommodations "commodious, elegant, and impenetrable to the howling blast" of winter (97). Yet, careful reading of the letters, particularly to family and friends, hints that Hargrave was

both impatient for promotion and very much aware that his life was often onerous (180).

These personal letters are key features of Hargrave's correspondence as they deal with issues far removed from York Factory; his letters to family open vistas into immigrant life in the Canadas—work, society, finances, and more. Among the most interesting are his persistent advice (badgering?) to his younger brothers on their new home. The "suggestions" are quite precise:

From what I gather and of all your accounts of your building I[t] seems to be snug substantial & roomy. The plaster should be allowed to dry well. ... The planks ought also to be well seasoned. ... It is an excellent plan to get your shingle roof painted. ... Spanish Brown is as good as any [paint] ... it ought not to cost more than 25/P Cwt ... White paint ought to be used for the Windows. (151–152)

Hargrave's writing also expose clear social expectations, ranging from familial responsibilities, to "proper" behaviour (officers did not drink rum) (149), to the tensions created by failure to marry. Revealingly, Hargrave reminds his "spinster" relatives that one should choose well but *not* be too choosy. His own view, meanwhile, shifts from pragmatic "lifelong bachelor" to an ever-so-proper suitor of his wife-to-be Letitia. Another series of letters deal with Hargrave's parents—clearly worried as they grow older, he sends them annual stipends and writes siblings insisting that they, too, support their parents. Overall, these missives speak to expectations placed upon "better" society in early nineteenth century British Canadian society.

In contrast to his reflections about "proper" social issues, Hargrave virtually ignores the fur trade lives of Indigenous peoples or labourers. Scholars frustrated by that silence may also wish for a more vigorous editorial oversight. Ross's work reflects personal interest—a retired scientist and epidemiologist, she is a distant descendant of Letitia Hargrave. Her editorial work here is uneven. Explanatory footnotes are adequate, but rarely insightful. John Franklin, for instance, receives a very perfunctory, positive biography—one might prefer either nothing (he *is* well known) or a more balanced assessment (62). Similarly, a depiction of Montreal in 1821 relies solely upon Nicholas Garry (19). Other elements of editing are also inconsistent. Some individuals mentioned in the letters get no annotation—Hargrave, for instance, refers to "McK"—who is that (55)? The index, too, is incomplete: various geographical locations noted in the letters lack an entry. To be fair, most of the missing are familiar (Missouri, Huron, Fort William),

but the gaps are annoyances—edited collections benefit from rigorous and precise indexing.

Ross's Introduction is also open to challenge—in forty-five pages she gives us a largely sympathetic overview of James Hargrave's life and family ties. Ross is not blind to Hargrave's flaws: she rightly notes Hargrave's racist attitudes toward the First Nations (her use of "Native" may trouble some readers.) Overall, the Introduction is adequate, but the "real" Hargrave remains a trifle obscure, or perhaps a figure that his letters *wished* to reveal. Ross also has the occasional stumble. For instance, she shares Hargrave's view that promotion was delayed—yet eleven years was not especially slow given Governor Simpson's reluctance to promote. (22) To Ross's credit, she closes the Introduction with an admonition urging "careful reading," reminding readers to be very conscious of Hargrave's *language*, not just the information he provided. Readers heeding that advice will find that Ross succeeds in revealing how "Hargrave presented himself" (42). Minor deficiencies notwithstanding, *Letters* is a worthwhile addition to the published collections of Rupert's Land history.

Peter V. Krats, University of Western Ontario

Who Owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the North.
By Michael Byers. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2009.
x + 179 pp. Notes, bibliography, index.

Over the past five years there has been a surge of interest in the subject of Arctic sovereignty. The topic, which a decade ago received little public attention, has now become an important item on the Canadian government's policy agenda and is regularly front page news across the country. The interest is due in large measure to the significant environmental changes taking place in the region which, in turn, have begun to alter the economic, social, and security situation. Michael Byers's book is an attempt to tie together and explain the numerous challenges facing the Canadian Arctic in a concise and straightforward manner. *Who Owns the Arctic?* casts a broad net, examining Canada's territorial and maritime boundary disputes with Denmark and the United States, the legal and political conflict in the Northwest Passage, the division of the continental shelf, and the challenges faced by the Canadian Inuit in a changing world.

Byers does a good job placing many of these issues in context for the average Canadian reader whose main source of information is the popular media, a medium prone to exaggeration and occasional sensationalism. In