

Monica Tennberg is a lecturer in International Relations and Political Science at the University of Lapland, Department of Social Studies and an advisory editor of *The Northern Review*. Her latest publication is *Arctic Environmental Cooperation: A Study in Governmentality* (Ashgate, 2000). *Who Lived In This House? A Study of Koyukuk River Semisubterranean Houses* by A. McFadyen Clark. Archaeological Survey of Canada Mercury Series Paper 153. Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996. xviii, 261 pp., tables, figures, plates, maps, appendix, references. ISBN 0-660-15958-9 (pb). \$24.95 CDN. Reviewed by Douglas Rutherford.

The Mercury Series of publications produced by the Archaeological Survey of Canada is designed for the rapid distribution of data from archaeological projects. Its format often provides limitations on the subject material. Frequently, papers were technical in nature and their scope often beyond the general reader. Speed of the publication process often prohibited the series from considering the publication of long-term projects.

Over recent years, this practice has changed, resulting in the publication of several multi-year project results. Further, these papers have presented results of projects in a more generalist perspective, allowing for a broader audience. *Who Lived in this House?* is one such paper. It covers one aspect of the Koyukuk River Culture History Project that was conducted between 1961 and 1972. Its foci are the identity of the ethnic affiliation of the builders of three semisubterranean houses through archaeological excavation; the recovery of oral tradition from local residents and through participant observation; and the collection and assessment of early written documents, photographs and other illustrations against which to compare information recovered during the oral history phase.

The intention of ascertaining the ethnic affiliation of the three houses excavated is quite important. The Koyukuk River drainage is an interface zone for four tribal groups: the Kobuk and Brooks Range Inupiat, the Koyukon Athapaskan and Gwich'in Athapaskan-speaking peoples. Both the Koyukon and Inupiat peoples built semisubterranean houses to escape the winter cold. The book approaches the problem through seven chapters. These present an introduction, the natural environment, history and culture of the region, a description of three winter villages, a description of the excavations, house contents and their spatial distributions, comparative analysis and conclusions.

In the introduction, Clark discusses the purpose of the investigation, her approach, and the models and methods used to answer her research question. The primary objectives of the research are

1. To excavate and study the methods used to construct three semisubterranean houses selected from three two-house winter village sites in the Allaket-Alatna region of the upper Koyukuk River, Alaska, that were built and used prior to direct

conjunction in 1884-85 and to determine if there was variability in their construction.

2. To analyse the contents of the houses and to assess variations in content and their locations on the living floor to learn whether or not patterned behaviour can be delineated from type and position of the contents.
3. To describe human behaviour attendant to house construction, occupation and utilization of space within the houses.
4. To compare Koyukuk River house construction and content with those from other sites in Alaska and Yukon.

The approach to the problem of occupational identification is that of ethnoarchaeology, defined by Clark as tracing “aspects of culture represented in archaeological contexts to models observed in descendent living societies. . . .” The interpretive models she employs centre on observation of traditional winter housing and ideology, especially those practices related to propitiation of animal spirits and disposal of faunal remains. The methods used included archaeology, ethnography and ethnohistorical study.

Chapter 2 outlines the physical context, history and culture of the region. Clark considers the climate of the Koyukuk River drainage and provides a broad description of the faunal, avifaunal and piscine resources of the area. Emphasis is placed upon those resources of economic importance to peoples of the area.

The cultural history of the region is described briefly, beginning with the earliest occupations of the Koyukuk region, dating between 10-12,000 years ago. This is presented in a table. This outlines the prehistoric periods, proto-historic period of indirect contact beginning with the establishment of Russian trading about AD 1649, direct contact between the lower Yukon and lower Koyukuk Rivers in AD 1837 and direct conjunction of the middle and upper Koyukuk River bands beginning with trade in 1884-85. Clark proposes that indirect trading had little effect on indigenous lifeways before the late 18th century. However, by the early 1890s, the discovery of gold in the upper Koyukuk drainage opened the area to traders, prospectors, missionaries, geologists and topographers. Their presence led to changes in demography, population distribution and settlement patterns.

Clark also provides an overview of the social structure of Koyukon society as well as a view of their ideology and belief systems. Their annual subsistence cycle is also presented both in text and a series of maps. The chapter closes with a short overview of Koyukon material culture.

Chapter 3 considers the physical description of three winter village sites. Before 1884-85, Koyukuk drainage Athapaskans and Inupiat lived in small, usually two house, villages during the coldest part of the year. The village descriptions consider the physical location of each village, the site terrain, and local environment and resources.

The latter are more site-specific than those presented in the second chapter. Finally, ethnohistorical data, traditional knowledge, and genealogies for possible occupants are presented for each village.

The excavation of the three selected houses, conducted in 1968, is described in detail. This includes a pre-excavation description, summary description, construction detail, and furnishings. The three houses are rectangular, approximately five square metres, and excavated to a depth of sixty-five to eighty centimetres below ground level. At one site, the entrance tunnels were of the cold-trap type, and constructed forty to fifty-five centimetres below the level of the floors in the main rooms. Posts were placed at the corners and the walls lined with split wood. The superstructure was then covered with moss or shingled with sewn birch bark and then banked with turf and sand or silt. Hearths were located in the centre of the structure on a slightly raised mound and usually contained within a timber enclosure.

Besides the archaeological description of the houses, Clark includes the summary of oral tradition accounts of house construction and use from local elders. These came from two Athapaskan women, two Athapaskan men and an Inupiat woman and were collected in 1961. These accounts considered not only construction details but also spatial construction and behavioural arrangements within and without the houses themselves.

The fifth chapter reflects on the recovered artifacts and faunal remains and their spatial distribution through the three excavated houses. The influence of contact is evident in that the majority of recovered items were of European rather than indigenous manufacture. These results are slightly skewed in that the majority of European items were beads and their large numbers are typical of the nature in which they are obtained.

The faunal distribution is curious, particularly that of bear bones. Clark earlier notes that Athapaskan women before the age of menopause are not permitted to eat bear meat, while this tradition is not found among the Inupiat. Bear bones were found in all three houses, yet their distribution was, in places, purported to have been used by men or older people.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Clark compares the three houses excavated to those found in other parts of the Alaska-Yukon region, including those of Athapaskan-, Inupiat-, Ingalik- and Yupik-speaking peoples. House size and social organization, climatic adaptation, construction and the potential of idiosyncratic behaviour are examined. Clark proposes that two of the houses were probably inhabited during the late 19th century by Athapaskans. The third house may have been of Inupiat origin. Alternatively, Clark proposes a series of hypotheses that may provide reasons for the differentiation between the third site and the other two houses excavated during the project.

The book is well written and presents a worthwhile attempt at determining

ethnicity of occupation in a region where two diverse cultural and biological groups exist. Clark illustrates the immense value of obtaining first-hand cultural knowledge to enhance archaeological field research. It is obvious that there would have been minimal data determination without the assistance of both Koyukon and Inupiat elders.

Other aspects of the report are also quite good. The book is lavishly appointed with figures and tables that quickly make it easy to interpret complex data. The plates clearly show the site environments and the artifacts recovered.

There were only minor negative aspects to the report. There were a few typographical errors, although these are probably the result of the Mercury Series paper being prepared and distributed quickly. Scales were absent from some of the figures and plates and would have been highly useful for interpretation.

In summary, *Who Lived in this House?* is recommended for anyone with an interest in determining ethnicity in areas with cultural contact.

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The Alaska-Klondike Diary of Elizabeth Robins, 1900 edited by Victoria Joan Moessner and Joanna E. Gates. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 1999. Xviii, 390 pp., photographs, maps, references, indices. ISBN 0-912006-99-4 (pb). \$20.95 US. Reviewed by Barbara Kelcey.

The editors of *The Alaska-Klondike Diary of Elizabeth Robins* declare this journal “the most engaging, witty and readable one available that documents the Alaska and Yukon territory of 1900.” This diary is all of these things, although it might be argued that being the “most” would be a stretch for those familiar with the others. What might be a better description of the Robins diary was offered by the author herself in one of her articles reprinted in the appendix. She wrote that she had acquired “a queer new picture to hang on memory’s wall about Nome,” and, in many ways, that line best describes what the diary has to offer for even those well familiar with Klondike and Alaska Gold Rush literature.

This diary recounts the travels of American author, playwright and actress Elizabeth Robins who goes off in search of her brother in Alaska and, as in many of these journals, there are accounts of preparations and of the trip itself. Robins, however, adds incredible detail about accommodation, meals, and the sensual experiences of life in gold rush towns and on gold rush beaches—not usual in diaries of this place and time, where the focus is often greed and avarice. Perhaps more important, Robins paints word pictures describing the many people she meets along the way. Character is important to Robins, and reporting the character of those she meets is important to her.