

Whilst this future northern RFE/Arctic aspect is somewhat speculative at the moment, what is apparent is that Chinese financing in the RFE is available (and could be available from other Asian players as well, including Japan and South Korea); the AIIB, NDB, and the Silk Road fund are all heavily Chinese dominated, and as the authors point out, it is inevitable that their funding will primarily favour Chinese regional aspirations, at the same time as financing partner countries' projects as well. Nonetheless the strategic direction is apparent, and at present, unchallenged by the west. However the application, value, and sustainability of Chinese investment (FDI/cash) in the RFE is not yet clear as the authors state; and perhaps as serious in this Sino-Russian relationship, is the lack of a technically trained Russian labour force, poor ITC capacity/capability, lack of infrastructure, and the total absence of even a single added-value strategic **joint venture** equity project, without which Russia simply cannot kick-start their local strategic industries, or guarantee sustainable growth of a modern economy in the RFE - and only by doing so, build an equitable relationship with China in the RFE, and greater APR.

The final aspect of this book is a review of the present status of U.S./Russian relations, regarding the RFE. A conclusion is that there is much to agree upon, and that in this region irrespective of European sanctions, relations are good, straightforward, and practical.

In fact American policy makers make the point that Russia is an essential ally of the U.S., if the latter is to prevent Chinese hegemony in the broader APR; one challenge is the lack of an agreed western framework and /or institutional mechanism that could attract not only Russia, but other U.S. Asian allies (Japan, ROK) into such a coalition, and that could then match Chinese financial institutions such as the AIIB, Silk Road fund, and the China-dominated NDB, which are presently leading the way in funding the required infrastructure build-out that is necessary for any subsequent Sino-Russian regional integration.

This penultimate chapter and the final chapter on possible scenarios for collaboration in the RFE/APR, is a must-read for policy makers, especially in Washington following this year's presidential election outcome; an underlying theme throughout these two concluding chapters is that now is the time to act; and it occurs to this reviewer that there may be a deal on the horizon for Russia consisting of an alternative outcome for the RFE in the APR, alongside the U.S. (still with a Chinese presence, but less exclusive), in return for some leeway over Russian Arctic sanctions discussions, especially the negative effects on the NSR, as a future trade and energy corridor between east and west.

For Arctic specialists this is a most stimulating and unusual book, as its view of the RFE and its deepening relationship with NE China both economically and politically, is in an understated way, clearly linked to the development of the Russian Arctic and northern territories, and in particular the strategic role of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Arctic scholars will be fascinated by many of the implications for the Arctic of these deepening Sino-Russian relations in the RFE and wider APR.

The book benefits from excellent primary source material; interviews with key Russian and Chinese (and other Asian players') decision-makers and analysts, well-cited coverage of original texts and documents, and shrewd and well informed analyses of the policy positions of politicians, military personnel, and leading business leaders from Russia, Asia, and the United States. A brief history of Sino-Russian relations in NE China/Manchuria and the RFE is deservedly included, which explains the background to the region(s) and provides the framework for the book's contemporary discourse. The book clearly benefits from the balanced inputs – and differing cultural perceptions of both the American and Russian authors; the fact that Artyom Lukin is a native of the Russian Far East, adds further insight and authenticity to the analyses. (Tim Reilly, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Rd, Cambridge CB2 1ER, UK ([tbr22@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tbr22@cam.ac.uk)))

### **Perished. The 1914 Newfoundland sealing disaster.**

Jenny Higgins. 2013. Portugal Cove-St. Phillips: Boulder Publications. 72 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-927099-22-3. CA\$ 29.95.

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The seal hunt has for decades been an activity of utmost controversy. In light of its perceived cruelty, also the European Union has adopted a ban which prohibits the trade in seal products, resting on the assumption that the hunt is inherently cruel and that non-indigenous sealers do not benefit sufficiently from it – culturally and economically – that it could in any way be justified. Interestingly, however, this assumption is not based on empirical data, but rather on information by and large produced by organisations opposed to the seal hunt. Ethnographic data draws a different picture and places the seal hunt within a context of community integrity and socio-economic relevance (Sellheim 2015).

In how far the seal hunt plays a role in the self-understanding of Eastern Canadian rural communities show the most recent publications on the seal hunt that were published by Québécois and Newfoundland publishers (for example Gillett 2015; Menge 2016) of which the present volume *Perished* has for some

reason gone unnoticed albeit its publication already in 2013. Two reasons may to some degree justify this oversight: first, for a scholar familiar with the Newfoundland seal hunt of the past and present the book does not hold much new information; second, it is a book whose target audience is not necessarily the academic world, but rather lay persons and those very broadly interested in Newfoundland (sealing) history. That being said, there is no doubt in my mind that this book is truly unique. Essentially, it follows William Coaker, the leader of the Union Party of Newfoundland who joined the seal hunt on *Nascopie* in the sealing season of spring 1914 – the year the colony experienced its greatest disasters with a loss of more than 270 lives: the *Newfoundland* and *Southern Cross* disasters in which the former lost more than 70 men on the ice due to miscommunication and absence of modern equipment due to financial reasons, and the latter sinking along with its entire crew upon its return from Newfoundland's capital St. John's from the seal hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (see also Brown 1988). Higgins skillfully inserts what has become known as 'Mr Coaker's Log', a series of log-entries as published in the *Daily Mail* between 11 April to 17 April 1914 into the narratives of the seal hunt. Providing insight into the living and working conditions of a sealer, the economy and processing of the seal, and as the title implies, the prelude, 'main act' and the aftermath

of the *Newfoundland* disaster, the book does this with little, but poignant text. To get a better, indeed, tangible experience of that time, the book contains numerous photographs, reproductions of maps and logbooks, telegrams and other materials which are inserted in the book in envelopes or as unfoldable ‘goodies’ (for lack of a better word). With this in mind, it would even appear reasonable to assume that the target audience of the book are school children who are supposed to get an interest in sealing history.

Not surprisingly, the lively design and make-up of the book earned the author the *Democracy 250 Atlantic Book Award for Historical Writing* in 2014, a prize to ‘to honor an outstanding work of non-fiction that promotes awareness of, and appreciation for, an aspect of the history of the Atlantic Provinces’ (Atlantic Book Awards 2014). Indeed, I would fully support this book as falling under these criteria and, this may sound slightly polemic and somewhat out of place in a journal such as *Polar Record*, I several times caught myself thinking while going through this book: ‘Wow, this is just cool.’ This reaction is particularly interesting in this context, simply because the book deals with two very serious issues at the same time: the disaster with significant human loss and the seal hunt – one of the most controversial hunts in the world. But be that as it may, it shows that the author has managed to get the reader enthralled, to get him or her captivated by the seal hunt and to paint a picture of the sealers that goes way beyond notions of ‘barbarism’ or ‘cruelty’.

In fact, the book deals exclusively with the people, a very rare thing to find in the context of seal hunting.

Let me conclude by saying that even though I would consider myself being very familiar with the Newfoundland seal hunt, this book was a special experience. Not because of the information it held, but because of the way the basic information on the seal hunt and the *Newfoundland* disaster was conveyed. For research purposes scholars should, however, turn to works such as Shannon Ryan’s *The ice hunters* (Ryan 1994). For educational purposes, Higgins’ work is indispensable. (Nikolas Sellheim, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Rd, Cambridge CB2 1ER, UK (nps31@cam.ac.uk)).

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**A wretched and precarious situation.** David Welky. 2017. New York: W.W. Norton. 502 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-0-393-25441-9. US\$28.95  
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‘Do not draw a veil over the whole voyage’, Captain George Comer advised, ‘bury it deeply and cover it with concrete’. Comer, a crusty arctic veteran, was speaking of the Crocker Land Expedition, of which he had become an unwilling participant. It had been sent out under the sponsorship of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in 1913 to explore the most northerly land on earth, which Robert E. Peary claimed to have sighted from the tip of Axel Heiberg Island in 1906. In his new book, David Welky, a professor of history at the University of Central Arkansas, does not take Comer’s advice; quite the opposite. He resurrects the Crocker Land Expedition and reanimates its participants, both willing and unwilling.

Judging from *A Wretched and Precarious Situation*’s text, whose informal language is peppered with modern colloquialisms, the book is aimed squarely at a general audience. It also contains a number of asides on diverse topics that seem designed to add to reader interest. Some of these work well as effective bridges between topics; others, frankly, fall flat and simply seem irrelevant. But none of this should draw a veil over the fact that, overall, Welky’s book is a solid piece of original research that makes a major contribution to the scholarship of polar history and, in total, his writing shows the author’s passion for his subject to the extent that it allows him to bring together related bits from diverse sources in a telling way. That’s because Welky bases his narrative largely on original sources, many of which have never been touched by other scholars, and he has read them so carefully that these connections come naturally, as only they can to one who has taken such a thoroughgoing approach. Nevertheless,

there are also reasons for some reservations as to everything in Welky’s narrative being gospel truth.

The history of the expedition goes back to at least November 1909, when Donald MacMillan, one of Peary’s assistants on his last attempt to reach the North Pole that year, broached the idea of an expedition of his own to Herbert L. Bridgman, Secretary of the Peary Arctic Club, Peary’s association of millionaire backers (MacMillan 1909). He proposed exploring Peary’s ‘Crocker Land’ and also suggested such an expedition would allow him to gather evidence against Peary’s rival for polar honors, Dr. Frederick A. Cook. But MacMillan’s lobbying didn’t stop there. He, along with fellow 1909 expedition member George Borup, developed detailed plans, eventually obtained Peary’s blessing, and gained the financial assistance of the AMNH, long a locus of Peary’s institutional support.

In detailing the expedition’s genesis, Welky reveals how MacMillan was displaced from the leadership job by the charismatic Borup, who had become the protege of the AMNH’s powerful curator of geology, Edmund Otis Hovey, and that MacMillan was nearly bounced from its rolls entirely. He was saved only when Borup lost his life in a boating accident in June, 1912. This set back the expedition’s sailing date a year and made its sponsors reluctantly accept MacMillan as its new leader, only because any other alternative would have further delayed the project. Even so, Hovey forced his own conditions on MacMillan, most telling being the assignment of US Navy Ensign Fitzhugh Green and Elmer Ekblaw, a professor of geology at the University of Illinois, to the expedition without consulting MacMillan. Rounding out the expedition staff were Maurice Tanquary, an entomologist and friend of Ekblaw’s, Harrison Hunt as surgeon, a Navy wireless operator named Jerome Allen, and Jot Small, MacMillan’s friend, as cook.

From his research Welky brings forward little known or previously unknown facts about the inside preparations and