

REVIEW

ULTIMATE AMERICANS: POINT HOPE, ALASKA, 1826–1909

by Tom Lowenstein, 2008. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks. Paperback, xxx + 351 pp., three maps, 38 figures, three appendices, index; ISBN 978-1-60223-038-5; \$36.95

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Tom Lowenstein's edifying and eloquent *Ultimate Americans: Point Hope, Alaska, 1826–1909* is the third in a series of presentations resulting from his 1973–1989 oral historical and archival research into the social, spiritual, technological, material, and historical milieu of the traditional Northwest Alaska Iñupiaq Eskimo whaling culture as seen from the environs of Point Hope (see also Lowenstein 1992, 1993). Known as Tikigaq in its pre-European days, this millennia-old settlement on the Chukchi Sea coastline was a perfect resource extraction locale for traditional subsistence hunting of the bowhead whale and for subsequent industrial harvests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries following decimation of whale populations by commercial pelagic whalers in the western Arctic fishery. This well-illustrated, ably researched, and plainly written volume walks us through a history of the place from initial direct Iñupiaq and European contact in the early nineteenth century, through sustained Iñupiaq/EuroAmerican social and material relations in the mid-late 1800s, and into early twentieth century events figuring prominently in building contemporaneous and near-future historical landscapes.

Lowenstein understands local manifestations of the triumvirate of EuroAmerican colonialist agents: the state, commerce, and missions (e.g., Fabian 1990). In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Point Hope, the state was represented by the U.S. Bureau of Education, which imposed a Native Alaska schooling plan managed by Christian missions and introduced and managed the Native reindeer industry, and by the U.S. Revenue

Cutter Service, which provided American law and order in this recently acquired colony. The role of commerce was played by the numerous commercial shore whaling and trading entities at the nearby shore whaling enclave at Jabbertown, which employed regional (but not local) Iñupiat as shore whaling crews and offered an enormous variety of EuroAmerican manufactured goods for trade and as partial remuneration for Native labor. Mission involvement was provided at Point Hope by the Episcopal Church and its Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, and in Alaska more generally by Sheldon Jackson, the Presbyterian missionary appointed by the federal government to plan and direct Alaska Native education and reindeer herding programs.

In Point Hope (and elsewhere in contemporary Northwest Alaska), the intermingling of these institutional agents could be remarkably convoluted. The Episcopal Church was contracted by the Bureau of Education in 1889 to operate the new school. Dr. John Driggs was the Episcopalian missionary in Point Hope from 1890 to 1908; this medical doctor was also the schoolteacher, a trader running a shore whaling crew, and a gold prospect claimant. The Revenue Cutter *Bear* patrolled the coastline, managing order amongst the cosmopolitan Jabbertown whaling crowd, meting out justice and supplies, as appropriate. (These circumstances are reminiscent of the long tenure at Point Barrow of Charles Brower, a whaler, trader, and federal appointee, and Driggs' contemporary.)

While institutional colonial agents endeavored to bring social and behavioral Americanization to the people

of Point Hope, local Inupiaq forces served to maintain a traditional community in the face of colonial development. This included maintaining traditional Inupiaq structures of power and the control over people and resources held by shamans and *umialit* (whaling captains). The powerful Point Hope *umialik* Atajauraq, together with shamans, forbade shore whalers to establish stations in Point Hope proper, hence the founding of Jabbertown. Atajauraq profited handsomely through trade with commercial operators and retained his local Native whaling crews. Point Hope people refused to work for Jabbertown whalers (but they worked for other American whaling interests in the region, such as Brower's outfit). Local *qalgi* (traditional "men's houses") used in spiritual and subsistence whaling tasks were sustained (thanks in part to a sympathetic Driggs; they were destroyed after Driggs' 1909 removal and subsequent replacement by the generally unsympathetic Rev. Hoare). Inupiaq actions vis-à-vis EuroAmerican state, mission, and commercial interests in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Northwest Alaska present a fine historical example of social agency.

Lowenstein is a writer of poetry and spirituality and music; he is not a trained professional historian or anthropologist. This permits two observations. On the one hand, his grasp of historical materials and the scale and scope of the work are all the more remarkable given a background that does not ordinarily include such discipline-specific skill sets. On the other hand, his occasional editorial commentary and conjecture on historical goings-on are readily forgiven. As readers, we are aware that Lowenstein has the requisite research, compilation, and composition abilities, we know his sources, and we take his presentation not as *the* authority but as *one among a few* well-conceived and reasonably approached histories of the time and place.

Ultimate Americans is of interest and substantive use to professional, student, lay, and stakeholder audiences. Practitioners in Native studies, sociocultural anthropology, northern and maritime history, ethnohistory, and archaeology will appreciate its historical depth and breadth and the numerous and detailed primary source references. Lay readers will appreciate the book's fascinating topic and historical context and benefit from its clear prose and organization. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a local and regional Inupiaq readership will gain from Lowenstein's consistent invocation and extensive use of oral histories conducted with a now-departed generation of Inupiaq elder knowledge bearers about this transformative period in the history of Point Hope in particular and

of Northwest Alaska in general. Useful and broader historical context for Point Hope and the Northwest Alaska region can be gleaned from reading *Ultimate Americans* in conjunction with Lowenstein (1992), Bockstoce (1986), Burch (1982), VanStone (1962), Larson (2004), Rainey (1947), Chance (1990), Brower (1994), Sheehan (1997), and Cassell (2000, 2004). *Ultimate Americans* is a good read, a worthy source, and a must-have addition to any serious Alaska history library.

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