

BOOK REVIEWS

Condon, Richard G., with Julia Ogina and Holman Elders: *The Northern Copper Inuit: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. ISBN 0-8020-0849-6 Cloth CDN \$45.00

In an era when we are all conscious of change because it is happening so fast, it is intriguing to look at a society regarded as "traditional" and consider how it has coped with the challenge. The northern Copper Inuit have survived for more than a thousand years in an uncompromising land because of their adaptability; while their predecessors, the Dorset, who had survived very well in a cold climate, were unable to cope with varying circumstances brought about by a warming trend, and so disappeared. Differing rates of change mean that some adaptations can endure for a long time, but clinging to "old ways" for their own sake is not a recipe for survival. That holds true whether the changes have been brought about by natural forces or by the hand of man.

Their adaptability has stood the Copper Inuit of western Victoria Island (as well as the Inuit generally) in good stead. Within a single lifetime they have gone from living off the land to a wage economy, and in the main have managed to maintain a balance, albeit a shifting one, between the two lifestyles. There have been problems, some of them very serious, and there have been regrets and concerns too for the loss of old knowledge and old skills, not to mention old social values. For example, Elders, faced with heating problems in contemporary houses, recall that they never got cold living in tents and igloos; and there is nostalgia for the hours and days spent visiting and engaging in community activities which are now much reduced because of television watching in the comparative isolation of one's own home. The social glue of old interactive activities that once united the people has been dissolving at a faster pace than the alternatives have been worked out. In the meantime, however, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs, in its five-year investigation, reported in 1996 that Inuit are among those First Peoples who are in the van developing new lifestyles, economically, socially, and politically.

Richard Condon, who died before the publication of this work, begins his story with the distant predecessors of the northern Copper Inuit, and works his way with careful detail through the ages to the establishment of

Holman in 1939, first as an isolated trading outpost on King's Bay, later to be relocated to Queen's Bay as the major centre for the people of the region. It received hamlet status in 1984, the year of the Invaluit Final Agreement (Western Arctic Claim Agreement). In 1991, Holman recorded a population of 386. It has its own airstrip with regular flights, long-distance telephone service, a flourishing art cooperative, a school and a hotel in which to accommodate a growing number of tourists. In 1994, Holman's operating budget was \$2.2 million. This is a far cry from the days when the "magical" power of matches to make fire caused Inuit to flee in terror.

By interspersing his account with the lore and recollections of Elders, Condon gives his story a personal touch, if repetitive at times. One learns about the near disappearance of dog teams when they were replaced by skidoos for hunting and trapping, and their re-introduction for tourist sport hunting when mechanized travel for the purpose was ruled out by the government. Today, sports guiding is an important activity. While subsistence hunting continues on a reduced scale, most families now depend upon a variety of activities and sources for their incomes.

This tale of human resourcefulness in the face of intimidating odds is quietly told, concentrating on material aspects of daily rounds that together make up a large part of a way of life. Spiritual matters come in for little attention, and most of that concentrates on the rivalry between Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries which, however, is not fully explored. We do not learn about the effects of evangelization on Arctic lifeways, apart from its encouragement of Christmas and Easter gatherings, which could be regarded as an adaptation of prechristian gettogethers. With that reservation, this is a comprehensive and instructive account of the emergence of a new way of life under challenging conditions, adapting and building upon skills and knowledge carried over from the old.

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Enrico, John and Wendy Bross Stuart: *Northern Haida Songs*. (Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians.) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, ISBN 0-8032-1816-8 Cloth USA \$40.00.

This collection of Haida songs is the product of an ideal team, a linguist, John Enrico, and an ethnomusicologist, Wendy Bross Stuart. Like many