

# ENCYCLOPEDIA ARCTICA

By VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON

*Encyclopedia Arctica* is to be like *Britannica*, but instead of taking in the whole globe our work is to focus on the Arctic and shade off into the Subarctic.

For EA purposes, the Arctic has not as yet been defined (as of 1948). The Subarctic on land has been considered provisionally as the region north of a line connecting the most southerly points at which permafrost has been discovered, whether in the Old or New World. According to Soviet writers of 1947, this would place within the sphere of EA about 47% of all their territories, mainland and islands; by estimates of various Canadian geologists and geographers, the sphere of EA would cover anything between 50% and 70% of their country's land surface.

It has not yet been decided for EA whether Newfoundland, Iceland, and Sakhalin are to be appended to the Subarctic, nor has the decision been made for the Kuriles. Arbitrarily it has been settled that all of political Alaska will be included, though some of the Aleutian Islands are as far south as Edmonton or Liverpool and although many components of that island chain seldom or never get colder, near sea level, than the minimum records of the State of Florida. At sea the outermost fringe of the Subarctic will be, in any longitude, the southern limit of drift sea ice or of icebergs, whichever is more southerly.

## *Scope of the Encyclopedia*

EA is to have not less than five million and not more than six million words. Its goal, which we do not expect to approach closely, is to answer every question that any intelligent and reasonable person may want to ask concerning the region geographically covered. This means that the range will be from geophysics to Eskimo music and from the northern lights to Christian missions. We cover everything, whether imaginary or prehensible, from the vicinity of 49° N. Lat. on the northern shore of Lake Superior, where permafrost was uncovered during the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway around 1880, to 90° N. Lat. which Peary first attained in 1909. There will have to be some account both of how the permafrost was discovered and of how the North Pole was discovered.

EA considers the manner in which Canada, Denmark, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. govern their Arctic territories; and, if by 1950 Newfoundland is not yet a part of Canada, we shall have to deal likewise with their management of Labrador. Nor do legal considerations cease at the world's most northern land, the north tip of Greenland; so there will be a discussion of international law (which perhaps should be in quotation marks as "international law") in its relation to the Arctic Sea, and there will be a more general paper on the Arctic in world politics.

To indicate further the scope of the encyclopedia we mention that there will be an article on the influence of polar exploration on the writings of Shakespeare, dealing also with his influence upon the geographical thinking of Elizabethan and succeeding generations. There will be a study of "what did they know and believe about the Arctic," with relation to the Egyptians, the ancient eastern peoples, the biblical Jews, the Phoenicians, the Hindus, Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Saracens and other remote nations, as well as those that were closer to the Arctic,

such as the Germans, Scandinavians, Russians, Netherlanders and English. These papers will consider the garbled form in which the earliest discernible reports or theories about the Far North took shape, and will continue the story down to the present, or down to such time as one field merges into another, as in the case of the Greek epoch merging into the Roman.

It goes without saying that an encyclopedia which deals with the spiritual and the ethereal, like religion and music, will deal no less and even more with the strictly practical and the up-to-the-minute. We discuss not merely how primitive man reached Alaska across Bering Straits tens of thousands of years ago, and his migrations covering thousands of years, but also how the modern scientist has his breakfast conventionally in Fairbanks, lunches with a thermos bottle over the North Pole, and dines in Fairbanks, Alaska, or in London, England, that evening, where he discusses the results of his trip. We tell how the Eskimo makes skin boats, and how the engineer builds an air field. We deal with what the shaman tells us regarding spirit control of disease, and with what the physiologist tells us he has learnt at the Point Barrow research laboratories. In short, we aim to cover not merely all sciences but also all other branches of knowledge as they apply to the North.

#### *Authors from Many Countries*

According to the program, about half the encyclopedia will be written by ten research and clerical workers who are on the staff of the Stefansson Library in New York. Between 5% and 10% will be done by able piece-work writers who are not on salary because they work in spare time at various United States and Canadian libraries. About 40% will be done by distinguished specialists in a dozen or more countries.

In all cases the specialists selected to write the 40% are near the top in their field, but some of our contributors are as yet too young to be quite as famous as a few older men who do not contribute. For in rare cases we have to pass over the greatest of the living authorities through the circumstance, unfortunate for EA, that they do not write in English, and that we do not have the means for perfect translation—if indeed a perfect translation is ever possible.

In a number of cases contributors to EA are unique. For instance, William Thalbitzer of the University of Copenhagen writes on Eskimo music and on Eskimo phonetics, subjects which have been his life work; Morten Porsild, the supreme Greenland botanist, writes on the botany of Greenland; our Peary biographer, William H. Hobbs of the University of Michigan, has been a lifelong student, friend and collaborator of Peary and is the author of far the best of the published works on Peary; Harald Sverdrup, our writer on Polar Sea oceanography, is just resigning his professorship of oceanography at the University of California and his directorship of the Scripps Oceanographical Institution, to become head in Norway of institutions both national and international, that deal with polar studies. Rockwell Kent, our contributor on the scenic qualities of arctic lands, is foremost of all artists who have ever spent whole years at a time in the Arctic.

A main task of the EA editors is to discover in every land scholars who have already devoted to certain northern specialties anything from a few years to

several decades. Such men are the only ones whom we could expect as contributors, for the financial rewards held out to encyclopedia writers are small and standardized. The men who collaborate on EA do it for the good of the cause and, in some cases, because this gives them their first, or at any rate their best, opportunity of publishing to a considerable and significant audience the results of their scholarship.

### *Contributions from Learned Societies*

A feature of the encyclopedia is that, generally speaking, learned societies and government departments will each write for it their own history, insofar as it relates to the Arctic. In this regard, the editors have come no croppers. Every scientific society, to whom we have appealed, has agreed; a third or more of them has already sent in manuscripts which run from 10,000 words down, some of them masterpieces and all of them good, for the societies have been careful to select writers who are no less articulate than they are well informed. From government departments EA has received corresponding promise of support, in some cases at the first application. In a few cases we have received preliminary drafts, but there are as yet no final drafts of government contributions. A meaningful reason for this delay is that arctic and subarctic work, particularly in the cases of the United States and Canada, is more active in 1948 than it ever was before.

*Encyclopedia Arctica* will be published by a regular commercial publisher, or rather by several. Tentatively the assumption is that the chief publisher will be a United States firm, with subsidiary publishers at least in Great Britain and Canada, perhaps in other countries.

All authors are being requested to supply for illustration as many photographs, drawings and diagrams as they can. No doubt there will eventually be a struggle between the editors and the publishers on how many of these can be included and on how sumptuous the presentation ought to be. For example, the use of expensive color plates has not been decided upon; there is a commercial argument for it, since the pictures of artists like Rockwell Kent, who is doing the papers on Greenland and Alaska scenery, will add considerably to sales volume.

### *Government Support Obtained*

In spite of sales possibilities, it is obvious that a work like the *Encyclopedia Arctica* could not be compiled and published on a strictly commercial basis, the publisher being then expected to advance all money required not merely for the manufacture and sales promotion but also for the writing and editorial work. So the editors of EA necessarily had to seek patronage from a wealthy man, from a foundation or from a government agency. We sought and found government support. Like many another current scientific enterprise which does not fall either into the money-making or the "defense" class, our study is being financed by the Office of Naval Research, a branch of the Federal Government of the United States. The work began on December 1, 1946; the manuscript is to be ready for a publisher by December 31, 1949.