

Diamond Jenness (1886-1969)

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Canada's most distinguished anthropologist, Dr. Diamond Jenness, formerly Chief of the Division of Anthropology, National Museums of Canada, and Honorary Associate of the Arctic Institute of North America, died peacefully at his home in the Gatineau Hills near Ottawa on 29 November, 1969. He was one of that rapidly-vanishing, virtually extinct kind — the all round anthropologist, who, working seriously, turned out first-class publications in all four major branches of the discipline: ethnology, linguistics, archaeology, and physical anthropology. One must also add a fifth: applied anthropology, a fitting designation for the series of monographs on Eskimo administration in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland which he wrote after his retirement and which were published by the Arctic Institute between 1962 and 1968.

Diamond Jenness was born in Wellington, New Zealand, on 10 February 1886, and attended Victoria University College, one of the four branches of the University of New Zealand, where he graduated with first class honours in classics in 1908. Later he studied at Balliol College, Oxford, under one of the outstanding ethnologists of the time, Professor R. R. Marett. He received both a B.A. in Lit. Hum. and a diploma in Anthropology at Oxford in 1911. In 1911-12 he was designated Oxford Scholar in Papua and was sent by the University to make anthropological studies among the Northern d'Entrecasteaux, a primitive tribe dwelling on the islands of the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago off the east coast of New Guinea. The results of this first field-work were published by Oxford University (1920a).

His New Guinea work completed, Jenness had just recuperated from yellow fever in New Zealand when he received a cablegram from Edward Sapir, Chief of the Division of Anthropology, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa: "Will you join Stefansson Arctic Expedition and study Eskimos for three years? Reply collect." In the spring of 1913, in response to this unexpected invitation, Jenness found himself headed for Victoria, British Columbia, to join Stefansson and the twelve other scientific members of the Canadian Arctic Expedition. The Expedition was planned to operate as two more or less distinct units. A Northern Party, under Stefansson's direction, was to carry out geographical explorations in the Arctic Archipelago and Beaufort Sea while a Southern Party, under the direction of Dr. R. M. Anderson, was to conduct biological, geological and anthropological investigations on the arctic mainland and adjacent islands. Jenness was a member of the Southern Party, and his assignment was a three-year study of the Copper Eskimos around Coronation Gulf.

In June the Expedition's flagship, the old whaling vessel *Karluk* under command of Captain Bob Bartlett, steamed northward to Nome, where Stefansson bought two 60-foot schooners, the *Alaska* and the *Mary Sachs*, to supplement the

Karluk. The three vessels were to rendezvous at Herschel Island, near the mouth of the Mackenzie River. These plans, however, were not to be realized. Throughout the summer the winds blew continuously from the west and northwest driving the pack ice close inshore, imprisoning the *Alaska* and *Mary Sachs* in Camden Bay midway between Point Barrow and the Mackenzie, and carrying the *Karluk*, drifting helplessly in the ice, to her eventual destruction off the Siberian coast near Wrangell Island. Jenness' colleague, the French ethnologist Henri Beuchat, was one of those who perished on the ice, or on Wrangell Island, in an attempt to reach the Siberian coast after the *Karluk* had been crushed in the ice.

On 30 September, Stefansson, with his secretary Burt McConnell, Jenness, two Eskimos, and the expedition's photographer G. H. Wilkins (later Sir Hubert Wilkins), left the *Karluk* near the mouth of the Colville River to hunt caribou and lay in a supply of fresh meat when it had become apparent that the ship, immobilized in the ice, could proceed no further. With two sleds, twelve dogs and food for twelve days the party set out for the mainland, but they never saw the *Karluk* again, for a week or so later the unfortunate vessel began her final drift westward.

This was the inauspicious beginning of Jenness' arctic career. Few young anthropologists have faced such difficulties in beginning field-work in a new and unfamiliar area; yet none, surely, has emerged from the test with a more brilliant record of work accomplished.

With no signs of habitation nearby and with the first permanent settlement to the east, Herschel Island, 300 miles away, the stranded party set out for Barrow, 150 miles to the west, to obtain provisions and some news of the whereabouts of their three vessels. On 12 October they reached Barrow where the trader, Charlie Brower, supplied them with new skin clothing and provisions to carry them over the winter. On 27 October, before the outfitting was completed, Jenness and Wilkins, with two Eskimos and two dog teams, were sent east again to lay in a supply of fish from a lake near Cape Halkett and obtain meat for dog food from two stranded whales.

They were joined by Stefansson, McConnell and two Eskimos on 21 November. Two days later Stefansson and the rest of the party, including Wilkins, left for Camden Bay, where they had learned that the *Alaska* and *Mary Sachs* had found refuge, and which was therefore to be the expedition's winter base. Jenness remained behind to spend the winter with an Eskimo family at Harrison Bay to learn the language and obtain whatever information he could on Eskimo customs and folklore. What he was able to record on these subjects was later described in various Reports of the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-1918: *Eskimo folk-lore, Parts A and B* (1924a, b); *Eskimo language and technology, Parts A and B* (1928b, 1944); and in half a dozen shorter papers such as *The Eskimos of northern Alaska: a study in the effect of civilization* (1918), and *Eskimo music in northern Alaska* (1922b), published in technical journals.

Jenness' first winter's field-work on the Arctic coast of Alaska that led to this impressive list of publications was conducted under conditions that many an ethnographer would have found intolerable. The people he lived with most of

the time were inland Eskimos from the Colville River who spent the winter on the Arctic coast trapping white foxes to trade for ammunition and other necessities; their food consisted mainly of whitefish and trout caught in nets set under the ice in coastal lakes, supplemented by ptarmigan, waterfowl, and an occasional caribou. Food was never plentiful, indeed often insufficient for their needs, and it was frequently necessary for the group to pack its belongings on sleds and set out for some other locality where the prospects for food were more promising. Jenness shared this precarious existence with his Eskimo hosts, living with them in their tiny over-crowded wooden cabins and travelling with them or, sometimes, after he had mastered the technique of dog sledding, travelling alone or with one companion over many miles of frozen tundra and sea ice in the coldest and stormiest months of the arctic year. Such was the young New Zealander's introduction to the Arctic and the way of life of its people.

Scarcely a hint of these personal experiences of his first winter in the Arctic will be found in Jenness' anthropological writings. They were reserved for his retrospective volume *Dawn in Arctic Alaska* (1957) which he wrote while on a Guggenheim scholarship in 1954, some years after his retirement. This book, however, is far more than a personal narrative. It is a vivid account of how the Eskimos to the east of Point Barrow spent the late fall, winter and spring hunting, fishing and trapping on the arctic coast — an account all the more accurate and revealing because the narrator had himself participated in these activities.

With the coming of spring Jenness set out for Camden Bay to join the other members of the Southern Party of the Expedition under the direction of Dr. R. M. Anderson. While there he made an archaeological survey of the 100-mile stretch of coast between Camden Bay and Demarcation Point, and spent about seven weeks excavating Eskimo ruins on Barter Island, the first archaeological excavations that had been made east of Point Barrow.

Jenness' first year in the Arctic ended in July 1914 when the Expedition's schooners left Camden Bay and sailed eastward to Dolphin and Union Strait where he was to meet with another though very different, Eskimo people named by Stefansson the Copper Eskimos, most of whom, before Stefansson worked among them in 1910-11, had never seen a white man.

The few white explorers who had visited the country of the Copper Eskimos can be quickly enumerated: Samuel Hearne in 1771; Franklin, 1819 and 1821; Richardson and Kendall, 1826; Back, 1833; Dease and Simpson, 1838-39; Richardson and Rae, 1848; Rae, 1849-50; M'Clure, 1851; Collinson, 1851-52. The first white traveller to visit the region in modern times was David T. Hanbury in 1902 and 1903. Two whalers, Captain C. Klengenber and Captain William Mogg, wintered on the west coast of Victoria Island in 1905-06 and 1906-07, and Captain Joseph Bernard, in the schooner *Teddy Bear*, wintered in Coronation Gulf and Victoria Island in 1910-11, 1912-13, and 1913-14, the first white trader to reach the Copper Eskimo country.

Jenness had arrived among the Copper Eskimos just in time. The few brief encounters with the early explorers, and even the contacts with the whalers who wintered among them from 1905 to 1907 had in no way affected the Eskimos' way of life. The coming of the little *Teddy Bear*, however, with its store of white

man's goods, was an event of far more importance. Other changes were to follow. An Anglican missionary arrived in the summer of 1915, and when the Canadian Arctic Expedition concluded its work in 1916 the wood and sod building it had constructed at Bernard Harbour became the mission's headquarters. A Hudson's Bay post was established at Bernard Harbour the same year, and patrols of the Northwest Mounted Police brought the white man's law to the Copper Eskimos.

Fortunately, these beginnings of change in the Eskimos' economy had no serious effect on Jenness' work. The rifle was coming into use, to be sure, and a few of the Eskimos were beginning to trap white foxes, but caribou were still being hunted with bow and arrow or speared in the water from kayaks. And in its nonmaterial aspects their culture remained unchanged. Thus in the two years that he lived among them Jenness was able to observe and record the life of the Copper Eskimos as it had existed for centuries or millennia before the white man's "civilization" had reached them.

To obtain a faithful picture of the life of the Copper Eskimos Jenness chose an approach that in those days was not often employed by ethnologists. He entered into their life directly, as one of them. He attached himself to an Eskimo family and became the adopted son of Ikpukhuak, one of the foremost hunters and respected leaders of the Puivlik tribe of southwest Victoria Island, and his jolly wife Higilak (Ice House), who was not only proficient in the ordinary and burdensome duties of an Eskimo wife but was also a shaman in her own right, a talent that saved Jenness from a local murder charge. Jenness lived with these people in their snow houses in winter and skin tents in summer, observing and recording the vastly different modes of life according to season. He joined in the hunting and fishing on which their life depended, travelling by dog team and sealing on the ice in winter and sharing their nomadic existence in summer as they roamed the tundra, fishing in lakes and streams and hunting caribou in the interior of Victoria Island. Jenness' first year among the Copper Eskimos is best summarized in his own words: "Thus was completed the project that I had outlined for myself the previous winter. By isolating myself among the Eskimos during the months just past I had followed their wanderings day by day from autumn round to autumn. I had observed their reactions to every season, the disbanding of the tribes and their reassembling, the migrations from sea to land and from land to sea, the diversion from sealing to hunting, hunting to fishing, fishing to hunting, and then to sealing again. All these changes caused by their economic environment I had seen and studied; now, with greater knowledge of the language, I could concentrate on other phases of their life and history" *The People of the Twilight* (1928f, p. 191). Few now living can comprehend what a demanding, dangerous and rich experience it was.

The Expedition sailed from its base at Bernard Harbour on 13 July 1916. Soon after his return to Ottawa Jenness joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a gunner in the Field Artillery, and was on active duty overseas from 1917 to 1919. At Oxford, on leave from occupation duty in Germany, he had completed his report on the Northern d'Entrecasteaux (1920a). In the same year, Jenness returned to Canada, married Frances Eileen Bleakney whom he had met

before going overseas, honeymooned in New Zealand and returned to join the National Museum of Canada staff.

Now began a period of intensive writing as Jenness worked up his field notes for publication in the Reports of the Canadian Arctic Expedition. The result was a flood of publications issued in rapid succession from 1923 to 1928 and two others in 1944 and 1946. Those dealing with the Alaskan and Mackenzie Eskimos have already been mentioned. Two of them, on mythology and string figures (1924a, b) also included the Copper Eskimo data on these subjects. The first of the monographs on the Copper Eskimos (1923b, c) alone was a classic which assumed its place immediately not only as the definitive work on a little known but important segment of the Eskimo population but also as the most comprehensive description of a single Eskimo tribe ever written. The anthropometric data in Part B (1923c) consisted of measurements that Jenness had made on 82 males and 44 females belonging to 11 of the 17 groups of Copper Eskimos. The next substantial work to appear was a large volume *Songs of the Copper Eskimos* (1925b). The songs, recorded on a phonograph, were sung by men, women and children from almost all parts of the Copper Eskimo area. The musical transcription and analysis of the 137 songs were by Helen H. Roberts of Columbia University, the introduction, texts and translations were by Jenness. This volume represents the largest single collection of songs from any Eskimo area. The last of the Canadian Arctic Expedition Reports dealing with the Copper Eskimos was *Material Culture of the Copper Eskimos* (1946). A half dozen shorter papers appeared in the *American Anthropologist*, *Geographical Review*, etc., including *The 'Blond' Eskimos*, which contested Stefansson's view that the Copper Eskimos had physical characteristics suggestive of White, early Norse, admixture. These articles and the volume, *The People of the Twilight* (1928f) completed Jenness' major writings on the Copper Eskimos.

Jenness' researches extended far beyond Coronation Gulf and the arctic coast westward. He made field studies among a number of other Canadian tribes (the Sarcee, 1921; Carrier, 1923-24; Sekani, 1924; Beothuk, 1927; Ojibwa, 1929; Salish, 1935), and published on their ethnology and historical background. Many other papers dealt with special aspects of Indian and Eskimo culture, history and economy. His *Indians of Canada* (1931c) is the definitive work on the Canadian aborigines, dealing comprehensively with the ethnology and history of the Canadian Indians and Eskimos. The usefulness of this book is enhanced by its arrangement, the first half being topical with separate chapters on language, material culture, economic conditions, religion, social and political organization, archaeology, interaction with whites, etc. for the area as a whole, whereas the second half contains a short description of each of the tribes.

As Chairman of the Anthropological Section of the Fifth Pacific Science Congress held in Vancouver in 1933, Jenness organized and edited *The American Aborigines; their Origin and Antiquity* (1933b), one of the basic syntheses on American prehistory. The ten contributors to the volume included some of the foremost anthropologists of the time: Franz Boas, Roland B. Dixon, E. A. Hooton, N. C. Nelson, Herbert J. Spinden, Clark Wissler. Jenness' own contribution, "The Problem of the Eskimo", is one of the most valuable and the

one that probably has best stood the test of time. In it he showed the special talent he so often displayed of being able to survey a wide scene, analyse its complexities, contradictions and difficulties and, with convincing logic, come up with what turns out to be the right solution.

Jenness always disclaimed being an archaeologist, yet he made two discoveries that are fundamental to an understanding of Eskimo prehistory — discovery of the Dorset culture in the eastern Arctic, and of the Old Bering Sea, earliest stage of the maritime pattern of Eskimo culture that later spread from northern Alaska to Canada and Greenland to form the principal basis for modern Eskimo culture. His discovery of the Dorset culture was one of the most brilliant feats of scientific induction in the history of American archaeology. A collection of artifacts dug up by Eskimos at Cape Dorset and Coats on Mansel Island had been sent to the Museum by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. On examining the material Jenness saw that it was a mixture of modern and prehistoric Thule artifacts along with others that appeared new and strange. The latter, consisting of small, delicate harpoon heads and other artifacts of ivory, bone and stone, he interpreted as belonging to a new and distinctive phase of Eskimo culture, the Cape Dorset, which in his view had preceded the prehistoric Thule culture in the eastern Arctic (1925a). On the basis of this small collection of secondhand material he not only defined the main characteristics of the new culture, but postulated its age, its geographic distribution, and the basic economy of its people. Therkel Mathiassen, the distinguished Danish archaeologist who had excavated at numerous localities in the Canadian Arctic a few years earlier, had found Dorset artifacts at several of his sites but had regarded them as local and specialized types of the Thule culture. Jenness' theory was strongly resisted, but later investigations have borne it out completely, and the Dorset culture, extending from Newfoundland through the eastern Canadian Arctic to Greenland from around 3,000 to 700 years ago, is now recognized as the basic, autochthonous form of Eskimo culture in the eastern Arctic.

Equally impressive was his discovery of the Old Bering Sea culture, and this was a result, in part, of his own field work. In 1926, while excavating at Cape Prince of Wales, Bering Strait, he made a brief trip to nearby Little Diomedé Island. In the short time he was there he was able to excavate only the upper few feet of the huge frozen midden underlying the present village. Beneath the surface layers and the accumulation of modern and recent material he found harpoon heads and other artifacts recognizable as Thule, like those he had been excavating at the prehistoric site at Wales. However, an Eskimo digging a meat cache unearthed a harpoon head of unusual type at a depth of 8 feet in the midden. It was deeply patinated, complex in form, and decorated with a graceful pattern of flowing lines and circles. Several other old harpoon heads and artifacts bearing this elaborate incised ornamentation were purchased from the Diomedé Eskimos. It was on this slender basis that Jenness postulated a pre-Thule ancestral phase of Eskimo culture in the western Arctic. He ventured even to estimate its age — around the first millennium B. C., its relation to known Eskimo cultures in the American Arctic and, on the basis of art, some relationship to the cultures of eastern Asia (1928a, c; 1933d). Later investigations, which

have revealed the Old Bering Sea culture in its entirety, have extended and reinforced but in no way contradicted Jenness' original postulations as to its age, relationships and origin.

And so much more. In 1926, Jenness succeeded Edward Sapir as Chief Anthropologist of the National Museum of Canada. In 1929 he represented Canada at the Fourth Pacific Science Congress, and in Vancouver in 1933, chaired the Anthropological Section of the Fifth Pacific Science Congress. In 1938 he was Canada's official delegate to the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Copenhagen. His exceptional stature as an anthropologist and the high personal regard he had earned in his profession are reflected in his being elected President of the Society for American Archaeology in 1937, Vice-President of Section H (Anthropology) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1938, and President of the American Anthropological Association in 1939. It was also during the years between the wars that Diamond Jenness developed the Antiquities Legislation that has been so important for the protection of archaeological resources in the Northwest Territories.

With the outbreak of World War II Jenness joined the Dependents Allowance Board then, in 1940, became Deputy-Director of Intelligence for the Royal Canadian Air Force. In 1943 he became Chief of the Inter-Service Topographical Section. Afterward he organized the Geographical Bureau and was its Director until his retirement in 1947. Thousands passing through Coral Harbour or Frobisher Bay are unaware of the influence that Jenness' war-time recommendations have had on the course of their travels in the Canadian Arctic since that time.

With his retirement, the Jennesses travelled widely and he continued his research and writing, lectured, and advised scores of scholars, especially younger ones who could depend on his rare combination of kindness and brilliance. After living in Cyprus and echoing his Balliol College studies, he published *The Economics of Cyprus, A Survey to 1914* (1962b). Between 1962 and 1968 the Arctic Institute of North America published his admirable five volumes on Eskimo administration in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. These monographs reflect his durable and compassionate concern for Canadian Indians and Eskimos and in them one can find much of the advice that he, for so many decades, provided the Canadian Government.

Diamond Jenness was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Danish Geographical Society, an Honorary Member of the Royal Society of New Zealand, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, an Honorary Associate of the Arctic Institute of North America, and a member of the American Ethnological Society. A Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, he received the Society's Massey Medal in 1962. Further, Diamond Jenness received honorary degrees from the University of New Zealand, Waterloo University, Carleton University, the University of Saskatchewan, and McGill University. Finally, this quiet man was appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada, his country's highest honour. As winter passed in March 1970, Governor-General Roland Michener awarded the Order's medal to Mrs. Jenness on behalf of her late husband for his "services in the field of anthropology, particularly in connection with the Indian and Eskimo population of Canada."

Diamond Jenness was patient, sentient and an extremely modest man, yet courageous, aggressive and resourceful in fighting for any cause he felt worthwhile. His generosity and consideration for his younger colleagues were boundless. He had great strength of character, a rugged integrity and tenacity of purpose, traits that were the more admirable because of the selfless ends toward which they were always directed. Generosity, courage, integrity — one senses that these were the essential traits of character that endeared him to his Eskimo and Indian friends and insured the success of his work among them. Such qualities, even more than his professional eminence and admirable public services, cause all of us to cherish the memory of this exceptional man.

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