

ALAN GORDON RICHARD COOKE
(1933-1989)

Alan Cooke, a person well known to all those interested in the history and development of the subarctic and arctic regions, died in Montreal on 11 July 1989, after an illness of several months. Alan was born in Montpelier, Vermont, on 29 April 1933. After entering Dartmouth College in 1951, he worked with a geological field party in northern Quebec during the summer of 1953 and soon came under the influence of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who with his famous collection of polar books, pamphlets, and letters had just taken up residence at Dartmouth. These two events set Alan firmly upon a long trail of northern studies, which he followed for the remaining four decades of his life as traveller, researcher, writer, consultant, and editor. By the time Alan graduated from Dartmouth he had already compiled a comprehensive bibliography of northern Quebec, which a decade later, with considerable expansion, was published in two volumes as the *Bibliography of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula*, co-authored with Fabien Caron.

After a brief sojourn at McGill University, Alan began doctoral studies in historical geography at the University of Cambridge and earned a Ph.D. in 1970 with an analysis of



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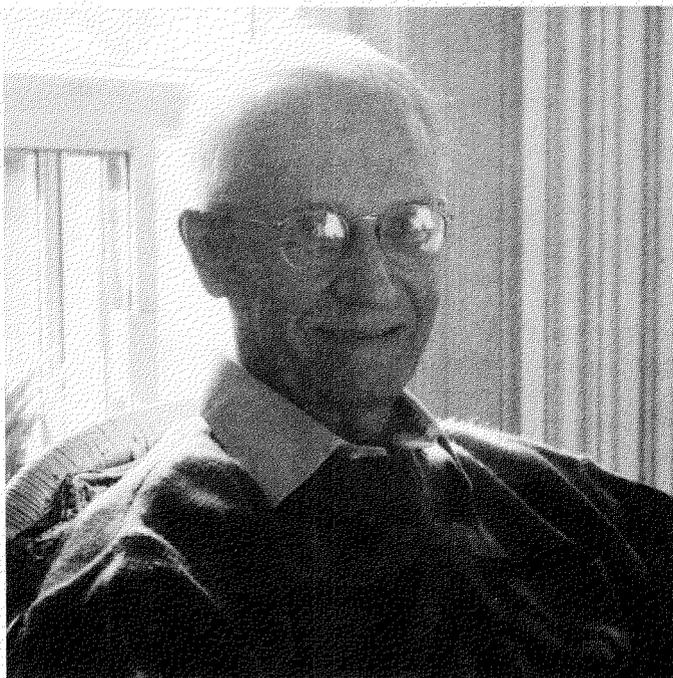
the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Chimo operation in the early nineteenth century. During the 1960s and early 1970s he enjoyed a close association with the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge and for three years edited its journal *Polar Record*. He also served as a research analyst on the staff for the *Arctic Bibliography* published by the Arctic Institute of North America. In 1975 he moved back to Montreal to undertake freelance editorial work.

Alan was a literary person. He loved language with a passion and his favourite recreation, by his own admission, was reading. He always took editorial responsibilities seriously, as anyone who asked him to "look over" a manuscript can testify, and he brought superb skills to the task.

But his knowledge of the North was not gained merely from the printed page. In addition to his initial geological field work, he spent most of a year at McGill's Subarctic Research Station at Schefferville, Quebec, a summer canoeing down the Mackenzie River, a winter teaching in an Indian school at Fort Simpson, N.W.T., a summer with his wife, Jane, carrying out human geographical studies in the Noatak River region of Alaska (in connection with a proposal to detonate several nuclear bombs near Point Hope), and some time among the Naskapi Indians near Schefferville.

Alan's career included jobs as assistant librarian and/or curator of manuscripts in two of the world's best polar libraries, the Stefansson Collection at Dartmouth College and the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge. He believed strongly in the advantages of relatively small, specialized polar libraries in which the staff knew a good deal about the region and the material, and he spoke out loudly against the dismemberment of the Stefansson Collection after the explorer's death in 1962, the loss from Montreal of the library of the Arctic Institute of North America in 1976, and the break-up of the library of McGill's Centre for Northern Studies and Research in 1983. These events left a gap in information flow that he endeavoured to fill in 1983 by establishing the independent Hochelaga Research Institute to provide specialized bibliographic services on northern topics. Building upon this initiative, he founded a new northern journal of "commentary and opinion" (his words) called *Arcana Poli* (Secrets of the Pole), whose first issue (and sadly its last) was published in 1988.

In journal articles Alan analyzed a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary topics and issues, ranging from the authenticity of the Vinland map to the potential environmental and social impacts of a proposed Rampart Dam on the Yukon River. His articles were always interesting and usually erudite; a few, including an unforgettable account of how he shocked Indians by eating the eyes of salmon, were highly amusing. He helped edit a number of influential reports and books, including *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* (1976), *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland* (1977), *Alaska Highway Pipeline Inquiry* (1977), and *Village Journey* (1985), but his most significant and enduring scholarly contribution was the book *The Exploration of Northern Canada 500 to 1920; a Chronology* (1978), co-authored with Clive Holland. This indispensable annotated compendium of subarctic and arctic expeditions and events



Alan Cooke, spring 1989. Photo credit: Patricia Cooke.

has already had a positive influence upon northern scholarship and writing, and there is no reason to think that its value will ever diminish. In addition to these and other

tangible achievements, Alan was very generous in giving personal encouragement and useful advice to many individuals pursuing topics relating to the northern regions, as the acknowledgements in an impressive number of books attest.

Like his mentor Stefansson, Alan was a collector of written material on the North. His books will constitute a special collection in the library of Arctic College, Iqaluit (formerly Frobisher Bay), N.W.T., and his papers will go to his alma mater, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, where they may help to rekindle the flame of enthusiasm for northern studies that went out with Stefansson's death a quarter century ago.

On important issues Alan was always ready to express an opinion and fight for a principle. He was outspoken and seldom hesitated to stand on the gunwhales if he thought a boat needed to be rocked. Some people resented his frankness, but usually he said only what needed to be said and what others lacked the courage to say.

I knew Alan as a fellow graduate student in two universities, and as a friend for more than thirty years. His influence expanded my limited intellectual territory, stimulated my interest in arctic research, and enriched my career and life, for which I will always be grateful.

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