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Before the Storm: A Year in the Pribilof Islands, 1941–1942. By Fredericka Martin. Edited by Raymond Hudson. Fairbanks: University of Alaska, 2010. 385 pages. \$39.95 paper.

Fredericka Martin's story languished in the University of Alaska, Fairbanks archives for six decades before Alaska historian Raymond Hudson determined to fulfill Martin's aspiration. Martin's manuscript, which she had titled *The Wind Is No River*, is an excellent firsthand account of a pivotal time period for the Aleut people, or Unangan, of the Pribilof Islands, Alaska, and the United States. Hudson craftily integrates quotations taken from Martin's diary into her story's narrative. The two writing styles serve to portray Martin as a "regular guy" and as a storyteller, thereby offering the reader a more intimate relationship with the author's personal and professional style. Throughout the decades, others had the opportunity to record personal observations during their tenure on the islands, but few did. Since G. Dallas Hanna's *The Alaska Fur-Seal Islands* (2008), written during the 1920s, Martin's book represents the only other popular first-person account of life on the Pribilofs.

Before the Storm brings to light the clash between whites and Natives living in a feudal state and brings forth the author's fascination with the dynamic environmental setting in which it took place. In 1941, with little more than a fancy for adventure, Nurse Martin and her physician husband, Dr. Samuel Berenberg, volunteered for a tour of duty with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) at St. Paul Island, one of two inhabited islands among the five-island Pribilof Archipelago. Although Berenberg received remuneration for his physician services, Martin supported her husband without pay. During that time, their first child, Tobyanne, was born on St. Paul and is the one to whom "Freddie," as she was affectionately known, dedicated her manuscript. "Someday Tobyanne is going to ask her parents, Why was I born on St. Paul Island? Who lives there? What happens there?" (327). Little did Martin realize what a lasting impact she would have on the people of the Pribilof Islands. *Before the Storm* provides the foundation of her greater story, which has yet to be written at length.

The Pribilof Islands, or Seal Islands, were a government "special reservation" in the central Bering Sea dedicated to the preservation of the northern fur seal, or more aptly, the fur-seal industry. The USFWS administered and managed the Seal Islands Reservation for the purpose of harvesting northern fur seals whose peltry supplied a high-end, women's fashion industry. The industry added tens of millions of dollars to the US Treasury. The Aleuts provided the mainstay labor force for the United States' only industrial monopoly. The Aleuts had similarly served their Russian conquerors beginning in 1786 with the Russian discovery of the Seal Islands. Lisa Marie Short

stated that “She [Martin] did not know the world she was stepping into mirrored . . . two hundred years of slavery” (“Fredericka I. Martin,” master’s thesis, Pacific Alaska University, 1995, 5). At the time of Martin’s arrival on St. Paul Island, the Aleuts had been wards of the government for about seventy-three years.

The Berenbergs’ experience began six months prior to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japan’s subsequent attack on Alaska set in motion events that would eventually bring long-denied civil liberties to a unique group of Native Americans largely sequestered from normal American society. Martin recognized the significance of her circumstance soon after arriving on St. Paul Island, beginning with the deplorable medical facility and the aberrant attitudes of the people—whites and Natives.

Much of the book is directed toward Martin’s observations of the environment—climate and natural history—and human relationships with it. Her general descriptions of the landscape are exquisite; however, Martin’s telling of the islands’ natural history is not without error. For example, “I . . . collected . . . a few dozen . . . oyster shells” (144). Oysters never grew at the Pribilofs, but a large species of jingle shell similar in appearance to an oyster does. Martin states that shrews and lemmings abound on St. George Island (274). Biologists W. H. Osgood, E. A. Preble, and G. H. Parker wrote that lemmings alone exist on St. George and the Pribilof shrew lives only on St. Paul. Likewise, her description of the formation of fossil records and the birth of St. Paul Island is particularly questionable (Osgood, Preble, and Parker, *The Fur Seals and Other Life of the Pribilof Islands, Alaska, in 1914, 1915*, 131). Hanna had written about fossilized rocks being entrained by volcanic activity, although his manuscript remained in an archive until recently and was unavailable to Martin (*The Alaska Fur-Seal Islands*, 234–35). Since her time, several geologists have examined the geology of the island. G. S. Winer, T. C. Feeley, and M. A. Cosca provide a modern interpretation of the St. Paul’s volcanic evolution (“Basaltic Volcanism in the Bering Sea: Geochronology and Volcanic Evolution of St. Paul Island, Pribilof Islands, Alaska,” *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, 2002, 277–301).

Probably for many readers, Martin’s story about government attitudes and the day-to-day living and struggles of the Unangan on the Pribilofs will take precedence over eloquent accounts of the islands’ natural history and climate. Freddie was no newcomer to human frailties and tragedy during times when political ideologues challenged civilian populations. During 1937 and 1938 in the Spanish Civil War, she served as chief nurse and administrator of the American Hospital Division: “I remembered sprawling blurred bodies under the trees of Madrid’s University City” (69). Her accomplishments and persona likely led to her selection in 1939 to establish and administer

the Greenbelt Hospital on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. Her resolute character is emblazoned in her manuscript: "We have no qualms about being disliked or not having the proper respect shown us. We are accustomed to being ourselves wherever we are and do not curry favor" (12), and "we are isolated from the world by bureaucratic stupidity and inertia and indifference" (305).

Martin's writing reveals her profound recognition of a social injustice callously ignored by government bureaucrats and employees. "They shared the dread that paralyzes so many government employees and turns them into bureaucratic automatons, the fear that freely voiced opinions and independent action may displease a superior and cost them their economic security" (12). However, she places much of the blame on Washington, D.C.: "On the Pribilof reservation, human beings, whether government employees or Aleut sealers, are of secondary importance because they do not grow fur" (115). Her character intimates an honest broker of human rights. Remarkably, she spews venom where it's due, while she offers charitable comments about government employees earnestly trying to right wrongs: "Kind agents like Judge and Murray tried to institute reforms" (266); "Big hearted, vitriolic Colonel Marston . . . bitterly condemned the company's [Alaska Commercial Company] ruthlessness in trying to rob the Aleuts of their rights. He combated the efforts of one or two favor-carrying Aleuts who sought excuses" (75). Then there were those who, despite their faults at times, exhibited kindness toward the Natives. Of her contemporary, Agent E. C. Johnston, she wrote much: "His absorption in nature and acceptance of her law . . . may have been principally responsible for his blindness to the needs of man." A bit later she wrote, "The little things he did for the people endeared him to me" (118). Martin did not refrain from chiding individual Aleuts. For example, "his foster mother . . . had frustrated his desire to attend a Russian seminary . . . or even to go outside to an industrial school" (166); "when I saw the purple wheals left by a belt or strap I asked Hoverson . . . to punish the mother" (54); and "at some place in this book I have to discuss drinking [by the Natives]" (265).

Occasionally she lapses into condemnations unsupported by the record, using what appear as convenient expressions of frustration over subjects for which she has no direct experience—a strategy taken in other attempts to right the Seal Islands' wrongs (for example, Dorothy Jones, *A Century of Servitude*, 1980; and Barbara Torrey, *Slaves of the Harvest*, 1983). Regarding the decision to send some of the brighter children to the Chemawa Indian School in Oregon, she states without qualification, "One official excuse was that the children could not endure the warmer climate" (179). In contrast, a qualified official excuse read: "you are informed that until otherwise advised, the policy of the Bureau will be to send no more children to the Chemawa

school [sic] unless specific request to do so is made by the parents or guardian. It is realized that occasionally natives may desire to go to Chemawa, but it does not seem the course of wisdom for the Bureau to urge or instigate such attendance" (Jones, *A Century of Servitude*, 61).

Before the Storm also offers historical trivia seemingly lost to current generations, such as the ethnography of the seal rookery Ardiguen (189–90), the extent of walrus-tusk mining near Northeast Point (142–44), and the location of an early village in proximity to the current one (22–23). However, the work is not a perfect historical recital. Martin acknowledges the daunting task of combining "personal experience, the history of the Aleut people, . . . their shrinking language, an account of the fur seals, a synopsis of political scandals," and so forth (327). This recognition would seem all the more reason to document sources—but she didn't. Editor Hudson astutely points out this shortcoming in the introduction, recognizing that Martin's greatest contributions are "found in her own observations and reflections" (x). Hudson attempted to rectify the shortcomings within certain constraints—he redacted two chapters about Pribilof Islands history apparently because of inherent weaknesses, and he documented numerous unqualified statements made by the author. But the task was huge because the agent's logs alone include more than ten thousand pages. Other researchers will be tasked with verifying her historical account before applying it to other critical analyses. Even so, the Pribilof Islands historical record is replete with inconsistencies, especially pertaining to spellings of places, surnames, Unangan words, and numbers. For example, the number of sealskins taken by pelagic sealers "rose through the years until in 1896 over sixty thousand were taken" (232) compares with numbers summarized by Hanna who lists more than 121,000 taken in 1893 and 70,008 in 1896 (*The Alaska Fur-Seal Islands*, 36). In another example, Martin refers to "The Paris Tribunal of 1891," which is more properly referred to as the "Fur Seal Arbitration" or "Paris Tribunal of Arbitration," that convened from 1892 to 1893 (232). She also confuses the lineage and work history of several historically relevant men on the islands: "In 1875 William J. McIntyre, assistant treasury agent at the time, though soon to be on the staff of the Alaska Commercial Company with his relatives" (75). Three McIntyre brothers worked for the Alaska Commercial Company: Hugh H., Hamden, and Benjamin. William McIntyre was not a known relative (cf. Betty A. Lindsay and John A. Lindsay, *Pribilof Islands, Alaska: The People*, 2010, 440, 449, 451, 455). Further, William never worked for the Alaska Commercial Company after resigning from federal service in 1876 (cf. *Pribilof Islands, Alaska: The People*, 448, 455–58). In another instance, Martin states that Alexandra Melovidov was eighteen, rather than sixteen, when she married

the savior of the northern fur seal, Henry Wood Elliott, (229; cf. *Pribilof Islands, Alaska: The People*, 14, 223–24, 226). These are but a few of the incongruities, yet they do not grossly detract from the history.

During the early years of World War II and fearing a Japanese attack, the government evacuated the Aleuts and the Berenbergs off the Seal Islands. The Berenbergs continued on to Seattle, while the Aleuts were left to reside at derelict mining and fish camps in Southeast Alaska. Berenberg soon returned to serve the Pribilof Aleuts at the Alaska camp, while Martin began a pursuit to bring down the feudal walls surrounding the Pribilovians. *Before the Storm* is the background for Martin's human-rights crusade, which Hudson briefly addresses in the afterword.

Typographical errors are few but present. The most noticeable is the first word in chapter 14, "Wne," which Martin had scribed as "One" in her original manuscript. Again, such shortcomings do not detract from the work's overall contribution. Martin's observations of conditions and personalities on St. Paul Island are among the very few that are not tainted by a government business perspective, especially for the time period. Overall, Martin reveals insights into numerous Aleut characters of the period, such as Gabriel Stepetin, Elary Gromoff, Alice Gromoff, Metrofan Krukoff, Heretina Kochergin, and John Hanson, some of whom today may be but faint memories, while others survive as local legacies. Martin reveals educational aspirations, interests, ambitions, skills, and leadership among members of the Aleut community. Generations subsequent to the 1940s have undoubtedly lost considerable local lore. I have been informed that some young members of the current generation do not even know that there was a fur-seal industry on their island. *Before the Storm* keeps alive the character and the times of the Unangan and contributes to a growing written account of their heritage. It documents place names, nicknames, the occurrence of rare flora, historic buildings, the state of medical service and health, and education on St. Paul Island. Interestingly, her writing documents that English was still very much a second or third language for the Natives on the Pribilofs during 1940.

I only wish I could have read *Before the Storm* prior to beginning my own ten-year adventure on the islands. Before reading Martin's story, I had reservations about her character. After reading her story, I wish we had been friends.

John A. Lindsay

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