

THE ANTARCTICAN SOCIETY HEARS
DR. BERTRAND AT SEPTEMBER MEETING

The Antarctic Society held the first meeting of the 1964-1965 season on 30 September at the National Academy of Sciences. In the absence of the President, Mr. George R. Toney, who was in the Antarctic area aboard USNS ELTANIN, Mr. Morton J. Rubin, the Vice President, presided. Mr. Rubin announced that the Society had determined to award its Certificate of Recognition to Mr. William F. Bakewell of Skandia, Michigan.

As a young man, Bakewell had gone to sea, been shipwrecked off Montevideo, Uruguay, and made his way to Buenos Aires, Argentina. There he saw Shackleton's Endurance and, hearing that a hand was needed, applied for the post. In order to join the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, he represented himself as a Canadian. He was accepted by Shackleton, thus becoming the sole citizen of the United States to take part in the great adventure that followed. After Endurance had been crushed in the ice and the party had made its way to Elephant Island, Bakewell was among those, who remained with Frank Wild, while Shackleton went off to South Georgia to obtain help.

In recent years, Bakewell has been sheep-farming in Michigan. Last July, he went to London where the Antarctic Club had arranged a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the Expedition. He was one of five who appeared on that occasion.

Senator Patrick V. McNamara of Michigan kindly agreed to present the certificate to Bakewell and an appropriate ceremony was arranged for 21 October 1964 at the Marquette County Historical Society. In making the presentation, Senator McNamara said in part:

"The Shackleton Expedition is an epic story of exploration, courage, and endurance. William Bakewell, as an active participant in these exploits, deserves this recognition and our tribute."

The feature of the Antarctic Society meeting was a talk entitled "American Activity in the Early History of Antarctica," by Dr. Kenneth J. Bertrand, Department of Geography, The Catholic University of America. Dr. Bertrand has spent many years in research of this early period of Antarctic voyaging and in so doing has discovered much hitherto-unknown material.

Probably, no item is of greater importance than Dr. Bertrand's deciphering of the log of the New Haven Sealer, Hersilia, which visited the South Shetlands in 1819-1820. Hersilia's voyage had long been known, but exactly where she went was something of a mystery. Dr. Bertrand's reconstruction of the ship's track was a masterpiece of scholarly detection. Dr. Bertrand has provided the abstract of his talk which is printed below.

American Activity in the Early History of Antarctica

Early American activity in the Antarctic was based on the fur seal. The account of Captain James Cook's third voyage, 1776-1780, indicated the presence

of a profitable market for furs in China. Acting on this information, American merchants initiated the China trade by dispatching the ship *Empress of China* in 1784 with a mixed cargo, including some furs. Boston merchants began the fur trade between the Pacific Northwest Coast and China, in 1787. Meanwhile, however, Francis Rotch of Nantucket and New Bedford, who had been leader of an American whaling fleet in exile at the Falkland Islands during the Revolution, decided that the southern fur seal was the best source of furs for the China trade. In 1784 he dispatched the ship *United States* to the Falkland Islands. It returned to New York in 1786 with 13,000 seal skins, which were transhipped aboard the brig Eleanor to Canton where they sold for \$65,000.

From this beginning, the sealing business expanded rapidly along the coasts and off-lying islands of South America and Africa. However, as early as 1792, Elijah Austin of New Haven dispatched the brig *Nancy*, commanded by Captain Daniel Green, and the brig *Polly*, commanded by Captain Roswell Woodward, to South Georgia. So far as is now known, these were the first American vessels to cross the Antarctic Convergence. While the *Polly* returned to New Haven, the *Nancy* sailed with the skins to Canton and returned home in 1795 with Chinese goods, on which a duty of \$10,324 was paid. Another early voyage of note was made by the whalers *Asia* and *Alliance*, commanded by Captains Elijah and Bartlett Coffin, respectively, which remained at Kerguelen Island from December 17, 1792, to March 11, 1793, hunting elephant seals, for oil.

An example of the wealth that fur sealers brought to the United States at a time when trade was stifled by lack of gold for foreign exchange is the voyage of Captain Daniel Green in the ship *Neptune*, 1796-1799. Skins which he obtained in sub-Antarctic sealing grounds were exchanged at Canton for goods valued at \$280,000 on which a duty of \$74,000 was paid.

For 2 decades the sealing industry flourished, but indiscriminate slaughter of seals of all ages and both sexes brought the business to a low ebb by 1810. Clark estimated that 3,500,000 skins were taken between 1793 and 1807 from the island of Mas Afuera, about 500 miles west of Valparaiso; and Weddell estimated that not less than 1,200,000 had been taken at South Georgia. The business revived slightly after 1816, following the War of 1812.

The discovery of the South Shetland Islands by Captain William Smith, in the British brig *Williams*, in 1819, resulted in a great but short-lived revival of sealing. Meanwhile the brig *Hersilia*, commanded by Captain James P. Sheffield, had sailed from Stonington, Connecticut, July 22, 1819, on a combined sealing and exploring voyage. At the Falkland Islands, Nathaniel Palmer (the Second Mate) learned of Smith's discovery from the crew of a vessel bound for the South Shetlands from Buenos Aires.

Later, the Hersilia also set out to find the South Shetlands. The Hersilia's voyage was reported by the old sealing captain, Edmund Fanning, in his Voyage Round the World, published in 1835. When the Hersilia returned to Stonington, May 21, 1820, the news of thousands of seals at the South Shetlands was electrifying, and 3 separate fleets and a number of single vessels prepared

for voyages to the newly-found Islands. Until recently, only fragmentary evidence was available concerning the voyage of the *Hersilia*, and some of that was contradictory. Because of the importance of the voyage, there was a considerable amount of speculation as to just what was seen on the voyage. It was suggested, for instance, that the brig may have been the first vessel to cruise along the south shore of Livingston Island and possibly the first to see the Antarctic mainland.

In 1956 the existence of the *Hersilia*'s logbook was made, known, but owing to the difficulty of interpreting the log, details of the voyage have only now been worked out. No physical features are referred to by name. The longitude, as reported, is at least 8 degrees too far east, and Elof Benson (the Swedish First Mate) wrote in a phonetic English that is not always easily deciphered. Smith Island was sighted on January 18, 1820, and after cruising, off-and-on, for several days, the brig came to anchor at *Hersilia* Cove on Rugged Island, on January 23, where they found a "black brig from Buenos Aires." The track of the *Hersilia* has been drawn on a large-scale map of the western South Shetlands.

In 1820-21 there were 30 American vessels at the South Shetlands. Much has been written about Palmer of the schooner *Hero* and his cruise to the Orleans Channel in November 1820, as well as his exploration of Deception Island and McFarlane Strait. Perhaps more important was the landing made February 7, 1820, in the vicinity of Hughes Bay, by men from the schooner *Cecilia*, commanded by Captain John Davis of New Haven. This is the first landing on the mainland for which there is documentary proof. Another notable achievement was the voyage south to a reported position of 66° South, 70° West by Captain Robert Johnson of New York in the sloop *Sarah*, tender to the *Jane Maria*. At least 3 maps were drawn by sealers in 1820-1821, and several returned with collections of mineral specimens.

With 30 American and 23 British vessels hunting seals at the South Shetlands in 1820-1821, the seals suffered wholesale slaughter. Some sealers left with less than full cargo and others wintered in South America or at the Falkland Islands, to return in 1821-1822. That year there were 18 American and 28 British vessels at the South Shetlands. So great was the slaughter of the remaining seals that, in a few years, the business had dwindled to 1 or 2 vessels a season and some years there were none. In December 1821, the South Orkneys were discovered, on a joint cruise made by Captain Nathaniel Palmer and the British sealer, George Powell.

In January and February 1830, 3 American vessels, the *Seraph*, *Anawan* and *Penguin*, sailed in the South Shetlands and then cruised westward to 103° West, in an unsuccessful search for the Islands reported by Captains Swain, Gardiner and Macy. Aboard the *Anawan* was James Eights, the first American scientist and one of the first scientists of any nation to visit the Antarctic. His work, published in now-obscure American journals of the day, is still valid. He discovered an unknown species of sea spider and the first fossils found in the Antarctic. From glacial erratics at the South Shetlands and in Icebergs, he inferred the existence of a large continent to the south.