

***Great Heart: The History of a Labrador Adventure.* James West Davidson and John Ruge.**

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Great Heart: The History of a Labrador Adventure. James West Davidson and John Ruge (new introduction by Howard Frank Mosher). Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. 1997 (orig. pub., 1988), softcover, xxiii + 389 pp., maps, notes, \$22.95.

ADRIAN TANNER

THE APPEARANCE of the paperback edition of *Great Heart: The History of a Labrador Adventure* has an unexpected significance for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, strange to say. I say strange because the book is about a famous Labrador incident, a series of three attempts to cross from Lake Melville to the George River early in this century. The leader of the first expedition, Leonidas Hubbard, perished tragically. Two years later a bizarre race between Hubbard's wife Mina, accompanied by his part-Cree guide, George Elson, and a group led by a second survivor of the original Hubbard expedition, Dillon Wallace, took place over the same terrain. As it happens, many of the characters in this book fit nicely in a long tradition of adventurers from the northeastern United States who have come under the spell of Labrador, but who, with the exception of the Grenfell alumni, never really became a part of the place. Now two authors hailing from the same region, James Davidson and John Ruge, and raised under the same Labrador spell, have undertaken to tell their stories.

Set in a time of privation for the always hard-pressed Labradorians, the purposes of these comparatively well-heeled strangers, in undertaking these expeditions, must have seemed puzzling to the locals. The authors, basing their work largely on the diaries of the main characters, delve at length into their feelings during the ordeals, with particular attention to the almost-love-affair between Mina and George. The resulting book, written like a novel but incorporating as many facts as their research could determine, adopts a viewpoint that is continually

switching between the participants of the various expeditions. Motives are treated, for the most part, as taken-for-granted enigmas, steeped as each participant was in nineteenth century romantic notions of honour and heroism. Like the soap operas of today, the activities of Hubbard, his widow, Elson, Wallace and the others appear to be of another, rather exotic world, unconnected to the lives of the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians of the day. And, of course, it was their very unconnectedness with the people of the locality which in great measure resulted in the blunders of the journeys, making them the harrowing, and sometimes tragic, adventures they were, in contrast with the usually fairly routine trips over the same territory with which many Labradorians of the day, particularly the Innu, were familiar.

This book contains much more of the story than do the published first hand accounts by Mina Hubbard and Dillon Wallace. In addition to contemporary newspaper accounts of the expeditions, two diaries were consulted, that of George Elson for Hubbard's and Mrs. Hubbard's trips, and that of Clifford Easton for Dillon Wallace's. We discover that Hubbard's trip, based on an assignment from *Outing* magazine, came partly out of his antagonistic relationship with the editor, Caspar Whitney, a man vain about his own accomplishments as an explorer in the Canadian north. We also find out that Hubbard's endeavor was influenced by a suggestion from W.B. Cabot, a more cautious Labrador explorer, who, unlike Hubbard, based his expeditions on extensive prior discussion with local Indians. We also learn of Cabot's subsequent concerns, when the two met by chance en route to Labrador, over Hubbard's fatal lack of preparedness. Unfortunately, his concerns were not acted upon. The story of the antagonism between Mina Hubbard and Dillon Wallace is treated in the book as having been passed down orally within the Ruggie family. However, in spite of the fact that neither Hubbard nor Wallace mention any rivalry, it seems to me rather obvious, given the very fact of two simultaneous expeditions along the same route which failed to acknowledge each other's existence.

The authors document their sources for each chapter in an endnote. However, given their focus on the feelings of the main characters, and the detail they provide of private dialogue and inner thoughts, it is never entirely clear to the reader how much is based on documentation and how much on the authors' educated guesswork. A new three-page afterword to this edition gives some further clues, as well as providing the unexpected point of local significance I mentioned at the beginning of this review. The authors acknowledge that, largely thanks to the efforts of its Head, Anne Hart, Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies contains the most significant collection of private material on the subject, and that many of these items had not been consulted by them at the time they wrote their book. They then provide a listing of corrections to factual errors which the text contains. However, the authors (or perhaps their publisher) apparently felt these errors were insufficient to justify rewriting the book. Once more in this enduring saga, for want

of making closer local contacts, a key opportunity was missed, although thankfully not as fatal as was Hubbard's.