

have been a combination of lay preacher and missionary and who performed some informal civic duty. The rest details Robins' voyage up the Yukon River to Dawson via Anvik, where she met her brother Saxton, and her passage via Skagway to Juneau and Louisville.

From the point of view of the historian of Alaska and the Yukon, this is a most fascinating and useful document. It is precisely in the detail that the value is evident, and it constitutes a primary source of the highest significance. Robins was a most perceptive observer, and, as far as Nome is concerned, the prominent position within society of her brother enabled her to meet important people and to achieve a level of insight that an independent traveller without her connections would not have been able to attain in such a short residence.

Nome, at the turn of the century was in the throes of the gold rush, with all the general disorganisation and lawlessness that the arrival of a large number of people intent on making their fortunes, with all the associated parasites thereon, might have been expected to produce. Robins noted the opinion of one resident that there would be likely to be more disorder in Nome than at Dawson because there was 'no such body as the Mounted Police' (page 94). She wrote wittily and well upon the situation that she found on board and on shore, including, on pages 49–50, an excellent description of the voyage in the cramped *Tacoma* under all the misery of seasickness and the general uncouthness of her fellow passengers. On page 55 is an amusing description of a bollard, and one would not have thought that such could produce a smile. At Nome, the problems of landing people and stores on an open beach and the chaotic conditions on the beach itself are well described (pages 68–71) and accompanied by a wonderful photograph. Onshore, Robins' relations with her brother take up much of the diary. He appears to have been an obsessive personality about whose welfare Robins had serious reservations. But, as is illustrated on page 85, with regard to a dangerous climb to the roof of his building to admire the view, she was unable to defy him, even though he was several years the younger.

In this reviewer's opinion, the immediacy and point of Robins' writing declines after her departure from Raymond; clearly she found contact with him emotionally exacting. But the value of the diary for historians is no less. She met Saxton briefly in Anvik and arrived in Dawson on 15 August, during the stay there of the Earl of Minto, governor general of Canada.

The quality of the edition is excellent and a model of its kind. Certainly any reader who was contemplating the edition of a text would be well advised to use this work as an exemplar. The editors have performed their task with care and great diligence, even finding it necessary to inform the reader what N.B. means (page 90)!

There is a useful editors' preface in which the stylistic conventions to be adopted are set out, a full chronology of the life and works of Robins, and a concise and informative introduction. It may seem churlish — but after all it is a

reviewer's privilege to carp — to comment that the final sentence of the introduction makes the meretricious point that the publication honours women who went to the far north, 'especially those who went alone or whose names have never appeared in print.' It does nothing of the kind, of course; if it honours anyone, it honours Robins herself and the editors.

The text of the diary has many footnotes and the range of the matters commented on reveals the depth of the editors' research. As a bonus, the editors have republished five of Robins' articles based upon her travels, which appeared in various journals. These are valuable, illustrating as they do, the process of polishing from diary entry to finished paper. The work concludes with a list of references, including e-mail communications, and name and subject indices.

The book is illustrated by contemporary photographs, some from Robins' camera, and these serve to add to the immediacy inherent in the text. There are two maps, one of which is on an agreeably large scale. To sum up: a first-rate edition of a text that is an important source. The editors deserve our warmest congratulations. (Ian R. Stone, Laggan Juys, Larivane Close, Andreas, Isle of Man IM7 4HD.)

Reference

Gates, J.E. 1994. *Elizabeth Robins 1862–1952: actress, novelist, feminist*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press.

NOEL WIEN: ALASKA PIONEER BUSH PILOT. Ira Harkey. 1999. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. xxvii + 307 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 1-889963-16-X. \$US24.95.

This is a reprint of a book originally published 25 years ago under the title *Pioneer bush pilot* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1974). Noel Wien, though not the first to fly in Alaska, was the pre-eminent bush pilot from the day he arrived in 1924 until the Second World War. His early biplanes had an open cockpit, no compass, and no radio; yet in them he made many pioneering flights through all kinds of weather to places where no aircraft had been before. The most important cockpit instrument was the engine oil pressure gauge — it could warn of an imminent forced landing. The terrain below was unmapped.

Ira Starkey intersperses his well-researched narrative with accounts in Wien's own words. Modest and shy, Wien had to have stories wrung out of him. In those days there were no airfields. Landings were on sand bars, on hilltops, and on tundra, sometimes causing his aircraft to nose over, bending or breaking at least the propeller. Wien took to carrying a spare propeller strapped to the side of the fuselage, and he was skilled at bending struts and control surfaces back into shape. One of the most astonishing things to anyone versed in modern bush flying was that for some years he carried no survival equipment — its weight would have made the reduced payload uneconomic. More than once this nearly cost him his life, but it was the only

way he could demonstrate the potential of aviation to prospectors, to miners, and to isolated villages.

As Harkey puts it, Wien 'did not envision founding an airline that has grown from biplane to Boeing jets, or pulling a primitive land from the stone age to the air age, or becoming a certified international hero. He wanted to fly, only to fly...He saw instead people, the good people of the Great Land, those rich and poor, old and young from whom the warmth of good will and love radiated during adversities to make bearable the almost unbearable life on the icy frontier.'

Wien and his three brothers — he taught them all to fly — each played a major role in Alaskan aviation history, but it was Noel who paved the way. He was the first to open a commercial service from Fairbanks to Nome and from Fairbanks to Seattle, the first to fly from Anchorage to Fairbanks, and the first to fly and land beyond the Arctic Circle.

In March 1929 he flew a rescue mission from Alaska to a fur-trading schooner beset in ice off the Siberian mainland opposite Ostrov Vranghel'ya. The only suitable aircraft to cover the distance was the Wien company's flagship, a metal single-engined, high-wing monoplane that had not been paid for. Neither Lloyds nor any other insurer would cover the flight at any price. Taking off from Nome, he carried an automobile mechanic because no aircraft mechanic was available. The engine oil vent pipe repeatedly froze and the mechanic had to stretch out of the cockpit window to clear it — in an air temperature of -40°C . If they had gone down, nobody would have come looking for them. Finally, after 600 miles, they found the schooner *Elisif* and landed nearby on a rough lead. Unavoidably using old and inferior Russian fuel for the return flight, the engine ran alarmingly rough the whole way to Nome. But they had succeeded — it was headline news throughout the world.

On one occasion Wien took off with crossed aileron controls, an airframe fitter's error that commonly leads to a fatal crash. Few pilots ever recognize the problem in time to land their machine intact: Wien did. In the course of his long career he knew many of the great aviators of the day: Sir Hubert Wilkins, Carl Ben Eielson, Wiley Post, Floyd Bennett, and Richard Byrd. Bernt Balchen offered him a job as pilot on Byrd's 1929 expedition that flew over the South Pole, but Wien's heart was in Alaska.

Sometime in the 1930s Wien had polio, and he later became blind in one eye after an accident in his house. Concealing both conditions from the CAA, which would have grounded him, and from passengers, who would have sought another pilot, he carried on flying anything up to the company's largest aircraft, a Ford Trimotor. Limping and blind in one eye, he flew DC-3s through the 1940s and 1950s. It is said that there are old pilots and bold pilots — but no old bold pilots. Wien was the exception — he had close calls, as did every bush pilot in those days, but he lived to a ripe old age.

For anyone interested in the pioneers of northern avia-

tion, Starkey's beautifully told story leaves the reader aghast at the hazards that these airmen routinely faced and as routinely overcame. Flying was, to them, a vocation — not just a way of earning a living. (Charles Swithinbank, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

THE CENTENNIAL OF S.A. ANDRÉE'S NORTH POLE EXPEDITION. Urban Wråkberg (Editor). 1999. Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. 212 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 91-7190-031-4. SEK 150; £11.00.

On 11 July 1897 Salomon August Andrée and two colleagues, Nils Strindberg and Knut Frænkel, left Virgohamna on Danskøya, off northwest Spitsbergen, in the hydrogen-filled balloon *Örnen*, headed for the North Pole. Due to an accident on take-off, the trailing ropes and ballast ropes, intended to control the steering and height of the balloon, became detached, and new ones had to be improvised. The balloon drifted northeast, and the three men were never seen again.

Andrée's disappearance was sensational news around the world, and accounts speculating about his fate appeared regularly in newspapers and magazines in ensuing years. It wasn't until 1930, however, that the fate of the explorers became known. That year a Norwegian expedition unexpectedly discovered Andrée's final camp, which contained diaries and a camera with film in it, which, when developed, helped document the last months of the explorers' lives.

The three men, it turned out, had abandoned *Örnen* on the morning of 14 July, after it had been forced to ground by the ice and hoar-frost that had formed on its structure. It had come to a standstill on the ice some 300 km northeast of Svalbard. After starting towards Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa, hauling sledges over the ice, they found that the drift was carrying them south rather than southeast, so on 4 August they turned southwest towards Sjuøyane in northern Svalbard and continued their exhausting march. On 16 September they came in sight of Kvitøya, the almost unknown, northeastern-most island of Svalbard. They landed at its southwestern point on 5 October. Soon after, their diary notes ended, and little more is known of their activities, although it is probable that they died within weeks. The cause of their deaths has long been the subject of speculation, with theories including carbon monoxide poisoning from a stove, trichinosis, scurvy, or simply cold.

A symposium marking the one-hundredth anniversary of Andrée's expedition, arranged by the Center for History of Science of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences together with UNIS, the Norwegian university extension on Svalbard, was held in Longyearbyen on Spitsbergen in August 1997. This book is the proceedings of that symposium, and the two sections of the book mirror the two parts of the conference, one examining the history of Andrée's expedition, and the other presenting an agenda for social-science research in the polar regions. As could be ex-