



## Polar Libraries Colloquy

### Media Release

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#### Winner of the 2024 William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Polar Books Announced

The Polar Libraries Colloquy is pleased to announce the winner of the 2024 William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Polar Books is ***The Life and Times of Augustine Tataneuck: An Inuk Hero in Rupert's Land, 1800-1834*** by Renee Fossett (published by the University of Regina Press).

Augustine Tataneuck, an Inuk Hudson's Bay Company interpreter/hunter employed at Fort Churchill, accompanied John Franklin's two eventful Arctic overland expeditions of 1819-1822 and 1824-1827. These expeditions were both part of an effort by the British Admiralty to chart a northwest passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Tataneuck distinguished himself in the eyes of expedition officers who later recorded his name and accounts of his valued participation within the historical record. This ensured that he acquired a kind of recognition generally unknown to hundreds of individuals who also hunted, translated, and laboured in the fur trade within Rupert's Land during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Still, while charitable, accounts of Tataneuck's prowess, his endurance, and skill tended to the brief. There was clearly more to the industrious and talented Augustine Tataneuck.

Historian and author Renee Fossett initially encountered Tataneuck in 1989. She was then engaged in research about westering Inuit trade routes. However, in the process of working her way through the original Hudson's Bay Company journals for Fort Churchill, she was increasingly intrigued by references - some as early as 1812 - to Tataneuck, "a lad" working as a fur trade apprentice. Inevitably, Fossett began tracking Augustine's movements and adventures across time - month by month and year by year - until finally deciding that she wanted to write his story. Moreover, she "... wanted Canadians everywhere and anywhere to know about him."

Tataneuck left no personal diaries and no letters. His birth and death were not included in the public record. Creating his story therefore necessitated building a yearly chronological narrative with information laboriously gleaned from period journals, account books, correspondence, expedition narratives, and many other contemporary sources.

Fossett utilizes Tataneuck's experiences to enhance the reader's understanding of the lives of other men and women, not themselves among the ruling elites, who laboured in various forms and who played a salient role in the development of a growing economy based on the fur trade: Inuit, Cree, and Chipewyan hunters (and their wives and

children), Royal Navy seamen and marines, Scots employed by the Hudson's Bay Company officers, and French and Metis voyageurs.

In **The Life and Times of Augustine Tataneuck**, author Renee Fossett has skilfully and comprehensively introduced an Inuk interpreter/hunter as an important actor on a vast stage where "the struggle for possession of northwestern North America by Britain, Russia and the United States" was played out.

Two other nominations were awarded honorable mentions:

- ***Expedition Relics from High Arctic Greenland: Eight Decades of Exploration History Told Through 102 Objects*** by Peter R. Dawes (published by Museum Tuschulanum Press).

Peter Dawes' book ***Expedition Relics from High Arctic Greenland*** beautifully and succinctly lays out the panorama of European and American exploration history in Greenland from 1853-1934. The book's production is first class. Descriptions of the objects place them in context with the expedition, the time and the personalities who used them. Expedition records and photographs are included. This book makes exploration and expeditions of another time come alive and highlights the critical role the Inuit played in those endeavors.

- ***Erebus The Ice Dragon: A Portrait of an Antarctic Volcano*** by Colin Monteath (published by Massey University Press).

The subject of Colin Monteath's book ***Erebus The Ice Dragon*** is Antarctica's only active volcano. Mount Erebus has loomed large over Ross Island since it was first seen by Sir James Clark Ross. Every expedition, even up to the present time, has marveled at its magical and ever-changing presence. Colin Monteath has a long association with the Antarctic and here he gathers, in a beautifully produced book, everything one would want to know about Mount Erebus.

Thirty-three remarkable books were nominated for the 2024 Mills Prize, the second largest number ever received. A full list of all titles nominated for the 2024 William Mills Prize, including those titles that were shortlisted, is available on the [Polar Libraries Colloquy website](#).

The William Mills Book Prize is awarded every two years and honours the best Arctic and Antarctic non-fiction books published throughout the world. The prize was first presented in 2006. It is named in honour of William Mills, a polar librarian and author, and a core member of the Polar Libraries Colloquy during its formative years.

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