Polar Libraries Colloquy

Media Release

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Winner of the 2020 William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Polar Books Announced

The Polar Libraries Colloquy is pleased to announce the winner of the 2020 William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Polar Books is *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* by Bathsheba Demuth (W.W. Norton).

Demuth uses environmental history to synthesize a contemporary view of the natural, human and socio-economic conditions of the Bering Strait. With experiences in the Russian Far East, Alaska and Arctic Canada, she researched previously disparate archival and scientific sources. DeMuth bravely sets out an environmental model for integrating disparate information. As issues of Arctic resource exploitation, international transportation and national sovereignty are being debated, so too must the roles of the region’s trans-national indigenous peoples in defining governance, jurisdiction and environmental sustainability.

Two other nominations were awarded Honorary Mentions:

- **White Fox and Icy Seas in the Western Arctic: The Fur Trade, Transportation, and Change in the Early Twentieth Century** by John Bockstoce (Yale University Press).

  Bockstoce’s rigorous research and scholarship over the years put him on the ice and tundra, and in and atop the water, exploring the vast Arctic, meeting and recording interviews with the indigenous and other inhabitants of the region. His lifelong research is synthesized in this volume on the evolution of the Western Arctic fur trade. Fortunately, researchers like Bockstoce have documented and authenticated indigenous perspectives, thinly evident in the literature of earlier voyages of discovery, exploration and commerce.

- **Adventures in Polar Reading: The Book Cultures of High Latitudes** by David H. Stam, with the Assistance of Deirdre C. Stam. (The Grolier Club).

  David and Deirdre Stam - both distinguished librarians and bibliophiles - wondered “what did polar explorers read, whether under duress, or in periods of ennui and boredom? Thus began an almost twenty-year search for answers to that question.” The result is this beautifully produced book published by New York’s Grolier Club. Expedition libraries, periodicals, reading and writing, in both the Arctic and Antarctic, are presented and discussed in a collection of separate
but related chapters. The authors’ purpose was “…to learn what explorers read, why they read, how they read, and what their accounts of their reading life revealed about their mental state in isolation.” This will make a fine addition to any polar library.

Thirty-six nominations qualified for consideration this year, the most ever since the inception of the prize. A full list of all titles nominated for the 2020 William Mills Prize, including those titles that were shortlisted, is available on the [Polar Libraries Colloquy website](https://www.polarlibraries.org/).

The William Mills Book Prize is awarded every two years and honours the best Arctic or 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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