

In Pursuit of Knowledge:

Three northamericans In Chile

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In 1976 Americans celebrate 200 years of national existence with many cultural and social activities which glorify the past, accentuate the present, and express hope for the future. While most of the activities reflect pride in what Americans have achieved within the confines of their own country, it would not seem inappropriate to focus attention on what Americans, scholars at least, have done in pursuit of knowledge in other countries of the world. In some cases foreigners writing about a country can provide a perspective which may be difficult to obtain by nationals of the country concerned. For instance, we Americans have long regarded as classics two works about the United States: *Democracy in America* by the Frenchman, Alexis de Toqueville, and *The American Commonwealth* by Lord Bryce, the Englishman. It is with pride, therefore, that we note that American scholars have turned their attention to Chile and that many have produced works of merit on this country. Three of these are Col. Charles Wellington Furlong, explorer; Isaiah Bowman, geographer and George McCutchen McBride, geographer and social scientist.

Before his death in 1967 at the age of almost 93, Charles Wellington Furlong had done about everything an explorer had ever thought of doing. Born in Massachusetts and educated in the U. S. and England, he devoted most of his life to exploration along geographical and ethnological lines and to writing, painting, illustrating, teaching and lecturing. His quest for knowledge and zest for life carried him to Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, the Caribbean, French Guiana, almost all of Africa (where he is supposed to have located a 92-year old native who had accompanied Dr. Livingstone) the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, and Chile.

According to Furlong, his two expeditions to Chile en 1907 and 1908 were sponsored by *Harper's Magazine* and were for the purpose of conducting ethnological research and obtaining geographical data. Arriving in Punta Arenas in late September or early October, 1907, Furlong made his way to Ushuaia, on the Argentine side of Tierra del Fuego. Here he chartered a boat owned by Austrian smuggler and cruised along the Beagle Channel. To the east he went as far as Remolino, studying the Yahgan Indians en route. He then went north to Lake Cami (Fagnano) and explored its northern border on the Argentine side before returning to Ushuaia. He next tried to reach Horn Island but failed because of storms. After exploring Isla Navarino he returned to Ushuaia and travelled west through the Beagle Channel to Punta Arenas, passing around Isla Londres and through Canal Cockburn and Canal Magdalena.

After resting at Punta Arenas, Furlong then travelled north to explore Southern Patagonia. Arriving at the Santa Cruz River, he followed it to Lago Argentino where he camped for a while, living among the Tehuelche Indians of the high pampas. Furlong always travelled alone with guides, never with another white man because he claimed that "when there are two or more white men, one's natives feel that they must have eyes in the back of their heads, for they cannot be included in white men's conversations. Hence, going alone with them makes for their greater naturalness, intimacy and trust". Then with "a gaucho and pack outfit of eight unshod horses", he claims to have broken a new trail across the cordillera through the *baguales* into Chile

to Ultima Esperanza. From there he made his way south through the Archipielago Adelaide to Sholl Bay where the small vessel to which he had transferred was nearly wrecked. He finally reached Punta Arenas safe and sound.

First and foremost an explorer, Furlong was not necessarily known for his modesty. He claims to have been "the first American to penetrate the interior of that Island (Tierra del Fuego)" and "the first American to cross Patagonia from east to west" as well as to have broken "a new trail over a rugged Andean region.

In Tierra del Fuego he states that en route through Murray Narrows, "an attempt to spear me failed". Although warned by an English rancher in Tierra del Fuego that he shouldn't go with the four Ona Indians because each of them "had killed one or more men", Furlong went anyway and lived to tell his story. Without doubt there was something of bravado (*bravata*) in Furlong, but we cannot deny that he was willing to take chances.

He was a scientist. He gathered one of the largest collections in existence today of plants from Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, each plant carefully described and classified. With an old fashioned Victor phonograph he recorded on 12 wax records the speech and music of the Yahgan and Ona Indians, obtaining 181 words of the Ona Language, mostly nouns, adjectives and verbs, by making drawings which would then be identified by the Onas in their own tongue. Finally, he published sixteen articles on his journeys through Tierra del Fuego in *Harper's* magazine and various scholarly journals. Returning in 1910, he did further research in the area, concentrating on Almiranty Sound. He then departed Chile, although he returned briefly in 1925 and 1926 to serve as one of General Pershing's senior officers on the Tacna-Arica Plebiscite Commission in an area so distant from the one which he had so thoroughly explored.

To Isaiah Bowman, geographer, we are indebted for his studies of the Atacama Desert. Born in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, in 1878, his family moved to Michigan at an early age where he grew up on a farm. Described by his biographers as a man of enthusiastic and imaginative curiosity, self-discipline

and self reliance, and great vitality, he studied at the Ferris Institute in Big Rapids, Michigan, at the State Normal College at Ypsilanti, Michigan, and at Harvard. He received his Ph. D. from Yale in 1909 having written his dissertation on "Physiography of the Central Andes". Participating in three expeditions into regions of South America (Southern Perú, Northern Chile, Northwestern Argentina, and Bolivia), Bowman led the first (1907) and third (1913) and served under the famous Hiram Bingham, discoverer of Macchu Pichu, as geographer, geologist, and surveyor of the second in 1911. As a result of these journeys he authored a number of articles and two books: *The Andes of Southern Perú* (1916) and *Desert Trails of Atacama* (1924) which in 1942 was translated into Spanish by Emilia Romero and appeared as *Los Senderos del Desierto de Atacama*, a publication of the Sociedad Chilena de Historia y Geografía. These works, says A. G. Ogilvie, "demonstrated the value to an explorer of systematic training in geography for, while only very poor maps existed, he (Bowman) was able to discover geographical relationships of all sorts and to convey their significance to the reader with great clarity."

Desert Trails of Atacama, said to be the "first work of any size in the English language to describe a region which from the rainfall standpoint is probably the driest in the world", is a description of the travel paths which Bowman found there, paths made by mules and horses, llamas and cattle, and carts. The nearness to water was the only consideration in blazing these trails, the principle which determined their direction. In this work he vividly describes conditions under which the herdsmen of the high mountain and desert country live; the life in the desert towns and irrigated cases; the use and control of water in desert villages; Copiapó, an unusually interesting type of desert and frontier town; the cattle trade across the *cordillera*; and the trade and trails of the desert settlements.

In a letter written to the American Geographic Society, of which he later served as Director from 1915 to 1935, Prof. Bowman vividly described the struggle for survival in a region where man's occupancy has been limited to a small area yet where there are indications that man has lived for thousands of years. Dated July 2, 1913, and written at San Pedro de Atacama, Bowman

describes the trip made from Salta, Argentina to San Pedro across a region of volcanoes and borax basins (*salar*es), often in temperatures of -20° C. and biting winds which combined to freeze all but one's hopes. Here the cold is all but too intense for a stay of any length during the winter yet in spite of such obstacles a cattle trade is conducted across the mountains which Bowman says is "without exception . . . the most extraordinary trade of its kind in the world". Around 1913 between 25,000 and 35,000 head were sent over the passes from Salta and Jujuy, Argentina, to San Pedro and Calama. Forced across waterless plateaus and deserts, through extreme cold and heat, the emaciated animals arrived at the *oficinas* near the coast to become food for the workers in the nitrate fields. Bowman doesn't say how many perished along the way, but he does refer to the skeletons along scores of miles of the trails.

Bowman's description of San Pedro ("a city of *arrieros*") is that of a true geographer. He attributes its rise as a trading town to the convergence of many desert and mountain trails on this "green spot in the middle of a vast desert". Each trail led to an important town some distance away and as the city grew, streets were laid out—the improved terminals of the trails—bearing these names: Antofagasta Street, Calama Street, Caracoles Street, etc., much the same way streets in San Antonio, Texas, are today named for cattle trails which converged on it.

In a delightful little book lent to me by Dra. Grete Mostny, Conservadora del Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, a close friend of Bowman brings up to date some of the explorer's findings. In *Vanishing Trails of Atacama* (American Geographical Society Research Series N° 24, 1963), William E. Rudolph, an North American mining engineer at Chuquibambilla who lived nearly forty years in the province of Antofagasta, writes that the trails described by Bowman have become nearly obsolete, made so by the automobile and truck which carry their water with them. The routes which they follow are different. They are shorter. Although the Atacama may be conquered, the old trails leave their indelible mark on the dry surface. They do not disappear.

Author of some eighteen books and articles on the Andes and the *norte grande* of Chile, including "Regional Population Groups of Atacama", *Bulletin of the American Geographical*

Society, Vol. XLI, 1909; "Results of an Expedition to the Central Andes", *ibid.*, Vol. XLVI, 1914; and, "The Military Geography of Atacama", *The Educational Bi-Monthly*, June, 1911, it is in *Desert Trails of Atacama* in which Bowman reveals his passionate devotion to the desert (Atacama); "To my mind the desert is the most interesting place in the world for exploration and geographical study. I love the desert and everything about it. The desert doesn't have to teach me a lesson or stand for a great principle. I just love it in everyone of its moods."

After leaving Chile, Bowman went on to become one of the foremost geographers of the world, winning special recognition as a political geographer. He was Chief Territorial Specialist on the American Commission to Negotiate Peace during 1918 and 1919. During and after World War II he served as a special adviser to the Secretary of State on post-war problems and plans, was a member of the US representation at the Dumbarton Oaks Conversation on International Organization and an adviser to the US Delegation to the UN Conference at San Francisco in 1945. He served as President of the prestigious John Hopkins University from 1935 to 1948 and as President Emeritus until his death in 1950. Bowman also conceived the "Millionth Map" covering the whole of the Americas south of the United States as well as the West Indies in 107 sheets, a map which was begun in 1920 but not completed until 1945. A great geographer, it is significant that he began his career and his thinking on this subject in the Atacama Desert of Chile.

The third American of this trio of scientists, and probably the best known, is George McCutchen McBride, geographer but social scientist as well. Of the three he knew Chile the most intimately. Born in Kansas in 1876, he attended schools in Missouri and received the D. D. degree from Auburn Theological Seminary in New York in 1901 whereupon he went to Chile as a missionary teacher. From 1901 to 1906 he taught at the Instituto Inglés in Santiago, where he became intimately acquainted with Chileans of all social classes. In 1907 and 1908 he taught at the Colegio Nacional, Oruro, Bolivia and for the next seven years served as teacher of geology and geography and finally as Director of the Instituto Americano in La Paz. It was here in 1915 that a chance meeting with Isaiah Bowman

resulted in a complete reorientation of his life and work. Renouncing the ministry, he returned to the United States, obtained an instructorship in physiography at Wesleyan College, and entered Yale University to pursue graduate work in geography. Probably on Bowman's recommendation, he became Assistant Librarian of the American Geographical Society in 1917 and Research Associate in 1910. When Yale awarded him the Ph. D. in geography in 1921, he went to UCLA as a lecturer in that discipline, later becoming a full professor. As a thinker he posed perplexing questions to his students. According to one, Homer Aschmann, now Professor of Geography at the University of California (Riverside) McBride would ask questions such as these: Why had pre-Columbian civilization attained greater complexity in the Andean region than in other parts of South America? How would the Amazon Basin be organized politically in the 21st century? Why, after being treasure houses to the world for centuries, had Mexico and Peru failed to satisfy the material wants of their peoples?

But it his classic work on Chile wich concerns us at this point. This is *Chile: Land and Society* (Research Series N° 19, American Geographical Society, 1936). Based on personal observations and research in Chilean libraries, archives, and government offices, McBride wrote a perceptive analysis of the agrarian background of Chilean life and its pervasive social influence on the whole country. Land ownership, he concluded, was the key factor by which an educated and cultured aristocracy kept a rural labor force in poverty and ignorance. Paternal as this relationship between "Don Fulano y Zutano" was, McBride pointed out that the rigid class structure of the rural estates carried over into the social structure of all Chile, or as he put it "gave its cast to the nation". Writing with depth, understanding, and true affection for Chile and its people, he foresaw the need for change it there was to be social and economic justice in Chile. McBride died in 1971 but he lived to see his work translated by Guillermo Labarca Huberston and published by the University of Chile in 1938 as *Chile: Su Tierra y su Gente* and republished in 1970. This work has had a profound influence on those in Chile who have sought to effect a meaningful agrarian reform. Nor did this classic work go unheeded in the United States. In 1956 McBride was awarded the David

Livingstone Centenary Medal by the American Geographical Society "for scientific achievement in the field of geography in the southern Hemisphere."

The Instituto Chileno-Norteamericano de Cultura, an institution dedicated to the maintenance of friendship and understanding between the peoples of Chile and the United States, will soon mount an exhibit of books by Chileans about the United States and by North americans about Chile. Among the latter will be the works of Furlong, Bowman, and McBride. North americans in pursuit of knowledge, their fame lives after them. It is fitting that we North americans in Chile pause to honor them in this the Bicentennial year (and the centenary of McBride's birth), but in reality they belong to both countries: Chile and the United States.