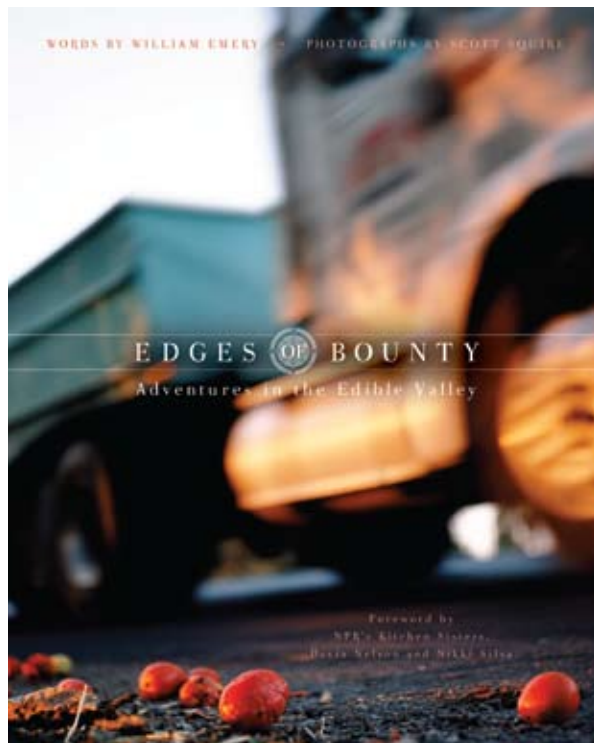


SEASON'S READINGS

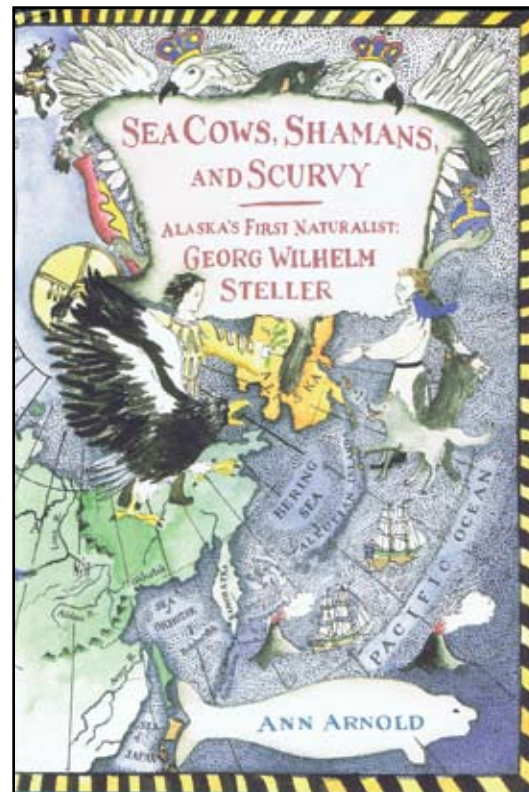
BY CHERYL ANGELINA KOEHLER

As dwellers on the edge of a celebrated food-producing region, we have been witness to the diminution and degradation of farmlands and the dissolution of family farming. We know it's happening throughout the world, but do we really see? Merely driving down I-80, I-5, or Highway 99 tells us very little about the state of agriculture in California. Reading Michael Pollan or an Edible Communities magazine (like this one and many others) might give us insight, but few of us ever take the time to detour onto the farming roads or stop to talk to the people who live and work in the Central Valley farming communities. Writer William Emery and photographer Scott Squire did just



that. From their very intimate research they produced a collection of luminous essays that meld the observer and the observed. In *Edges of Bounty*, the two wander with eyes wide open into the world of the farmers, shopkeepers, hunters, and gatherers who still manage to live and work on the edges of bounty—the center of which is now nearly consumed by the monstrosity of industrial agriculture. The book is a project of Berkeley's Heyday Institute, a nonprofit that seeks to “foster an understanding of the history, literature, art, environment, social issues, and culture of California and the West.” This is a lively and lovely work of art that people will page through if you leave it on your coffee table. But please do not leave it there—pick it up and read it as well. Doing so is safer than driving through the tule fog of the Central Valley at this time of year, and you'll be leaving less of a carbon footprint, but moreover, you will be changed. The language and images in *Edges of Bounty* are raw, graphic, and honest. Sentimentality is absent, except where the two explorers are lured a little too often into saying that something is beyond anything they have ever tasted before. We'll forgive them, since we know that food is always seasoned by the place in which it is experienced and by the love with which it is given.

In our last issue, as we were reviewing the great new locally produced Bamboo Bread Bags, we were delighted to become acquainted with Ann Arnold, one of the bread bag inventors. She turns out to be a long-time Berkeley resident, and the illustrator of Alice Waters' book *Fanny at Chez Panisse*, which led us to understand that she is well hooked in to the local food scene. When we inquired about her other undertakings, we learned that she has authored and illustrated two books aimed at



the type of young reader inclined to haunt the history and biography section of the school library. In the earlier of the two books, *The Adventurous Chef: Alexis Soyer*, published in 2002 by Francis Foster Books, Arnold introduces a most extraordinary and

amiable chef who lived and worked in Europe in the middle of the 19th century, a time when kitchens were still quite primitive and food-borne illness was rampant. More than for his culinary magic, Alexis Soyer is remembered for his inventions, many of which made food safer and more easily available for soldiers and the poor.

In Arnold's newest book, *Sea Cows, Shamans, and Scurvy*, published in 2008 by Francis Foster Books, people are again saved from starvation and illness, but this time it's happening a century earlier and the venue is eastern Russia—Siberia, the Sea of Okhotsk, the Kamchatka Peninsula, and crossing the Bering Sea, to Alaska. This eye-opening tale unfolds as the young naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller signs himself up for a series of drastically ill-conceived and ill-funded discovery expeditions, during which he identifies and catalogues several species we now associate with his name, most notably the Steller's jay. Steller's role on the expeditions became pivotal when the knowledge he was gleaned from the indigenous peoples living in these harsh regions became vital for the survival of the men with whom he traveled. In addition to learning about locally occurring sources of vitamin C (raw fish and various herbs) that could cure the scurvy afflicting his companions, he became aware of the resources and mechanisms that allowed the native peoples to survive in those very harsh environments. The book is heavily footnoted, illustrated, and indexed, making it an excellent resource for anyone interested in the natural history of the far northwestern Pacific region.

Cheryl Angelina Koehler is publisher/editor of Edible East Bay and author of Touring the Sierra Nevada, published in 2007 by University of Nevada Press.